



## Exploring the Figurative Languages of *Because I Could Not Stop for Death* by Emily Dickinson

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### Abstract

*This article aims to unravel the layers of meaning embedded in the poem by analyzing and identifying intrinsic elements, such as imagery and figurative language, in Emily Dickinson's "I Could Not Stop for Death." Imagery is used to make readers feel things through their five senses. On the other hand, figurative language is a form of speech craftily varied from ordinary usage. The method used in this article was a descriptive qualitative approach. Reading the poem in order to comprehend its overall meaning and discover the meaning that was primarily the essence related to the topic was how the data was collected. In this article, there are four figurative languages found, which are Personification, Metaphor, Symbolism, and Hyperbole.*

**Keywords:** *Intrinsic Element, Because I Could Not Stop For Death, Emily Dickinson.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Literature refers to a body of written work, including prose, fiction, drama, and poetry, that is often considered an art form. Warren and Wellek explained that literature mirrors and expresses life, which is even more ambiguous. In other words, literature serves as a reflection of life and a means of expressing the complexities and uncertainties inherent in life. Poetry is different from other literature. It is because of the presence of alliteration, meter, metaphor, and parallelism.

The author explores the intrinsic elements of poetry in Emily Dickinson's "Because I Could Not Stop for Death," focusing on captivating elements like imagery and figurative language that immerse readers in the speaker's experience. Eaglestone (2009) explains an intrinsic method by drawing a parallel to the analysis of a painting, emphasizing the study of its fundamental elements, such as color and structure, encouraging an intrinsic perspective in the observation process. Peck and Coyle posit that poetry serves as a manifestation of a poet's emotions, depicting conscientious reflections and intense sentiments through eloquent verses, presented with a captivating style and rhythm that enhances their aesthetic and auditory appeal.

Born on December 10, 1830, in Amherst, Massachusetts, Emily Dickinson, the poet, is renowned as a prominent figure among 19th-century American poets. Her distinctive and bold original verse is characterized by its epigrammatic compression, haunting personal voice, and enigmatic brilliance.

Ketaren, Sipahutar, Marpaung, and Saragih (2021), in their study "*Figurative Language Use in Song Lyrics in English Textbook Senior High School*," examined the presence and dominance of figurative language within song lyrics featured in the *Pathway to English* textbook for senior high school learners. The research aimed to identify the various types of figurative language employed in the selected lyrics and to determine which type appeared most frequently. Employing a qualitative research approach, the authors gathered data through documentation, which entailed reviewing the song lyrics, pinpointing figurative language expressions, documenting them, and organizing them in line with recognized theoretical classifications. The analysis was anchored in Perrine's (1992) framework, which outlines twelve categories of figurative language: simile, metaphor, personification, apostrophe, synecdoche, metonymy, symbol, allegory, paradox, hyperbole, understatement, and irony. The study's results indicated the presence of four types: simile (two instances), metaphor (one instance), hyperbole (eight instances), and metonymy (one instance). Among these, hyperbole was the most frequently used, highlighting its significant function in amplifying the emotional and artistic qualities of the song lyrics.

Sharma (2022) analyzes the figurative language in the poem "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" by Robert Frost in his article entitled *Analysis of figurative language in Robert Frost's poem: Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*. The analysis delves into the various literary devices employed in the poem, including alliteration, assonance, consonance, hyperbole, imagery, metaphor, personification, rhyme, and symbolism. The article used the theories of Meyer Howard Abrams as a framework for understanding the various literary devices employed in the poem and their impact on the overall meaning and interpretation. The review emphasizes the poem's rich symbolism and its adept use of literary techniques to convey the underlying themes of responsibility and pleasure. Overall, this article sheds light on its figurative language and symbolic depth while situating it within the broader context of Robert Frost's literary legacy.

Hasanah et al (2023) examine the intrinsic and extrinsic elements in Audre Lorde's poetry, as well as the presence of racism in their work entitled *A Structural Analysis of Audre Lorde's Racism Poetry: Its Intrinsic and Extrinsic Elements*. The study utilizes a qualitative method and structuralist approach to analyze themes, figurative language, diction, and social elements in selected poems. The findings highlight the themes of inequality and the power of black women, along with examples of racism in poems such as "Power," "Who Said It Was Simple," and "A Woman Speaks." The theory of Wellek and Warren (1956) is often used to understand the extrinsic

aspects, which refer to the author's subjective state regarding attitudes, beliefs, and worldviews that influence the creation of a work of fiction.

Gunawan (2017) conducted a study to identify various types of figurative language and interpret their meanings within five chosen poems by Lang Leav. The study utilized a qualitative approach, gathering data from the selected poems and presenting the findings in essay form. The study employs Laurence Perrine's (1978) theory for analysis, revealing the presence of seven distinct types of figurative language in the chosen poems: Metaphor, Personification, Hyperbole, Symbol, Simile, Synecdoche, and Paradox. Personification emerged as the most prevalent among these figurative languages.

