

If you were coming in the fall,
I'd brush the summer by
With half a smile and half a spurn,
As housewives do a fly.

If I could see you in a year,
I'd wind the months in balls,
And put them each in separate drawers,
Until their time befalls.

If only centuries delayed,
I'd count them on my hand,
Subtracting till my fingers dropped
Into Van Diemen's land.

If certain, when this life was out,
That yours and mine should be,
I'd toss it yonder like a rind,
And taste eternity.

But now, all ignorant of the length
Of time's uncertain wing,
It goads me, like the goblin bee,
That will not state its sting.

Questions:

1. What periods of time does the speaker suggest in each of the four stanzas? What action does the speaker take in the first four stanzas? Why, in your opinion, do the periods of time change from stanza to stanza?
2. According to the fifth stanza, what is the speaker uncertain about? Why might she compare this uncertainty to a bee's sting?
3. Would you categorize this as a love poem? Why or why not?
4. In this poem, what might Dickinson be saying about the nature of waiting? Do you agree? Explain.

Because I could not stop for Death,
He kindly stopped for me;
The carriage held but just ourselves
And Immortality.

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

We passed the school where children played,
Their lessons scarcely done;
We passed the fields of gazing grain,
We passed the setting sun.

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

Since then 't is centuries; but each
Feels shorter than the day
I first surmised the horses' heads
Were toward eternity.

Questions:

1. According to the first stanza, why does "Death" stop? In your own words, describe how "Death" is portrayed.
2. What places and things does the speaker pass while taking the ride with "Death"? What might these places and things represent?
3. What revelation does the speaker make in the last stanza? Why? What can you infer from this about the speaker's attitude toward death?