



Emily Dickinson a photograph made by Lewis Heisterkamp in 1846

Emily Dickinson

Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)

(1830-1886)




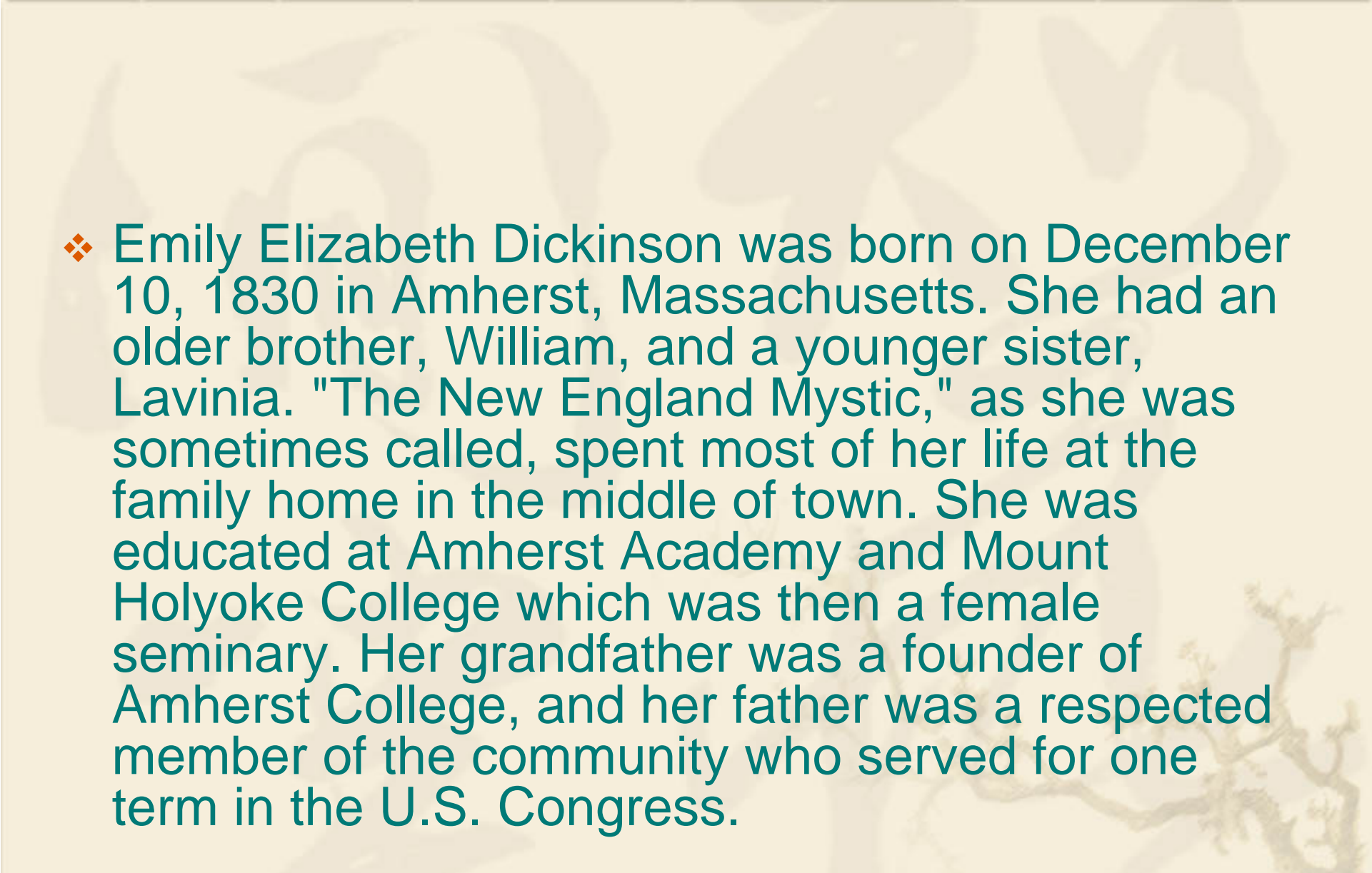
- ❖ Emily Elizabeth Dickinson, a 19th century American poet, was born 10 December 1830 in Amherst, Massachusetts, USA. She attended Amherst Academy and Mount Holyoke Seminary, and lived a private life: only ten of her poems were published in her lifetime. She was a good cook, tended a lovely garden, and sent baskets with notes, poems, or epigrams and flowers to friends and sick town folk. After her death on 15 May 1886, over 1700 poems, which she had bound into booklets, were discovered. The fame of her poetry has spread until now she is acclaimed throughout the world.
- ❖ Read her epigrams at <http://swc2.hccs.cc.tx.us/htmls/rowhtml/emily/epigram.html>


