**Cost of Death**

*Missing a good secondary source*

“All that live must die, passing through nature to eternity” wrote William Shakespeare in *Hamlet*. While it is true that death plays a common factor in every single person’s life, this subject matter is not supposed to be taken lightly or something to mess around with because everyone has a point in their life when they pass away. Everyone enters the world and strives to find their purpose in life. Life is very fragile, and it can be taken away when people least expect it. This particular theme is supported by two stories: “Heart” by Amy Tan and “The Man I Killed” by Tim O’Brien. In both stories, the reader follows the characters as they go after their goals, as they shield themselves from danger, and as they mull over a life-changing event.

During the first story, “Heart”, it takes place in Immortal Heart. The main characters are Precious Auntie and the narrator who is found out at the end to be her daughter. This place was once referred to as lucky and sacred because of the pine tree that had been placed in the middle of the village by an emperor. This tree resembled the love the emperor had for his dead mother and because of his strong love; he thought that the tree would never die. Every person in the narrator’s family had a certain job that they did on an everyday basis, including the young children and the elders. Women in this family made ink and the men sold it. Behind the compound that they lived in appeared the “End of the World”. This place consisted of a cliff that had “unwanted babies, suicide maiden’s, and beggar ghosts” drowned inside ravine. Another inheritance that Auntie’s family shared was the occupation of being bonesetters for the past nine hundred years and they had to do whatever it took to heal the people who came to them. Auntie’s father had his own place of work where he held his bonesetter business. There was a day when he had two new patients; a crying baby and a man known as Baby Uncle. The baby’s father was a coffin maker who had the traits of being controlling and abusive. The babies shoulder was knocked out of its socked and it was the father’s fault. As time went by of the men realized they wanted to marry Precious Auntie. After they both spoke to a fortune-teller, the coffin maker was the first to go to Auntie’s father and speak with him about marrying his daughter. Her father spoke to her about it and she highly declined. Not only was he married to another woman already but she did not like this man. So he came up with the excuse that she did not want to leave her father yet. This excuse would have worked if Baby Uncle had not come shortly after to talk to her father about marrying his daughter. Of course Precious Auntie wanted to marry him so they started making plans. Everything would have ended as happy ever after but there was a jealous, mad man on the loose. He found out that the father and his daughter had lied to him so he threatened her by saying, “[y]ou’ll soon be sorry every day of your miserable life” (664). The father went to great lengths to make sure that his daughter stayed protected. As they were on their way to the wedding, two bandits came out of nowhere and attacked. Auntie soon realized that one of them was the coffin maker. Next thing she knew her father was lying in a ditch dead. Precious Aunty and Baby Uncle stood there trying to make sense of the situation but nothing could come of it. Baby Uncle picked up one of the pistols that one of the guards had dropped to set off to find the bandits who had done this to her poor father. He had his horse by his side as he was preparing to ride off but first he fired a gun shot in the air. This scared the horse, and then the horse kicked Baby Uncle. This killed him. She was now lost and abandoned with nowhere to turn. Even her own immediate family did not know what to do with her. She was going mad. Over a few months they realized that Auntie was pregnant and that became her only reason to stay. This was her only hope. The grandmother of the family made one of her daughters claim Auntie’s child as her own. While growing up the narrator had no idea that her Auntie was her real mother but after she died she read the words, “I am your mother” (666).

In the second story “The Man I Killed” by Tim O’Brien is a war story. This story is based on the man that Tim killed while in battle. The man he killed was only in battle for one day. Tim is extremely torn up about the situation. He gives details about how he appears to be after he shot him. As well as specific details of his life that he thinks may have been true back home. His friend Kiowa is trying to get him to get over the fact that he killed this man but he will not let it go. He is torn up completely that this happened even though he expected it would happen as he went into battle.

The characters in both stories are seeking out their goals in life but they both end in tragedy. As well as fighting their hardest to get their way for what they are fighting for. In “Heart” the bride and groom are on their way to get married but jealous bandits come out from nowhere and seek revenge. This leaves the woman empty handed. The bandits steal her joy away. Auntie, thought her dream of finding the man of her dreams had come true and they were going to live happy every after. She did not fully prepare herself for losing two of her loved ones. Although death is always an option, you do not always consider this to be possible. When the narrator says that the “life was gone from his face” this is when devastation first entered her life. Everything in her life was working as she had always hoped but then it went up in smokes. Not only did she lose her father that night but also her fiancé on the day they were to get married. Then in “The Man I Killed” both sides are fighting in battle for what they believe in. The soldier expects that he may die while fighting but does not care because he wants to make his family proud. This is shown when the narrator states that, “[i]n the presence of his father and uncles, he pretended to look forward to doing his patriotic duty […] but, at night he prayed with his mother that the war might end soon” (801). He was fighting in the war to make the men in his life proud but also wanted it to end so that he could go home to his ordinary life.

Another similarity is that in both stories they are shielding themselves so that death is not a possible option. Although they try their best to protect themselves from harm’s way, it still happens. In “Heart” they are expecting for the bride to be killed but instead the father and the fiancé die. When the narrator states that, “[t]hat was how Precious Auntie became a widow and an orphan in the same day” this shows that she was completely devastated and heartbroken (665). The dad spent so much time and money making sure that his daughter was protected that he did not make sure that nothing would happen to them. They shield the girl but they should have also shielded themselves. In “The Man I Killed” the phrase, “[t]he guy was dead the second he stepped on the trail” goes to show that there really was no hope for the man (802). He had protection but that was not able to stop him from being killed while in battle because he was an easy target.

Finally the third comparison is that even though Auntie and Tim are bent out of shape that these people are dead, they must self-consciously answer the question if they would rather trade places with him. In “Heart” Auntie is confused and does not understand why both her father and fiancé died in the same day. She is beyond miserable and tries to run away from all of her pain but in reality if she would have been in their place then she would never have been able to have her baby. Her baby girl would have died as well. In the statement, “her reason to live” this goes to show that the baby was the only hope she had to stay under control (666). She realizes that this child is her only hope to a happy life. In “The Man I Killed” Tim is bent out of shape that he killed the other soldier. First off when Kiowa asks Tim if he “want[s] to trade places with him?” this opens his eyes to the bigger picture (800). Also when the narrator says, “Tim, it’s a war” this makes him realize that this is what he is here for in the first place (800). He is still really upset over the situation but at the same time there is nothing he can do about it because that is why he is there.

In both of these stories it is proven that there are several occasions where death is involved. This happened when they least expected it and not the way they would have ever imagined. Both stories are easy to compare on the topics of: they were both trying to accomplish their goals; they were shielding themselves from death, and the main characters determining if they would rather trade places.

**Works Cited**

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