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Death in literature brings a quite varied array of feelings, like anger, or sorrow or grief. Here however, the reader of these prose texts can get a feeling that death in these texts is portrayed as a natural occurrence, even if it is more apparent in “On the Black Hill” by Bruce Chatwin. In both extracts we see at first that they show different reactions of people towards the dead: in “The Old Curiosity Shop”, the author seems to describe death as something abstract and surreal, while “On the Black Hill” focuses more on what lead up to the death of the grandfather, and he touches on how sudden death can be.

Throughout the integrity of Dickens' text, the author presents the Nell's dead body and the scene surrounding it as if she was alive. Practically the whole passage is in a contrast between the author both emphasising on how dead Nell is and how she doesn't seem to be. Already from the beginning of the text, Dickens gives an emphasis on the fact that Nell is dead, which already sets a sorrowful tone for the rest of the passage, and leaves the reader without any illusions. However, Dickens then goes on to give a brief description of her body, which is mostly based on her features from when she was alive: “The old fireside had smiled upon that same sweet face”. The following paragraph continues on how closely the corpse looks as if Nell was still alive, focusing on how gentle she was for other people that were in need. Through this description the reader can get a feeling that the difference between life and death is very slim. In addition, Dickens seems to suggest that death can bring a sense of liberation, seen in the second paragraph of the text: “Where were the tracer of her early cares, her sufferings, and fatigues? All gone. Sorrow was dead indeed in her, but peace and perfect happiness were born”. Dickens gives his readers the impression that death liberates us from the hardiness and the evilness of the world, especially for Nell, who was practically an angel for people around her, and her death can be seen as her returning to what is supposed to be her original place, not as a human but as an angel. However, the illusion of Nell's liveliness that was just brought to a standstill can be deceptive for some, like the reader sees with the old man: he hugs the body continuously as if he's searching for Nell's one last pulse, one last sign that she might be alive. He refuses to acknowledge the fact that she's dead, and instead goes on insisting that she's not gone, he refuses to realize that his guide through the world, suggested with “the hand that had led him on through all their wanderings”, is no longer with him. It could be also interpreted that their ways are now separated, and each now will need to wander his own path. However, the last paragraph of Dickens' work returns the reader's thoughts and wonders back to the solid ground: he is reminded that Nell is dead, and that all the gentleness she brought to the world, the “ancient rooms she had seemed to dill with life”, “the garden she had tended”, all of it was gone, the world “could know her no more”, and soon all that would remain of her would be just the memories.

On the other hand, instead of focusing after the moments after someone's death, he seems to focus on his last moments, just like with the grandfather in the passage from “On the Black Hill”. Here, instead of dwelling on the corpse of a dead person, the author briefly tells the reader that Old Sam was dead, and he quickly jumps to a flashback onto Old Sam's last moments. Already at the beginning of the flashback we see that the grandfather, who is presumably Old Sam, is uncertain: he's “groping his way down the stairs”, showing his incertitude and his age, hinting that he's approaching his end. However, he decided to end his life as happily as he could: by playing on a fiddle, probably reminding himself of his younger days, which is also hinted with the image of the “red handkerchief, knotted round his neck, made him young again”. At this point it becomes quite apparent that Old Sam tries to come back to the happiness of his younger days, to not die as an old and sorrowful man, but as someone who felt that was fulfilled in life. For that reason, he starts to play on the fiddle, with some initial croaks missed notes, but “the second note was sweeter, and the successive notes were sweeter still”. We could argue if it could be a representation of his life, disorganised at first, that became more and more melodic as it went on. However, he's caught up by the present time, and his personal flashback fades out, leaving him with his present uncertainty. It is interesting however to see how the stairs are used in Chatwin's passage: at first Old Sam goes down the stairs to play his melody, and at the end he needs to pull himself up, where he dies. We could imagine that these stairs could represent a stairway to Heaven, with the grandfather descending back to Earth to leave his last memory of himself, and then he returns upstairs, where he leaves this world. What is also worth noting is that the idea of liberation through death reappears in Chatwin's text: Old Sam dies on a quilt, with an expression “of amused condescension”, hinting that he passed away without regrets and in peace, where as right next to him a bumble-bee was stuck on a window pane. That image could hint at the idea that with death all the troubles of this world go away, and you are left with peace. The living however, are stuck with the sad reality of their current world.

In overall, both of these authors show a different approach to represent death, one wondering over the emptiness that a dead body leaves, where as the other focuses on someone's last moments, and how he tries to find happiness before he dies. However, both of the authors seem to agree on the idea that we can find a sense of liberation through death, throwing away our concerns and leaving with peace on our minds.