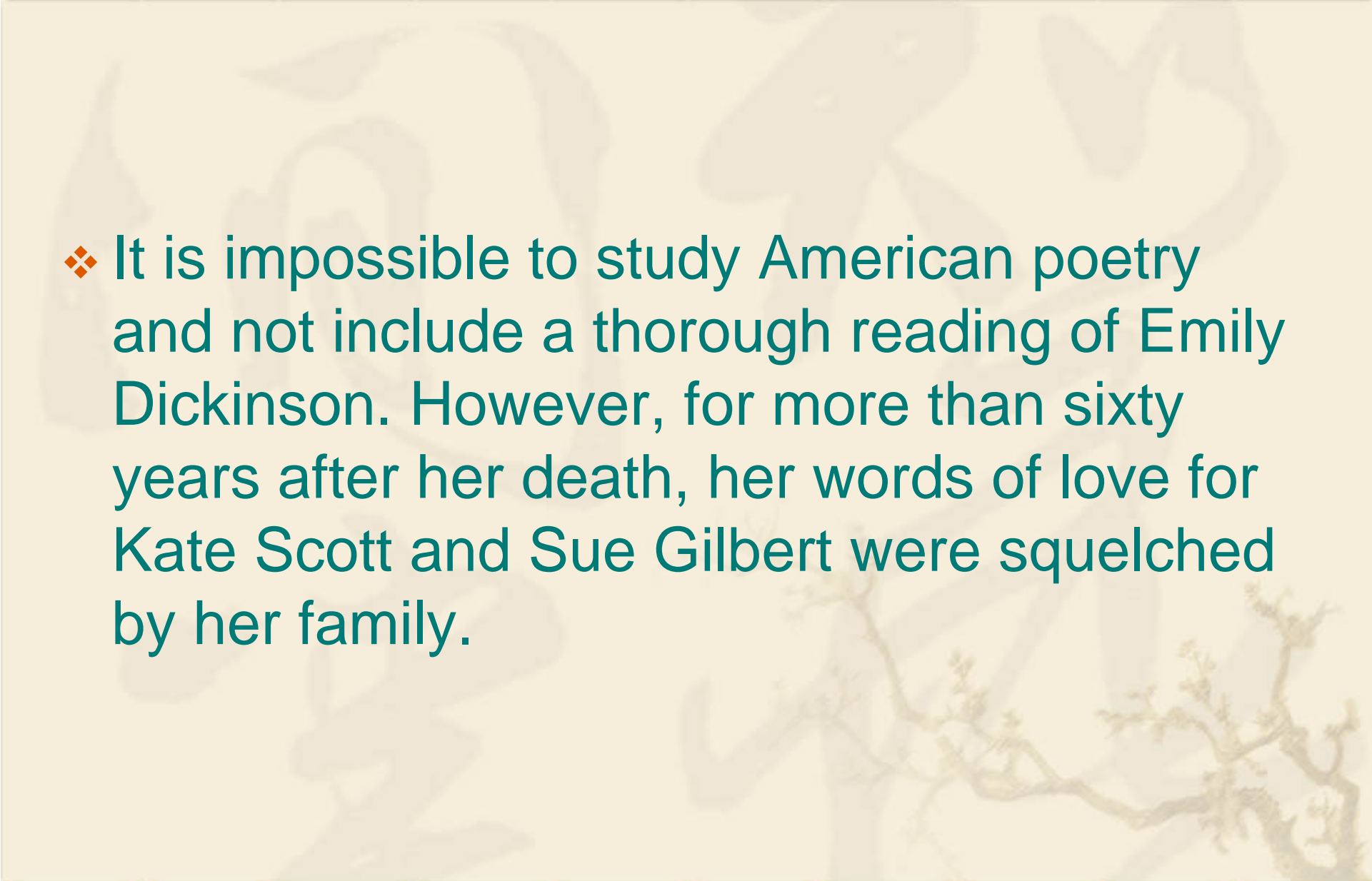
Life

Emily Dickinson, "the belle of Amherst" (the Massachusetts town where she spent her entire life), is almost as famous for her mysteriously secluded life as for her poetry, which ranks her with Walt Whitman as one of the most gifted poets in American literature.

