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"Because I Could Not Stop for Death": Emily Dickinson's Perspective on Life, Death,
and Beyond

Emily Dickinson's poem, "Because I could not stop for Death", written in the late 1800s, explores the theme of Death and the journey that follows it while touching on the idea of eternity. Through her unique perspective and curiosity about the inevitable end of life, Dickinson characterizes Death. Her use of tone, symbols, and powerful imagery throughout the poem allows for a deeper understanding of her perception of mortality and Death. Dickinson conveys that Death is a natural and unstoppable part of life for everyone, but it does not signify the end.

At the beginning of the poem, Dickinson uses the description of being on a relaxing carriage ride, through imagery. She can find peace and relaxation throughout the passage as if it was a way to her afterlife. We can visualize Dickinson in a carriage with a gentleman driver leading her to the eternal life of immortality. Emily describes Death as "something portrayed as a restful trip, a pleasant journey with a courteous visitor and an unnoticed third traveler, immortality" (Arun 1). This description of Death is difficult to understand compared to the common assumption of Death—something seen as being evil and sadly inevitable. However, Dickinson was still able to prove that Death is typically not planned and comes unexpectedly. In the first line, she describes herself as Death, "Because I could not stop for Death" (line 1). She had come for herself as being too busy and couldn't stop. She focuses on Death as an unfamiliar person, but is at ease with the peacefulness in the lust to see Death.

Each stanza within the poem breaks down a different moment of her life until it leads to the end, where she reaches eternity and realizes she is no longer living. The poem has a rhyming pattern, making the person viewed unbothered by mortal nature and viewing it in an accepting way. Until she is greeted by the afterlife, As she stands "Paused before a House" (line 7). She refers to her Coffin as her house-making, inferring she will feel welcomed and continue the afterlife. In the article "A View of Death in Emily Dickinson's 'Because I could not Stop for Death'", Emily Dickinson is viewed for her close examinations of Death and the sensations of dying. One point from the article speaks on, "the terrible struggle of the body for life, the adjustments in a house after death, the arranging of the body for the funeral, the church services, and even the thoughts of the dead persons" (Johnson). These views of Death can be seen as terror or fear by most, but Emily takes them and provides the view of peace, rest, and something to look towards. She brings eternity and immortality repeatedly as a way to express the importance of the two and how they go together. This is how Dickinson says her satisfaction with Death and her view of accepting eternal life.

Dickinson continued her view on Death and initially greeted her as an acquaintance. In the article, "Because I could not stop for Death", Theodore Hoepfner states, "Immortality ought to be the destination of the coach and not one of the passengers. The personification of Death, however, is unassailable" (Hoepfner). Dickinson can show that no matter how people try to deny or escape the inevitability of Death, the concept of Death will always remain unchallenged and impossible to defeat. We can view Death as a new outlook on the afterlife and how we can interpret dying. Seeing how Dickinson welcomes Death instead of fearing it can bring peace to a common fear. Emily used visual patterns and sound effects to bring the poem to life. The

experience of Death was seen as a peaceful ride, allowing us to look at Emily and her relationship with Death from her view of immortality as a ride with a companion.

Dickinson goes on within her poem by personifying many of the adjectives within the poem. This gives insight into the perception of Death overall. For example, when she states he "kindly" (2) stops to take her to eternity, she is using this describing word in order to portray that this is a friendly gesture. In the carriage, where Death then escorts her to eternity, immortality is also along the ride. The view of immortality is seen as a person along with Death, as she knows that Death will come to the afterlife, and explains this very descriptively throughout.

As Death and Emily depart, she puts her life away to accept the gesture of Death. She starts this journey at the school with children, which we can compare to the first stage of life. Then she passes "Grazing Grain" (11) which is the second stage of life, and concludes the "setting sun" (12). Emily proceeds to share that though Death leads to immortality, she passes the sun, but the sun seems to be passing her instead. In the Article "A View of Death in Emily Dickinson's 'Because I could not Stop for Death'," she states the view of "both the dying in the cycle of nature and the death of those dear to her had a strong effect on the poet that her understanding of death is inevitably influenced her feelings itself very strongly" (Johnson). Understanding this and Emily's life growing up, we can fully see Death's realization. Her pain and acceptance of the Death of loved ones at a young age allowed her to move through the stages of approval. When she gets to the end of her carriage ride, she feels unfamiliar with the new destination she has arrived at. She has become further from the living world. However, she accepts her new home and sees it as a new life, as well as her immortality. This comparison shows how Dickinson was ready to leave her old acquaintances for her new life.

Emily Dickinson employs metaphors to reinforce Death as a fundamental stage of life. The poem changes perspectives from the idea of morality concerning her when she is stopped in the carriage approved by the field where the children are playing (line 9) with the grains during the sunset. For emphasis, she includes this in the poem with the connection to adjectives. Though Emily is aware of her viewpoint of the children, the children need to be made aware of the carriage as well as Emily herself. On the contrary, the interpretation of morality can also suggest that even though dying is sure to happen in life, the same can apply to eternity after Death. She uses metaphors of grains and sunset to symbolize a strong likelihood. The passing carriage moves throughout the school, field, and sunset moments. By understanding this travel of different locations, we can understand the end of her physical presence. In the article "Because I could not stop for Death" by Theodore Hoepfner, he explains, "The soul is immortal, and our immortality, therefore, "rides" always with us as a co-passenger; it is with us because the soul is an immortal part, and so maybe the journeying with us" (Hoepfner). Using this description by Hoepfner, we can see how Dickinson previews morality as a body that is a living and a living organism. The poem incorporates this time of human life as the nature of the human. Immortality is always with us throughout life. It's just till the right moment when Death appears and takes over.

In conclusion, the aspect of Death and immortality converge to enforce the proper understanding of the poem's main idea. Dickinson's incorporation of the sentence structure helps us understand the poem's tone and the tension or fear associated with the concept of Death. Emily uses her life story to build the poem's idea and show the true significance of this event that is unavoidable in all our lives. Everyone is associated with Death, but some choose to hope for what will be provided after Death. The poem can push us towards understanding a grieving and

upsetting part of life by using expression and imagery to illustrate Death as a common thing within nature. She presents a positive view of Death, showing it is a necessary part of life but does not necessarily signify the end.

Work Cited

Hoepfner, Theodore C. "'Because I Could Not Stop for Death.'" *American Literature*, vol. 29, no. 1, 1957, pp. 96-96. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/2922703. Accessed 21 Mar. 2023.

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