

An Interpretive Essay of the "Auto Wreck"

Philosophers have pondered the meaning of life and death since the beginning of time. There are many hypotheses. From reincarnation to Valhalla -- then on to heaven. There have been many proposed solutions. Yet no one fully understands death. In Shapiro's poem "Auto Wreck," he illustrates the irrationality of life for it can be taken away at any given time for no rational reason.

Shapiro uses metaphors to emphasize the fantasy-like and wild setting of the auto wreck. The following is an excerpt taken from "Auto Wreck":

"And down the dark one ruby flare
Pulsing out red light like an artery."

This statement contrasts the red light emitted from an ambulance to the blood of an artery. The idea that a light is spurted out like blood is abstract and bizarre. In addition to that metaphor, Shapiro writes:

"One hangs lanterns on the wrecks that cling
Emptying husks of locusts, to iron poles."

This rhythmical sentence paints a picture of locusts, grass-hopper like creatures, clinging to a luscious green jungle of grass. Yet symbolically this jungle is the twisted, black, and crisp auto wreck. This depiction of the auto

wreck is extravagant and almost unreal. Using metaphors, Shapiro portrays the fantasy-like auto wreck in which wildness is indispensable.

In addition to Shapiro's use of metaphorical phrases, he emphasizes the lack of comprehension of the on-lookers as a result of death's inconsistency with logic. Shapiro directly tells the reader, "We are deranged." The word "we" symbolizes us, as a whole institution or better yet -- society. He goes on further to say, "Our throats were tight as tourniquets." By this he means that the on-lookers were stopped, almost speechless, as they gazed upon the wreckage contemplating the reason behind death. Finally, Shapiro writes:

"We speak through sickly smiles and warn
With the stubborn saw of common sense."

What the writer is getting through is that the on-lookers attempted to rationalize the accident with their common sense. But their "common sense," or their logical reasoning ability, was being sawed upon as they continued to puzzle over death. Once again, the old age question of "What is the meaning of death?" was tackled at the scene of the auto wreck.

Finally, Shapiro asks rhetorical questions which could never be answered by logical means. One question which Shapiro asks is "Who shall die [next]?" This question could never be answered for death strikes without cause but randomness. The second question Shapiro asks is "Who is

innocent?" No one knows who is innocent. The driver might have been suicidal. Maybe he might not have. Who knows, for this is death that is being dealt with. These hard questions could not be reasoned with deductively. Only an irrational source such as an all-supreme and omniscient being could answer these questions.

In death, there exists strictly irrational causes for the loss of life. Death is an eccentric jungle whose twisted, convoluted, and entangled vines represent the causes of death which can not be mapped out mathematically, but can be mapped out by the deranged explorer or sole creator of that jungle, both of whom are irrational persons in themselves.