

Emily dickinson

Experience, Meaning of Life



In Emily Dickinson's, " Because I could not stop for Death", the use of imagery with sensory language as well as personification to reveal the persuasion of the readers awareness about death. As soon as the poem begins, Dickinson begins giving attributes to death as if it is a spectacular moment in our lives. Emily Dickinson expresses her revolt against the predictable awareness of the hereafter, and the standards maintained by civilization in that period. Right in the first stanza, Dickinson lets the audience know that death is personified. Death has been given human-like characteristics. Death is humanized as a ' man' pursuing a young woman. It seems to show that the young woman has an appointment with death. Dickinson shows this in lines 1 and 2 when it states, " Because I could not stop for death, / He kindly stopped for me." The reader can see in line two, Dickinson gives death the human trait of being thoughtful. It begins feeling like the woman is almost thrilled and even grateful because of the generous nature of this man named Death. Richard Chase commented on Emily Dickinson's portrayal of death in which he stated, " The personification of death, however, is unassailable. In the literal meaning of the poem, he is apparently a successful citizen who has amorous but genteel intentions. He is also God..." (Chase 249-250). Death is obvious in what Dickinson portrays it to be, a young, powerful man in which changes life forever. It is ironic, that the woman in this poem believes death to be such a kind-hearted fellow. Most do not perceive death as a relief but as a nightmare instead. The woman in the poem feels a sense of relief when death stops for her. She is able to continue her crazy fast life and does not have to wait around to die because like Hoepfner says in his book, " To those who believe in an afterlife,

death may be kind in taking us from a world of proverbial woe into one of equally proverbial eternal bliss; the irony is in the contrast between our fear of death and the kindness of his mission, and it seems unnecessary to call upon an amorous implication" (Hoepfner 96). This is an unusual view on the concept of what death usually is looked at as, but this is what Dickinson wants to portray to the reader and it is executed very well. Dickinson also shows human-like traits to immortality. She seems to give 'Immortality' the role in being almost a caretaker to Death and the woman. Richard Chase commented on Dickinson's use of immortality in the poem in which he said, "The only pressing technical objection to this poem is the remark that "Immortality" in the first stanza is a meretricious and unnecessary personification and that the common sense of the situation demands that Immortality ought to be the destination of the coach and not one of the passengers" (Chase 249-250). In lines 3 and 4, it says "The carriage held but just ourselves / And Immortality." These lines give the impression that 'Immortality' is basically their watchman. During the period of time in which this poem was written, it would have been very inappropriate for a young man and woman to be alone without someone along beside them so Dickinson makes sure to include a chaperone in the interaction between the young woman and Death. Chase believed that Immortality should not be the chaperon that Dickinson implied it to be, rather the endpoint of where the woman was trying to get to. Although Richard Chase has a point in his opinion on how Dickinson should have referred to Immortality as, Theodore C. Hoepfner has opposing thoughts. Hoepfner states, "The trouble with this remark is that it does not present the common sense of the situation. Emily

Dickinson was taught Christian doctrine--- not simply Christian morality but Christian theology--- and she knew that the coach cannot head toward immorality, nor can one of the passengers. Dickinson here compresses two related but differing concepts: (1) at death the soul journeys to heaven (eternity), and thus the image of the carriage and driver is appropriate; and (2) the soul is immortal, and our immorality, therefore, "rides" always with us as a co-passenger; it is with us because the soul is our immortal part and so may be the thought of as journeying with us" (Hoepfner, 96). It seems that Dickinson did an undeniably excellent job giving personification to Death and Immorality that the reader was able to understand exactly what was meant. Along with the personification of Death and Immorality, there is also a proposal of irony in the stanza. It says that since she is overly busy, she does not stop for Death, but instead Death makes her stop with force. However, it does kill her and this portrays the erratic changes in life. Every human being can relate to the fast paced life our world lives. People can forget how important the small things in their life are. They live life as if they have nothing to lose. Many times the reality of death is so far away from their everyday thoughts. It hits them like a ton of bricks, an unexpected tragedy stopping their fast paced life in its tracks. How interesting that Dickinson respects the importance of maintaining the woman's dignity. She is moments from death and yet having a chaperone while she meets with death is considered a top priority. This goes to show you the age of this poem. It has stood the test of time and its concept inspires people today in the 21st century. Throughout the second stanza, line 5 states. " We slowly drove, he knew no haste." Dickinson is emphasizing that Death has no

