

# EMILY DICKINSON

## INTRODUCTION / CONCLUSION

- Emily Dickinson certainly faces poetry with an incredibly unique approach and presents the reader with many startling and thought-provoking moments through her poems.
- She presents the reader with her own unique viewpoint on an array of subjects including death, hope, and nature.
- I thoroughly enjoyed this idiosyncratic poet who brought her own individual, modern approach to each of her poems.

## ‘HOPE’ IS THE THING WITH FEATHERS

- Dickinson uses her unique and original approach to poetry to describe the strength of hope in “Hope’ is the thing with feather’.
- Dickinson tactfully uses a bird image to describe hope’s uplifting quality.
- This metaphor shows how smart Dickinson was with her ability to create such thought-provoking moments by taking abstract ideas and making them realistic.
- Hope is a small songbird; it “*perches in the soul*”.
- It is resilient; the bird sings as “*a tune without the words*” and “*it never stops – at all –*”.
- I find this image of hope to be beautifully simplistic and powerful.
- Dickinson exploits capitalization to convey the power of hope. By singling out the words “*Gale*”, “*Sea*”, and, “*Extremity*”, Dickinson is demonstrating the sheer fortitude of hope in times of hardship.
- Hope is heard in times of great turmoil, and Dickinson represents such times in terms of landscape and seascape: “*the chilliest land*” and “*the strangest Sea*”.
- The delicate word choices of “*warm*” and “*little*” to describe the bird is endearing and puts the reader at ease.
- The poem is a celebration. All difficulties are overcome because of hope and Dickinson’s confident belief in hope is seen in the structure of this poem.
- The first two lines are a statement of belief: “*Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul*”; and then follows four lines, each beginning with “*And*”, which gather momentum and emphasis through repetition.
- “*Gale*”, “*storm*”, and “*abash*” are all loud-sounding and destructive, but hope’s “*sweetest*” sound cannot be drowned out.
- The consolable powers of this poem, through the ingenious poetic language employed, make “Hope’ is the thing with feathers’ a memorable piece of work.

## I HEARD A FLY BUZZ – WHEN I DIED

- One of the most enduring appeals of Dickinson's poetry is her ability to create more questions than answers – a quality that is prevalent in 'I heard a Fly buzz – when I died'.
- Throughout this enigmatic poem, Dickinson focuses on the final moments of life and the first moments of death
- The question of what happens when we die is most certainly something, we have all pondered. Dickinson gives voice to these thoughts through her powerful use of language.
- This poem begins with a startling statement and unusual viewpoint of death. We are presented with a distorted image of a fly interposing on a death-bed scene: "*I heard a Fly buzz – when I died.*"
- This poem reflects Dickinson's deep interest in death.
- The repetition of 'I' underscores the intensely personal nature of the poem ("*I heard...*", "*I died...*", "*I could not see...*", "*I willed...*").
- There are two sounds in the first stanza, or rather, a sound and the absence of sound: the still silent sound of the room and the buzz of the fly.
- The buzzing is a distraction; it trivializes a serious and unique moment, and the silence of the room is even more pronounced. The stillness is ominous.
- Indeed, the repetition of the abstract noun "*Stillness*" creates a sense of pregnant expectation.
- The mood in this stanza is one of calmness and control. The lines of this poem are written in hymn meter, and the tight, formal control is maintained throughout. This meter is a unique style feature of many of Dickinson's poems.
- The speaker is at the center of the poem. Lying on her death bed, she is surrounded by mourners: "*The Eyes around – had wrung them dry –*".
- The personification of the "*Eyes*" and the random capitalization adds a sense of cold disembodied watching to this stanza, a sense of uneasy voyeurism.
- We see that death is a harsh reality to the speaker as she explores the role of decomposition within the word "*fly*". The fly is an organism closely related to death and decomposition, and its role in the poem is to confuse and disgust the reader.
- Another reading of the poem argues that the fly itself represents death and that perhaps Dickinson is thinking of the Devil, the Lord of the Flies.
- The poem ends in darkness; it offers no vision of immortality.
- The light from the windows "*failed*" and then the speaker's own vision failed; "*And I could not see to see –*".
- The dash with which the poem ends leaves the reader with a feeling of confusion and adds to the sense of obscurity in the poem.