This study will use Kennedy and Gioia's (2007) theory about imagery and figurative language. Imagery is used to evoke emotions in readers through their five senses. An image may be visual, olfactory, tactile, auditory, gustatory, abstract, and kinesthetic (Cuddon, 1999). Imagery involves conveying sensory experiences through language, providing a tangible and sensory encounter with an object, acknowledged by one or more senses, and constitutes a fundamental element in all forms of creative writing, engaging the reader's senses. On the other hand, figurative language is the use of words, phrases, or sentences in such a way that deviates from the normal or conventional order and meaning to express specific and unique meanings. The term "figurative" comes from the Old French word "figuratif," which means metaphorical. A figure of speech is a departure from the conventional form of expression or the ordinary sequence of ideas to yield a greater effect (Wren & Martin, 1981). This poem includes the following figures of speech to turn the literal language into the figurative one:

a) Imagery

Kennedy and Gioia (2010) define imagery as the use of descriptive or figurative language to represent objects, actions, and ideas in such a way that they appeal to one or more of the reader's or listener's five senses. (e.g., "My heart sank when I heard the news").

b) Personification

Personification is a figure of speech in which a thing, animal, or abstract term like truth or nature is made human. (Kennedy and Gioia: 2005). It is particularly associated with literary, especially poetic language (Wales, 2002). Giving human attributes to non-human beings intensifies the assertions. (e.g., "The wind whispered secrets").

c) Metaphore

According to Kennedy and Gioia (2005: 121), a metaphor is the result of a simile, which is a statement of one thing in something else, not the literal sense. Unlike a simile, a metaphor compares things without using words like "like" and "as." Metaphor uses words like "is", "are", "was", or "were" when comparing two things. (e.g., "The snow is a white blanket").

d) Symbolism

Symbolism refers to the use of symbols to signify ideas or qualities. Symbol is an object, animate or inanimate, which represents or 'stands for something else (Cuddon, 1999). Kennedy and Gioia (2010) describe symbolism as the use of an object, action, place, person, or event to represent meanings beyond its literal sense. A symbol operates on two levels simultaneously:

1. Literal level – the concrete, physical object or event as it appears. E.g., A red rose
2. Figurative level – the abstract idea, value, or concept it signifies. Eg. In Rihanna's song Diamonds, the diamond may symbolize strength, uniqueness, resilience, or eternal love, depending on the interpretative lens.

e) Hyperbole

Hyperbole is an exaggerated statement. It is a bold overstatement, or the extravagant exaggeration of fact or possibility; it may be used either for serious or ironic, or comic effect (Abrams, 1993). According to Kennedy and Gioia (2005: 129), Hyperbole or overstatement is not a literal truth, but a figure of speech when speaking about something. (e.g., "I'm so hungry I could eat a horse").

## METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design. The method of collecting the data is the documentation method and the observation method. The data is analysed using a descriptive qualitative method, which, as per Moleong (2010: 6), involves studying subjects comprehensively to elucidate phenomena such as behavior, perception, motivation, and actions, presenting the findings through verbal descriptions. Furthermore, according to Gay et al (2006:9), qualitative research involves gathering, analyzing, and interpreting extensive narrative and visual data to understand a specific phenomenon. The author seeks to uncover the poem's layers of meaning by utilizing a descriptive qualitative approach and examining both intrinsic and extrinsic elements in Emily Dickinson's "*Because I Could Not Stop for Death*".

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Poem Presentation of "Because I Could Not Stop for Death" by Emily Dickinson.

Stanza 1

Because I could not stop for Death— He kindly stopped for me—  
The Carriage held but just Ourselves— And Immortality.

Stanza 2

We slowly drove—He knew no haste  
And I had put away  
My labor and my leisure too, For His Civility—

Stanza 3

We passed the School, where Children strove  
At Recess—in the Ring—  
We passed the Fields of Gazing Grain— We passed the Setting Sun—

Stanza 4

Or rather—He passed us—  
The Dews drew quivering and chill— For only Gossamer, my Gown—  
My Tippet—only Tulle—

Stanza 5

We paused before a House that seemed  
A Swelling of the Ground—  
The Roof was scarcely visible— The Cornice—in the Ground—

Stanza 6

Since then—'tis Centuries—and yet  
Feels shorter than the Day  
I first surmised the Horses' Heads  
Were toward Eternity—

B. Analysis of Figurative Language

Upon analyzing the figurative language used in *Because I Could Not Stop for Death* by Emily Dickinson, the author finds imagery, personification, metaphor, symbolism, and hyperbole. Each of the texts will be presented in the following discussion.

