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Science, Biology



Agam Sidhu Johnson Rhet 1302 26 February 2013 The Death of the Moth
Analysis All living creatures must face the battle between life and death. In Virginia Woolf's "The Death of the Moth" a moth is shown to be injured and laying in a window pane staring upon death. Like the moth, humans face the struggle of living life and facing death. The fact that death is inevitable, allows humans to shape their lives in a way that makes them content. Woolf effectively uses the dying moth to represent the pathetic nature of life and the acceptance of death. The moth, injured and dying, represents how pathetic life can really be. While the moth is injured it tries to free itself from the binds of its physical injury. Watching the moth struggle, "One, was, indeed, conscious of a queer feeling of pity for him. The possibilities of pleasure seemed that morning so enormous and so various that to have only a moth's part in life, and a day moth's at that, appeared a hard fate, and his zest in enjoying his meager opportunities to the full, pathetic." (Woolf 19)

The emotional appeal Woolf uses allows the reader to understand how Woolf sees the moth. The negative connotation of the moth's life signifies the pathetic view Woolf has about life. Details in the moth's role in life and the personification of the moth, giving the moth emotions, portray the sorrow the author has towards life. As the moth is stricken with injury it unsuccessfully tries to escape the room through the window, "That was all he could do, in spite of the size of the downs, the width of the sky, the far-off smoke of houses, and the romantic voice, now and then, of a steamer out at sea. What he could do he did... enormous energy of the world had been thrust into his frail and diminutive body. As often as he crossed the pane, I could fancy that a thread of vital light became visible. He was little or

nothing but life. "(Woolf 19) The contrast between the sky and the moth emphasize the frailness of the moth and of life. The imagery of the world outside the window help show that life alone is meager, the individual aspect of life is pathetic. Woolf's sentence structure further emphasizes the moth's uselessness in the world and its pathetic nature of being just a piece of life. The moth did what he could because life only provided him with those opportunities, had life been less pathetic the moth would play a larger role in the Universe. Being as it is merely an empty piece of energy the moth will leave the world while nobody notices. The emotional appeal gives the reader sympathy towards the moth. Knowing that the moth is nothing more than the definition of life itself, the foreshadowing of death is easily seen. The moth, which is nothing more than life, must lose its energy someday destroying the life inside. Life's fight against death is Woolf's ultimate message of the pathetic nature of life. Life is in a forever losing battle against death, and that must be accepted. After the moth has been injured and has tried to escape it must accept the notion that it will die. Woolf parallels the moth's death with the acceptance of death in all life. When the energy of life is coming to an end the moth accepts its fate of death and allows life to escape its body. " Nevertheless the present specimen, with his narrow hay-colored wings, fringed with a tassel of the same color, seemed to be content with life. "(Woolf 19)The imagery Woolf uses helps the reader connect to the moth emotionally and physically. Personifying the happiness of the moth's life foreshadows its upcoming death. Once an individual is considered to be content with life one can say that their life is over. Life is a struggle of prolonging death; the foreshadowing connects to the moth's

acceptance of death. Woolf immediately shifts away from the moth further emphasizing the acceptance of death in the moth. After struggling to escape through the window, “ Stillness and quiet had replaced the previous animation. The birds had taken themselves off to feed in the brooks. The horses stood still...It was useless to try to do anything. ”(Woolf 20) Once again Woolf’s sentence structure emotionally appeals to the reader. By using short sentences filled with imagery the reader is drawn into the fact that the moth will sadly die. The reader is entrapped in the fact that the moth has accepted its fate and will soon die. The surrounding environment, which has also become still as if it were dead, parallels with the moth’s life. The tone justifies the assumption that the moth has accepted death; the moth was stuck in its fate without hope of escaping. Woolf ends her essay in a melancholy mood, revealing her true purpose of the essay. “ The body relaxed, and instantly grew stiff. The struggle was over. The insignificant little creature now knew death...O yes, he seemed to say, death is stronger than I am. ”(Woolf 21) The imagery reveals the final moments of the moth’s life. By personifying the moth, giving it knowledge, Woolf once again emotionally attaches the reader to the moth. The acceptance of death is clearly seen as the motif of the essay. The organization of the writing, waiting until the end to reveal the recurring theme, helps the reader see the parallel that every living being must accept death. The reader is emotionally blinded by the death of the moth, and the metaphor comparing the moth to life. Virginia Woolf uses rhetorical devices to help the reader see her point of view. The imagery greatly contributes to the emotional appeal the reader has towards the moth. Metaphorically Woolf uses the moth to represent life

itself and the pathetic nature life has. The moth also symbolizes the acceptance of death that every living being must face. Woolf effectively uses rhetorical strategies to help the reader understand the true meaning of the moth. Work Cited Woolf, Virginia. " The Death of the Moth. " Ed. Chris Ansen. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1942. 19-21. Print