



The Inevitable: Contemporary Writers Confront Death

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Birth is not inevitable. Life certainly isn't. The sole inevitability of existence, the only sure consequence of being alive, is death. In these eloquent and surprising essays, twenty writers face this fact, among them Geoff Dyer, who describes the ghost bikes memorializing those who die in biking accidents; Jonathan Safran Foer, proposing a new way of punctuating dialogue in the face of a family history of heart attacks and decimation by the Holocaust; Mark Doty, whose reflections on the art-porn movie *Bijou* lead to a meditation on the intersection of sex and death epitomized by the AIDS epidemic; and Joyce Carol Oates, who writes about the loss of her husband and faces her own mortality. Other contributors include Annie Dillard, Diane Ackerman, Peter Straub, and Brenda Hillman.

The Inevitable: Contemporary Writers Confront Death Details

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Joyful Mimi says

Although many of the stories were interesting, I kept finding that I had to force myself to finish most of them, thinking "When am I going to get to the good part?" Plus, I do not think some of the authors really confronted death per se. I am such a purist. I highly recommend "The Art of Death" over this one.

Kim says

Enjoyed this book, despite the topic being confronting death.

Learned that in Tibetan monasteries, one learns to practice a "death meditation" at dawn. Upon waking, instead of joining others for sitting meditation and chores, one lies in bed with eyes closed and says to oneself:

"I'm going to die tonight. What shall I do with the rest of my time?" This isn't meant to be a rare occurrence in the otherwise smoothly slathered hours of one's life, but a regular practice over months or years - b/c it might be true of any day, and certainly will be true one day. Cuddled up with my loving dear? Looking at photos of my mother? Strolling down the street and feeling the sensations of being alive and in motion? Admiring the beauty of the natural world from sunrise to sunset? Writing a poem? Doing good for the loved ones who remain on earth? I begin to appreciate and schedule my allotted hours to what matters most, and that's a tonic to carry into waking life.

Knowing I have a terminal illness, I do this quite frequently. I am not going to be on my deathbed wishing I had cleaned the house...that is a fact. I will be content that I have lived my life with meaning, spending my time with those I love and cherish, and trying to make the most of every day.

Jules Vilmur says

As with any book of essays, some spoke to me more than others. In particular, the pieces by Christopher Sorrentino, Jonathan Safran Foer and Joyce Carol Oates were brilliant. Overall, the book is full of well-crafted and thoughtful pieces.

Nikoleta says

I started reading this on the bus and the first essay *Deathwatch* by David Gates had me in tears. When I finished I had to put it down for when I was alone. Nothing was as moving as that first essay was to me. *The Inevitable* is like many other collections in that some are very powerful and others I could not wait to get to the end of because I couldn't understand the point. Overall a very forgettable read with the exception of a few standout pieces.

MJ Nicholls says

Sampled. David Gates's opening piece is a personal reminiscence of his parents' passing and a self-pitying look at his own lugubrious domestic circumstances. Christopher Sorrentino touches upon the differences between public and private grieving with reference to Gilbert. Geoff Dyer's ghost bikes essay was almost interesting. Quite a heavygoing read—too many maudlin essays about the writers' families dying and attempts at philosophastering to maintain full-book interest. Safran Foer's clever essay with symbols is here in all its splendour, and here too.

Ron says

Only gave it three stars because I didn't read all of it, just the parts I wanted to. It's hard to get into reading about death. Kind of the point of the book. But one of the essays that I did read was really powerful. So it's worth at least dipping into.

Blair Emsick says

It's rare to love every essay in collections like these but every essay in here was so damn good wowowowow

Mark Bennett says

Just started it and am looking forward to taking my time, savoring the individual essays.

Lu Yawen says

I bought the book after a death of someone close and the short stories gave me some sense of hope that someone's been here before. And of course, the myriad of interesting and intimate ways you can choose to deal with the heavy taboo of death.

Michelle says

This was sometimes depressing, but mostly forgettable.

Mercedes says

I thought I would try these essays and ditch them if they got too religious or maudlin. I was delighted to find

instead a fascinating look at death, and inevitably life, and our collective ways of dealing with the inevitable. The essays are not sad and depressing but insightful. My favorites pieces were by Peter Straub and Joyce Carol Oates and I learned from Geoff Dyer's piece about the Ghost Bike project of placing white bikes in memorials for people killed in biking accidents.
