

If You Were Coming In The Fall Analysis

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Analysis Of "If You Were Coming In The Fall," By Emily Dickinson

"If You Were Coming in the Fall," by Emily Dickinson, expresses how, for a lover, anticipation without certainty causes anguish and misery, contrasting imagery and rhythm in the first four and last stanzas. In the first four stanzas, the imagery, repetition of words, and ballad meter invoke an illusion that dramatizes the insignificance of time. The simple, dreamy phrases "brush the summer by," "wind the months in balls," "only centuries," and "toss [life] yonder like a rind," show the speaker's dreamy tone, in response to actually difficult situations.

The speaker doesn't give her problems her consideration, and uses imagery to respond unrealistically because, while dreaming, she does not have to deal with reality. Moreover, the repetition of the word, "if," at the beginning of each of the four stanzas creates a pensive tone that takes her farther away from reality. The speaker's use of ballad meter also adds to the dreaminess of the tone, creating a song, as she fantasizes about the insignificance of time. In contrast, the last stanza abruptly introduces different rhythm, and imagery that expose an indistinct and haunting reality.

The first line, "But now, all ignorant of the length" has nine syllables, and shows the unexpectedness and indistinctness of reality. Unlike the first four stanzas, the last stanza does not flow, and the speaker can no longer dance to her dream. The new imagery portrays the scary, haunting reality, rather than a fluffy dream-- while in the first stanza, she shoos the fly, in the last stanza, "the goblin bee".

"will not state its sting." The speaker does not have control over the bee, which attacks her, and can never know when the sting will come. She is no longer dreaming, and instead, does not know what to expect because the uncertainty of when her lover will return overwhelms her.

The contrast of the dreamy imagery, repetition of words, and rhythm in the first four stanzas and the erratic rhythm and imagery in the last stanza give the poem the unique power of expressing distress and uncertainty. After the first four stanzas build up the speaker's dream, the last stanza faces a harsh reality, beginning with "But now." The music stops, and the dream is over? --uncertainty must forever haunt the speaker, as she can never know when her lover will return.

If You Were Coming in the Fall is a poignant and evocative poem by Emily Dickinson that captures the essence of longing, love, and the inevitable passage of time. Through her unique use of imagery, structure, and themes, Dickinson invites readers to explore the complexities of human emotion and the nature of relationships. This article delves into the analysis of the poem, examining its form, themes, and the rich symbolism embedded within.

Context and Background

Emily Dickinson, one of America's most celebrated poets, lived a reclusive life in the 19th century. Her poetry often reflects her introspective nature and deep contemplation of life, death, and the human experience. "If You Were Coming in the Fall," written around 1859, showcases her distinctive style characterized by slant rhyme, unconventional punctuation, and profound emotional depth.

Structure and Form

The poem is composed of six stanzas, each containing varying line lengths and a consistent ABAB rhyme scheme in most stanzas. This structure contributes to a musical quality that enhances the emotional weight of the poem. Dickinson's use of enjambment—where a thought continues beyond the end of a line—creates a sense of urgency and fluidity, reflecting the speaker's yearning and anticipation.

Stanza Breakdown

- Stanza 1: The speaker expresses a sense of longing for a loved one who is absent. The use of the conditional "if" sets a tone of speculation, suggesting that the anticipated arrival is uncertain.
- Stanza 2: The imagery of autumn is introduced, symbolizing change and the passage of time. The fall season often represents maturity and the transition from life to death, mirroring the complexities of relationships.
- Stanza 3: The speaker reflects on the nature of waiting, contemplating how time alters emotions and perceptions. This stanza emphasizes the emotional weight of anticipation.
- Stanza 4: The speaker imagines the reunion, pondering how their feelings might change upon the loved one's arrival. This uncertainty highlights the complexities of love and longing.
- Stanza 5: Here, Dickinson introduces the theme of mortality, suggesting that time is fleeting and that every moment is precious. The imagery evokes a sense of melancholy, as the speaker grapples with the transient nature of life.
- Stanza 6: The poem concludes with a powerful reflection on the nature of hope and despair. The juxtaposition of joy and sorrow encapsulates the human experience, leaving readers with a sense of unresolved emotion.

