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### Slim Night of Recognition

At first glance, it is quite evident that death is an element in the poem “Slim Night of Recognition” (Howell, see appendix), and many readers would easily conclude that it is the theme of the poem, but I would disagree. I do not believe death is the main theme of the poem. To me, it is about living, and more specifically, it is about living without truly appreciating life until its almost over. Howell stated how life has become “all about the ritual” (2). Death is the ultimate fate for everyone, and many tend to live their lives in fear of what comes next. People plan every action in life around their beliefs and religious views of what death will bring, but only during their final moments do these individuals begin to realize they wasted so much time fearing their transformation into “becoming something less than whole” (18). At life’s end, people begin to accept death and appreciate the time they received, and even though they fear the unknown and absence of life, a part of them still remains: their legacy. Their final actions and words leave their mark on the world they leaving behind and forever become “one of the stars” (23).

Howell uses conversational language when communicating the message of the poem and her feelings about it to the reader. Though the language is casual, she uses powerful metaphors and personification to add depth to the message of the poem. Most of the metaphors give the

poem a dark feeling. For example, Howell compares death to an “inevitable avalanche“ (14). This comparison makes the reader view death as a terror that is approaching every person with great speed, eventually consuming each one. She also compares life to a path: “There is a path of evolution / that can follow you anywhere / so you’ve got to watch your footing” (7-9). With this metaphor, Howell personifies life by saying the people’s actions and behaviors made in life follow them. People must carry the weight of the decisions they make; therefore, they must consider the permanent responsibility that coincides with making more decisions in the future. This metaphor and personification also darkens the poem by creating the image of life as an inescapable stalker. Another metaphor can be found when Howell talks about hiding from “the light” (5): “looking for darkest corners because / you don’t want the light / to find out what you’ve done” (4-6). The metaphor found in these lines compares and personifies light to a god, or a higher power, who judges the actions of individuals and looks for the blemishes in people’s characters. This dark metaphor creates a scary image of hiding in the dark.

The dark tone of “Slim Night of Recognition” is also emphasized by the alliteration found in the poem. One example is when Howell talks about escaping from “the light” (5) by hiding in dark corners. The phrase “darkest corners” (4) uses harsh consonant noises to create alliteration. The hard consonant sounds made by these words make them stand out and put an eerie and mysterious feeling behind them. The words “inevitable avalanche” also create an uneasy feeling. The alliteration found in this phrase creates a humming noise as if something like an avalanche is approaching in the distance.

Though the poem uses many powerful metaphors to create a dark tone, other metaphors can be found that create a hopeful message. “The last rite is the laying down, / the acceptance of lasts, / the becoming something less than whole” (15-18). In these lines, the “last rite” (15) refers

to the final and often religious practices performed for a dying person (Rite). In the metaphor, Howell says the acceptance of death is a last rite; it is the final ritual everyone goes through in the end. The choice of words used to describe death in this stanza lightens the dark tone of the poem. When the process of dying is described as “the acceptance of lasts” (17) and “becoming less than whole” (18), it changes the readers’ feelings about it. These different descriptions give the readers a sense of hope and comfort because death is described with less frightening metaphors.

Finally, the poem ends with another hopeful metaphor. In the last stanza, Howell describes the actual moment of death. She compares it to “the final appreciation of sky” (20). She then finishes the poem in saying death ultimately “makes your last word / one of the stars” (22-23). The metaphor in these last two lines compares the final words or actions of an individual to the stars; the last impact each person has on Earth is how the world will remember that person. Their legacy will live in their final moments, and their impact will remain a part of the universe like a gleaming star for everyone to see. This description of death takes away any fear a person would have of no longer existing and makes death sound like a beautiful process.

The title, “Slim Night of Recognition”, describes the final moments a person has on Earth. In these moments, people recognize death as something they never had to fear, and they begin to accept it. Night consists of the final hours of the day, therefore, in the title, it symbolizes the final moments of life. They appreciate the slim, or little, amount of time they have left to make their last impact on the world they are leaving behind.

The main theme of “Slim Night of Recognition” is not death; it is life. Many people go through life fearing death, and Howell addresses these fears, but at the end of the poem, she leaves her readers with a comforting outlook on the fate everyone faces. Though there will come

a time when everybody must depart from this world, they must remember that the life they lived will be remembered. Their legacy will forever live in the lasting impression they made on the world they left behind.

## Works Cited

"Rite | Define Rite at Dictionary.com." *Dictionary.com* | *Find the Meanings and Definitions of Words at Dictionary.com*. Web. 27 Nov. 2011.

"Slim Night of Recognition - by Emma Howell". *Stingray*. Web. 15 Nov. 2011.

## Appendix

### Slim Night of Recognition

By Emma Howell

1. I've been practicing
2. because it's all about the ritual.
3. Wrapping myself tighter
4. and looking for darkest corners because
5. you don't want the light
6. to find out what you've done.
7. There is a path of evolution
8. that can follow you anywhere
9. so you've got to watch your footing.
10. And there is no escape
11. when your intention is carved
12. in every bone and step
13. between you
14. and the inevitable avalanche.
15. The last rite
16. is the laying down,
17. the acceptance of lasts,
18. the becoming something less than whole.
19. Too slowly
20. the final appreciation of sky
21. before it rolls over
22. and makes your last word
23. one of the stars.