

# Emily Dickinson | Topic Notes

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## Background on the poet

- Born in 1830 in Amherst
- Well educated and rebelled against the extreme religious zeal of the era by refusing to publicly declare her faith to God at school. Spent a lifetime exploring the nature of the soul and spiritual life. Her poetry is often influenced by rhythms of protestant hymns. Bible is a major source of diction and imagery.

Language of Calvinism and of the bible is evident in her poetry and provides a rich source of imagery.

- Her bedroom window faced towards the local cemetery in Amherst. As a young girl she observed burials on a regular basis. Life and Death would have clearly been in her thoughts. The question of everlasting life was one which she returned to often in her poetry.
- Dickinson's poetry explores her morbid fascination with death and the question of whether or not there is an afterlife; mental anguish and depression; the beauty and wonder of the natural world; the essence of human emotion both positive & negative. There is also a wonderful, playful, humorous quality in Dickinson's poetry. Her poetry speaks of extreme states of mind, hints at suppressed emotions and feelings, challenges religious orthodoxy and reveals an individual deeply at odds with the social and religious values of her day; One who stood alone in rebellion.
- There is a scientific emphasis in her poetry- fascination with naming, detailed descriptions, choice of words and range of imagery. There was an emphasis in Science in the Amherst academy which she attended. There was link to Amherst college where students could attend lectures in botany, zoology, chemistry etc...

- As she grew older, she withdrew from society, preferring to interact with the world from a distance via correspondence rather than in person. Ultimately she began to live her life as a recluse and became known locally as "The Myth". This reclusive lifestyle and her exploration of what she referred to as the "undiscovered continent" echo some of the themes she found in Ralph Waldo Emerson's writing. This type of philosophy was called Transcendentalism- God dwelt or was immanent in nature and in humanity.
- Wrote over 1800 poems; however less than dozen were published during her lifetime. Even then, her poetry was likely changed and regulated. Thomas Wentworth Higginson was her mentor from 1862 and tried to alter her poems being faced with her epigrammatic style. After the 1890's Mabel Loomis Todd and T.W. Higginson began publishing her poems, often corrected grammar, conventionalized punctuation, improved rhymes, omitted stanzas, and supplied titles in order to create a popular public acceptance.
- Dickinson's poetry is perhaps the most instantly recognizable of all poetry in the 19th Century.

- For Dickinson, the crucial religious question was the survival of the soul after death. She rejected absolutely the idea of man's innate depravity; she favoured the Emersonian partial reversal of Puritanism that conceived greatness of the soul as the source of immortality. The God of the Bible was alternately real, mythical and unlikely to her. She could neither accept nor reject his assurance of life after death and her doubts pushed her faintly in the direction of transcendental naturalism.
- She was independent minded and did not shift her stance in letters to suit her recipients, nor in her poems presumably, to suit her moods; she was interested primarily in her poetic momentum.
- In some sense, Dickinson is almost always a religious poet- if her concerns with human perception, suffering, growth and fulfillment as directed towards something permanent can be called religious concerns. These concerns are important for her as are death and immortality, and though they have doctrinal and literary sources, they come chiefly from her observations and reflections on life.
- She alludes often to the bible, and her combination of dense metaphors with everyday reality sometimes resembles Shakespeare's.

- Nature appears widely in her work- as a scene of great liveliness and beauty, as the embodiment of the process of the universe which may resemble the actions of God and the shape of the human mind, and as an endless source of metaphors and symbols for all of her subjects. Nature, for her is usually a bright and dark mystery, only occasionally illuminated by flashes of pantheism and sometimes darkened by hopeless fatality. Her treatment of nature blends into all of her subjects.

### **Quotes of interest:**

*"I am standing alone in rebellion"*

*"I find ecstasy in living, the mere sense of living is joy enough"*

*"The brain is wider than the sky- the brain is deeper than the sea"*

*"A fascinating waver of words", "An impressionist of many moods and startling perceptions"-* **Ted Hughes**

*"She has not been outside of her home in 15 years... she dresses wholly in white, her mind is said to be perfectly wonderful, she writes finely but no one ever sees her".* - **Mabel Loomis Todd**



