

# THE DEATH OF THE MOTH: RELATING LIFE AND DEATH

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## ABSTRACT

Life is short, struggle is common, death is inevitable and beyond our control where nobody can make their escape, but still we all have that one hope to make our existence real and pleasant by combatting the same in the given time. The fear of death and the purpose of life makes human race to realize the foremost duties and responsibilities to add more meaning to their lives within the short duration. Through her essay *The Death of The Moth*, Virginia Woolf exhibits the universal fact that no matter human beings fight for their survival in this world, it remains only for a temporary period ending up with *Death* finally. As mortal beings, we know that our life is destined to death one day or the other, so ignoring the time left we prepare our *Self* to exist in this blessed world by showing liveliness and progressing with the same. Here, Woolf relates the theme of struggle for life ending up with death through the character of the tiny creature *Moth* with that of human life. She deeply studies the psychology of the characters and portrays the same in her works where the readers can understand the real scenario of the same naturally.

**Keywords:** struggle – liveliness – combat – dread – death

## INTRODUCTION

Virginia Woolf is celebrated as one of the pioneered writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As a critic, essayist and an English novelist she is also considered as the most powerful writers, especially in the middle part of the same century. Being an active and important member of the *Victorian Literary Society*, she not only pioneered modernity but also influenced the readers with her unique style of writing.

The main cause of worries is the fear of death. Known the fact that it is inevitable at the end, we still have some hope to pass the time filling it with joy and pleasant memories at every moment of our routine. In this essay *The Death of the Moth*, Woolf exhibits her views of human beings struggle for life through a tiny living creature *Moth*. She compares the little *Moth* combatting for its life hopefully to that of the struggles experienced by the human beings throughout their lives where they too wrestle with everyday issues. Here, she highlights the Moths' vigorous fight for its life where its efforts ends up with no progress resulting with death finally. Like this tiny *Moth*, we human beings too fight for our life every day, but our efforts remain in vain, since death is the end of all living beings in this eternal world. As it is the unique law of the nature, we do aware of the fact that *Death* is the end for all, but still we confront every moment ignoring the time left for our final exit.

### **QUEST FOR SELF**

Woolf, fascinated by the miraculous of life, compares the smallness of life with the bigness of her insight to look beyond the matter distresses her, and she wants to know the real purpose of life to which she looks beyond the matter of sight which keeps her uncomfortable for all her life. She could not find that profound purpose of life from which the masses of people are unaware or not worry to think about it. It is a painful knowledge where the sufferings can be felt only by the sufferer. Woolf wants to find the purpose of a real life. Her quest for real meaning of life makes her depress and sullen. She wants to know after all why we are here. Her insight beyond the curtain of material makes her restless and she feels envious with the moth, which “seemed to be content with life”- 434. She reflects that the moth is as lucky as it has the satisfaction in its life where the sentence has supposition, that this is *the* satisfaction that Woolf lacks in her life.

She wants to know what is the purpose of this hustle and bustle life is, and why we live and why we die. Her question mark stays as a dragger in her mind and the same hangs in it like a skiver.

This essay has a tone of desperation. Woolf, not capable of tracing the meaning of this valuable life feels obstinate. She herself in a vexed mood already perceives satisfaction and content in a minute organism the *Moth* and reveals that it “seemed to be content with life” - (434). She envious the moth for where it shows the content what she lacks.

### **LIVELINESS OF LIFE**

“It is odd how the character of a public space changes when it is empty; the abandoned amusement park, the shuttered opera house, the vacant hotel: in films these often features as backdrops for events intended to frighten” - (Hamid 155). The pathos that Hamid evokes in this quote is what Virginia Woolf intends to incite in this essay *The Death of a Moth*.

Woolf incites strong emotions of enthusiasm to show the liveliness of life. She illustrates this thrill by sketching the imagery of rooks which actively and excitedly “round the tree top” and then “sank slowly down upon the trees” and “thrown into the air again” - (43). The movements and flying of the rooks build optimistic tone in this essay. By building the eagerness here and using it as metaphorically, she implies that the world is a place with full of pleasures and blissful things where one would wish to live for a long time.

She shows the spirit, thoughts, feelings, emotions, desires and goals, motivations of people walking, hustling and bustling in New York subway, Egypt Bazaars, Damascus streets, tourist streets, and West Edmonton mall and so on. People with heart full of ambitions and mind full of aspirations spend their whole life running after mirages. She, furthermore, strengthens the tone of thrill by describing the “soaring,” “clamour,” and “vociferation” - (434) of the birds to elucidate the joyous bustling of life. By illustrating thrill, Woolf not only wants to identify the energy of the world, but also wants to depict the bright, vivid, and golden side of life, which she later uses to contrast to its darker side. So she tries to make the audience understand that one cannot make his or her escape from the clutches of death, but atleast can try to survive and preserve it until the arrival of the final movement.

