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### Dichotomy of Life and Death in Dickinson's Poem

Death is a natural, yet largely unspoken part of life. The poem "Because I could not stop for Death" by Emily Dickinson is a complex exploration of life and death. Through her subtle yet powerful language, Dickinson is able to create a portrait of death that is simultaneously peaceful and sinister, reflective and thought-provoking. Emily Dickinson was an American poet known for her unique style of writing and use of paradoxes. She wrote nearly 1,800 poems, and many of them were about death and mortality. This poem has been the subject of much critical analysis and interpretation. In "Because I could not stop for Death," Emily Dickinson uses a unique poetic style, visual imagery, somber tone, and related themes to explore the concept of mortality.

The structure and iambic tetrameter of Dickinson's poem reveals a powerful insight into the speaker's journey of life, death, and eternity. The poet writes in iambic tetrameter, with each line containing eight syllables. Li Na in their research revealed that this poem abides by a traditional linear structure (Na 3). It comprises of six quartet poems constructed with alternating iambic meters; four beats followed by three beats in succession (Na 3). This signifies an ingenious manipulation of poetic rhythm and style. It further indicates that Dickinson is aware of the powerful influence of the structure of a poem on its overarching theme. The structure gives insight into Dickinson's own thoughts and feelings about death. The poem begins with a seemingly peaceful scene as the speaker is taken on a journey by Death, but each quatrain reveals a deeper sense of unease and tension. Each quatrain is a new point of view and insight

into the scene, emphasizing the feelings of anxiety and apprehension that accompany death. The poem's meter, iambic tetrameter, also works to emphasize the slow and steady pace of the journey, giving the reader a sense of unease as they wait for the inevitable. Moreover, the poem is separated into three distinct sections, each depicting a different stage in the journey of life. The first stanza describes the speaker's journey with death, the second stanza details their arrival, and the third stanza describes the speaker's realization of eternity. Therefore, the poem's structure and use of iambic tetrameter create a feeling of inevitability and emotion, deepening the meaning of the poem.

Dickinson mindfully employs the poetic device i.e. repetition, as the first verse of the poem, "Because I could not stop for Death", is repeated in the fourth line of the poem (Foundation). This repetition creates a sense of anticipation and foreboding, as the speaker must confront death and the implications of mortality. The repetition also lends a sense of rhythm to the poem, creating a sense of inevitability that matches the speaker's journey with death. By repeating the phrase, Dickinson conveys the idea that death is a major part of everyone's life, a universal truth that must be accepted. In addition, the repetition also serves to emphasize the idea that life is fleeting, and that death will eventually come to us all. Dickinson also utilizes the repetition of words and phrases throughout the poem in order to emphasize certain ideas. For example, the phrase "We slowly drove" is repeated twice in the first stanza, highlighting the idea of a slow, reflective journey (Foundation). By repeating the phrase, Dickinson emphasizes the importance of the journey taken and the importance of slowing down and taking in the scenery. Through repetition, Dickinson also conveys the idea of a journey of growth and reflection, as the speaker is taking their time and savoring the experience. The repetition serves to underscore the importance of the journey, and the need to take time and appreciate the beauty of life. Thus,

Dickinson's frequent reiteration of particular words and phrases serves to emphasize the inevitability of death and the importance of appreciating life.

In her poem "Because I Could Not Stop For Death", Emily Dickinson gracefully presents the idea of the beauty and transience of life through vivid images of life and death, as well as the mystery of death. Dickinson paints a realistic picture of life on earth, describing the "Schools," the "Fields of Gazing Grain," and the "Setting Sun" (Foundation). These images of life on earth symbolize the beauty and joy of life, as well as the brevity of its existence. Dickinson also uses imagery to evoke a feeling of death. She describes Death as a kind yet mysterious figure, arriving in a "Carriage" to take her away (Foundation). The "Horse" pulling the carriage is a metaphor for the inevitability of death, while the "Gazing Grain" symbolizes the transition from life to death (Foundation). The imagery Dickinson uses in this poem contributes to the themes of the poem. Dickinson's descriptions of life on earth show the beauty and joy of life, while her descriptions of death emphasize the inevitability and mystery of death. Through her imagery, Dickinson conveys a feeling of peace and acceptance of death, recognizing it essential. The article by Yang Qiao argues that Dickinson's imagery of death is presented as kind, comfortable, and courteous. It emphasizes the poetess's peaceful attitude toward death (Qiao). He also argues that the imagery of "the setting sun" and "the vision of the 'gazing grain'" symbolize the transition from life to death which reinforces the themes of inevitability and mystery of death (Qiao) (Foundation). Through her use of vivid imagery, Dickinson effectively conveys her peaceful acceptance of death and its inevitability in life.

Moreover, Emily Dickinson's poem also addresses the mortality and loss of power while also conveying a sense of acceptance through her striking tone and language use. Dickinson addresses death as "he," a personification that she then changes to "we" when describing the

journey she takes with Death (Foundation). The article by Yang Qiao analyzes the poem utilizing the poem's shift in tone/language from “he” to “we” which suggests the speaker's acceptance of mortality and her understanding of death as a collective journey (Qiao). Furthermore, Dickinson's use of a carriage to represent death reflects the power imbalance between life and death. The carriage is “kindly” and “slow”, suggesting that death is a gentle journey, but it is also a journey that the speaker has no control over. Qiao also supports the idea of a power imbalance between life and death, noting that the speaker is a passive passenger unable to stop the carriage (Qiao). Despite this imbalance, the poem ends with the speaker accepting death as the “House” they arrive at, the “Gazing Grain” they pass, and the “Swelling of the Ground” they traverse (Foundation). By using the language of acceptance to describe death, Emily Dickinson suggests that death is something to be accepted and embraced openheartedly. Thereby, Dickinson's poem serves as a reminder of the inevitability of mortality, and her use of language and tone conveys a sense of acceptance and understanding.

To sum it all up, Emily Dickinson's poem "Because I could not stop for Death" is an intricate examination of the life and death dichotomy. Through her captivating structure, poetic imagery, somber tone, and distinct motifs she paints a picture of death that conveys both tranquility and dreadfulness. Personifying death as a compassionate yet enigmatic figure, Emily Dickinson poignantly illuminates the disparity between life and death while allowing her readers to come to terms with mortality. Consequently, "Because I Could Not Stop for Death" is an insightful poem that incites contemplation of life's fragility in a reverent manner.

## Works Cited

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