Themes and Symbolism

The poem is rich with themes and symbolism that resonate deeply with readers. Some of the most prominent themes include:

1. Longing and Anticipation

The central theme of longing permeates the poem. The speaker's desire for the

loved one is palpable, creating a sense of urgency and emotional depth. Dickinson captures the essence of waiting for someone who holds significant meaning in one's life, which many readers can relate to.

2. The Passage of Time

Time is a recurring motif in the poem. The speaker's reflections on the changing seasons symbolize the inevitable progression of time and its impact on relationships. Dickinson uses autumn as a metaphor for change, suggesting that as time passes, emotions and relationships evolve.

3. Love and Connection

The poem explores the complexities of love, particularly the interconnectedness between longing and fulfillment. The speaker's contemplation of the loved one's arrival underscores the emotional stakes involved in relationships, highlighting the joy and pain that can accompany love.

4. Mortality and Transience

Underlying the poem is a poignant awareness of mortality. Dickinson often grapples with themes of death and the fleeting nature of life, and this poem is no exception. The imagery of fall evokes a sense of impermanence, reminding readers that moments of connection are precious and should not be taken for granted.

Imagery and Language

Dickinson's use of imagery is particularly striking in "If You Were Coming in the Fall." Through vivid descriptions, she paints a picture of the emotional landscape experienced by the speaker. Some notable examples include:

- **Seasonal Imagery:** The mention of fall evokes a rich tapestry of colors, textures, and sensations associated with the season. This imagery serves as a backdrop for the speaker's emotional journey.
- **Nature Metaphors:** Dickinson often employs nature as a metaphor for human emotions. The changing leaves symbolize the impermanence of relationships, while the chill in the air reflects the speaker's sense of longing and melancholy.
- **Sensory Language:** The poem engages the senses, inviting readers to feel the

weight of anticipation and the bittersweet nature of love. Phrases that evoke touch, sight, and sound immerse the reader in the speaker's experience.

Conclusion

In "If You Were Coming in the Fall," Emily Dickinson masterfully weaves together themes of longing, the passage of time, love, and mortality. Through her unique structure, rich imagery, and profound emotional depth, she creates a powerful meditation on the intricacies of human relationships. The poem resonates with anyone who has experienced the bittersweet nature of love and the inevitable changes that accompany it.

As readers reflect on the poem, they are left with a sense of both hope and sorrow—a reminder that while love can be a source of joy, it is also entwined with the fleeting nature of time. Dickinson's ability to encapsulate these complexities in a few short stanzas is a testament to her brilliance as a poet, making "If You Were Coming in the Fall" a timeless exploration of the human condition.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the key themes explored in 'If You Were Coming in the Fall'?

The poem explores themes of time, uncertainty, and the nature of longing through the metaphor of a journey.

How does Emily Dickinson use imagery in 'If You Were Coming in the Fall'?

Dickinson employs vivid imagery related to seasons and nature to convey emotions and the passage of time.

What literary devices are prominent in 'If You Were Coming in the Fall'?

The poem features personification, metaphor, and enjambment, enhancing its emotional depth and fluidity.

What is the significance of the fall season in the poem?

The fall season symbolizes transition and change, reflecting the speaker's feelings of anticipation and uncertainty regarding love.

How does the poem address the concept of waiting?

The speaker articulates the emotional strain of waiting, suggesting that time can alter perceptions of love and expectation.

What role does the structure of the poem play in its meaning?

The poem's irregular structure mirrors the unpredictability of love and the ebb and flow of emotions over time.

In what ways does 'If You Were Coming in the Fall' reflect Dickinson's personal experiences?

The poem reflects Dickinson's own themes of solitude and yearning, possibly drawing from her reclusive life and limited romantic relationships.

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