

Student's Name

Professor's Name

Course

Date

Editing Emily Dickinson

Emily Dickinson spent most of her life writing poems. Although they were not published during her life, the world saw her poetry posthumously and it remains prevalent in the present day. Her poetry dates back to 1850 when she wrote her first verse *High-spirited Valentine*. She was nineteen at that time and has written hundreds of other poems since then. She arranged her poetry in folders that were carefully copied and folded containing almost a hundred and seventy poems each. The folders were referred to as fascicles. There were eight fascicles by the summer of 1860. Sometimes Emily wrote her poems in the letters that she would send to her friends and family. The total number of her poems is approximately 1789.

Another set of poems written by Emily was found in envelopes. In her final days, Emily used envelopes to write notes in them and little poetry pieces. The manuscripts in Emily's envelopes are more messages than poems. One of them is *Death warrants*, "Death warrants are supposed to be believed, to be an enginery of equity, hazardous" (Dickinson 20)

The punctuation marks used in Emily's poems are dashes and capitalization. Usually, many poems are punctuated with commas, periods, colons, and semicolons but Emily often uses dashes at the end of most stanzas. The reasons for her punctuation style are not clear yet. As for me, Emily uses dashes and capitalization of words to stress on common nouns, or

personify them. Supposedly, the dashes were also a bridge between poem sections. Another opinion is that Emily could have used the dashes to indicate areas to make pauses when reciting the poem loudly.

In this paper, I will analyze one of Emily's poems *Because I could not stop for Death*. The poem can be found in the reader's edition and the variorum. It was first published in 1890 titled *The Chariot* (Franklin 494). The name was later changed to be the first line of the poem *Because death could not stop for me*. The poem is exciting and has a rich background of figurative language as well as symbolism, imagery, and personifications. It is one of the most famous poems by Emily.

The manuscript gives a description of the poems and the time they were written. The poem is estimated to have been written in 1862 in Fascicle 23. Compared to the reader's version, the variorum is more comprehensive and gives indications of what is present and what has been omitted. For instance, the variorum version indicates that the fourth stanza was omitted. Franklin's reader edition presumes some facts like the date it was written, and dates when published. Franklin also fails to indicate the stressed words and the fascicle from which the poem was adopted. Nothing is lost when reading the manuscript form of the poetry. The content is the same as the reader's version. The manuscript version does not change the meaning of the poem or any of its aspects.

Editing the Poem

Editing this particular poem for a non-academic audience, I would first consider addressing the punctuation - dashes, capitalization, attachments and thie role for fascicles, and

letters. My edited poem would be less idiomatic and more apparent to the general audience. It is read as follows:

Because I could not stop for death,
 He kindly stopped for me.
 The carriage held just the two of us,
 And immortality.

We slowly drove, he knew no haste.
 And I had put away My labour,
 And my leisure too.
 For his politeness

We passed the school where the children strove.
 At recess, in the ring
 We passed the fields of gazing grain,
 We passed the setting sun.

Or rather, he passed us;
 The dewes grew trembling and chill,
 For only beautiful my gown,
 My tippet only fibre.

We paused before a house that seemed
 Swelling of the ground;
 The roof was barely visible,
 The cornice but a mound.

Since then, it is centuries, and yet each
 Feels shorter than the day,
 I first surmised the horses' heads
 We're towards eternity (Franklin b).

Editorial decisions

There is always a better way to edit and visually present Emily's poems than the present edited versions. The reader's version used in classes today can be adapted to suit lesser academic audiences. My editorial decisions for Emily's poem "Because I could not stop for death," are based on the elimination of hard to understand vocabularies and removal of the capitalization, dashes, and relation to fascicles.

The variorum edition relates every poem to a fascicle, and they seem to be part of a larger piece. In my version, the poem stands alone and is not associated with any of the fascicles. Other versions eliminate the fourth stanza, as stated in the variorum version, but in my case, I have included it because I believe it adds strength to the poem.

