

The relationship between the selves: a consideration of emily dickensons poem 670...

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The Relationship between the Selves: A Consideration of Emily Dickenson's Poem 670 Emily Dickenson's Poem 670, "One need not be a Chamber - to be Haunted", is a fascinating study of the relationship between the constructs of the 'social self' and the 'poet self'. This primary self, feeling like a haunted chamber, is the 'poet self', while the secondary self, relating to the spatiality of a house, is the 'social self'. Although the first person is never employed, Dickenson seems to compose these lines in the guise of her 'poet self', wistfully contemplating the potential power of the past over each of the realms where she invariably resides. Whether in the small, safe singular room of contemplation and creation, or wandering throughout the spaces of an entire house with no guarantee for solitude, both selves, emerging from the same brain, have the potential for receiving ghosts from the past. "The Brain has Corridors" (4) and the labyrinth of the mind can expose haunting images from the past to either self. That each self is open to attack carries throughout the composition.

This 'poet self' emerges as a construct that is more vulnerable to the undefined haunting. "That Cooler Host" (8) is "interior" (7), without any sort of layers of protection from any potential "Confronting" (7). Any such encounter is removed from ambiguity and moves into a more nefarious and dangerous realm. That the 'poet self' openly acknowledges surfacing from a lowered position is tenderly evocative. "Unarmed" (11) and open to any sort of attack, the 'poet self' resides in a "lonesome Place" (12) that offers no potential for external assistance. As the part of herself that is closest to her core, the "Ourself behind ourself" (13), the 'poet self' resides in hiding, "concealed" (13) from the world and with little experience of self-defense.

Because of this, the primary self “ should startle most” (14) and this is another extraordinary admission. As the dominant construction appears to be writing these verses, she is openly admitting the flaws of her own position and exposing her deepest fears.

Despite the primary position of the ‘ poet self’, the ‘ social self’ is openly conveyed in a better light. Any experience of haunting would be “ Far safer” (5 and 9) for this ‘ social self’, a point made even stronger by its repetition. While the encounter with the ‘ poet self’ is clearly negative, the ‘ social self’ only has a “ Meeting” (5) in store, with an “ External Ghost” (6) that can be more effectively approached. Although this engagement is assigned to “ Midnight” (5), there is no premonition or indication that the rendezvous will be negative. Unlike the unarmed and susceptible ‘ poet self’, the ‘ social self’ is active and in motion, “ through an Abbey gallop” (9). In this, the ‘ social self’ appears ready for the haunting, as this construction is further from the core than the ‘ poet self’. As the ‘ social self’ has had more experience, it is more able to function under the pressure, even though it is not the primary self of the poem.

By the final stanza, the relationship between the primary and secondary selves is set. Frightened and convinced of its own inadequacies, the ‘ poet self’ “ borrows a Revolver” (17) and “ bolts the Door” (18). Bunkering close to the core of the entire person, the ‘ poet self’ hides behind the better prepared ‘ social self’. The primary self remains unable to express in any sort of specifics the potential haunting causing such terror, referring to it on as “ a superior spectre/Or More” (19-20). One, although voicing the poem, is afraid and feels unprotected from specters of the past emerging from her

mind, while the secondary self is portrayed as actively ready for a meeting that is not doomed to failure. This lingering image is what remains after closely studying this poem, the confession of a woman caught between two constructs of herself.