

Uphill critical analysis

Sociology, Communication



“Uphill” is a poem that was written by Christina Rossetti in 1861. According to our textbook *Discovering Poetry*, this poem uses allegory, which is when various “symbols work together in a set pattern”. The various symbols portrayed by the author in this poem are consistent with those of a journey; a road, an inn, a resting place at night, and other wayfarers. The poem consists of four stanzas, in which an individual is posing questions in the first and third lines of each stanza, and in the second and fourth lines of the stanza someone is responding to those questions.

In my initial readings of the poem, I was thinking of the communication taking place as that of a conversation between two individuals. For example, the person posing the questions was talking to their priest, or a child was asking their parents questions about life. However, after reading the poem numerous times, I began to view the interaction as not being an actual conversation, but rather an individual deep in prayer and having a conversation with God. Although God doesn’t usually speak directly to us, we often seem to find the answers we seek through prayer.

In this poem the individual is posing their questions in prayer, and then receiving the response in their minds, which then offers comfort. I believe that the various symbols that are used in this poem are the author’s attempt to describe our journey through life, and her vision that our place in the afterlife will be dependent on how we lived in our earthly life. The first stanza poses the questions “Does the road wind uphill all the way?”, and “Will the day’s journey take the whole long day?” Here the author is using the symbols of a road, a day, and a journey to describe our life here on earth. Using “uphill” as a metaphor is indicative of the fact that she perceives life

as difficult and challenging , and is wondering if the road through life will always be that way. The responses indicate that yes, the road will be an uphill one to the very end, and that we will face difficulties and challenges throughout our life. The challenges will last the entire “ day” of our lives, from morn to night, or birth to death.

The first stanza ends with “ my friend”, indicating that the person answering the questions is someone who cares about the questioner and that they should trust them. In this opening stanza, it is as if someone is facing a hard time in their lives, and is praying to God for answers. The second stanza opens with the question “ But is there for the night a resting place? ” with the response being “ A roof for when the slow dark hours begin”. Here the author is changing from the “ day” of the first stanza, which was our life on earth, to “ night”, which would be the afterlife.

The questioner is wondering if there will be a place of “ rest” or safety after we die, and the answer is that yes we will have a “ roof” over our heads. This again follows the allegorical vision of a journey, with a person traveling an uphill road throughout the day of our lives, and at the end when darkness comes we all want a place of safety. The questioner is being told that yes, when it gets dark, or in the afterlife, we will have a roof over our heads, meaning we will be safe. The questioner then asks “ May not the darkness hide it from my face? with the response being “ You cannot miss that inn”. Here the questioner is worried that when we die there may be nothing, just darkness. However, they are assured that they cannot miss the inn, meaning that there is certainty of arrival in this place of safety. In this stanza, the person is continuing their prayer to God. They have already received a

response that life is going to be difficult and challenging, and now they are being assured that there is an afterlife and that it will be a place of safety.

The third stanza opens with the question “ Shall I meet other wayfarers at night? ” with the response being “ Those who have gone before. ” The use of “ wayfarers” continues the vision of a journey, and here the questioner is asking if they will see other people in the afterlife. “ Wayfarers” would be other people who have been on the same journey through life. The questioner then asks “ Then must I knock, or call out when just in sight? ” and is given the response “ They will not keep you standing at the door”.

Here the questioner is assured that when they arrive at the inn, or place of safety, their loved ones will be waiting to greet them. In this stanza the person is being assured by God that they will meet their loved ones in the afterlife. The fourth stanza asks the question “ Shall I find comfort, travel-sore and weak? ” with the response being “ Of labor you shall find the sum”. In the second and third stanzas, the questioner asked if they would find safety in the afterlife and if they would see their loved ones, and here they are asking if they will find comfort.

The response is that the comfort they achieve will be dependent on the “ labor” or work in their earthly lives. This indicates that there is some form of judgment in the afterlife of how we conduct our lives here on earth. The questioner then asks “ Will there be beds for me and all who seek? ” and is told “ Yea, beds for all who come”. The term “ seek” is important here, because here God is telling the questioner that there isn’t a bed for everyone, only those who seek Him.

As you have read, the poem “ Uphill” uses the symbols of a journey to create an allegorical vision of our life on earth and into the afterlife. In the final stanza of the poem, it is clear that the author is conveying the message that how we conduct our lives on earth will be a gauge for how we fare in the afterlife. While we will never know who the individual is that is answering the questions in the poem, I believe that it is God responding to the questioner through prayer, because God is the only one who would have the true answers to the questions.