# Properties/ Characteristics of her Idiosyncratic genius

## 1. Unconventional Style:

- Her poems look unique on the page. There is an eccentric use of punctuation and capitalization of nouns. She capitalizes nouns she wishes to single out and highlight. This capitalization is important in establishing a special prominence with certain words. As her poetry is very concise, each word is significant in understanding the concept she is portraying and the poem itself. This capitalization is effectual in enabling the reader to gain insight into her poetry.
- Her use of the dash is also notable throughout her poetry. This is extremely effective in bridging her ideas together. It helps blend the symbolism and allegory throughout her poetry, this blend is another reason for some reader's difficulty when they encounter her poems initially; yet her evocative powers are paramount and she is always a challenge to read. The use of the dash also adds weight and significance to thoughts expressed as well as focusing our attention on certain words or phrases. It regulates the pace, meaning and rhythm of the words and this is done so in a carefully crafted and deliberate manner. It reiterates the continuity of action as well as the intensity of the experience.

- Synecdoche: one of the most striking aspects of Dickinson's style is her blending of the homely and exalted.(ordinary and high/noble/power), the trivial and the precious, in her images, metaphors and scenes. The chief effect that she achieves here is to increase our scrutiny of small scale things and focus on the texture and significance of large ones. It serves to permeate her physical world with questions of value. Her sense of humour and skepticism help communicate the urgencies of her doubt and need to find faith. Her metaphors are sometimes telescoped; that is they incorporate small elements so condensed or disparate that they must be elongated, drawn out like a telescope to reveal the full structure of a picture or idea.

## **2. Poet of contradiction:**

- Lived the life of a recluse though had numerous friends through which she communicated via correspondence. Possessed a strong awareness of God and immortality yet rebelled against formalized religion. Longed to love but yet never married. Much of her poetry dealt with death though she loved the joy of living. She longed to be recognized publicly though only a handful of her poems were published in her lifetime.

## **3. Concise/brevity/tight economy of diction:**

- Dickinson did not always feel the need to be explicit in her poetry, her condensed style can be described as enigmatic or obscure. The short lines require the reader to take it slowly and digest and analyze each word carefully in order to understand the meaning, it is challenging though the sparseness of words and expansion of meaning is yet another striking characteristic of her poetry. Her condensed style and monotonous rhythms make sustained reading of her work difficult.
- The speaker in these individual poems is often hard to identify. In many poems, she preferred to conceal the specific causes and nature of her deepest feelings, especially experiences of suffering, and her subjects flow so much into each other in language and conception that often it is hard to tell that she is writing about people of god, nature or society, spirit or art.
- Her subjects are often parts of the topography of her own psyche/
- She writes aphoristically- compresses a great deal of meaning into a small number of words. Makes her poems hard to understand initially however when the meaning unveils itself, it often explodes in the mind all at once, lines that seemed baffling can become intensely clear.

#### 4. Cryptic puzzling images

- Her poetry may tease us like a riddle, when solved, a jewel of meaning is revealed.
- Ability to make abstract concepts concrete through her genius use of imagery.
- Words are often assembled in an unusual way and create deciphering difficulties for the reader. Behind all the confusion however, a hidden meaning becomes clear, and one realizes that all the odd word choices and imagery were chosen for a reason. The reader must decode the imagery to establish their own understanding or insight into the allegorical meaning. they must assemble and reassemble her use of synecdoche to compose the bigger image, the main paradigm. her conclusions are often cryptically implicit and largely dependent on the readers ability to interpret it etc..
- Exhibit her extraordinary powers of observation and description.
- Explores her own feelings with painstaking honesty but never loses sight of their universal poetic application; greatest technique to write about her own emotions in a kind of universal homiletic style.
- Her poetry is filled with moments of ambiguity with regard to her meanings because she focuses on topics that do not have a definitive interpretation. She explores these, not for the answer but for the sake of exploring them.

**Her poems simply record thoughts and feelings experienced naturally over the course of a lifetime devoted to reflection and creativity: the powerful mind represented in these records is by turns astonishing, compelling, moving, and thought-provoking, and emerges much more vividly than if Dickinson had orchestrated her work according to a preconceived philosophical system.**

## **5. Rhythm and Rhyme**

- Customary four line stanzas, ABCB rhyming schemes, alternations in iambic meter between tetrameter and trimeter, derived from psalms and protestant hymns. She thoroughly appropriates the form- interposing her own long rhythmic dashes designed to interrupt the meter and indicate short pauses- that the resemblance seems quite faint. Chief source from protestant hymns- Isaac Watts
- Varied and loosened iambic rhythms, speeded and slow. Rhymes are slant, partial or off rhymes- some so faint and barely recognizable. Absence of rhyme in final stanzas- reiterate concept. She violates convention but stubbornly stuck to these ways. Indicates her own peculiar sense of rhythm with dash which she

felt was not adequately served by regular punctuation such as colon/semi colon.

