

Emily Dickinson Poetry Practice Guided Analysis (Poem 511)

Peter Wang

Mr. Lam

October 5th, 2021

“If you were coming this Fall” by poet Emily Dickinson conveys the feeling of emptiness that the narrator feels when they are waiting for their loved ones to return. Even when the narrator is unsure whether their beloved person will even return as shown by the “uncertain of the length” (17) of absence, he/she is willing to “take Eternity-” (16) to await their return. Throughout the poem, Dickinson uses slant rhyme and metaphors to convey the discomfort that the narrator feels when in wait for his/her lover’s return but remains optimistic that the unease is only temporary and certain that they will one day return.

Foremost, slant rhymes are used to demonstrate the discomfort that the narrator feels when he/she is waiting for their lover to return. Slant rhymes are often used to replace normal rhyming to create an atmosphere of discomfort but also to paint an image of optimism. Contrasting to perfect rhyme, slant rhymes are attempted rhyming that does not follow the structure of normal rhyming and hence leaves the reader with a sense of dissatisfaction and unease. In the context of the poem, slant rhyme is present within the first four stanzas of the poem when Dickinson describes the centuries that the narrator is willing to wait for their lover to return such as when “by” is slant rhymed with “Fly” in the second and fourth line of the poem and “year” and “drawers” in lines five and seven. The slant rhymes are only present when the narrator is described to be waiting for their lover, hence creating a mood of suspense and discomfort. Furthermore, slant rhyme is not present within the last stanza of the poem even though the narrator is uncertain of the time they have to wait, he/she is optimistic that their lover will certainly return. This is

contrasted with the use of slant rhyme within the first four stanzas and shows that the discomfort that the narrator feels is not caused by a feeling of abandonment as if their loved ones would not ever return, but to depict the loneliness and discomfort he/she feels while they are apart from their lover and further confirms that all of the loneliness and discomfort will no longer be present once the narrator's lover returns. The repeated use of slant rhymes conveys the discomfort that the narrator feels from being apart from his/her lover, but remains hopeful that the lovers will one day be reunited again.

Dickinson further reinforces that the feeling of discomfort he/she is experiencing is only temporary and the hopefulness that the narrator feels towards the future through an array of metaphors present throughout the poem. In the first stanza, the narrator metaphorically compares the discomfort he/she feels to the annoyance of a fly to a housewife as can be seen in the line "As Housewives do, a Fly" (4). As insects such as a fly within a household is often irritating to the housewife, who in this case is responsible for either relocating the mosquito outside of the house or to kill it. Furthermore, in the third stanza of the poem, the speaker metaphorically compares "Van Diemen's Land" as the end of the world in the lines "Subtracting, till my fingers dropped Into Van Diemen's Land" (11-12). As Van Diemen's Land is the original name of Tasmania Island, which is geographically the most southern point in the world, the author has metaphorically compared the island to hell. By stating that the narrator would count until his/her fingers dropped into hell, it enforces the commitment of the narrator to the cause of love. Moreover, in the fourth stanza of the poem, the narrator compares the uncertain future to "a Rind" (15). The rind of a citrus fruit is hard to penetrate and hides the fruit within. Through the metaphorical comparison of the future of the narrator to a rind, it

demonstrates that the narrator believes that the uncertainties of the future are shrouded just like how the rind of a fruit hides and protects the fruit itself. In the same sense, even though the narrator might not know what to expect once he/she peels open the rind of the fruit, it will be worth the wait. Finally, the narrator compares the wait to the “sting” of a bee in the lines “It goads me, like the Goblin Bee- That will not state - its sting” (19-20). The sting of a bee is often painful to the victim, but the discomfort is only temporary and goes away after sometime. By comparing the unease he/she felt while waiting for his/her lover to return, the narrator believes that the pain and discomfort is only temporary and will eventually fade. The use of many metaphors within the poem further exemplifies that the feelings of discomfort are temporary and will eventually go away.

To summarize, Emily Dickinson’s poem “If you were coming this Fall” portrays the undying love of the narrator towards an unknown lover who was currently apart from the speaker. Through the use of slant rhymes throughout the first four stanzas and no rhyming at all in the final stanza, Dickinson portrays the discomfort of the state of being apart and conveys all of it will be cured once they reunite. Metaphorical literary devices are also present throughout the poem to show the annoyance that the narrator feels of the separation but also shows the undying love of the narrator by metaphorically stating that he/she would count the days he/she waited for him/her until his/her fingers fell off his/her hand and dropped into the hell. Although the narrator is uncertain of the time that they have to wait, but remains hopeful that they have not been abandoned and that their lover will one day return.