

Analysis of philip roth's everyman – assignment



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The main character says, " Old age isn't a battle; old age is a massacre. "

How would you respond to this statement? Why does he say this? What feelings does it express? In saying this is he a cynic?

I would say that it can be one way to look at it. If you are looking at death in terms of a fight, it is one everyone will lose and this can be very negative. It should be focused more on the life you still enjoy, instead of the death that surrounds you. If it is a fight, whatever you may be fighting against will no doubt win and there is less of a battle when in the end you know you will lose. Everyone else is old and dying and he feels it is not a battle is it a massacre because there are no winners and everyone eventually ends up dying. The battle means to him that there is a chance to win and there would be survivors, in a massacre there is no one left standing.

He says this because looking at all that has aged with him is now becoming sick and frail and all are getting closer to death. With each day that passes he notices that his health is not what it used to be. It is continuously getting worse and there is no getting better, more of a waiting game to see when and how it happens. He also sees his friends that he has worked with and his family aging around him. He is slowly losing what he had, having alienated himself from his family, and losing his friends slowly he has nothing left and everything he did want is now out of reach. He is defeated and now waiting for the end. This statement expresses feelings of frustration, hopelessness and fear.

He is frustrated with what has come to him, his friends and ex wife. There is nothing he can do to prevent the inevitable. This also causes the

hopelessness with him feeling like the despair of having lost what he had and what he would like to have done in his life. He has this fear of what will become of him, and how it will end for him. Yes he is a cynic. He has such a negative outlook from all of these emotions there is no joy left for him to see. He has lost so much that he does not have anything left to look forward to. Even his own daughter, the only one left in his life, is too busy with her mother who is in the hospital by the end making him completely alone. Not even wanting to call anyone for his surgery is showing what little is left of meaning in his life. 2. Why is he so envious of his brother Howie? What does Howie represent? Howie is everything that he is not. Howie always had it easy. Everything that he values in life Howie has. Howie kept a wife and family, no health or medical problems, rich, adventuresome and youthful even in his older age. Howie represents the life that he has always wanted but could never have, both with and without choice. He could never bring himself to lead a life like Howie's. Even though that was what he idolized it was never in his personality or his medical history. He always looked up to Howie right from childhood. Howie is the idol to look up to.

Howie is everything good, everything that he sees as important in life. 3. The main character tells us that he was a young man worried about oblivion (P. 32) Why do you think he had this fear at this age? Does this explain any of his behaviour, particularly his sexual promiscuity? As a young boy he had his first of many hospital visits. At nine years old he stayed at the hospital for a surgery on his hernia. While there he was a spectator while the doctors worked on a boy in the next bed. When the boy was gone the next morning

he is set that the boy beside him died, making him very nervous going into his surgery not trusting the doctor to be the one he met prior to the surgery.

Once he has this first visit he realizes that life may not last forever and there was no way to know when it would end. His appendix is his next stay in the hospital, followed by numerous heart surgeries. Each time he goes in not sure whether there will be an after. He is convinced by this point there is nothing after death, that it is the end. There is also the soldier washing up on the shore. To see a sailor wash up on shore bloated and dead was quite a shock to a young boy. Seeing this example of what happens after death is another point towards his belief that oblivion is only a matter of time. This does explain his behaviours, particularly his sexual promiscuity.

He lived his life in fear of death; with each new woman he was looking for the excitement and the youthfulness that he felt he was losing as each year passed. His ego needed these women in his life so he could keep telling himself that he was young and that he was attractive to women. This is what his life was based around. Even in his old age he still tried to pick up a woman from the boardwalk; one who was close to 50 years younger than he. Through the whole conversation he was aware he was making a fool of himself, but could not help himself. He needed to see if he still had the ability to attract the opposite sex. When she stopped running along the boardwalk it was a real blow to his ego and had a real impact on his fragility, causing him to lose most of what he built his life around.

Once he lost his confidence, he realized how alone he really was and with only his daughter left to turn to. 4. " religion was a lie that he recognized

early in life" (P. 51) What do you think of his views on religion? How do you think his atheism affects his ethical conduct? I think it is realistic for his character - he is not one to believe in something that is not proved. He believes in the physical. There is no God and no afterlife in his world. There is life and death. Even in the end he is still using the physical as his way to look at life. Since he has no religious belief he doesn't feel guilt the same way someone who is strongly religious would.

Once he dies he will not have a judgment made about his life. He has made his decisions based on his life from childhood through adulthood. This has helped mold his morals. He does not worry about what will happen in his afterlife. 5. "Everyman has a lot of medical problems throughout his life and most in his later life." Viktor Frankl wrote a famous book *The Will to Meaning*, based on his experiences in Auschwitz. Frankl argues we all have a fundamental moral choice whether to create meaning in their lives or accept what fate brings. Why couldn't Everyman make this choice? He could not create meaning in his life b/c he did not know what he had and what it had meant to him.

To have a daughter who took care to call every morning was just another reminder of what he had messed up on. He could not accept the fate he was given. He had a happy family with a wife and children, and he could not be happy with that it was what he felt he needed. He could not accept that his body was giving out on him. He was always jealous of his brother and his good health. It was something that was never good enough. Could not accept that his youthfulness was leaving and old age was setting in. This change was not what he wanted and constantly battled with it throughout

the book. References Roth, P. (2006). *Everyman*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company.