She never married, and after age 30 she almost never saw anyone outside of her immediate family. Some scholars believe that this was her response to the narrow literary establishment of her time, which expected female writers to limit their subjects to the domestic and the sentimental.

Author of over 1700 poems, only 10 were published in her lifetime, and these without her permission. After her death, however, her sister found and published the body of her work.

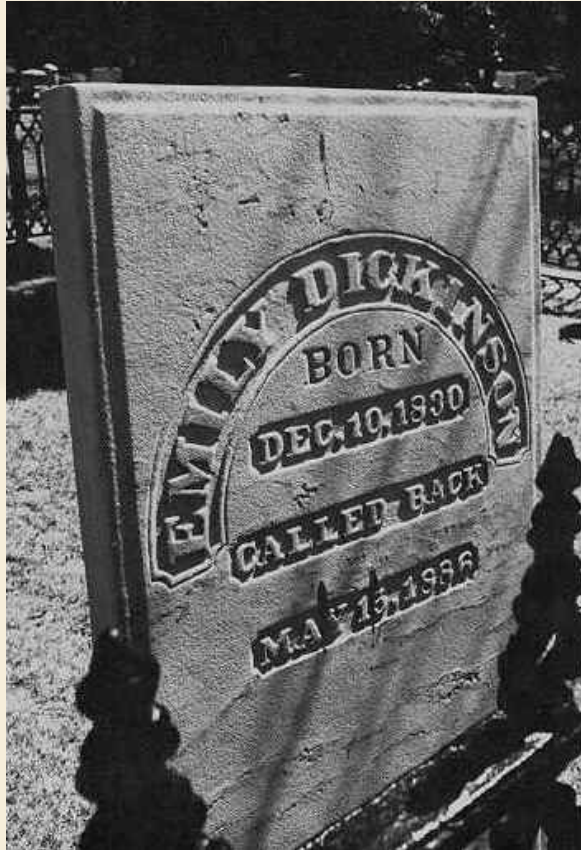
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- ❖ Emily Elizabeth Dickinson was born on December 10, 1830 in Amherst, Massachusetts. She had an older brother, William, and a younger sister, Lavinia. "The New England Mystic," as she was sometimes called, spent most of her life at the family home in the middle of town. She was educated at Amherst Academy and Mount Holyoke College which was then a female seminary. Her grandfather was a founder of Amherst College, and her father was a respected member of the community who served for one term in the U.S. Congress.

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- ❖ It is impossible to study American poetry and not include a thorough reading of Emily Dickinson. However, for more than sixty years after her death, her words of love for Kate Scott and Sue Gilbert were squelched by her family.

Emily Dickinson's Poem Drawer

- ❖ Dickinson wrote more than 1800 poems, the majority of which were not discovered until after her death when her sister found the neatly organized collection in a dresser drawer. All but 24 of her works are untitled, and only ten were published in her lifetime. She is considered one of America's finest poets.

