

Poetry comparison essay sample

[Life](#), [Death](#)



Poetry and song share common themes or ideas. Each idea is carefully crafted to create a mood or tone, to tell a story, or simply to entertain an audience. Either way the reader or listener is left with different feelings and emotions. The writers make use of figurative devices, rhymes, rhythm and imagery to create the overall mood and atmosphere. In the poem “ Because I could not stop for Death” by Emily Dickinson and the song “ Flirted With You All My Life” by Vic Chesnutt, both writers view the inevitable nature of death and the impact death has on an individual’s life.

In “ Flirted With You All My Life”, the reader’s first impression is that the song is about someone having a frivolous affair with another person. The language is simple and the title suggests that there is a period of courtship in the first four lines – “ I am a man/I am self aware/And everywhere I go /You are always right there with me”(1-4) He further misleads his audience into thinking that the relationship has grown “ I flirted with you all my life/Even kissed you once or twice”(5-6). However, he changes direction with his thoughts as he uses euphemism to describe the change in his emotions – “ you touched a friend of mine”(9). His friend dies. Here the writer realizes that death comes to all even when one does not want it. He then realizes that his flirting with death, his attempts at suicide were just a game and in reality he was not ready to die. Later, he confirms his desire to flirt with death is unwanted as his mother’s battle with cancer leaves her begging for death.

The poem “ Because I Could Not Stop for Death” is similar to the song in many respects. Dickinson appears to be fascinated with what happens after death. The poet imagines that death is a handsome gentleman who comes

to take individuals for a ride in “ carriage”(3). Here, death is accepted as the speaker is relaxed with the euphemistic kind gentleman called death. The speaker is taken on a journey to relive her life. She sees everybody getting along with their lives in a normal fashion. The speaker was not ready for death and was unprepared for it as she was not even dressed for it “ The Dews drew quivering and chill – For only Gossamer – my Gown” (14 – 15), but, “ He kindly stopped for me”(2)

The tone of in the poem is one of acceptance. The writer has accepted the fact that while she was not prepared to die she was ready to go. The song on the other hand, reflects the writer’s lack of acceptance of death. He knows that this is unavoidable and thoughtlessly flirts with death but, comes to the realization that he is not ready for death when he loses his mother and friend. Chesnutt’s earlier thoughts of life and death are more carefree than Dickinson’s. His encounter with death appears to be intentional and he notes “ I swear it was nice”(7).

Both writers personify death. In the song “ Even kissed you once or twice”(6) suggests that death is a person who can be touched physically. He gives Death human qualities and implies that he can touch it. Dickinson does the same as she portrays death as a “ suitor”. She is not afraid of death but embraces the arrival of death. The implication is that the poet wants the reader to see death in the poem from the perspective that they share a love relationship.

In both works, the use of repetition is common. While Chesnutt appears to be confused about his acceptance of death, Dickinson is not. At first the songwriter, flirts with death, embracing death as it comes, and even taunting

death, then he repeatedly tells death in the final verse “ I am not ready/I am not ready”(25-26) and the final line ‘ Really, I am not ready”. This adds reinforcement to the idea that he has become more understanding of the power of death and now believes that this is a stage that he would best leave alone. On the other hand, Dickinson repeats “ We passed”(11-12) in an effort to give the reader the view that her life was not at a standstill but that she was moving on to a new chapter in her life.

The songwriter faces internal conflict as he battles with his acceptance of death and towards the end of the song the audience realizes that he has matured and has come to the realization that he would prefer to live than to die. He realizes that death can be harsh “ You me/Decimate those dear to me” (15-16). On the other hand, the poet does not appear to be in conflict with death but she has embraced the moment even though she was not ready for it. She sees death as someone she is comfortable as he approaches her in a calm and reassuring way.

In concluding, Chesnutt and Dickenson deal with the theme of death. On one hand, Chesnutt flirts with death and taunts it with his attempt to kiss death twice and liking it. In the end, he embraces the reality that death is final and one has to learn to accept death. Dickinson treats death with more reverence as she accepts that her time has come and takes whatever death brings, with total acceptance.

Reference

“ Introduction to Poetry” by Billy Collins (page xvi) [http://www. loc. gov/poetry/180/001. html](http://www.loc.gov/poetry/180/001.html)

“ Because I could not stop for death” by Emily Dickenson (page 1005)

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“ Because I could not stop for death” by Emily Dickenson

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“ Flirted With You All My Life” Vic Chesnutt

<http://songmeanings.com/songs/view/3530822107858811563/>