

Death as life

[Experience](#), [Meaning of Life](#)



English 1102 November 30, 2006 Death As Life Life will end, of that fact there is no doubt. Death, or the end of life approaches the living in various disguises. The acceptance of death's intention also varies among individuals. In "Because I Could Not Stop For Death" (Dickinson, Emily. [c. 1862]) for example, death is perceived as a kind carriage driver and it's intentions are so well disguised that the speaker does not even realize she has died. The intention of this paper is to express the belief that how life is lived is how Death will introduce itself at the end. To further expand on afore mentioned Dickinson poem, the first and second lines, "Because I could not stop for Death-/ He kindly stopped for me-", shows the reader that the speaker enjoyed her life and was not ready to go. These lines also show that the speaker was probably used to being treated with kindness and respect, thus her perception of Death being kind and respectful. The poem tells the reader that the speaker was dead for many years before she realized she was, "Since then-'tis Centuries-and yet/ Feels shorter than the Day/ I first surmised the Horses' Heads/ Were toward Eternity-", obviously meaning that Death made the speaker's transition into eternity as enjoyable as her life had been. The speaker in "Lady Lazarus" (Plath, Sylvia. [1962]) continually tricked Death, thus deceiving herself with the idea that Death would never win. Jean-Paul Sartre believed it is our existence that precedes our essence, that by our action, we define what we become. (qtd. Boardman, Victoria.) The idea that our actions define what we become is certainly relevant in the way the speaker in "Lady Lazarus" is teasing Death. In the first stanza of the poem, the speaker arrogantly announces, "I have done it again. / One year in every ten/ I manage it--". (Lady Lazarus; Plath, S.) She is boasting her ability to

cheat Death by rising again from an attempted suicide. Her first encounter with near-death happened accidentally when she was ten, as stated in the twelfth stanza. She admits that she had no intention to "come back at all" the second time in stanza thirteen, which is followed by "Dying/ Is an art, like everything else. / I do it exceptionally well," in the fifteenth. By the time the speaker is ready to make her third attempt at cheating Death, she considers herself putting on a show as evidenced in stanzas sixteen and seventeen. And although the speaker never actually dies in the poem, the poem is reflective of the way the writer, Plath herself, viewed her life. After Plath made her first suicide attempt, she wrote in her journal: "To annihilate the world by annihilation of one's self is the deluded height of desperate egoism. The simple way out of all the little brick dead ends we scratch our nails against.... I want to kill myself, to escape from responsibility, to crawl back abjectly into the womb." (www. neuroticpoets. com) Obviously believing that by crawling back into the womb, she could start life all over. But Death finally won and took the trickster for his own when she (Plath) made another and final attempt at suicide. Sometimes life itself is so cruel that people seek the comfort and friendship of Death. Such is the case in "Barbie Doll" by Marge Piercy. A normal girl who was healthy, intelligent and strong was forced to turn to Death for comfort. The subject of the poem did not live up to societies 'perfect' profile of beauty (i. e. the 'Barbie' doll) and chose Death over being taunted about her "great big nose and fat legs". The poem does not specify the face that Death wore for this young girl, but one can assume it was a face she was seeking and gladly embraced. "Ulysses" by Alfred Lord Tennyson is another example of Death representing a life lived,

but in this poem Death is given the face it is expected to wear because of a man's desire to continue an unfinished journey. Ulysses experienced many adventures in his life and at an old and sedentary age, makes the conscious decision to continue his quest for knowledge and understanding. Although physically weakened with age, " tho'/ we are not now that strength which in old days/moved earth and heaven," he knows his heart " made weak by time and fate, but strong in will", and decides to leave his old age comfort so as not to face a sad end. In other words, Ulysses chooses Death to be just another adventure in his long line of many and will continue " to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield," until the very end. (Lindsay A. Braman; 2003)

The most profound proof that Death reflects a life lived can be read in the words of John Donne in " Death Be Not Proud". Donne reminds the reader that Death is not the killer with the lines " For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow/ Die not, poor death, nor yet canst thou kill me." Death is told, " Thou art slave to fate, chance, kings and desperate men," which is really saying that death has no power. Personifying death allows a person to see death as easily as that person sees life. An evil man, for example, will perceive death as something to be feared; because evil is all he knows, death too will be evil for him. Although Donne's words do not specifically say that Death reflects life, it is easy to understand the correlation by knowing that death is a slave, or better yet an escort from this world to the next. All that is living will face Death, and how it approaches is up to each individual and the life that is lived. Works Cited Hannaford, Michael. Introduction to Literature. Boston: Pearson Custom Publishing, 2006