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Dear Colleague:

Thirty years ago, on Friday, November 22, three famous men died: John F. Kennedy, Aldous Huxley, and C. S. Lewis. The shot that killed a young president rang so loud that it completely muffled the death rattles of the other two men. It is atrocious to call Kennedy's death a good death, yet from his point of view, what a way to go--at the peak of his fame and power, never to be diminished by the bathos of being an ex-president (remember Bush's murmurings, "ex, ex, ex" as he entered the White House for the Rabin-Arafat handshake)?

Christopher Isherwood visited Aldous Huxley on his deathbed. "Aldous was in obvious discomfort, but there was nothing poignant or desperate in his manner, and he clearly didn't want to talk about death. Not talking about it made me embarrassed, however, and I touched on subject after subject, at random. Each time I did so, Aldous commented acutely, or remembered an appropriate quotation. I came away with a picture of a great vessel sinking quietly into the deep; many of its delicate marvelous mechanisms still in perfect order, all its lights still shining." What a way for an intellectual to die! The light bulbs start to go but those that remain--down to the last one--shine as brightly as they ever did.

As for the death of C. S. Lewis, it was cozy--the way he would have liked it. "Shortly after six, Warnie looked in on his brother and met a cheerful 'I'm all right'. Breakfast was usual, after which he managed to get dressed and answer four letters. He had difficulty, however, in keeping awake, and when Warnie found him slumped asleep in his chair after lunch he advised him to get into bed. At four, Warnie brought him tea and found him very drowsy... He was 'calm and cheerful'. One and a half hours later, Warnie heard a crash and ran into the room. Jack [i.e., C. S. Lewis] was lying at the foot of the bed, unconscious. He was still breathing, but some three or four minutes later he ceased to do so." (See A. N. Wilson's wonderful biography of Lewis).

As a child I envied other children's popularity. As an adult I envied other people's vitality and requited love. Now that I am old, I envy other people's styles of dying and death. But I am being frivolous. "Men must endure their going hence" (King Lear)--the epitaph on Lewis's gravestone.

Best wishes,

*Y. Fu*