Great consciousness of language\*

# A Narrow Fellow in the Grass

- The speaker recalls walking through the grass and scaring a snake away. They describe this through vivid imagery - strange ways and develops it into an extended metaphor. The snake reminds the speaker of meeting certain people that take his breath away.
- Opening quatrain describes the snake. The speaker seems playful in their description of the creature through the use of colloquial phrase. The snakes movements are captured by the use of the word ride - suggesting an ease of movement and a natural harmony with its surroundings.
- Poet adopts a male persona - may reflect Dickinson's Puritan background and her position in a patriarchal society where it was more acceptable for young boys to write.
- Addresses the speaker directly, almost as if to verify the experience. this engages us into this intimate encounter with the snake.
- Unconventional capitalization and frequent use of dashes seen in the poem characterizes Dickinson's poetry. She cleverly manages to create a picture of the animal without ever directly saying "snake" - "a spotted shaft", "a whip lash/ unbraiding the sun." - creates a vivid picture without ever specifying what the creature is.
- Observes the neatness in which the snake moves through the grass, like a comb parting hair - sends shivers down one's spine.
- The use of punctuation allows the immediate thoughts of the speaker to be expressed, just as quickly as the snake is described, its movements. The swiftness and ease of movement so admired by the speaker is reinforced by her language.

- familiarity felt by the speaker towards the creatures that he encounters. Personifies creatures which suggests an appreciation on the speaker's part, who even describes his affinity with nature as a kind of "cordiality".
- Just as suddenly as the speaker and the snake meet, the speaker recognizes the threat posed by the snake - a creature frequently associated with evil and slyness. Suggestion of fear and anxiety, and a sense of the much more dangerous and ominous associations of snakes and wild animals.
- **Her attitude to animals is often one of amused absorption - the snake arouses a terrified fascination.** - written in a male persona.
- Imagery hints at the **secrecy, danger and unpredictability** of the snake - "shaft" suggests the danger and speed of an arrow shaft.
- barefoot boy suggests vulnerability and simplicity of the boy, no match for the crafty snake.
- The last line of the poem captures the inner terror caused in the speaker by the animal - void, emptiness, physical sensation of an indescribable terror.
- devil in disguise - **Adam and Eve** deceived them against God's command - this story predisposes us to see the snake as an evil deceiver.
- **Her success as a poet comes in the dramatic use of the dash, the change in tone she achieves through the sound of words and startling imagery - rarely strays from 4 line stanza of ballad or hymn.**
- **Initial friendly amusement turns to fear in final stanza**
- accomplishes in the reader, the same destabilizing sense of unease that the snake is associated with.
- Sibilance\*

- **A poem that, on the surface, describes a boy's encounter with a snake. There's a change in tone — about halfway through, the snake changes from a friendly character to one of deceit.**

Dickinson, throughout the course of the poem, has constantly used the 's' sound, resembling the 'hiss' the snake makes. For example, in the first stanza: grass, rides, notice, sudden, is.

- One way to see the speaker is another device to remind us that, what is assumed to be one thing to begin with, may not always be what we assume it to be in the end. Just like the confusion between the snake and the "fellow".

- *"A narrow fellow in the grass Occasionally rides - You may have met him - did you not his notice sudden is."*

- *"The grass divides as with a comb, A spotted shaft is seen"*

- *"A whip lash unbraiding the sun."*

- *"But never met this fellow Attended, or alone Without a tighter breathing and zero at the bone."*

Hope is the thing with feathers.

