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OP 1

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Today I am going to talk about success. The speaker talks about success and loss in this poem. I chose this poem because I think it is a crucial subject in life, and it is related to me, personally. Human beings want to be successful at something in their life. People have different kinds of wishes which they want to achieve. It can be living long, having a family, getting a good job, or earning a college degree. But not everybody is lucky enough to get his or her wishes. In real life, some people do succeed and some do not.

In the first stanza, the speaker says, “Success is counted sweetest / By those who never succeed” (1-2). There is an irony in this section. Conventionally, success is supposed to belong to winners, not to the losers. But the speaker is saying the opposite. She is saying that those who fail or lose know more about success than the winners. I like this part because it is related to me. After I left my country, Ethiopia, my two childhood best friends managed to graduate from college. There is a time when I think too much about their success, probably more than they do, and say it is so good to achieve a childhood dream. In the third and fourth lines of the first stanza, the speaker asserts, “To comprehend a nectar / Requires sorest need.” The speaker equates comprehending nectar to understanding the real meaning of success. To me, it means that the loser pays the hard price to understand what success is. When my friends graduated and got jobs, I was a refugee in Kenya. I pondered day and night about their success and I thought of myself as a failure even though I did not leave the country by choice. Every single good story I heard about them was a torment for me. In the second stanza, the speaker likens the idea of success with winning a war on a battle field, when the winner takes the loser’s flag to show as the sign of a triumph. The speaker is saying that those who are now holding the flag do not understand the definition of victory as clearly as the defeated person. I think I understand the value of education much better than my friends did by going through all the challenges I faced after I left school back then.

The speaker shifts from defeat to death in the third stanza. She says “As he defeated –dying/ On whose forbidden ear / The distant strains of triumph / Burst agonized and clear.” Now the defeated man is dying, which is even worse. Here the speaker says that a defeated man’s ears are not forbidden to hear; rather, the sounds of triumph he hears from his opponents are forbidden to him because his side lost the battle. He is anguished at hearing the sounds of triumph of his opponents. Recently, after I immigrated to the United States, one of my friends went to Norway to specialize in Pediatrics and the other one went Germany to do his master’s. Even though my friends are not my enemies, it is agonizing to hear of their success.

Finally, this poem implies that those who never succeed won by paying the highest price. However, the speaker is not glorifying the loser when she says the loser understands better the definition of victory than winner. I believe she also means that the loser would do much better the second time since they have learned their lesson the first time they lost. The defeated, dying man would be triumphant too if he survived. So I believe that I too can succeed in earning a college degree since I got a second chance to go to school.

Work Cited

Dickinson, Emily. “Success Is Counted Sweetest.”1864. *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. Ed. Nina Baym and Robert S. Levine. 8th ed. Vol. C. New York: Norton, 2012. 94. Print.