

An analysis of emily
dickinson's poem
"because i could not
stop for death"



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The background of Emily Dickinson (1830 - 1886) Emily Elizabeth Dickinson was an American poet of the 19th century.

Her writing style is quiet weird at that time. Here is a description of Emily Dickinson from the book *The recognition of Emily Dickinson: selected criticism since 1890*[1], " Her poetry is not like any other poetry of her time; it is not like any of the innumerable kinds of verse written today. " Therefore, her literary status was not very high until the middle of 20th century. The following is an introduction from Wikipedia[2]. Dickinson lived an introverted and hermetic life.

Although she wrote, at the last count, 1, 789 poems, only a handful of them were published during her lifetime. All of these were published anonymously and some may have been published without her knowledge. This poem of Emily Dickinson " Because I could not stop for Death" is the number 712 which is one of those unpublished poems during her lifetime. There are a great number of her poems which concerning the subject " Death.

" And this one " Because I could not stop for Death" is a typical of her works. Analysis of " Because I could not stop for Death" Because I could not stop for Death— He kindly stopped for me— The Carriage held but just Ourselves— And Immortality. The writer clearly points out the main idea of this poem in the first stanza. Unlike ordinary people's feeling of death, the description of death in this poem is very different or even weird. From death to immortality, the tone of Emily Dickinson seems very free and easy.

It seems that death is nothing more than a happy journey on a breezy day.

The Death in here looks like a kindly gentleman instead of a Grim Reaper.

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Blake and Wells[3] have a statement in their book, " He is a gentleman taking a lady out for a drive . . .

The terror of death is objectified through this figure of the genteel driver, who is made ironically to serve the end of Immortality. " The leader of the journey to Immortality is Death. Usually we consider death as the end of life, however, the writer gives us a totally different idea of Immortality—Death itself is Immortality. We slowly drove—He knew no haste And I had put away My labor and my leisure too, For His Civility— The journey starts in this stanza with a slowly speed. The first phrase indicates that this journey is so restful.

Their pace is so slowly that you cannot smell any fear in the air. Johnson[4] said, Since she understands it to be a last ride, she of course expects it to be unhurried. . . She is therefore quite willing to put aside her work.

And again, since it is to be her last ride, she dispense with her spare moments as well as her active ones. Because she understands it to be a last ride, she can put her labor and leisure away. Labor and leisure symbolize her life before the coming of Death. Now, Death takes her away, and perhaps will never back. We passed the School, where Children strove At Recess—in the Ring— We passed the Fields of Gazing Grain— We passed the Setting Sun—a Miller[5] said in his book Emily Dickinson, a poet's grammar[6], " With the reiteration of ' passed' in the third stanza and the increasing awareness of time, the slow journey begins to hasten.

" It is sure that the use of " passed" three in a row in this four line stanza

must have some special meaning. The speed of the poem accelerates when <https://assignbuster.com/an-analysis-of-emily-dickinsons-poem-because-i-could-not-stop-for-death/>

they passed the memory. In this stanza, the poet reviews the whole life of a human being. One by one, they passed the school, the fields of gazing grain, and the setting sun.

These three images symbolizes different period of man's life. School symbolizes childhood, the fields symbolize mid-life, and finally the setting sun symbolizes the old age. The following is a statement from the book *The recognition of Emily Dickinson: selected criticism since 1890*, " The third stanza especially shows Miss Dickinson's power to fuse, into a single order of perception, a heterogeneous[7] series: the children, the grain, and the setting sun (time) have the same degree of credibility. " Or rather—He passed Us—The Dews drew quivering and chill— For only Gossamer, my Gown— My Tippet[8]—only Tulle[9]— Compare with the third stanza which the writer said they passed the sun, the forth stanza presents a different mood. In the first of this stanza, she corrects the statement in the third stanza. It is the sun passed they rather than they passed the sun.

