

Melville, Herman



1819–91, American author, b. New York City, considered one of the great American writers and a major figure in world literature.

The Importance of Melville

- ❖ One of America's top novelists
- ❖ Many people take *Moby Dick* to be America's greatest prose epic.

“Bartleby the Scrivener” (1853)

- ❖ Question: “Bartleby” can be read as a parable. Can you give an interpretation of this long short story as a parable?

Question

- ❖ Bartleby makes a point of saying he would "prefer not to" do something, rather than saying he "will not" do something. The Lawyer points this out several times, and he even begins to use the word "prefer" in odd situations himself. What is the significance of the word "prefer"? Why do you think Bartleby uses it?



Emily Dickinson a photograph made by Lewis Heisterkamp in 1846

Emily Dickinson

(1830-1886)



Dickinson's Seclusion

- ❖ Northrup Frye: “It would be hard to name another poet in the history of the English language with so little interest in social or political events.”

The Importance of Emily Dickenson

- ❖ She is one of the founders of modern American poetry.
- ❖ Her concrete imagery, forceful language, and unique style ushered in poetry as we know it today. She plumbed life's philosophical and tragic dimensions in little jewel-like poems.
- ❖ Her poems paved for the Imagist movement.

Dickinson's style

(<http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/cs6/dickinson.html#style>)

- ❖ Her seeking the crux of experience affected her style. As part of her seeking essence or the heart of things, she distilled or eliminated inessential language and punctuation from her poems. She leaves out helping verbs and connecting words; she drops endings from verbs and nouns. It is not always clear what her pronouns refer to; sometimes a pronoun refers to a word which does not appear in the poem. At her best, she achieves breathtaking effects by compressing language.

Dickinson 2

- ❖ Her disregard for the rules of grammar and sentence structure is one reason twentieth century critics found her so appealing; her use of language anticipates the way modern poets use language. The downside of her language is that the compression may be so drastic that the poem is incomprehensible; it becomes a riddle or an intellectual puzzle. Dickinson said in a letter, "All men say 'what' to me"; readers are still saying "What?" in response to some of her poems.

Problems with Dickinson's Poems for her Contemporaries

- ❖ They did not look like poems.
- ❖ Didn't rhyme.
- ❖ Figures of speech too striking.
- ❖ Ideas too radical.



Some of Her
Famous Poems
(Dickinson wrote
1775 poems. Only
seven were
published in her
lifetime.)

Topics (arranged by Todd and Higginson)

- ❖ Love
- ❖ Nature
- ❖ Friendship
- ❖ Death
- ❖ Immortality

260 [288]

- ❖ Why is it better for one to be Nobody than Somebody?

269 [249]

- ❖ Why does Dickinson repeat “Wild nights” two times?
- ❖ Why are “port” and “moor” sexual images?
- ❖ The first and the third stanzas are rhymed. The second is not. What do the varying rhymes suggest about the speaker?
- ❖ What does the reference to Eden suggest about the speaker’s conception of love?

1096 [986]

- ❖ Is this poem an example of free verse?
- ❖ What might be the function of the inversion: “You may have met Him—did you not/ His notice suddenly is—”?
- ❖ How do the metaphors used to describe the snake reflect the speaker’s changing feelings about it?
- ❖ The first lines contain several [s] sounds, whereas the ending lines several [o] sounds. What do these repeated sounds tell us?
- ❖ What might be Dickinson’s attitudes toward Nature?

479 [712]

- ❖ Which stanza best tells us that death is always close by, even though we never realize it?
- ❖ The rhyme scheme alternates iambic tetrameter and trimeter lines. How does this scheme reinforce the speaker's statement about death?
- ❖ Why is the speaker not afraid of death?



591 [465]

❖ What does the fly represent?



519 [441]

- ❖ What is this poem about? Can you paraphrase this poem?



359 [328]

❖ What is the bird an emblem for?



Question

- ❖ Emily Dickinson lived all of her life in her father's houses in Amherst, and for the most part, in the Main Street mansion. She traveled very little, and even within town, preferred to stay at home rather than socialize with neighbors. How could she have experienced enough of life to make her today one of America's leading poets, not only in this country but abroad?