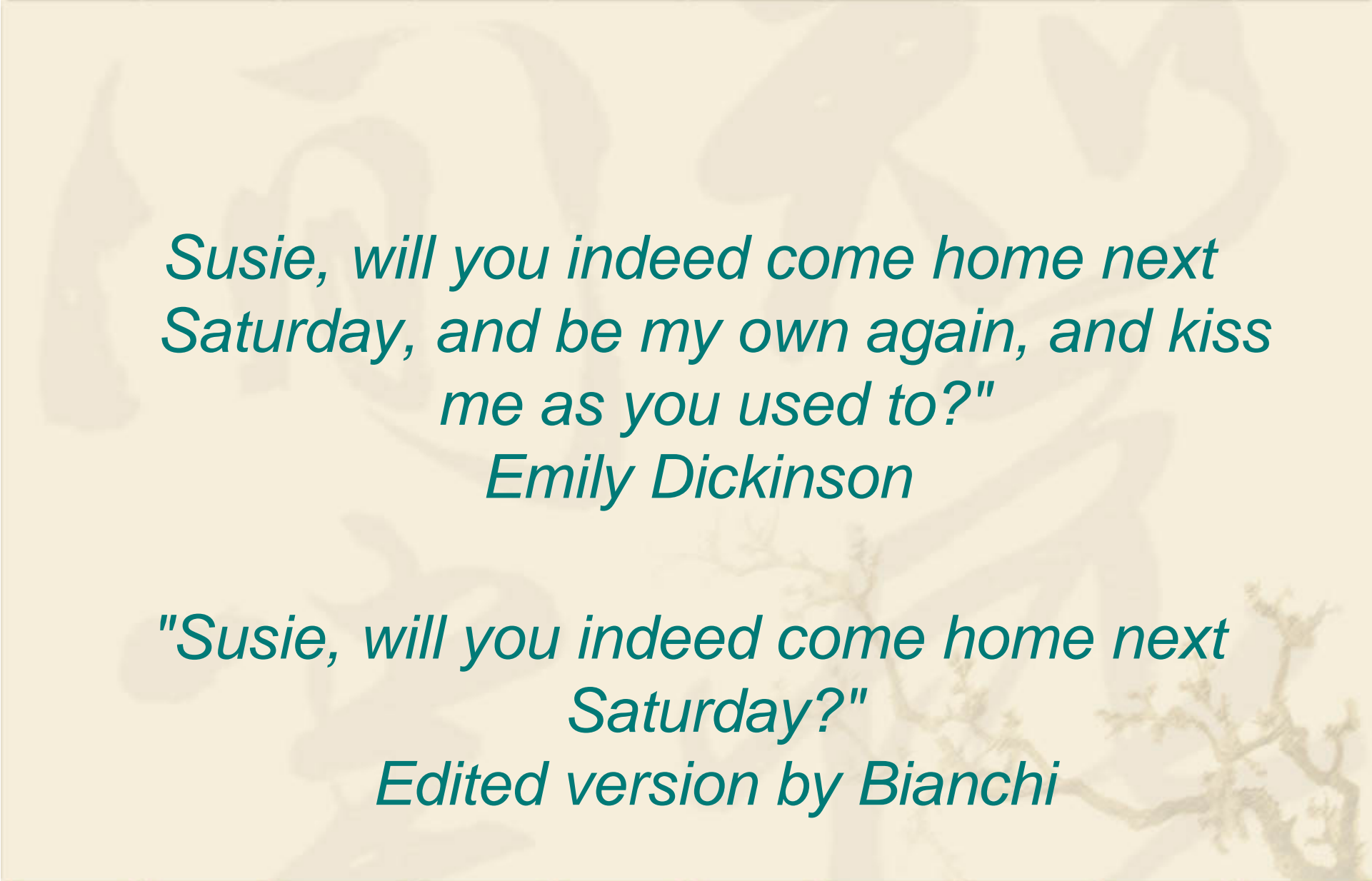

*Garlands for Queens, may be -
Laurels - for rare degree
Of soul or sword.
Ah - but remembering me -
Ah - but remembering thee -
Nature in chivalry -
Nature in charity -
Nature in equity -
The Rose ordained!
- - - E.D.*



- ❖ After her death, Dickinson's family began publishing edited and corrected excerpts of her work. The original versions of her manuscripts were not fully published until 1955.

The Censored Writings of Emily Dickinson

- ❖ Dickinson wrote passionate letters to her sister-in-law, Sue Gilbert, that some historians describe as simply representative of the writing style of the Victorian era. Others, including Dickinson's biographer Rebecca Patterson, saw the letters as evidence of the writer's homosexuality.
- ❖ What is known for a fact is that Gilbert's daughter, Martha Dickinson Bianchi, edited the letters that her famous aunt wrote to her mother before she allowed them to be published. Much of Dickinson's personal correspondence was burned by her sister and other family members. A few remaining pieces of Dickinson's personal letters were published in 1951 by Patterson.



*Susie, will you indeed come home next
Saturday, and be my own again, and kiss
me as you used to?"*

Emily Dickinson

*"Susie, will you indeed come home next
Saturday?"*

Edited version by Bianchi



- ❖ Most of Emily Dickinson's private life remains a mystery but her poems are frequently subject for interpretations with Sapphic undertones. Just what Martha feared.