Johnson wrote this statement in his book *Emily Dickinson : an interpretive biography*[10], She now conveys her feeling of being outside time and change, for she corrects herself to say that the sun passes them, as it of course does all who are in the grave. She is aware of dampness and cold, and becomes suddenly conscious of the sheerness of the dress and scarf which she now discovers that she wears. There are many concrete images in the forth stanza—Dews, Gossamer, Gown, Tippet, and Tulle. The dews drew because there is no warmth.

The Gossamer and Gown can not provide a shelter from cold. The journey to her tomb is approaching the end. We paused before a House that seemed A Swelling of the Ground— The Roof was scarcely visible— The Cornice—in the Ground— Since then—' tis Centuries—and yet Feel shorter than the Day I first surmised the Horses' HeadsWere toward Eternity— The two concluding stanzas, the journey to death comes to an end. As Miller said, “ Here the terror is achieved without any morbid description of moldering bones and worms so frequently used by Poe[11].

” The atmosphere of the two concluding stanzas is gruesome. They achieve the tomb which the writer does not clearly indicate that is a tomb. The writer suggests the destination of the journey is her grave. The destination of the journey to death is described as a tangible figure: her house, a swelling of the ground, the roof, and the cornice. As Johnson said, “ The two concluding stanzas, with progressively decreasing concreteness, hasten the final identification of her ‘ House.

’ It is the slightly rounded surface ‘ on the Ground,’ with a scarcely visible roof and cornice ‘ in the Ground. ’” The final image in this poem: the Horses’ Heads, which once appeared in the first stanza: “ The carriage held but just Ourselves—And Immortality. ” It looks like at the moment when she took on the carriage, she already realized that only death can become “ Eternity. As Johnson said, At the end, in a final instantaneous flash of memory, she recalls the last objects before her eyes during the journey: the heads of the horses that bore her, as she had surmised they were doing from the beginning, toward—it is the last word—Eternity. Common Metre Emily

Dickinson used Common Metre in many of her poems.

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Common Metre is often used in hymns. It is an iamb. Each stanza of a Common Metre has four lines of length 8, 6, 8, 6 syllables. Dashes and unconventional[12] capitalization Emily Dickinson used a lot of dashes and capitalization in most of her works. These might be Emily Dickinson's writing habits.

Her use of dashes is out of common rule. In her poems, dashes could stand for a blank space or she probably used dashes to extend the meaning of images. For instance, " Recess and Ring" in third stanza: Because of the use of dash, the blank spaces are made. Then, in order to fill up the spaces, readers will think about the recesses and the schools in their childhood. Therefore, the image becomes a symbol of the period of childhood.

The use of capitalization is another feature of Emily Dickinson. Her use of capitalization can roughly distribute to three categorizations. First, capitalization is used when a word indicates a visible figure. There are some examples such as Ourselves, Dews, Setting Sun, Roof, and so forth.

Second, those abstract words are capitalized, such as Immortality, Civility, and Eternity. Last, the words of personification are capitalized. For instance, Death and the Setting Sun are a use of personification. Summary In " Because I could not stop for Death" Emily Dickinson uses a lot of symbols and images to represent a thought about death.

The poet conveys an idea Eternity to the readers. This poem of Emily Dickinson had a profound effect on the subject of death. As Johnson said " Death becomes one of the great characters of literature. " And this poem becomes one of the most famous poems concerning the subject " death. <https://assignbuster.com/an-analysis-of-emily-dickinsons-poem-because-i-could-not-stop-for-death/>

" " If the word ' great' means anything in poetry," Blake and Wells said," this poem in one of the greatest in the English language. " Works cited Caesar R. Blake and Carlton F. Wells. The recognition of Emily Dickinson: selected criticism since 1890Ann.

Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1964. Cristanne Miller. Emily Dickinson, a poet's grammar. Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 1987. Thomas Herbert Johnson.

Emily Dickinson: an interpretive biography. Cambridge, Mass. : Belknap Press, 1955. <http://en>.

wikipedia.org/wiki/Edgar_Allan_Poe<http://www.americanpoems.com/poets/emilydickinson/10664>