The original piece written by Emily was punctuated using dashes and capitalization. For a non-academic audience, such writing would be tedious to read, without knowing where to pause. My edited version addresses the challenge by using the common punctuation marks such as commas, periods, colons, and semicolons. The edited version utilizes commas to show where a reader should pause and also indicates a separation of two complete sentences with one complementing the other. For example, in the third and fourth line of the fourth stanza, "For only gossamer my gown, My tippet only tulle." A comma is used here to separate ideas in one sentence. Two complete sentences separated by a comma compliment the first part of the sentence.

The edited version replaces the ambiguous vocabulary used by Emily to simpler words that can be understood to the usual audience. The terms used by Emily pose a challenge to the knowledgeable specialists and can only be understood by checking the dictionary. For example, civility, quivering, gossamer, and 'tis, are replaced with simpler words politeness, trembling, beautiful, and it is. That way, a knowledgeable audience can understand the message of Emily's poem.

Close Reading of the Poem

The main issue raised in the poem is death. Emily describes death in her poetry as a civilized man who is driving her on a chariot. A closer look at the poem raises several questions. For instance, is death polite? Is death enlightened as Emily puts it? Is "Death" just

a word that Emily uses to describe a suitor that once took her out on a chariot? After examining the poem, I can describe it as a story of her life from childhood to death. The drive in a chariot is the journey of her life as she progresses from childhood to maturity and finally to death.

When Emily talks about death driving her through school where children strove, she simply means the part of her life where she attends school as a part of her life journey. Children in the poem are presented as active beings in their leisure time (Franklin a 493). Emily shows some images of children and grains, both of which suggest the future and also a representation of the standard passages during human life.

In the third and fourth stanza, the word “passed” is repeated four times (Franklin a 493). This is an emphasis on the passing time of human beings. The period when humans are born till their death, this time is described as passing. And even after death, some believe that people move away to eternity. The last line in the third stanza is, “We passed the setting sun” (Franklin 493). It talks about the time when people are buried, she calls it “a sunset.” When Emily alludes to the burial sunset, she brings in the idea that death took her. Also, this can be understood as, when the sun sets, the darkness comes. It gets dark, in opposite to the much light that was in proceeding stanzas. After the sun sets, the warmth is lost, and it becomes quivering cold as described in the poem.

In the fifth stanza, “we paused before a house that seemed a swelling on the ground; the roof barely visible, and the cornice but a mound” (Franklin a 493). The writer compares the cemetery to a house whose roof can barely be seen. A covered grave usually leaves a swelling on the ground; the effect of this comparison is to avoid using a scary language in a poem. The journey in this stanza has paused, death, and the persona are staring at the grave.

"Staring at the grave" is an expression that is widely used to describe a person who shows signs of dying soon. Such a person might be in critical health conditions, or in dangerous situations that could lead to death.

In the final stanza, the speaker is dead. It has been centuries since she died. Emily shifts from past tense to present tense, implying that death is the current situation she experiences. She also dismissed the idea of eternity. She describes how each century feels shorter than the day she first guessed (surmised) the horses, heads that they were headed to eternity. This could mean that she once believed in eternity only to be proved wrong when she is dead.

In summary, the poem *Because I could not stop for death* describes the speaker's journey childhood, to maturity, and finally to death. The original version, written by Emily Dickinson, was characterized by the use of capitalization and dashes for unclear reasons. Editors have since tried to edit the poem to simpler versions. My version eliminates the challenges of ambiguous vocabulary, dashes, and the random capitalization of words. The journey of a human being is briefly explained in the poem using a series of idioms described in this paper. A conclusion from the poem can be made that "death" as used in the poem does not represent a suitor. Death is not civilized or polite, as the speaker had indicated at the beginning of the poem. Death betrays the speaker at the end of the poem. Eternity is described as a fallacy in the poem not occurring to the speaker.

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