

## Cynthia Griffin Wolff: On 712 ("Because I could not stop for Death")

The speaker is a beautiful woman (already dead!), and like some spectral Cinderella, she is dressed to go to a ball: "For only Gossamer, my Gown--/My Tippet? only Tulle--." Her escort recalls both the lover of Poe's configuration and the "Bridegroom" that had been promised in the Bible: "We slowly drove--He knew no haste / And I had put away / My labor and my leisure too, / For His Civility--." Their "Carriage" hovers in some surrealistic state that is exterior to both time and place: they are no longer earth-bound, not quite dead (or at least still possessed of consciousness), but they have not yet achieved the celebration that awaits them, the "marriage supper of the Lamb."

Yet the ultimate implication of this work turns precisely upon the poet's capacity to explode the finite temporal boundaries that generally define our existence, for there is a third member of the party--also exterior to time and location--and that is "Immortality." True immortality, the verse suggests, comes neither from the confabulations of a mate lover nor from God's intangible Heaven. Irrefutable "Immortality" resides in the work of art itself, the creation of an empowered woman poet that continues to captivate readers more than one hundred years after her death. And this much-read, often-cited poem stands as patent proof upon the page of its own argument!

From *The Columbia History of American Poetry*. Ed. Jay Parini. Copyright © 1993 by Columbia University Press.

### **Publication Status:**

Excerpted Criticism [1]

### **Publication:**

- Private group -

### **Criticism Target:**

Emily Dickinson [2]

### **Author:**

Cynthia Griffin Wolff [3]

### **Poem:**

712 (Because I could not stop for Death) [4]

---

**Source URL:** <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/criticism/cynthia-griffin-wolff-712-because-i-could-not-stop-death>

### **Links**

[1] <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/category/publication-status/excerpted-criticism>

[2] <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/poet/emily-dickinson>

[3] <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/creator/cynthia-griffin-wolff>

[4] <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/poem/712-because-i-could-not-stop-death>