

Varying views of death essay sample

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



Death is mostly a terrible thing. The unknown aspect of this next phase in the journey of life brings much trepidation and much labor in trying to prepare for the inevitable. Since the mere mention of the word death causes a lot of anxiety, it is not surprising then to find out that mankind through the ages had found ways to cope. And one of the major ways to cope is to express the feelings via poetry.

Poetry is a tool to communicate things that could not be effectively said by means of simple prose or an elementary construction of nouns and verbs to comprise a statement of fact. Poetry bends the rules of writing somewhat and allows the spirit to soar or more importantly, voice out whatever it is bottling inside. The release that a poet feels after successfully crafting a work of art like a polished poem can be liken to an adrenaline rush and perhaps the tingling sensation of a good wine.

In trying to survive death, four poets had given the world at least four varying views of that dreaded word Death. And the result is a reflection of what most people feel in a lifetime.

No Glory in Dying

There is no glory in death. At least that is what Wilfred Owen seems to be suggesting in his turn of the century poem *Dulce et Decorum Est* (513). The words seem to tell a story of young men zealously desiring to take part in the glory of war. But Owen did not give much introduction as he brings the reader to the thick of battle. The opening stanza says:

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,

Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,

Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs,

And towards our distant rest began to trudge. (Owen, 513)

There was no hint that the boys in uniform enjoyed one solitary day in the theater of war. Owen was not content to just describe the moment of life slipping by, but also the futility and suffering that happens beforehand; especially so when one flirts with death. He ended his work by mocking those who encouraged these young men to go on early to their graves. Thus, his view of death here is something that should be avoided at all cost and must never be trifled with.

That Great Equalizer

An interesting commentary on death is given by Sharon Olds in her 1942 ode to Marilyn Monroe and to the screen goddess' legion of fans and those who may not be official member of her fan club but in one way or another was influenced by Monroe's iconic figure.

The “ ambulance men” which easily denotes the forerunner of the modern Emergency Response Team was used to represent the rest of humanity. These may perhaps be not crazy over her in terms of being a film buff or a fan; they were just ordinary people doing their jobs. But on this particular day they met a symbol of immortality and the real face of death in one body. And that is the lifeless form of Marilyn Monroe.

Sharon Olds offers multiple views of death. First of all, the author communicated a major idea and that is that death is the great equalizer. Mankind shares death like no other. No one has the same income, status, fame and influence. But when death touches a human being it is the same all over the world. The second view of death that Sharon Olds was able to communicate was that it strips the person naked; it unmask what is hidden and reveals the most basic person hiding inside the shell of whatever façade was built around that person. The opening stanza was so moving and so real because the author was able to describe the nakedness of death and she wrote:

The ambulance men touched her cold

Body, lifted it, heavy iron,

Onto the stretcher, tried to close the

Arms to the sides, moved a caught

Stand of hair, as if it mattered,

Saw the shape of her breast, flattened by

Gravity, under the sheet, (Olds, 547)

The rest of the poem is the consequence of these realizations. Death has changed them in different ways depending on what is already present in their personality and character. One of the “ ambulance men” could not handle the new found revelation about dying and he went down the path of

despair. The other person in the team that saw her awful state would not like to add another bad experience to his psyche and began to hate his job. The third one had a brand new realization of the meaning of life.

But at the end the author brings the reader back to the main idea. That is that death is a great equalizer. Notice the words ordinary that denotes a simple meaning but actually connotes something else in the context of this poem:

In the doorway to a room of sleep, listening to a

Woman breathing, just an ordinary

Woman

Breathing. (Olds, 547)

With Guns Blazing

In the poem *Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night* Dylan Thomas offers conflicting views of death but was able to tie it all together by encouraging people to go out with guns blazing. The conflicting view begins early just right after reading the title and the opening three lines that say:

Do not gentle into that good night,

Old age should burn and rave at close of day;

Rage, rage against the dying of the light. (Thomas, 527)

How can something good be an object of derision? That is the complexity of the ideas present in this work.

Yet, the author made it clear though that he is talking directly about death. Whereas, in the last two poems discussed, the respective authors were merely alluding to death but this time, Thomas is focusing on it, and even challenging it. In all stanzas he used a repetition of two phrases: dying of the light and that good night. He was using a metaphor for death and these phrases connote darkness. The metaphor is seen here by giving an image of a light slowly dying as in a candle about to be extinguished and also with sleeping into the night and not waking up.

Conquering Death

It is rather appropriate to end by presenting a radical view of death. For the author John Donne his message is, do not fear – death is not that mighty and not that dreadful. He is confident with the fact that all those who fell asleep with the sting of death will one day awake eternally.

But the author was not contented with this boast of finally able to overcome death and armed with this confidence and brimming with hope, he began to mock death once more. Death has become like a person that the author could see and converse with. With these lines he challenges him (death) and takes away from him whatever satisfaction he (death) has achieved every time he takes lives. With these lines he mocks death:

Thou art slave to Fate, Chance, kings, and desperate men,

And dost with poison, warre, and sickness dwell,

And poppie, or charmes can make us sleepe as well,

And better then thy stroake; why swellst thou then;

One short sleepe past, wee wake eternally, (Donne, 482)

What a brave thing to say. This last view offers a rather complete and encompassing understanding of that awful thing called death. And there are a few ways that can express these thoughts fully and with much satisfaction other than poetry.

Works Cited

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