

Examine how humans deal with the death of the loved one by comparing Wystan Hugh Auden's "Stop All the Clocks" with Lucy Maud Montgomery's "As the Heart Hopes"

Death is one of the inevitables in life of which all of us would confront sooner or later. Of course, it is rather rare for one to have a taste of death before he actually dies. But what many individuals share is perhaps the experience of witnessing a loved one passes on. And more than often such experience conjures different reactions and emotions depending on the individuals. With such insight, this essay aims to examine how humans react towards the death of their loved ones by comparing Wystan Hugh Auden's "Stop All the Clocks" with Lucy Maud Montgomery's "As the Heart Hopes".

The choice of Auden and Montgomery's poems in such comparison is not a coincidence. "Stop All the Clocks (Auden, 1966)" vividly portrays a persona who suffered from great sense of despair and hopelessness for the lover was dead. Whereas Montgomery's poem illustrates a persona remembering a loved one who had passed on a year ago with wonderful thoughts. Apparently, the convergent point where "Stop All the Clocks (Auden, 1966)" and "As the Heart Hopes (Montgomery, 1916)" meets is that both poems display the experience of losing a loved one. However, the poems begin to differ in the representation of the deceased, the representation of imagery in the poem, and how time influences the emotional states of a person upon his loved one's death. This essay will discuss the points of divergence along these three issues by comparing the two poems side by side.

The poems depict different representations of the deceased in both the personas' lives. In Auden's poem, the deceased was an entity that constitutes the persona's life. The lover was of immense importance in the persona's life. This is supported by that the persona's attempts to

gain control over the lover's funeral. He created a total silence environment, as could be seen in the beginning of the poem "Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone, Prevent the dog from barking ...", because for him the only thing matters for that moment was his lover's funeral and no one thing at that moment should disrupt it. How much the deceased meant for the persona is further emphasized by stanza three when the latter claimed that the lover was his directions in life. The deceased was referred to, almost God-like, as the persona's "North", "South", "East", and "West". In fact, the readers are even told that the lover was the essence of the persona's happiness. The persona feels that "...nothing now can ever come to any good" without his beloved. As contrast to this, Montgomery's persona perceived the deceased not as someone who makes up his life entirely, but as a person whose companionship was delightful and very much longed for. The persona and his loved one's unbreakable comradeship was palpable when the persona claimed that "...you (the loved one) come to me, For old, delightsome speech of eye and lip, Deeming our mutual converse thus to be, Fairer than archangelic comradeship..." These distinctive representations of the deceased in the two personas' world perhaps explain the difference in the general tones of both the poems. Seemingly, the death of the persona's lover in Auden's poem shatters the very existence of his being. Hence, the poem emits a tone of great despair and hopelessness. On the contrary, the loss of the loved one who was depicted as a chum in Montgomery's poem conjures more of a sense of loneliness instead of tremendous pain and sorrow. With these, this essay believes that how one perceives the deceased is correlated to how he reacts towards the death.

Apart from that, this essay also intends to find out how the poets' conscious uses of different imagery contribute to the overall mood of the poems. Auden's poem advocates a mood of sorrow and gloominess on the readers. Auden's use of imagery like 'coffin', 'mourners' in the

first stanza enables the reader to visualise a parade of mourners bring up coffin for burial while all the other motions, here the clock's ticking, were forced to stay static by the persona. Such parade was conducted in total silence apart from the moaning-like sound produced by the aeroplane. It is as if the persona put aside all the other things only to indulge himself in his sorrow, his loss of his beloved. In stanza four, the persona creates a sensation of dark emptiness by his attempts to remove all the celestial bodies - the stars, the moon, and the sun, from his world. As he continued to pack away the ocean and the woods, it is a possible postulate that he has lost hope to live for the sun, the ocean, and the woods are often seen as the sources of life. Quite the reverse, Montgomery's poem elicits a state of tranquil and pleasant emotions on the readers. The persona imagined that his loved one's soul would go through lovely and glorious experience that mortals could not enjoy. In stanza one, the persona thought that the loved one may have stayed on a star, "basked within the light of mightier suns", or 'trod the glittering pathways of the Pleiades" and walked "through the Milky Way's white mysteries." In stanza two, the loved one met the prophets and martyrs and learned of "Paradise" and "infinite wisdom" which are mentioned in the Christian bible. These are the dreams many Christians long to fulfil and hence it was a sheer honour credited to the persona's loved one. Besides, the harmonious and yet divine emotions are further enhanced by the music produced by a choir of the angels of the highest rank, "the seraphim". Such cherubic mood begins to descend to worldly comradeship when the persona imagined that the loved one would come to him for old time's sake. The readers would read these lines with smiles in appreciation of the wonderful time the persona and his loved one had spent together. Unlike Auden's sense of hopelessness, the imagery of the nature mentioned in Montgomery's poem like star, sun, the Milky way, rainbow, flowers, moon, and sunset, stirs the peaceful and calm emotions in the readers. Although both the poets may

