

How does the continuity and inevitability of the human condition as well as the exploitation of death and pain affect communities' outlook on life?

Death and pain have always been a part of the daily lives of every human being ever to live. However, through wars, dodging disasters, and losing loved ones, it can become more prevalent and affect people's outlook on life. Wislawa Szymborska explores this idea through her poems *On Death Without Exaggeration* and *Tortures*, and through understanding her authorial choices, she can lead us to two conflicting conclusions over the way it affects us. In *On Death Without Exaggeration*, it leaves us with a feeling of hope and the indomitable human spirit in reaction to death, while *Tortures* illustrates the destruction and despair that the exploitation of death can bring communities.

*On Death Without Exaggeration* primarily uses the personification of death to allow readers to give a non-human concept a sort of humanity. Death is described as being sloppy with kills, falling behind at its job of taking lives, and being amateur at its trade of killing. This is further seen in the quote "All those bulbs, pods, tentacles, fins, tracheae, nuptial plumage, and winter fur show that it has fallen behind in its work. Ill will won't help and even our lending a hand with wars and coup d'état is not so far enough". (Szymborska, 25) This poem turning death into an understandable entity and not an above human concept illustrates that evolutions created to be better at surviving and growing numbers, as well as humans being able to simplify it down to "defeat" death show that life may be slowly overpowering death. Even humanities helping with wars and tragedies isn't enough to allow Death to "win". The poem also uses Tense changes and symbolism to illustrate life's triumphs. In the quote "Oh, it [death] has its triumphs, but look at its countless defeats, missed blows, and repeated attempts." (Szymborska 17). This switches the poem away from simply talking about death to a response directed at death, and provides a very human reaction to death not overpowering us. The symbolism of its "failures" keeps us believing that we are slowly beating it. This can relate to the global issue because in this poem, it describes that while death has no regard for miracles of life or our plans for tomorrow, life evolving and surviving near death moments is causing death to have little effect on our daily normal lives.

Wislawa Szymborskas Other poem *Tortures*, however, argues through the use of Anaphora, symbolism, and repetition that nothing has changed and Death still negatively affects people. The constant use of "Nothing has changed" assumes the obvious, but goes into how even though there have been many changes to life such as more civil people, better living conditions and attempts to negotiate peace, nothing has changed. People hurt, people are still mortal, and people use those flaws to torture and make people miserable. This is further seen through the repetition of body parts and feelings in the poem, such as blood, teeth, joints, and skin, which shows the forever lasting continuity of the traits of life, and how it is easily exploited by others. The

symbolism of the line “Nothing has changed. Except for the course of boundaries, the line of forests, coasts, deserts and glaciers” essentially argues that the Earth's features and the rest of life besides humanity has evolved and flourished, and despite the changes in ways and technology, death is inevitable, and can be exploited, and like the global issue states, that death still holds as much of the threat and the fear that has had a hold on life since the beginning of time.

Wisława Szymborska's use of these two conflicting poems can lead to two very different answers to the question of death's impact on humans. One argues that life is slowly beating it out through technology and evolution, while the other argues that despite those advances, it remains present as always. This can lead to the conclusion that Death can be ignored only when one's life is progressive, safe, and healthy, while death looms ever present in places stricken by poverty, sickness, and war.

## Extracts/Bodies of Work Used:

On death without exaggeration

It can't take a joke,  
find a star, make a bridge.  
It knows nothing about weaving, mining, farming,  
building ships, or baking cakes.  
In our planning for tomorrow,  
it has the final word,  
which is always beside the point.

It can't even get the things done  
that are part of its trade:  
dig a grave,  
make a coffin,  
clean up after itself.

Preoccupied with killing,  
it does the job awkwardly,  
without system or skill.  
As though each of us were its first kill.

Oh, it has its triumphs,  
but look at its countless defeats,

missed blows,  
and repeat attempts!

Sometimes it isn't strong enough  
to swat a fly from the air.  
Many are the caterpillars  
that have outcrawled it.

All those bulbs, pods,  
tentacles, fins, tracheae,  
nuptial plumage, and winter fur  
show that it has fallen behind  
with its halfhearted work.

Ill will won't help  
and even our lending a hand with wars and coups d'etat  
is so far not enough.

Hearts beat inside eggs.  
Babies' skeletons grow.  
Seeds, hard at work, sprout their first tiny pair of leaves  
and sometimes even tall trees fall away.

Whoever claims that it's omnipotent  
is himself living proof  
that it's not.

There's no life  
that couldn't be immortal  
if only for a moment.

Death  
always arrives by that very moment too late.

In vain it tugs at the knob  
of the invisible door.  
As far as you've come  
can't be undone.  
Wislawe Syzmborska

TORTURES

Nothing has changed.

The body is susceptible to pain,  
it must eat and breathe air and sleep,  
it has thin skin and blood right underneath,  
an adequate stock of teeth and nails,  
its bones are breakable, its joints are stretchable.  
In tortures all this is taken into account.

Nothing has changed.

The body shudders as it shuddered  
before the founding of Rome and after,  
in the twentieth century before and after Christ.  
Tortures are as they were, it's just the earth that's grown smaller,  
and whatever happens seems right on the other side of the wall.

Nothing has changed. It's just that there are more people,  
besides the old offenses new ones have appeared,  
real, imaginary, temporary, and none,  
but the howl with which the body responds to them,  
was, is and ever will be a howl of innocence  
according to the time-honored scale and tonality.

Nothing has changed. Maybe just the manners, ceremonies, dances.  
Yet the movement of the hands in protecting the head is the same.  
The body writhes, jerks and tries to pull away,  
its legs give out, it falls, the knees fly up,  
it turns blue, swells, salivates and bleeds.

Nothing has changed. Except for the course of boundaries,  
the line of forests, coasts, deserts and glaciers.

Amid these landscapes traipses the soul,  
disappears, comes back, draws nearer, moves away,  
alien to itself, elusive, at times certain, at others uncertain of its own existence,  
while the body is and is and is  
and has no place of its own.

**Wisława Szymborska**