- Definition poem. Use of physical details to define what an abstract experience is or is not (scientific detail - emphasis).
- Comparisons often comprise her definitions. However, she does not use - like or as. Hope is the thing with feathers. This provides certainty, directness and confidence in her statement - vivid and immediate.
- Examines the possibilities hope can provide and how far hope can carry a person.
- Hope is personalized and made tangible in being described as a bird that perches in the soul. The uplifting feeling of hope comes naturally and is always present. It sings wordlessly and without pause. The song of hope sounds sweetest "in the gale" and it would require a terrifying storm to "abash it." The speaker has heard the bird on the "chilliest land" and in the "strangest sea" - yet no matter how extreme the conditions, it asked nothing of her.
- Simple metaphorical description of the singing bird is an example of Dickinson's homiletic style, derived from psalms and religious hymns. Introduces her metaphor in the first two lines and develops it throughout the poem by telling what the bird does, how it reacts to hardship, where it can be found and what it asks for itself.
- Few verbal shocks that characterize Dickinson's style: "abash" describes a storm's potential effect on the bird. This wrenches the reader back to reality, enabling us to see behind this pretty metaphor. It articulates the effect that hardship may have upon speaker's hopes.
- Hope

- Hope is the thing with feathers. Feathers suggest or emulate the comforting warm nature of hope and something that can fly - uplifting - lifts one's spirits.
- Hope seems to reside in the soul. By describing the song of hope as the tune without words, Dickinson suggests that hope goes beyond logic and reason and their limitations. Hope is resilient and unceasing. It doesn't stop. It is constant.
- The comfort that hope provides in times of distress and uncertainty is recorded in Stanza 2.
  1. Emotional.
  2. Spiritual.
  3. Psychological.

The phrase "The Little Bird" suggests the poet's affection and admiration for hope.

- In the poet's periods of personal crises, hope offered comfort without seeking anything in return. Hope is generous, selfless. The final stanza strikes a solemn note as if the poet wants to give hope the dignified celebration she believes it deserves.

Hope - Selfless.

2. Generous
3. Comforting
4. Constant, unceasing.
5. Resides in the soul.
6. Present in difficult periods.
7. Vulnerable, though resilient at the same time i.e. strong but not infinite and everlasting.

In the first stanza, the poet portrays hope as something that lifts our spirits. Its feathers are warm and comforting. Dickinson skillfully articulates the resilience of hope - "And never stops at all."

She introduces her metaphor and begins to develop it. We are provided with a vivid, buoyant and perhaps soothing delineation of hope. She makes such a trait or abstraction tangible and this is most certainly a striking aspect of her poetry.

- A tune without words seems appropriate for characterizing hope. It in itself is abstract. There are no tangible elements which comprise hope, like lyrics of a song constructing it to make it something real, something visible and something heard. A song without words abstracts from the song's tangibility (actuality, audible). The song exists. However, it is not fully visible. It is played through mediums, other than word, like hope emerges through times of distress. Both the music and hope is played in a different way, perhaps not as obvious as an object or worded song, but it exists nonetheless. Song without words may also be indicative of the everlasting presence of hope. A tune tends to reside in our memory, but sometimes the words don't - like this, hope resides in our spirit even though we may not always be able to recognize it.

Hope is depicted as something with extreme strength and resilience. "And sweetest - in the Gale - is heard."

Hope emerges with more prominence in times of hardship. However, the reader abruptly reminded of reality and forced to see beyond this pretty metaphor of hope, to see beyond its strength and to apprehend that, like all things on earth, hope is not infinitely strong. Periods

of severity and hardship may still have enough strength to overcome and annihilate one's sense of hope

"And sore must be the storm -  
that could abash the little bird  
that kept so many warm"

The poet provides subtle insights and evocations to the reader of her personal experience of hope. It is made clear that Dickinson has been subject to severe stress and has experienced states of distress, fear and hurt. She has had hope emerge or "heard it" in the worst of times. Perhaps severe depressions which temporarily feel like death is the solution, only to have hope emerge and provide her with comfort and resilience. However, even in extreme crises, hope offered her comfort without seeking anything in return

"yet never in extremity  
it asked a crumb of me."

The final stanza strikes a solemn note, as if the poet wants to give hope the dignified celebration she believes it deserves.

"Chilliest" and "strangest" emphasize the extremity of a situation in which hope can help. It depicts perhaps the most severe of depressions by, once again, making such tangible and personifying such crisis. It reiterates the fact that one could be in the most distress, whether emotionally, physically or psychologically and still have hope perched on their soul. It further delineates the dread, doom and unfamiliarity of such states of mind and situations.

Personally, as a Leaving Certificate student and someone who is aware of the intricacies of depression, anxiety and distress, I find this poem rather soothing.

