

Death – The Great Divide

‘Past’ forms are unconnected with now – they are distant from our present reality. Although they may be important or relevant, we are marking them as ‘distant’. A ‘Present Perfect’ form, though, is bringing something, which may in actual fact be distant in real time, closer to us and making a connection between an event or state with our present reality. Death is an end to this life and once dead we can only be talked of in the ‘past’.

Task 1. Read through these two obituaries of dead writers and note the verb forms used.

Ernest Miller Hemingway, the American novelist, died yesterday. Hemingway was known as ‘Papa’ to his many fans and many wives. He was born, the second of six children, in Chicago, in 1899. In 1917 Hemingway joined the Kansas City Star as a cub reporter and in the following year volunteered to serve as an ambulance driver on the Italian front. It was while working as an ambulance driver that he was badly wounded and twice decorated. His experiences there served as the basis for his fourth novel, *A Farewell to Arms*. After spending some years back in America where he married for the first time, he reported on the Greco-Turkish war in 1922 and then decided to devote himself to fiction and settled in Paris. He lived an exciting life of war, watching bull-fights, big game hunting in Africa, drinking in Cuba and marrying several times. He was a student of war and wrote a best-seller, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, based on his Spanish Civil War experiences and reported on the Second world War. In 1954 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for *The Old Man and The Sea*. He lived life to the full but finally blew his brains out with a shotgun in Idaho. He was 62. He was working on a novel called *The Garden of Eden* when he died.

Charles Dickens, the Novelist, died last week aged 58. Born in Portsmouth in 1812, Dickens was the second son of a clerk in the Navy pay Office. His father was constantly in debt and imprisoned. Dickens educated himself and got work as a clerk in a solicitor’s office and later, in 1834, as a parliamentary reporter for the Morning Chronicles. This provided excellent preparation for his first novel, *The Pickwick Papers* which was serialised between 1836 and 37. He followed this success with *Oliver Twist*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *The Old Curiosity Shop etc etc*. He was working on *Oliver Twist* when his beloved sister-in-law, Mary, died. He was best known for his host of distinctively cruel, comic and repugnant characters. He campaigned for many causes including the abolition of slavery which did not make him popular with Americans when he toured there in 1841. He separated from his wife Catherine in 1858. At the time of his death he was working on a novel entitled *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. He will be buried at Poets’ Corner in Westminster Abbey. Charles Dickens (1812 –1870). A Nation mourns.

Task 2. Now imagine these two writers are not dead (yet). You have been asked to write a short text on each for a Collected Works, summarizing their lives and achievements. Re-write the two texts above so that they would be suitable.