## I FELT A FUNERAL, IN MY BRAIN

- 'I felt a Funeral, in my Brain' traces the speaker's descent into madness.
- It is a terrifying poem for both the speaker and the reader; the speaker experiences the loss of self in the chaos of the unconscious, and the reader experiences the speaker's descending madness.
- Dickinson uses the metaphor of a funeral to represent the speaker's sense that a part of her is dying.
- However, the poet is not observing the funeral, she is feeling it.
- The idea is simple, vivid and original, and very chilling.
- The repetitive 'I' makes this an intensely personal poem. It draws the reader in because we can feel and comprehend the speaker's torture.
- The active verbs give a sense of panic, they withhold a cinematic quality.
- The "*treading – treading*" of the mourners and the "*beating – beating*" of the bell evoke the bleak funeral atmosphere, while simultaneously contributing to the intensity and drama of the poem.
- The sounds in 'I felt a Funeral, in my Brain' are harsh and severe. The references to treading feet, the beating, drum-like service, the creaking sound, boots of lead, the silence of the bell, all create a sense of inescapable, increasing pain.
- The reader can trace the process of the speaker's loss of rationality through stanzas three and four.
- The last two lines of stanza four assess her condition; she sees herself as "*wrecked, solitary*", a member of "*some strange race*".
- Her descent into irrationality separates her from other human beings; "*wrecked*" and "*solitary*" expose a disturbing sense of isolation,
- Stanza five marks another stage in the speaker's descent into madness; the final stage.
- Dickinson uses the metaphor of standing on a plank over a void to describe the speaker's last connections to reality
- The verbs "*dropped*" and "*hit*", the repeated "*down*", the idea which the word "*plunge*" conjures up, all suggest a terrible ordeal.
- The last word of the poem, and the use of the dash "*then –*" does not end the speaker's experience but implies that the nightmarish horror she experiences in her madness may never end.

## I TASTE A LIQUOR NEVER BREWED

- In 'I taste a liquor never brewed' Dickinson whimsically describes the exhilarating effect of nature.
- She uses the metaphor of drunkenness or intoxication to express how the beauty of nature and life elates her.
- Dickinson plays with this metaphor throughout the poem, developing it literally and concretely.
- The introductory line: "*I taste a liquor never brewed*" is a paradoxical statement that introduces the initial metaphor, and this metaphor continues through all of the stanzas.
- This poem is a rarity of Dickinson's work in that it celebrates the joy of excess, a reckless, indulgent joy that is captured in the word "*Debauchee*".
- The speaker is so drunk on air and dew that she is stumbling: "*Inebriate of Air – am I – and Debauchee of Dew –*".
- The use of assonance effectively portrays the calm "*endless summer days*", as the repeated 'e' sound soothes and comforts the reader.
- In the last line of stanza two Dickinson presents an image that continues through the third stanza – the image of drinking at an inn: "*inns of Molten Blue*".
- Dickinson's use of rich colours, and delightful almost blissful images, express the dizzy happiness and contentment of the speaker.
- The speaker exclaims that she will "*drink*" nature until foxgloves stop blooming and when butterflies give up gathering nectar from the flowers.
- She equates nectar, and all its positive associations, with "*drams*".
- To express how prodigious her enthusiasm for nature is, she asserts that the angels will shake their "*snowy hats*" and the saints will rush to see her.
- A possible implication of referring to saint and angels is that God approves of her drunkenness.
- Sibilance adds a lyrical quality to the poem, further enhancing the underlying sense of positivity: "*seraphs swing their snowy hats*".
- The poem ends with a startling and powerful image: the speaker leaning against the sun, as a drunk might lean against a lamppost: "*The little Tippler leaning against the – Sun –*".
- Dickinson's attachment and love of nature is remarkable and is most certainly conveyed through this poem.
- Her images are rich and vivid, like a painting, done with skill, precision and passion.