The simplistic language and the characterization of hope is calming. It acts as a pleasant reminder of the fact that hope is resilient and present within each of us.

It provides me with some solace through times of distress and enables me to imagine and characterize hope. This prevents me from perhaps concluding that hope is non-existent, that it is an abstract concept, hidden within the mist and infinitely deep crevices of my mind and sub consciousness.

The poem is persuasive in making one think that hope is real, something we can touch, feel and see, a living asset within each of us that we must remember in times of hardship.

Dickenson diminishes the barriers between reality and objects and that of emotion and situations which can't be seen or heard, but instead felt. She articulates these concepts through metaphors.

# I could bring you Jewels - had I a mind to

- Letter poem, many of her letters took the form of poems, or were written to accompany small gifts that she enclosed. Many were written as riddles, shows the playful, humorous side of Dickinson's personality. Though she was a recluse she had a wide circle of friends and corresponded with many of them throughout her life. This was sent to her sister in law Susan Gilbert Dickinson. 1863
- Focuses on the relationship rather than the individual consciousness of the speaker.
- She evokes Brazil, Peru, Veracruz, The Bahamas, India and other exotic places.
- Deviates from the concept of Dickinson's poetry being mostly poetry of interiority, her use of foreign place names encourages us to read her poems in a larger context - they testify to the power of 'exotic' or colonized lands in her imagination.
- Fascinated by delicacies such as jewels and extravagant places. First two stanzas she considers the gifts she will offer her beloved. She eventually settles on a small meadow flower.
- The chosen gift is a mark of the speaker's freedom and uniqueness, and a reflection perhaps, of her modest, unpretentious personality. The note of confidence and self ease is striking in this choice. In the first two stanzas, the luxury of considering exotic gifts is reflected in the long lines that she employs. However, as she settles on her gift the lines become shorter and the tone more decisive.

- She references the beauty of the natural world by saying that no expensive and extravagant gift can match up to the beauty of the commonplace wild flower.
- **In its playful, assured way, the poem establishes that the true value of gifts and the true nature of riches cannot be measured in material terms.**
- **Theme of beauty and the unsurpassable value of the meadow flower.**
- This sentiment is poignantly executed in the rhetorical question that the poet closes the poem with - *"Better - could I bring?"* - magisterial four word last line
- conversational, relaxed, unlike others
- *"I could bring You Jewels - had - I a mind to."*
- *"But You have enough - of those - I could bring you odors from St. Domingo - Colors - from Vera Cruz - "*
- *"But this little blaze Flickering to itself - in the Meadow - suits me - more than those -"*
- *"Never a fellow matched this topaz - And his Emerald Swing -"*

# I felt a funeral in my brain

- We are given an account of the progress of a funeral from the startling perspective of the person lying in the coffin.

1861 - difficult period - beset by both religious and artistic doubts.

- "Felt" and "brain" suggest an experience that is intense and physical.
- Allegorical description of the feeling that the normal function of her mind has ended.  
Funeral in the brain is a metaphor for the death of her mind.
- The allegory of the funeral attempts to exteriorize and give a temporal structure to what is, in fact, internal and simultaneous.
- The speaker alienates herself from her feelings and can freely express her thoughts without addressing the fact that these thoughts are her own torments of the mind. It allows her the freedom to present what tortures her the most, without granting us permission to enter into the privacy of her own feelings.
- Allegorical representation of her mental state and not the story of an actual funeral. Without the systematic articulated ceremony of the funeral rites, a reader might have no idea what the speaker was describing and the poem would lack coherence and unity; without the steady distortion of the terms by which self is defined, the reader could not apprehend fully the experiential anguish of the process.

By dramatizing what occurred with herself throughout this allegory she has given it a clarity that a mere straightforward description of the descent into madness could not.

Speaker uses familiar words and a familiar situation to dramatize the loss of her mind so that it is an explanation that can be understood by those who have not experienced it.

