

How imagery is used
in emily dickinson's
because i could not
stop for death



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Full and number of The Use of Imagery in Dickinson: “ Because I could not stop for Death” Patterson in her seminal work, *Emily Dickinson’s Imagery*, “formally presents her major argument that the poets recurrent imagery of major themes [including death] is a symbolic expression of her unconscious erotic feelings” (Patterson xiii). While this is an interesting perspective, most likely colored by aspects of Dickinson’s personal life, there is little to point to in her poem, “ Because I could not stop for Death,” that affirms it. The use of imagery in the poem can be more realistically explored from a more commonplace and less controversial perspective. As one makes their way through the lines their emerges an imagery reflective of Dickinson’s Christian belief in the afterlife and a poignant picture of how she views death will come, where it will take her, and a hopeful projection of eternity.

Dickinson often dealt with universal themes in her poetry, exploring events at times extremely personal and specific. Death is one of them. In it Dickinson, a Christian, uses the fine art of imagery to make the feared concept of death into something to be less feared and more something inevitable to contemplate as an expected and welcomed friend—a friend that guides us to the glorious afterlife. Because I could not stop for death, He kindly stopped for me. It is the non-threatening, positive image, if you will, reflecting the fact that the individual has little control over when death will come, but death, in its inevitable way, “ stops,” interrupting it’s path, and takes the chosen one along with it to a better place.

In addition to the use of the word “ kindly,” she adds the image of Civility, a different image in that kindness requires empathy, where Civility requires a concerted effort to assuage a difficult situation in the interests of doing just that. We slowly drove-He knew no haste. Death, recognizing her reluctance <https://assignbuster.com/how-imagery-is-used-in-emily-dickinsons-because-i-could-not-stop-for-death/>

and perhaps fear to accept her fate, did it's best to civilly sooth the journey—turning an otherwise negative event into one at least palatable.

The use of poignant images from life stir the heart, as Dickinson obviously intended. Who can not relate to thoughts upon death of their childhood, their schoolyard: Recess-in the Ring-We passed the Fields of Gazing Grain-We passed the Setting Sun- [itself obvious imagery used to convey life's cycles from beginning to end, and the setting of life ebbing]. With the next line, she hardens the image of the sun with the use of words such as Dews drew quivering and chill as the impending reality of death and its finality nears. The thin Gossamer of her gown leaves her vulnerable to the reality. We passed the Setting Sun-or rather-he passed us-conveys the image that at this juncture one has no control over death, it comes unexpectedly, as the imagery suggests she is not prepared for the quivering and chill.

We paused before a House that seemed A Swelling of the Ground-The Roof was scarcely visible- She is with and within death now. The House is of past ages—an archeological relic beyond which she is moving toward her own sense of being of the past, never to be of the present again. It is here that the reader officially parts with the rather spiritual and in a sense positive, even hopeful imagery of the beginning of the poem. She is hurtling back in time toward herself as an historical relic, remembered perhaps but never again to be of this time and place. The Cornice in the Ground is her tombstone set there as a reminder that she once existed.

In the end she is looking back on her life from her place in the past. The Horses Heads pointing the way toward Eternity seem perhaps images of something carved on her gravestone. But given that she is riding onward into eternity it is safe to assume she gives one final glance outward, forward
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toward her inevitable fate. Seeing the Horse's Head's thrust forward, as horse heads do when they are running, the imagery suggests a level of acceptance—the horses are propelling her forward toward eternity--her [and everyone's] ultimate destiny.

Works Cited

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