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Dickenson

The poem “Because I Could Not Stop for Death” by Emily Dickinson expresses the speaker’s reflection on death. Focusing on the concept of life after death, the setting mirrors the circumstances by which death approaches. It is through the promise of immortality that fear is removed, and death not only becomes acceptable, but welcomed as well.

As human beings, we feel that death never comes at a convenient or opportune time. When the speaker says, “Because I could not stop for Death,” she makes the reader ask why she could not stop. The answer is that she was so engrossed with her own life that she did not think about death. She makes it clear that it is unavoidable, when she says, “He kindly stopped for me”. The next few lines suggest that the miracle of life is one’s most precious possession and that there is the promise of unending life after it. With the presence of immortality one’s fears are reduced as they exit the physical world. It also provides the recipient with the necessary assistance to guarantee that the transition from reality to spirituality is a pleasant one.

If the promise of immortality did not exist, one would never go along willingly, nor would one welcome death without fear. The speaker and Death are in no hurry, as they have forever to reach their destination. This is made clear in the line, “We slowly drove–He knew no haste.” Having completed all her earthly chores, the speaker states that they are no longer of any concern to her. She has been allowed the luxury of rest and relaxation, as the next lines reveal, “And I had put away” and, “My labor had my leisure too”.

Therefore, the individual and death share a reminiscent journey as death allows the speaker to mirror the passage of life with things that are familiar to her. The journey allows her to see the stages of her life beginning with her childhood, then maturity, and, finally, old age which is all confirmed by the third stanza:

We passed the School, where Children strove

At Recess–in the Ring–

We passed the Fields of Gazing Grain–

We passed the Setting Sun. (Dickinson)

When the sun sets and darkness ensues, a cold, eerie chill will almost always accompany it. This makes the speaker wonder if, in fact, the sun had actually passed her. She takes notice of how inappropriately dressed she is for such an occasion, but then she realizes that the coldness and chill are not external, but internal. It becomes clear to the speaker that the coldness and the chill are associated with death and that her metaphysical journey has come to an end at the cemetery. Even though her gravestone is barely visible, she somehow recognizes it as her new home. In total contentment, she views her resting-place. This is acknowledged in the fifth stanza:

We passed before a House that seemed

A Swelling of the Ground–

The Roof was scarcely visible–

The Cornice–in the Ground– (Dickinson)

In the sixth stanza it is made clear that the speaker’s sense of time is skewed as her ability to recount how much time has passed since her death becomes irrelevant (Dickinson). This is because that upon death, the concept of time becomes non-existent. The speaker realizes that there is no price to pay for death, and it is not something to be feared, but rather embraced.

In conclusion, the speaker’s faith and belief in immortality allow her to peacefully exit one phase of existence, while embracing the next phase. Death’s kindness and compassion paved the way down memory lane and allowed the speaker to reminisce on the life she had lived. The poem ends with no inclination of unhappiness and thus implies that she’s had no regrets since her death despite the fact that it has been centuries.