

# Essay on death

[Life](#), [Death](#)



## **Introduction**

Death is the cessation of life or the termination of biological functions sustaining a living organism. Causes of death include: malnutrition, accidents and predation. Death has for a very long period of time been a central concern of the world's traditions both religious and philosophical. Belief in some kind of afterlife or rebirth has a central aspect of religious belief.

Themes of Death and How They Compare to a Modern Epic of Gilgamesh, the Epic of Gilgamesh is one of the earliest books which are still in use today. The influences of this book are still being seen in many modern works today. This book had the first account of the hero triumphing over evil and questing for his victories. From this book we get to know that the human desire to be larger than life is not a dream only found in the modern setting but it has been part of the human nature for several millennia. (The Epic of Gilgamesh, 1960)

In the book, Gilgamesh yearns for immortality but his heroic works do not achieve everlasting fame as he has always wanted. He desires eternal life on earth but this one is not possible. This is an example of how almost everybody on earth wants to live. Everyone wants to have an eternal life and therefore go greater lengths to prolong the mortal life as long as we can however, this doesn't come to be and the only thing that can survive is a record of our achievements. (The Epic of Gilgamesh, 1960)

The Epic of Gilgamesh compares and contrasts death to a modern epic. The book tackles the theme death in the following ways; death comes to us all,

death is embraced by the hero to find meaning in life and finally the loss of a loved one. All these themes are very visible in some form in the modern works. (Mitchell, 2004)

## **The Odyssey**

Odyssey is a form of classical Greek Literature. Odyssey employs the use of many literary techniques in order to bring meaning to the poem. The writer makes use of many motifs and the most important of them is the symbolic death. The use of this motif emphasizes the growth and enlightenment of the characters. Examples of instances of death in the poem include; when Telemachos is visited by Athena the goddess, he says ". . . and he left pain and lamentation to me. Nor is it for him alone that I grieve in my pain now (The Odyssey, Latimore, l. 242-3)." At this point Telemachos reveals the suffering he is undergoing in fear that his father is dead. Another example of the death theme in the poem is the symbolic death of Odysseus to the world. Odysseus also sees that staying with a goddess would cause his demise as this was the case with people staying with mortals. Another instance (Fagles et al, 1999).

Another instance of the theme of death in Odysseus is the adventure with Polyphemus where they got trapped in the cave of Polyphemus which symbolizes their death. This death is further emphasized when Odysseus refers to himself as 'nobody' a term commonly used to refer to those people of the underworld as they have no interaction with the living world.

Generally the theme of death has made a very important contribution to the Odyssey. The theme helps in gaining a better understanding into what is one

of the more important underlying themes in the entire book. The writer gives an account of his tale and gives an emphasis that “ even though a situation may seem insurmountable, there is always an option that, if taken, will not only sustain life but provide some valuable insight or experience.”

## **Aeneid's**

An instance of death in the book is the death of Dido. There was a belief by the Romans that the goddess of the underworld, Proserpina came to cut a lock of hair from a person about to die. (6. 187-190). In these lines as Dido died before her time, Proserpina hadn't come and so Iris was sent instead by Juno to do the job. These lines give a strong emphasis on death as a physical process.

Another instance where the theme of death is depicted in the book is the death of the warrior-queen Camilla. (11. 1125-1132). It is also seen in the last line of the poem that Turnus has just been stabbed by Aeneas as he was begging for mercy. Canilla is seen to have died as a result of an arrow that hit her exposed breast

## **Differences in depiction of death in the books**

Aeneid's book takes on the theme of mortality in a different approach as compared to other texts like the Odyssey and Homer's book, Epic of Gilgamesh. Aeneid is different from the other two in the following ways; the idea of reincarnation and the way death is depicted in the book. The view of death makes characters more interested in trying to be act in a way that the readers or the viewers will see them as good people. This achieved by trying to be pious and being the best warrior. Despite Anchises's delineation of the

soul as polluted by the body, the Aeneid depicts the life on earth as more important than life after death. The Aeneid also depicts the death of a son as the worst thing that can ever happen.

## **Comparing the three books**

The main dominant factor in the Epic of Gilgamesh is the heroic main character who is a son of a goddess or god given privileges by the gods. The heroic character is always harassed by constant flow of tragedies which force them to fulfill their fates. All these characters of heroic beings are seen in the characters of the Aeneid and in Gilgamesh from the Epic of Gilgamesh.

In the Odyssey, there is a belief that the abode of the dead is dark and dismal. According to this book the main purpose of life is to achieve intermediate rewards and live for the moment. Homer describes the underworld deep beneath the earth and that his wife Persephone reigned over the countless drifting crowds of shadowy figures of all those who had died. The ghost told Odysseus that he would rather be a poor serf on earth than being the Lord of all the dead in the underworld. (Odyssey, 11. 489-91). There was a belief that at the time of death, the spirit of the dead left the body. The deceased is then prepared for burial with a descent send off. The ancient literary sources put a lot of emphasis on the necessity of a proper burial and the absence of the same, meant an insult to human dignity. (Illiad, 23. 71). the relatives of the deceased especially women performed the burial rites.

Virgil depicts the afterlife in a different way. The afterlife in this book is occupied by three types of shades namely: the damned, righteous and those

who are being purged before returning to earth. Virgil writes in the poem that even upon death, many shades are not completely removed from the body's plagues and must be drilled in punishments. They have to pay for their old offenses. Comparing Virgil and Homer, there is less correlation between the will of gods with fate holding an even higher authority.

Virgil and Homer provide different accounts of the underworld and afterlife. There are several similarities in their accounts as well as differences in their accounts. Both of the accounts give an impression that afterlife is a form of continuous torture. However, for Virgil, the afterlife which is found in the underworld is more structured than the way it is portrayed by Homer.

Death is viewed by different cultures in a totally different way. Some people do not believe in life after death while others have the belief strongly glued in their minds. This can be seen on how the dead bodies are handled by the people concerned. Some people cremate the bodies while others give their loved ones a historic descent burial. These are all done in respect for the dead.

## **Conclusion**

Death is an inescapable or an inevitable fact that human beings cannot run away from. Gilgamesh learns that only the gods can live forever but humans have to die at some point. Life is a very short encounter and whenever death knocks on the door one has to respond to the inevitable call. Life is woven and even though human beings die, humanity does not but instead continues to be. The main lesson that Gilgamesh and other characters in the

three books discussed is not necessarily about death but it is actually about life.

### **Work cited List**

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