- She is able to capitalize on this use of allegory in her description of the breaking of the plank that holds her coffin - a horrifying thought to anyone - as a means of dramatizing the horror of her personal descent.
- A nostalgic retrospective, terrifying in its loneliness and her isolation from others yet represented without a feeling of terror.
- Choice to show that there was a deterioration that led to the loss of herself: presenting it as a loss of life through the means of a funeral. It is the loss of a person or "life" in a metaphorical sense.
- By describing the funeral as if it was her own, the vision of her, alone in her coffin knowing full well that this is something most people shudder to think about further compounds the sense of her loneliness and isolation.
- Separation from self is also illustrated as she presents the events of the funeral - not how she felt at the funeral, but instead details of the events of the funeral. Shares these events in a matter of fact manner.
- Mourners are portrayed as faceless, devoid of feeling and emotion. They are just beings who are there, unfeeling. No individual is mentioned, no sentence is uttered, no mourning attire is described.

No sounds of sadness or muffled cries, no eulogy or discussion of the person lost. It is as if the person / she / does not exist.

The illustration is one of total isolation from the real world and more importantly from any sort of feelings by people about her.

- Abolishes the traditional boundary between experiences of the mind and those of the body.

“Treading - emphasizes physicality.

“Wrecked, solitary here -” immediacy / startling immediacy to the experience. Reason was the faculty that could help to make sense of the experience did not hold up - “and then a plank in reason broke.” She undergoes a new sensation, that of falling, plunging deeper into the experience, down to new levels or worlds.

Dickinson strains her imagination to the limits of it’s power.

“And finished knowing then -” plunge beyond reason yielded a deeper, new knowledge - she learns something, but doesn’t reveal it.

Her thought and knowledge are lost in the fall - deterioration of her mind and sense of being.

- Rhyme scheme gives it a certain cadence which imitates the sound of marching, a sound that drones on throughout the poem - addressed in stanza 2 and discusses the impact of the sound on the speaker and how it accelerates her loss of self.
- Rhyme is defiantly used to set a tone for the poem and generate a certain feeling putting us right there at the funeral.
- Slant rhyme (instead of exact rhyme) is used in final stanza - juxtaposes ordinary cadence of the poem and startles us to make us understand that something extraordinary has happened.

Felt a Funeral IN her Brain - both capitalized alerting us to the thought that both the funeral and her brain are equally important and tied / linked to each other.

- Image of her being surrounded by people but no interaction - except when they perpetrate unpleasant actions that hurt her to the core. This presents an additional statement on the lack of feeling of people as they contribute to her demise, unknowing and unfeeling of what they are doing as they follow the conventional behavior of her time: to come to mourn, because it is what is done.

Lines drone on - tone of funeral procession. The least important thing seems to be the person who has died. It is the formality of the process that matters. Somber tone with an underlying feeling of desperation, one who is trapped emotionally and figuratively and cannot escape / find help. Solitary feeling of isolation on all levels both physical and emotional.

The structured monotony of the funeral service shows a metaphorical relationship in more detail, creating a parallel to let us know that this process of a progressive loss of her mind is just as natural as progression from life to death.

This illustrates that it was indeed a process, not a cataclysmic moment when everything changed.

- Funeral dirge has become her existence - kinesthesia - movements - unceasing spiral towards insanity.
- People do what they are supposed to do in attending her funeral - fulfilled societal obligation, but haven't helped her in life.
- Plank breaking - pain, final indignity depriving the person of leaving the world in a respectable manner.

- Accentuates her frantic efforts to survive as she “hit the world at every plunge” - not giving up until there was nothing left, no other worlds to try (life after death?)

Speaker uses familiar words and describes a familiar situation to dramatize the loss of her mind, so that it is an explanation that can be understood by those who haven't experienced it. By dramatizing through means of allegory, she has given it a clarity that a mere straightforward description of one's descent into madness could not.

Allegory exteriorizes and gives a temporal structure to what is, in fact, interior /simultaneous. Alienates herself from feelings. Can freely express thoughts, without addressing the fact that these thoughts are her own torments.

Progress of a funeral from start to finish - from the startling perspective of the person in the coffin.

- Structured detail and progression of funeral service serves as a metaphor / metaphorical relationship indicating that this process or progressive loss of her mind is as natural as progression from life to death. No cataclysmic moment when everything changed.
- Deterioration that led to the loss of herself - presented as loss of life through means of funeral.

Imagery of heaviness and contraction. Space was filled by tolling of a bell and "being" was reduced to just hearing. Sense of contraction is accompanied by an overwhelming sense of isolation.

A nostalgic retrospective terrifying in it's loneliness and isolation from others yet represented without a feeling of terror.

