

Comments Freshman Class

Jamie – Great insight about pregnancy, I completely missed this! You do a great job of supporting this insight with a close reading of the text. Your interpretation creates a fascinating juxtaposition of birth and death, joy and sorrow. I'm also impressed with your personal evolution in relation to the text. Your realization that death can be faced in many different ways demonstrates significant growth beyond your original position. Finally, I liked the different points of view you explored, from the death of your mother's friend, to your own feelings, and the reaction of your friend to her father's diagnosis. Sometimes, as the poem suggests, death can be a welcome friend. Your careful reflection on the themes of this poem demonstrate an impressive growth in your understanding.

I wonder what you made of the "trip" and "vacation" imagery. In a way this ties in with your perception that death can be a long-awaited, welcome event, just like a trip. On this dimension, perhaps the author is suggesting that death is just the final stage of our journey.

Roxanne – Roxanne, you start off your essay with a marvelous anecdote! I formed a vivid picture in my mind of you quoting "Black Lung" to your astonished friend. Sometimes sharing a poem can communicate in ways mere conversation cannot, so good for you! It also took a lot of self-awareness to recognize that you "blamed" this young man for "choosing" to ruin his body by smoking. Perhaps the trick is to share the poem with compassion rather than anger.

Thank you also for sharing the story of your grandfather. I was moved both by your evident love for him and your frustration and grief at the addiction that first took his voice, and then his life. Your depiction of him also shows very clearly the stigmatizing effects of a disease like lung cancer.

I'm not quite sure I agree with your interpretation that Dyer personifies cancer. In my reading, the line you cite refers to a patient dying of cancer. Nevertheless, you are on the right track. I'd say that Dyer "concretizes" cancer by using linguistic metaphors to describe it: cancer is a "loud word," "a plot," "a syllable." Because cancer becomes more than an abstract concept, we see its destructive power, and you're absolutely right, we can hate it.

BaoNgoc – You wrote a perceptive and empathetic essay. I think you captured the mixture of strength and vulnerability expressed by the narrator. As you rightly point out, the poem expresses the difficulty of receiving bad news, and the hope that a miracle will create the longed-for "good news." I also liked the way you paid attention to the language and structure of the poem. Part of the effectiveness of the poem is achieved through the style in which it is written.

Linda – This is one of my favorite poems too. It's incredibly poignant. Your interpretation is right on target, and I like the comparison to *The Lovely Bones* (I haven't read this, only reviews of it). One of the things that is so heartbreaking about the poem, as you point out, is that Davis seems to blame herself for having cancer, as though she is being punished by cancer for doing something wrong. "Here" is a fantasy-land (perhaps, as you say, the narrator's image of heaven) where childhood magic still works and there is the possibility that the human detritus left by cancer can be used to create miracles, rather than be discarded as useless waste. You did a close, sensitive, and accurate reading of the text, and it shows in your paper. You have written an intelligent essay full of feeling.

Saemyi – Thank you for sharing the trauma of your childhood illness. I actually have heard of Kawasaki's, because 2 years ago, the 2 year old daughter of one of our residents contracted the same disease and almost died. It was heartrending to see this young family struggle with such a devastating event. Fortunately, like you, she survived. In your essay, you tackle the great question of the relationship between suffering and religious or spiritual faith. There is no question in my mind that faith offers hope; and, in the absence of hope, trust that one is in God's hands. There is increasing interest from the medical side in the role of faith in healing, and in facing death. However, as you point out, not all people espouse a faith, and then emphasizing its absence may only make them feel more desolate.

Starlett– Outstanding attention to the language, images, and use of metaphor! Good distinction between “show” and “tell,” a fundamental principle of good writing. You have a really solid grasp of the metaphors Dyer uses to interpret cancer for us, making it a vivid presence as we read. Your interpretations of the metaphors are terrific. You did an all-around excellent job of carefully reading and interpreting the text.

I thought your comments in the last paragraph were very perceptive. The value of reading poetry and other writing about illness is that it is able to articulate with great clarity what many of us feel but can't put into words. It is this “art” that makes creative writing so useful to us by giving us a window into the heart and soul of the patient.

Thanks also for sharing about your family friend. I'm glad she's doing well. When we read something that connects with our personal experience, sometimes it gives us greater understanding into our own situation.

Lisha– Nice work, Lisha. Your essay honestly shows the evolution in your own emotional reaction. Good attention to the tone of the poem, this is important to consider. As we discussed in class, Cortney Davis herself undergoes a sort of evolution in her thinking about patient care. She describes in her commentary how this experience occurred when she was a young nurse, still enthralled by the mystery and power of medical technology. Her focus initially was on the “excitement” of getting a “dead” heart to beat again. But by the end of the poem she sees her patient “singing,” celebrating his restored life, and she celebrates that life as well. I think what makes a good doctor is not necessarily “bringing someone back from the brink of death,” but the ability to connect with the humanity of the patient.

Khor Xin – This is a very well-written and perceptive essay. I agree with your analysis that initially the love this nurse feels is the “excitement” of doing something heroic by saving the life of the patient. However, in my reading, by the end of the poem, this love has been transformed. What the nurse now loves is the fact that this anonymous organ has become a man restored to life.

Ashley– Ashley, this is an outstanding essay, very thoughtful and articulate. You write extremely well.