To Charge or Rage Against Fate?

One may run fast like a gazelle on an African plain, but, like a lion stalks the gazelle, fate waits patiently to strike. The arrival of fate is inevitable, and victories against fate are seldom. In many cases, fate is accompanied by death. The only option one has when at the front door of fate and death is to charge forward or to rage against the inevitable. In Dylan Thomas’ “Do not go gentle into that goodnight,” he tells his father to rage against the hand of fate; however, in Alfred Tennyson’s “Charge of the Light Brigade,” he has the soldiers charge into the eye of death proudly.

When the icy breath of death touches one’s shoulder, is it not natural to oppose fate’s might? This reaction is natural at any age, but the one who is closest to death my fear it more than the rest, as is shown in this quotation: “Do not go gentle into that good night, Old age should burn and rave at close of day; Rage, rage against the dying of the light” (1-3). This quote is saying that it is scary to be in death’s grasp, and Thomas places the quote at the beginning of the poem because older people are closer to death, and he wanted to show the mix of urgency and patience that fate embodies. Thomas also speaks of wise men, good men, wild men, and grave men. He tells the wise and the wild men “Do not go gentle into that good night” (6&12); however, he tells the good and the grave men: “Rage, rage against the dying of the light” (9&15). The author is telling the strong and savvy men, be it street smart and physically strong or book
smart and head strong, to do what is normal for them in not going gently. Thomas is also telling the more meek and weak men to be ready to Rage and do something that may be foreign to them.

At the end of the poem, Thomas is directly speaking with his father. He has been leading to this moment while drawing all elements in to the one stanza as shown in this excerpt. “And you my father,/ there on the sad height,/ Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray,/ Do not go gentle into that good night./ Rage, rage against the dying of the light” (16-19). At the end of the quote, Thomas tells his father both sentences he has told other men, showing that his father was once a very strong and intelligent man but that fate was changing him into a fainting view of what he once was. In this quote, Thomas also reveals his true reason for speaking to his father. Thomas’ reason is he is scared, revealing the true people at fate’s mercy are the ones that fate may not have in its grasp at all.

Many would claim “The Charge of the Light Brigade” is a poem that lacks the element of fear. On the contrary, the poem is based in implied fear, and the question of loyalty as shown in this excerpt: ““Forward, the Light Brigade!”/ Was there a man dismay’d?/ Not tho’ the soldier knew Someone had blunder’d: /Theirs not to make reply,/ Theirs not to reason why,/ Theirs but to do and die:/ Into the valley of Death,/ Rode the six hundred” (9-17). In this quote, Tennyson has the soldiers wrestle with their fear of charging where they know they will die. The author also has the men questioning the leadership of their brother soldier; this quandary does not last long for the soldiers as they decide to follow their brother into the valley of death.

With the soldier’s decision to follow their leading brother, they are deciding to charge into their own fate. With their charge, the soldiers set their legacy while facing death, therefore cheating death as shown in this quote. “When can their glory fade?/ O the wild charge they made!/ All the world wondered./ Honor the charge they made./ Honor the Light Brigade./ Noble
six hundred” (50-55). This quotation explains what the soldiers left behind in their service and proud death at the hands of fate. This quote also shows that their valiant charge meant that the people they left behind could be proud and stare death and fate down just as the soldiers did with their brothers.

Regular people face fate and death every day, and like “Do not go gentle into that good night,” the majority of people are not ready to confront this looming beast. As in Dylan Thomas’ heart wrenching poem, many of the people at the mercy of death are not dying and will try to deny death as seen in this quotation. “Forms of denial often recur throughout the period of bereavement. We tend to not want to accept the loss” (Grosz). This quote shows that those who are losing their loved ones may ask them to rage against the dying of the light because of their own denial. This denial may cause the person in the hand of fate to have the same feelings and fear death enough to try to escape fate’s mighty grasp.

While death and fates power might reign omnipotent there are a diaspora of people who have a heightened sense of courage that will stare death and fate directly in the eyes. The soldiers in “Charge of the Light Brigade” embody the definition of courage shown in this definition: “Courage: the ability to do something that you know is difficult or dangerous” (“courage”). This definition gives an understanding of what was in the hearts of the soldiers in Alfred Tennyson’s stimulating poem. These people who choose to stare fate down into their legacy find that there is nothing to fear as shown in this excerpt from Franklin D. Roosevelt’s first inaugural address: “This great Nation will endure as it has endured, will revive and will prosper. So, first of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance” (Roosevelt).
This excerpt gives credibility to the people who dare to face death. The excerpt also shows how the soldiers in the “Charge of the Light Brigade gave hope to all of these daring people.

Fate and death are dreadful, ugly facts of life that are inescapable. As shown in “Do not go gentle into that good night,” many people fear death and will rage against fate with all their might. While, like the soldiers in “Charge of the Light Brigade,” the courageous few realize they shall not fear death and ride gallantly through fate’s open gates. These two poems place a question into the hearts of every person alive and that question is: When death reaches out, will you rage against the dying of the light, or charge proudly into the eye of death?
Works Cited


“Courage: the ability to do something that you know is difficult or dangerous” *http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/courage*.

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