
The Concept of Ambiguity and Its Significance

Emily Dickinson, in most of her poetry, proves to cherish ambiguity. Some of her poems can be perceived in multiple different ways of which none are right or wrong. Depending on how the reader sees and interprets the poem, the meaning is twisted to fit their view. The ambiguity in her writing relates to the idea that human beings cannot tell what the world means, but they try to figure it out anyway. Dickinson offers explanations and answers in a way that does not state them as facts, but proposes them as possibilities. In her poems "I heard a Fly buzz – when I died-" and "I died for Beauty – but was scarce", Dickinson uses ambiguity to suggest that there are several different ways to view the mysteries of the world.

In the poem "I heard a Fly buzz – when I died-", Dickinson proposes answers to the question of the existence of divinity in the world. The narrator has died and is lingering around, with other people, waiting for the presence of "the King" ("I heard a Fly buzz" line 7). The "King", in this use, is God. They want to witness a sign that there is divinity in the world around them. The only sign of anything in the room, however, is a fly. The ambiguity of the poem comes into play with two different readings, one negative and one positive. In the negative reading, the poem tells the tale of the anti-climax in the belief of divinity. People wait their entire lives in search of a sign of God, or divinity. In death, they hope to see a hint of what they believe in, but instead all there is is a fly buzzing about. In this reading, humans never get to experience God, despite their life-long beliefs. In the positive reading, on the other hand, humans ultimately see to see that everything is divine, including the fly. This interpretation suggests that the fly might be God, and even though there is no way to be sure, there are subtle hints. The fly is described as "Blue", which is a color that is associated with the Virgin Mary and divinity ("I heard a Fly buzz" line 13), and it appears between the light and the narrator, which hints at light being a representation of understanding or heaven ("I heard a Fly buzz" line 14). This reading proposes that although there may never seem to be signs of true divinity while alive, humans will ultimately understand that everything they saw was divine. The two separate ways to interpret this poem were purposefully designed by Dickinson as offerings to the question of divinity that humans will never know the answer to. This poem's ambiguity can lead readers in either direction, altering the meaning and the answer they see.

The poem "I died for Beauty – but was scarce" tells the tale of two deceased people. One has lived life for beauty, and the other has lived for truth. The two talked at night until the moss that grew covered their lips and their names. This poem offers to readings in the same way as the poem, "I heard a Fly buzz – when I died-". The negative reading suggests that death and nature ultimately obliterate all of the high-minded searches for things like truth and beauty. These noble pursuits are nothing when death approaches. The names of truth and beauty, and

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the names of the people who devoted their lives to these virtues, are covered up by the growth of nature, and seemingly forgotten. The positive reading, however, proposes that as divinity is in everything, the moss is divine too, even as it grows and covers up noble pursuits. Also, the death of those in the name of beauty and truth represent universal unity. Although the two individuals may have spent their lives completely separate from each other, they are joined in death. There is solace in the unity of death, and the divinity of the moss proves to be special in covering the individuals. This poem's ambiguity offers two different interpretations. One views the negative side of death in that it destroys all noble pursuits that have been life-long. The positive side offers comfort in the idea that death is a type of unity that all meet at, and that divinity can be found in even the miniscule things, such as moss. The ambiguity of the poem leads to different readings, and the reader is the one who decides how they view the message of the poem.

In "I heard a Fly buzz – when I died-" and "I died for Beauty – but was scarce", Emily Dickinson uses purposeful ambiguity to propose different possible answers to questions that human beings may never know the answer to. Questions about the divinity of the world and the aftermath of death can never be answered. Dickinson offers several different interpretations of her poems in order to propose possible answers. There is no right or wrong way of viewing the messages of the poems, because there is no right or wrong answer to the mysteries of the world. The technique of using ambiguity alters the poems meanings because each reading offers a different message. The reader sees and understands what they read the poem to mean, whether negative or positive, it is neither right nor wrong, and Dickinson created her writing specifically to suggest that the answers to the questions she writes about are arbitrary and can never really be answered.

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