perception of time, which is also a human-like trait. Death moves in like a swift cat, quickly putting an end to a person's life. Death does not take into account how much time a person has been in this world. Death simply does not discriminate. Personification is an interesting element in itself. When inanimate objects are portrayed to have the characteristics and emotions of humans, readers develop an attachment to them. Readers are able to view the objects, or in this case ideas, on the same level as other humans. This allows the reader to feel as if they are connected with death in a more intimate way than usual. I feel like this is such a powerful concept in which Dickinson creates death into a "friend" for the reader. Usually death is an extremely sad and depressing concept for humans. Many people do not consider death to be a pleasurable thing. They do not even give the time of day or even consider that Death could possibly be a gratifying thing in the way, which Dickinson portrays it to be in lines 6 and 8. She states "And I had put away my labor and my leisure too, / For his civility." People are so busy with their individual lives to reflect about death. However, Dickinson places all her circumstances in her life to correlate with death. As if people should be living their lives ready and waiting to die. She then proceeds to mention once again on Death's noble behaviors. Most see death as something that is dark and uninviting but Dickinson once again shows Death to be something that is normal. Dickinson also nurtures death, which is not the norm with human beings. The use of imagery is extremely powerful in this poem as Dickinson uses descriptions of the earlier days as she remembers them and creates an image of correlation among realism and vision, the identified and the unidentified. This is a result of giving death human-like traits. People are

able to feel a nurturing connection with death, when it would normally be overlooked and forgotten. "Tuck Everlasting" was a commonly read book in childhood and this poem is a great reminder how thankful human beings should be that we have an eternity. In the novel, there is a water hole that provides everlasting life to those who drink from it. It seems so intriguing, and many search for the magical water. As you continue reading, you learn the true meaning of everlasting life; and it is not something you would desire to have. Everlasting life is a lonely sad way of life. You have no ending and everything just goes on and on. Dickinson is able to show the audience that Death is not always a dreadful thing because if Death did not come in our life, life would simply become redundant. The characters in "Tuck Everlasting" learn the benefits of death. They understand, just as Dickinson, how death can be great. It is thoughtful of those it meets and creates a sense of relief. Death allows people to relax and just live their life to the fullest because there is no way of knowing if it is your last day to be alive. Dickinson communicates detailed periods of her life by bringing up memories from her past. She observes these periods of her life from an advanced level of understanding, both factually and metaphorically. Dickinson uses an example of this when she refers to the house as "A Swelling of the Ground". Metaphorically, Dickinson accomplishes to signify the three periods of life, for example when it states "School, where Children strove" might easily be understood as her mentioning her childhood. Secondly, "Fields of Gazing Grain" seems to be referring to the fulfillment of maturation and thirdly when the poem states "Setting Sun", it seems to be referring to old age. By being able to see what Dickinson is saying through these certain phrases helps the

audience realize that there is a well-defined development of the different phases in life that everyone goes through beginning with birth and on into the afterlife. Dickinson is looking at each life event as though she is observing the events through an endless eternal window. Dickinson states in the poem that life is like the horses heads that lead toward eternity. " When the poem is seen as a unit, we realize that the retrospective last stanza focuses on " the day" (or short period of time) of relatively abrupt realization of what the rest of her life would be like--- so abnormal, so unlike the life that any sane woman (including Emily) would choose that it could compared only to death--- no marriage, no man, no fulfillment in the ordinary, worldly sense" (Green 218). Dickinson is able to come to the realization that there is no reason to only compare her life to death. When the poem states, " We paused before a House that seemed/ A Swelling of the Ground", Dickinson is implying that the house the carriage has stopped at is her own and she is able to clearly see what was being shown to her. The last stanza seems to be one in which " trauma- induced disorientation" (218) is apparent throughout the entirety of it. Death is what Dickinson wanted to keep focused on throughout her life, but as it is seen in the last stanza of the poem, Dickinson is able to visualize that life does not need to be fully compared to Death at every moment. Cooney hypothesizes, " her poems invite us to penetrate life itself, and death as a means toward understanding life" (Cooney 241). Dickinson has been able to change the audience's view on Death through the way she personifies and gives visual imagery to the things that come along with Death. " Because I Could Not Stop for Death" maintains a serene tone. Emily Dickinson uses remembered images of the past to clarify infinite

conceptions through the establishment of a dialectical relationship between reality and imagination, the known and the unknown" (Xiao-chuan 99). This poem clearly represents the nature of the limited and unlimited of life. Works Cited Chase, Richard. Emily Dickinson. New York; 1951. Cooney, William. The Death Poetry of Emily Dickinson. Omega: Journal of Death & Dying; 1998. Dickinson, Emily. Because I Could Not Stop for Death. The Norton Anthology of World Literature. 2. E. Ed. Sarah Lawall. New York: W W Norton , 2003. Greenburg, J. M. Dickinson's BECAUSE I COULD NOT STOP FOR DEATH. Explicator; 1991 Hoepfner, Theodore C. " Because I Could Not Stop for Death". American Literature; 1957 Xiao-Chuan, Ren. Death and Immortality: the Everlasting Themes. Canadian Social Science; 2009. I. Thesis II. Personification *How the personification exemplifies death *Examples from the text *Chase's point of view III. Imagery *Examples from text *Hoepfner *Xion-chuan IV. Dickinson's perception of death *Immoral rather than moral *Immortality *Examples of what Dickinson means by death and immortality IV. Conclusion 1. How these elements come together to form a persuasive argument to change the reader's perception on death.