### **COMBAT FOR LIFE**

Woolf, as a spectator realized that the Moth’s efforts are failing him and she sensed that he is very closer to death. Throughout this essay, she transfers her personal struggle internally and externally through the character of the *Moth* which is gradually progressing for its survival with full of its positive energy where this tiny poor creature sensed its inevitable death at the end Woolf was mentally affected by the impacts of the Second World War. Through the symbol of the tiny living creature *Moth* she tries to portray the struggle of her inner *self* for life and also about her personal struggle with her mental illness and bipolar disorder throughout her life. By witnessing the death of the *Moth* she realized that death is the final destiny for all the human beings though we combat for it. No matter we try hard for the survival, they are meaningless efforts pursued with passivity. But still we as mortal beings try to add more value to this gifted life by enjoying every precious moment ignoring all the oddities through our tireless efforts to overcome it.

As soon as she watches the act of the *Moth*, she started to think about her struggles throughout her life which is unbearable and irrecoverable. She couldn't find a way to overcome it.. Here, she acknowledges that though human beings are aware of their destined fate, they never give up and let the things on their way to go whereas they find a way to confront for more possibilities for life as what it is compared to the tireless act of the *Moth* for its life.

### **DEATH AT THE END**

Life, once full of enthusiasm, slowly progresses to decrepit and becomes pathetic at last. By depicting the metaphor of the *Moth*, Woolf draws the readers' attention towards the living beings that do not have same energy and power as their past when they are closer to their end. She says, "After a time, tired by his dancing apparently, he settles on the window ledge" - (435). The dancing - power of the moth - takes up all its energy and makes it exhausted. What Woolf shows in her essay is what Shakespeare implies in "All the world's a stage,"- (150); that life is no more than a turn of a player to perform his/her role, and then go off stage and lost forever. Running after pursuing our goals, there in life comes a time when we come to a dead end. It is not only a dilemma of energy of life, but people a loss of the enthusiasm too.

By describing power and flutter, Woolf diverts her readers' attention to the comparison of the two contrasting ends of life and death. For example in this sentence, "stillness and quiet had replaced the previous animation" - (436), where "stillness" and "animation" are opposites. She delineates how a living creature with after all its vigorous energy and activity becomes motionless. All living things are victims of death. The interjection of contrasting emotions makes it most vulnerable to feel the pain of losing a life. She incorporates this to draw the attention of the readers to the fact that people do not reflect on this side of the reality. She insists this with the simile: "one waits for a machine that has stopped momentarily, to start again without considering the reason for its failure" - (435). She makes the point that we wait for the machine to resume its work but we do not think about the reason what makes it to stop, or why it stops. We do not go beyond the surface of matter.

The pain she suffers through her mental illness is so cruel that no human being can tolerate. She tried hard to overcome it but day by day her mental condition worsened resulting with an attempt of suicide. It was the fact that she took a decision following the act of the *Moth* after being observed that all its efforts for life gone waste and eventually decided to drown herself in a river. She doesn't want to experience the suffering anymore, so she chose death as the *Moth* did finally after combatting life for a long period. She was so tired of fighting life throughout the years which ended up with giving up the same as the *Moth* opted at the end

Woolf thinks that no matter how happy and content a life would be, it comes to an end. She laments on the death of a life by creating a juxtaposing mood, first through emotions of excitement, and then through emotions of dismay, and declares that death is most powerful over powers of life. This symbolism throws the theme of uncertainty of life through the character of the *Moth* which reflects Woolf's own death at the end.

### **CONCLUSION**

Woolf, fascinated by the miraculous of life, reflects on the charisma of life. She uses similes to broaden this notion by saying that "as if someone had taken a tiny bead of pure life" - (435). She extends the meaning of continuous of breathing with the contrast of tininess of a bead. The notion of wonder of life, the moth, dies. She mourns when it metamorphose to a lifeless body. She implies the moth's death to the death of all living beings. She refers the "oncoming doom" - (436) to the final destiny for everyone who is alive. Adopting a unique style of writing, she explores the different themes of life and death where she highlights the marvels of this wonderful life and a tireless battle for it. She wrote this essay with a formal diction. Her casual language makes the readers to understand the common scene of the *Moth's* readiness for fighting the battle for its life. Although it becomes an aimless fight for life, we fill the same with some meaning to the days we live here. Thus, through her essay *The Death of The Moth* Woolf relates life followed by death at the end.

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