

Emily Dickinson

(1830-1886)

#1540 (c.1865)

As imperceptibly as Grief
The Summer lapsed away –
Too imperceptible at last
To seem like Perfidy –
A Quietness distilled
As Twilight long begun,
Or Nature spending with herself
Sequestered Afternoon –
The Dusk drew earlier in –
The Morning foreign shone –
A courteous, yet harrowing Grace,
As Guest, that would be gone –
And thus, without a Wing
Or service of a Keel
Our Summer made her light escape
Into the Beautiful.

ANALYSIS

“Although it ostensibly tells of the imperceptible passage of summer, this composition also may be read as a comment upon change and death. The meaning is subtly suggested by figures such as ‘As imperceptibly as Grief’ and ‘without a Wing,’ and by symbols. The symbols are figures perhaps only vaguely suggestive of their implications unless Miss Dickinson’s peculiarly personal ways of using them in a number of her poems are taken into account. As Thomas Dillon Howells has noticed in an unpublished master’s dissertation, morning, for her, signifies ‘hope, purity, innocence’; afternoon, customarily, is associated with death, funerals; twilight or dusk, ‘a solemn time of day, completion, peace’.”

James E. Miller, Jr.
The Literature of the United States II, 3rd edition
(Scott, Foresman 1953-66) 204