Thor Smith (aka Mrs. Rutan)

Mrs. Rutan

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**The Escape**

Suicide. The word can easily silence a conversation, turn heads, and invoke mixed emotions from whomever hears it. Simply put, the word suicide is disparaging, dejected, and doleful. However, it is a common aspect in both our real and literary world, and it pushes readers to critically think about suicide and ***why*** a character would choose to take their own life. A death in any literary piece is significant, but the death of a character at their own hand may be even more impressionable. Suicide occurs in many facets of writing and can be seen in the great Shakespearean play *Hamlet*. Ophelia, the beautiful, and oh-so-innocent female lead is one of the most readily recognizable suicidal characters in all of literature. Her death shocks the readers, and it is one of the “rubs” that haunts them throughout the play.

It begs the question: *Why?* Why would such a beautiful young woman take her life so early on? The answers can be found in Langston Hughes’ poem, “Suicide’s Note.” It is an extraordinary complementary piece when considering Ophelia’s character and her tragic demise. It also helps us understand that people who commit suicide do to for one simple reason—it is an escape.

Ophelia’s death is a direct reaction of the people and events around her. Her life has been quickly shattered: her only sibling is away, her lover has rejected her, and her father has been murdered by said lover. The cause of her suicide seems clear—Hamlet. But how, or why, would suicide be her first and foremost desired option? There are many answers, and many argue that Ophelia was not in her right mind at the time of her death. She spent most of Act Four singing and throwing out flowers in Denmark’s court. She sings away, “Young men will do’t, if they come to ‘t;/By Cock, they are to blame./Quoth she ‘Before you tumbled me,/You promised me to wed’” (Shakespeare, V. v. 62-65). Crazy or not, it seems apparent that Ophelia’s life, and especially her heart, has been shattered. She wants Hamlet’s love, and may have even given herself up entirely to him. With his rejection, came one only option: death. Plus, Hamlet’s impulsive sword-through-the-chest-into-Polonius-behind-the-tapestry didn’t help matters either. She couldn’t live on and Langston Hughes’ poem cleverly depicts how suicide can be a replacement, and especially, an escape from a forlorn lover.

Hughes poem’s title—“Suicide’s Note”—is vital to connecting the poem itself to suicide. Without the title, readers may not fully understand this poem’s darker undertones and connection to death. He offers a description of death as one that is “calm” and “cool” (Hughes, 1-2). Both diction choices invoke an encouraging tone for the whole poem. Suicide—more specifically intentional drowning—seems welcoming in this piece and it would help us better understand why Ophelia, and others, are so willing to end their own lives. ***Suicide offers an escape***. Ophelia needs it, and Langston Hughes cleverly describes it. By describing death as a “kiss” (3), it helps readers understand why Ophelia may have ended her own life. She was desperate for love and faced with two options. She had the heartache and pain that plague her every waking existence, so much so that she was driven to madness, or she had an out—the river. She chooses that fatal kiss instead. When face with all the hardships she had, death seemed like a better option and may have even been alluring, just like it is described in Hughes’ short, but eloquent poem.

The greatest irony in Langston Hughes’ poem is his tone; he shows us a view of suicide that most don’t accept, understand, or want to acknowledge. It is with his poem that we can better understand, or may forgive, or even sympathize for Ophelia. So many people, in the real and literary world, are quick to judge those who have committed suicide, but the reality is it is an option the victim may see as the only choice—there only escape. Both Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and Hughes’ “Suicide Note’s” give us insight into the human condition; they are wonderful pieces of complementary literature that teach us not to quickly turn our heads and judge those that had to escape life by their own hand.

Works Cited:

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