- Describing the funeral as if it was her own - knows most people shudder to think of it - further compounds sense of loneliness and isolation. Shares events of funeral in matter of fact manner - "numbness" shows separation of self.

Illustration of total isolation from real world / any sort of feelings by people about her.

Abolishes traditional boundaries between experience of mind and body.

Strains imagination to limits of it's power.

# I taste a liquor never brewed

- Dickinson whimsically describes the exhilarating effect of nature.
- Uses the metaphor of drunkenness or intoxication to express how the beauty of nature elates her. Intoxication is a common metaphor for powerful attachment or thrilling feelings.
- Pearl - a precious gem, indicates the value of liquor made under the best circumstances - her liquor which is the beauty of nature is even more precious. Her liquor is more precious than Rhine wine - a wine which is highly regarded.
- Sense of delight in the beauty of the world around her through an exaggerated, playful tone. The riddling quality and the extravagance of the imagery encapsulates the dizzy mood of happiness associated with such an intoxication. - this mood infuses the poem.
- In stanza 2 she humorously tells us what she is drunk on - air and dew - which represent nature.
- A debauchee is someone corrupted or debased, usually by alcohol. This delineates a reckless, indulgent joy of excess - a rarity in her work.
- She drinks at the inn - drunk with summer's splendor, the sky's intensely blue or "molten blue".
- She will 'drink' nature until foxgloves stop blooming and when butterflies give up gathering nectar from flowers. Then, she will revel in nature all the more.
- To express how prodigious her enthusiasm for nature is, she asserts that the angels will shake their "snowy hats" (clouds) and the saints will rush to see her. By referring to saints and seraphs she implies that God will approve of her drunkenness.

- Ends with a startling or powerful image, her leaning against the sun, as a drunk might lean against a lamp post.
- Lighthearted, happy, buoyant, playful and charming
- It is possible to see in her presenting herself as a drunk, a sublimated rebelliousness against societal restriction or sanctimoniousness. Naughty girl persona - naive and straightforward.
- Comic rebelliousness as the angels applaud and swing their hats to honor her.
- Meter of hymns and flows/effuses naturally, no pauses or breaks
- *"I taste a liquor never brewed - From tankards scooped in pearl - not all the vats upon the Rhine Yield such an alcohol."*
- *Inebriate of air am I and debauchee of dew."*
- *"Inns of Molten Blue."*
- *"Till seraphs swing their snowy hats - And saints to windows run - to see the little Tippler Leaning against the - Sun -"*

There's a certain slant of light.

There's a certain slant of light explores a state of mind in which the comfort of hope is absent.

In its place, there is a despair associated with a certain kind of Winter light, coming from Heaven as an affliction, affecting the inner landscape of our soul.

Personal crises

"that oppresses like the heft of Cathedral tunes."

The fall of this Winter light is oppressive as the heft of Cathedral tunes - striking simile. Links Winter and music light with a heaviness of the soul. What started off as a visual image is now described in terms of music. Music in turn as weight.

Blurring of distinction between the senses (synesthesia) creates a feeling of disturbance.

"Heavenly hurt it gives us - Articulates emotional or psychological pain, perhaps

We can find no scar - linking Heaven to mankind. It differs to physical pain

but internal difference, - there are no physical scars or evidence. It is

where the meanings are..." something inside. It may shift and change dynamics

whether within ourselves or in relationships. This internal difference relates to this kind of emotional pain, a unique experience for everyone, but not visible like a broken leg or physical illness. Suggestion of supernatural origin - a heavenly, it may be beyond logic or reasoning but the pain is there. This hurt leaves no physical wounds or scars but affects the inner life or

soul of the person and brings despair. Humanity linked with Heaven - cruelty on Heaven's part.

"Tis the seal Despair-

An imperial affliction

Sent us of the air -"

She delineates the uncertainty brought on by this slant of light. The pain is beyond logic and reasoning. It cannot be understood. However, she suggests that this is sent on by some higher, perhaps supernatural body or force. The slant of light is the mark or sign of despair, which is both a psychological and physical condition.

- Seal suggests the message of a royal personage, a closed communication, something beyond contradiction. "Imperial affliction" suggests the light is sent by a higher or sovereign authority.

"When it comes, the landscape listens -

shadows, hold their breath -

when it goes tis like the distance

on the look of death."