have employed the same imagery in their poems, the way the poems were written decides what kinds of emotions occur in the readers.

Besides, it is to note here that time influences the way the personas treat the death of their loved ones. As the persona's emotional states were compared, we, with great caution, could formulate that the passage of time actually heals the pain of losing a loved one. In Auden's poem, the lover of the persona just died not so long ago. By picking up words like "coffin", "mourners", and "moaning", the persona was most probably had just attended the funeral. Under normal circumstance, funeral could be conducted any time after a death, nevertheless the interval between the death and burial is seven days of average (Citizen Advice Bureau, 2011). Hence, the beloved would have passed away the most a week's time before the funeral. In contrast to that, the lover of the persona in "As the Heart Hopes" had passed on for a year, as mentioned in the first line of the poem, "It is a year dear one, since you afar". Bearing the difference of time in mind, Auden's stark despair is in contrast to Montgomery's calm reminiscence of the loved one. This is such for the persona in the former's poem had just felt the impact of the loss of his beloved. He was at the moment desperate, hopeless, and sorrowful. On the other hand, the "dear one" for the persona in Montgomery's poem had been dead for a year. The latter's grief has subsides and now he could imagine that the loved one might have spent wonderful time in his afterlife and that felt glad and happy for him. If truth be told, his tone was almost gleeful when he says "A wondrous year!" that the loved one might have spent. Nevertheless, although the emotions of grief are not as overwhelming as Auden's persona, there is a tinge of sorrow when Montgomery's persona yearned for the company of the loved one in stanza three. Time here could ease one's sorrow upon a death. If this is true, given time, Auden's persona would become as calm and composed as the persona in Montgomery's poem.

By studying Auden's and Montgomery's poems, we come to several conclusions. First, the emotional attachment that one has towards the deceased entails how he reacts towards the death. Second, the employment of imagery in the poems and how the poet manipulates them decides the kind of feelings emerge in the readers. Lastly, time is the cure for the loss of a loved one. Although death is not something any human being could control, how we cope with it display who we really are as well as the wisdom resides in us.

Works Cited

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APPENDIX

Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone by W. H. Auden

Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone,
Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone,
Silence the pianos and with muffled drum
Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.

Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead
Scribbling on the sky the message He Is Dead,
Put crepe bows round the white necks of the public doves,
Let the traffic policemen wear black cotton gloves.

He was my North, my South, my East and West,
My working week and my Sunday rest,
My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song;
I thought that love would last for ever: I was wrong.

The stars are not wanted now: put out every one;
Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun;
Pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood.
For nothing now can ever come to any good.

As the Heart Hopes by L.M. Montgomery

It is a year dear one, since you afar
Went out beyond my yearning mortal sight
A wondrous year! perchance in many a star
You have sojourned, or basked within the light
Of mightier suns; it may be you have trod
The glittering pathways of the Pleiades,
And through the Milky Way's white mysteries
Have walked at will, fire-shod.

You may have gazed in the immortal eyes
Of prophets and of martyrs; talked with seers
Learned in all the lore of Paradise,
The infinite wisdom of eternal years;
To you the Sons of Morning may have sung,
The impassioned strophes of their matin hymn,
For you the choirs of the seraphim
Their harpings wild out-flung.

But still I think at eve you come to me
For old, delightsome speech of eye and lip,
Deeming our mutual converse thus to be
Fairer than archangelic comradeship;

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Dearer our close communings fondly given
Than all the rainbow dreams a spirit knows,
Sweeter my gathered violets than the rose
Upon the hills of heaven.

Can any exquisite, unearthly morn,
Silverly breaking o'er a starry plain,
Give to your soul the poignant pleasure born
Of virgin moon and sunset's lustrous stain
When we together watch them ? Oh, apart
A hundred universes you may roam,
But still I know I know your only home
Is here within my heart!

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