(a) Imagery

Imagery was found in stanzas 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6, and the discussion of these imagery types was given in the following explanation:

Stanza 1

Line 1 and 2: *Because I Could Not **Stop** for **Death**, He kindly **Stop** for me*

Line 3: *The carriage **held** but just ourselves*

In the opening stanza, the image of Death stopping for the speaker creates a scene of the unexpected. In these two opening lines, the word 'stop' indicates an image in which Death stops for the speaker. The word 'held' is also a visualization of the carriage that stops moving for a moment for the reader.

Stanza 2

Line 1: *We **slowly drove**, he knew no haste*

The second stanza emphasizes the imagery of a leisurely drive with Death. The words 'slowly drove' tells the readers to imagine that the carriage is moving slowly.

Stanza 3

Line 1 – 4: *We **passed the school** where children played,  
There lessons scarcely done;*

*We **passed the field of gazing grain**,*

*We **passed the setting sun***

In this third stanza, the word 'passed' is repeated three times in lines 1, 3, and 4. Based on the Webster dictionary, passed means to move in a path to approach and continue beyond something. The word 'passed' shows the movement through three different places. The first one is a school, where the speaker sees a view of children at recess. The second one is the grain field that shows the speaker seeing a view of the grain field as if it gazes back. The third one is the 'setting sun', where the poet makes the reader imagine the situation where the speaker and death passed a beautiful setting sun.

Stanza 5

Line 1 and line 2: *We passed the house that **seemed**, **A swelling on the ground***

In this stanza, the word 'seemed' indicates that the speaker sees something which will be explained in the next 'a swelling on the ground'.

Stanza 6

Line 1: *Since then—'tis **Centuries**—and yet*

Line 2: ***Feels shorter than the Day***

In the last stanza, the paradoxical image of "'tis Centuries" passing, yet it "Feels shorter than the Day," creates a sense of temporal distortion.

(b) Personification

Personification was found in stanzas 1 and 2, and the discussion of these personification types was given in the following explanation:

The primary use of personification is in the portrayal of Death. In the poem, Death is personified as a courteous and patient driver who "kindly stopped" (Stanza 1, line 2) for the speaker. Throughout the poem, Death is given human attributes, such as knowing no haste (stanza 2, line 1) and exhibiting civility (stanza 2, line 4).

(c) Metaphore

Metaphor was found in stanzas 1 and 3, and the discussion of these metaphor types was given in the following explanation:

The entire poem is a metaphorical journey that represents the passage from life to death. The carriage ride becomes a metaphor for the journey into the afterlife. The use of "Carriage" (Stanza 1, line 3) and the scenes passed (Stanza 3, lines 1,3, and 4) during the ride are metaphorical elements representing different stages and aspects of life.

(d) Symbolism

Symbolism was found in stanzas 3 and 5, and the discussion of these symbolism types was given in the following explanation:

Stanza 3

We **passed** the School, where Children strove  
At Recess—in the Ring—

We **passed** the Fields of Gazing Grain— We **passed** the Setting Sun—

The scenes passed during the carriage ride, such as the school, fields of grain, and the setting sun, symbolize different stages and aspects of life. The school represents the childhood era, where kids attend classes and engage in play, while the term 'grain' signifies the period of youth. The concluding statement informs readers that the carriage moved beyond the 'setting sun.' The term 'setting sun' serves as a metaphor for the bygone era, signifying the conclusion of the day or, in this context, marking the end of the speaker's life.

Stanza 5

We paused before a **House** that  
seemed A Swelling of the Ground—  
The Roof was scarcely visible—  
The **Cornice**—in the Ground—

The stanza suggests that the term 'house' carries symbolic significance, elucidated by its depiction of the swelling structure on the ground, a roof barely discernible, and a cornice resembling a mound in the other lines. Webster's dictionary defines a 'cornice' as a molded and projecting horizontal element that tops an architectural composition, leading to the inference that the residence in the poem serves as a grave or burial site.

(e) Hyperbole

Hyperbole was found in stanza 6, and the discussion of these hyperbole types was given in the following explanation:

While the poem is not characterized by exaggerated or hyperbolic statements, the idea that "'tis Centuries" (stanza 6, line 1) has passed since the speaker's encounter with Death can be seen as a form of hyperbole. It emphasizes the distortion of time and the enduring impact of the experience.

## CONCLUSION

Analyzing the intrinsic elements of poetry is crucial for readers to comprehend the message conveyed. In Emily Dickinson's poem "Because I Could Not Stop for Death," intrinsic elements such as imagery and figurative language are employed to convey its meaning. In delivering the message to readers through poetry, the intrinsic elements are employed to evoke a shared experience between the reader and the speaker. The poem illustrates the speaker portraying death as a courteous figure, guiding them on a delightful carriage ride.

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