Further associates this slant of light with nature and the Heavens - a superior force. It is controlling of natural element. When it hits us, it is like the world around has stopped - even transformed into an earthly purgatory in which the pain is the only thing to be felt. Nature is passive in awe of Heaven's light. Light impresses as much as it oppresses.

In the -- stanza, the poem moves from inner landscape back to external landscape. The passing of such light does not lift or alleviate the pain and despair. Instead it leaves a piercing chill and uncertainty - an even more intense despair, a despair so ardent that may accrue to death. The final dash in the poem suggests the unknown which we must all confront.

The poem itself works as a seal. It is written in an authoritative style that brooks no contradiction.

- Sounds and rhyme of the poem add considerably to the feeling of seriousness and weighty issues.
- Final use of "T" sounds slow the rhythm and give a sense of definition and precision to the poem. Four stanzas.
- Dashes are like periods that simultaneously serve to link ideas together and to adjust and make the rhyme unique. Oppressive light - oppressive religion women?
- Paradox - Heavenly hurt - contradicts normal / accepted idea of Heaven.
- Providing the reader with the sublime - Heaven / hurt / reality - no physical evidence but internal differences. Effects of light are internalized - therefore understood / defined in a more personal way.
- Uses natural image of Winter light to illuminate some themes related to internal conflicts and despair. Slant of light is an extended metaphor for these kind of struggles.
- Emotional / intellectual internal difference - individual perception. Meanings are based upon perceptions, especially re. intangible concepts such as Heaven.
- Dashes: certain ideas are independent of each other, but also part of the bigger picture. Links ideas together.

The slant of light is depicted as something oppressive and negative. It is compared to music, like an organ in a Cathedral or the cacophonous sound of Cathedral bells, which boom throughout the area. She compares or describes this sound as "the heft of Cathedral tunes." Like loud sounds hinder one's ability to be heard, this slant of light is also an oppressive force. "Heft" suggests something weighty and heavy. On an emotional and intellectual level a source of oppression may put stress or apply a heavy weight to one's ability to perceive the intangible - express emotions etc. Taking the poem in context 1920's this was an oppressive era for women. Dickinson defies the stereotypical domestic housewife, expected of women at the time.

In my opinion, this slant of light is indicative of the pain brought on by her decision. It indicates a vulnerability within the speaker. She is oppressed by this vision of "the woman" though by choosing to defy it, she suffers. There are less publishing opportunities. She is perhaps misunderstood. She feels out of place or ahead of time in a seemingly stagnant world and so she resorts to reclusion subject to this certain slant of light.

Light is the origin of this Heavenly hurt. The speaker delineates light as something hugely powerful which has the potential to affect our internal state of being and question what is tangible and what is not - question our perceptions of the intangible - Heaven? It is supposed to be a place of happiness, yet a paradox is made with reference to Heavenly hurt?

It causes internal conflict. This hurt leaves no physical evidence, though it can change the dynamics within our emotions and intellect to cause a pain which is perhaps inexplicable and even more intense than physical. A pain that affects us psychologically, mentally and emotionally. This pain may deprive us of hope and comfort and render us uncertain and

confused as to how we perceive the world around us. This hurt and light affects our inner soul.

Seal suggests that this light, this heavenly hurt is something beyond logic, something inexplicable originating from the unknown. It suggests something of a royal personage / closed communication coming from a higher kingdom. The concept is sealed, unknown and even illogical. It suggests that permanence - we may never know why this slant of light brings such despair.

Once the light leaves, it neither lifts nor alleviates the sense of despair. On the contrary, it leaves a piercing chill and sense of uncertainty. It is as if one has looked on the distance between the present and our death. The final dash suggests the unknown into which we face. It also reiterates the sheer power of such light. It is as if the world stops and remains stagnant in it's presence transforming into a purgatory. Nature itself is in awe of such light and is reticent under it's comings and goings.

- It, like HITWF evokes a sense of a celestial control which has the power to manipulate, hinder or aid our emotions and dominate our internal environment. Some of these celestial forces are positive and constant such as hope. However, external aspects can deter to contradict this sense of hope. They can make us resilient through hardship or instigate our demise and dishevel our sense of being and perception.
- Both poems evoke and exhibit the power such metaphysical extraneousness exacts on both nature and one's internal state of being.

One example - nature cannot destroy hope or this metaphysical trait.

Nature is in awe of the slant of light and correlates with such Heavenly hurt.