

# Emily dickinsons exploration of death essay examples

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Emily Dickinson is well-known for writing on a variety of themes, death being major contender among them. "Because I Could Not Stop for Death" and "I Heard a Fly Buzz" are two strong examples of poems with death as their overarching theme. The former introduces a woman narrator who appears to go on a journey with a gentleman, only revealing to the reader near the end of the piece that the man is Death and that the woman has been dead for some time. The latter poem depicts a woman attempting to die peacefully when a fly interrupts her tranquillity and her very passing as well. While both poems depict death occurring in an ordinary, uneventful manner, they differ in the angle which they take.

On reading this "Because I Could Not Stop for Death," it is immediately clear that it covers death in some way, by the opening two lines: "Because I could not stop for Death - / He kindly stopped for me—"

Death is disguised as a male suitor who offers to take the narrator for a ride in his horse and carriage. The two of them travel along in a companionable fashion; the speaker appears to be relaxed with the man. As they tour the town, she observes idyllic scenes such as children playing, crop fields, and a sunset. A possible interpretation is that these pictures represent the three stages of life: the children playing could represent childhood; the fields of grain represent maturity; the sunset represents old age (Neff Shaw 20).

As twilight arrives, the narrator becomes cold as she is not wearing sufficient clothing for the time in the evening. Then, as Rachel Wetzsteon points out, "time rushes suddenly forward and the speaker looks back on the scene just described from the sudden vantage point of one who has been dead a long time" (Wetzsteon xx) The carriage halts at what is to be the woman's burial

place, shown by a simple headstone. This is described in the poem as, “ The Cornice - in the Ground”

In the closing stanza, it becomes clear that the woman’s ride with Death occurred many years ago, as did her actual death. However, it seems only recently that she began to feel that horse heads indicated the channel from life to death, and to the afterlife.

Death and mortality are the key themes for “ Because I Could Not Stop for Death.” It explores the narrator’s opinion on her death and what the day in which she died was like for her. Dickinson portrays the day in a way which seems fairly commonplace and uneventful. The narrator does not seem afraid of death, and appears to accept her demise easily.

While death is not a unique concept to be used in a poem, Dickinson manages to depict the theme in a new way by introducing death in the shape of a person. Of course, the well-known grim reaper takes on the form of a human and, therefore, in this respect it is not new. However, the man in “ Because I Could Not Stop for Death” seems to be a desirable gentleman. The author uses the Death character as an extended metaphor to explore what actual death may be like.

“ I Heard a Fly Buzz” depicts the setting and the mood at the instant when a person dies. The narrator begins by talking about the hum of a fly, which interrupts the dense, hushed space surrounding her deathbed. In the second stanza, the speaker begins to describe the room in which, her death is taking place. She tells the reader of the individuals with her, who are coolly getting ready for her last breath. At this point, she seems detached from what is happening to her, implying that she is peacefully fading into death

(Cameron). She even goes as far as to talk about her belongings being dispersed, to demonstrate that death is really imminent. This happens in the third stanza, when she says, " I willed my Keepsakes - Signed away / What portion of me be / Assignable." At this point, the speaker returns to speaking about the fly. It seems like an impostor, a strange and superfluous bug, imposing on her moment of death.

Once again, death and mortality are clearly the key theme in " I Heard a Fly Buzz When I Died." Dickinson uses this piece to investigate a variety of aspects of death. As in " Because I Couldn't Not Stop for Death," she considers how death might feel and the way in which it commonly occurs. Furthermore, she examines the concept from various angles; for example, this poem covers the aspects of before, throughout, and after death.

Perhaps the most interesting element of this poem is that it begins as a fairly standard death scene, but then a fly enters and alters the whole atmosphere. As Brooklyn University English Dept. website points out, " The death in this poem is painless, yet the vision of death it presents is horrifying, even gruesome."

The fly is first introduced in line one, when the reader is informed that its buzz is audible. The fly is then not mentioned again until line twelve, when, " There interposed a fly." The fly is interrupting the death scene and the poem. It is, arguably, stealing the dying woman's thunder. It is unclean, uncontrollable and loud, while all else is silent and tranquil. The fly becomes more of a presence and, indeed, more annoying as the lines go on from this point. In line fourteen, the fly puts itself between the narrator and the light: " Between the light - and me -." This is where the dying woman is most

irritated by the fly as it is getting in the way of her death. Not only does she suffer an undesirable outside disruption, but she also drops from a higher consciousness, from releasing perception, from belief, into a penetratingly dubious mood (Friedrich).

“ Because I Could Not Stop for Death” and “ I Heard a Fly Buzz” are both poems with death at their core. The major similarity between them is that they both explore death as a commonplace, fearless occurrence. Despite death being popular in poetry, Dickinson has managed to make both of these poems unique in their angles so that readers experience the theme from a fresh perspective. These two pieces provide an excellent sample of the author’s style and skill at casting new light on already familiar subject matters.

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