
Theme of Mortality in Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night and I Heard a Fly Buzz When I Died

Poetry Essay

In “Do not go gentle into that good night” by Dylan Thomas and “I heard a Fly buzz – when I died” by Emily Dickinson presents the topic of death. However, the two personas in the poems have different approaches on this topic. The theme presented in “Do not go gentle into that good night” by Dylan Thomas and “I heard a Fly buzz – when I died” by Emily Dickinson is mortality but they have different approaches; they view death from various angles, encourage different reaction towards death and emphasize the experience of death differently.

The personas in the two poems have various views on death. In “Do not go gentle into that good night” by Dylan Thomas the persona states, “Though wise men at their end know dark is right/Because their words had forked no lightning” (4-5). The persona indicates that even though wise men know death is natural and is unavoidable, regardless of whether or not they have reached their goals, they will still not give into death. The persona states, “Because their words had forked no lightning” (5) defines that the wise men know they did not achieve anything to change the world. The men know they have been unsuccessful thus they must rage against dying. In “I heard a Fly buzz – when I died” by Emily Dickinson the persona is not afraid of death and accepts his/her fate, “I willed my Keepsakes – Signed away/What portion of me be/Assignable” (9-11). The persona calmly discusses his/her death without any worry of what may come after. In “I heard a Fly buzz – when I died”, the persona accepts that he/she is dying and recounts what he/she is encountering while in “Do not go gentle into that good night” the persona questions what comes after death and is afraid of the unknown.

The two poems also encourage different reactions towards death. In “Do not go gentle into that good night” the persona encourages to rage against death, “Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright/Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,/Rage, rage against the dying of the light” (7-9). The wave is a metaphorical sense of the last wave of death and how it will approach the good men and engulf them. Also, the persona states how the good men wished they could have accomplished more, therefore they rage against death because they believe they are not ready. In “I heard a Fly buzz – when I died”, the persona is aware that he/she is dying and becomes distracted with unrelated details such as focusing on the fly on his/her deathbed:

I heard a Fly buzz – when I died –

The Stillness in the Room

Was like the Stillness in the Air –

Between the Heaves of Storm – (1-4)

The poem begins with the fly interrupting “The Stillness in the Air” (3), which is not permanent because the silence is described that the silence between two storms. The persona describes

the silence present within the room he/she is dying in and the first thought in the personas mind is the fly. This presents the personas priorities during his/her deathbed, the fly is deemed to look more relevant than his/her life. In "Do not go gentle into that good night" the persona views death as a time to view regret and encourages to fulfill deeds before death while "I heard a Fly buzz – when I died" focuses on the irrelevancies during death and does not ponder on the regret in life like "Do not go gentle into that good night".

The two poems also emphasize on the experience of death differently. In "Do not go gentle into that good night" the poem warns of death and urges the dying to fight their fate and cling onto life. The persona states, "Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight/And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way" (10-11), the wild men attempted to make the most of their time but later realize they worry too much on the passing of time rather than enjoying life itself. The men later grieve because of how they encountered their lives. However, in "I heard a Fly buzz – when I died" the persona emphasizes on the strangeness and oddity of the experience of death:

With Blue – uncertain stumbling Buzz –

Between the light – and me –

And then the Windows failed – and then

I could not see to see – (14-17)

The persona describes how the fly blots out the light, leaving he/she blinded, reciting how her first thought when he/she was dying and last are inclusive to the fly. The fly is a minor character in the persona's life but is the only significant character besides the persona in this poem. This fly represents the physical aspects of death, the rotting of a corpse and stands between the persona's path to the "light". The irony within this poem is there is a saying stating how life will flash through one's eyes before death, however in "I heard a Fly buzz – when I died", the only significant thought the persona has before death is the fly.

The two poems, "Do not go gentle into that good night" and "I heard a Fly buzz – when I died" both signify the meaning of mortality. However, they both take a different approach on the subject and have a different meaning within.