*"Her breast is fit for pearls,
But I was not a `Diver' -
Her brow is fit for thrones
But I have not a crest.
Her heart is fit for home -
I - a Sparrow - build there
Sweet twigs and twine
My perennial nest. "
- - - E. D.*

The Nun of Amherst

- ❖ Dickinson suffered a nervous breakdown in 1862, ending the most creative and artistically prolific period of her life. Dickinson gained the nick name "Nun of Amherst" from her years of seclusion following her father's death in 1874. During the final years of her life she tended her garden, baked for family and friends, and almost never left the house.

*"Because I could not stop for Death--
He kindly stopped for me--
The Carriage held but just Ourselves--
and Immortality. "
- - - E. D.*

- ❖ Emily Dickinson died on May 15, 1886.

<http://www.lambda.net/~maximum/dickins.html>

ED and the Civil War

- ❖ "Since Emily Dickinson's full maturity as a dedicated artist occurred during the span of the Civil War, the most convulsive era of the nation's history, one of course turns to the letters of 1861-1865, and the years that follow, for her interpretation of events. But the fact is that she did not live in history and held no view of it, past or current. Walt Whitman projected himself into the world about him so intensely that not only the war but the nation itself is continuously the substance of his thought in prose and verse. The reverse was true for Dickinson, to whom the war was an annoyance, a reality only when it was mirrored to her in casualty lists. Such evidently was true in some degree for all the Dickinsons, since Austin, when drafted exercised his privilege of paying the five-hundred-dollar fee to arrange for a substitute. Emily wrote Mrs. Bowles in the summer of 1861:

ED and the Civil War

- ❖ 'I shall have no winter this year-on account of the soldiers-Since I cannot weave Blankets, or Boots-I thought-it best to omit the season.' Only once again does she make any general allusion to the mighty conflict, the repercussions of which are clearly audible even after the lapse of a century. 'A Soldier called-', she wrote Bowles just a year later, 'a Morning ago, and asked for a Nosegay, to take to Battle. I suppose he thought we kept an Aquarium.' The attitude of mind that could prompt such shallow facetiousness can be understood in the light of her personal intent in living.

ED and the Civil War

- ❖ Years later, on the eve of the first election of President Cleveland, she made clear to Mrs., Holland the nature and extent of her concern with social history. 'Before I write you again, we shall have had a new Czar. Is the Sister a Patriot? George Washington was the Father of his Country' - George Who?' That sums all politics to me.'

ED and the Civil War

- ❖ The rejection of society as such thus shows itself to have been total, not only physically but psychically. It was her kind of economy, a frugality she sought in order to make the most of her world; to focus, to come to grips with those universals which increasingly concerned her."

(From Johnson's preface *Selected Letters*, xx, listed above)

Epigrams

- ❖ Emily Dickinson, aside from writing 1,775 poems, also wrote a number of epigrams. Epigram derives from the Greek *epigramma*- "in-scribed"- and it is a short meaningful saying that could be carved on a tombstone or monument.
- ❖ An epigram has always stirred a feeling of deep thought within a person and/or culture. It is, correspondingly, a statement that is short and insightful; it is often considered part of a nation's inherited "wisdom."

Epigrams

- ❖ Sometimes the word is used loosely to include all kinds of proverbs and aphorisms. Such forms are prominent in the Upanishads and also in Russian and German collections.
- ❖ The saying "An Englishman's house is his castle" is an example of an epigram that has become familiar to us. Below are five examples of Dickinson's masterful insights (these can be found on pages 21-25 in the New Poems of Emily Dickinson):

- 1) Hereafter, I will pick no Rose,
lest it fade or prick me.
(Emily could be stating that she will not choose something desirable unless it chooses her first or that she will not be tempted by beauty.)
- 2) The sailor cannot see the North-
but knows the Needle can-
(Sometimes you cannot see somethings eventhough they are there.)
- 3) The heart is the only workman
we cannot excuse.
(One cannot excuse the way a heart behaves because it does not reason.)
- 4) Gratitude is the timid wealth
of those who have nothing.
(For those who are economically poor are rich with thanks to those who aid them in their struggles in life.)
- 5) We must be careful what we say.
No bird resumes its egg.
(People must be carefull of what they say because words can never fully be taken back.)



Her Poetry

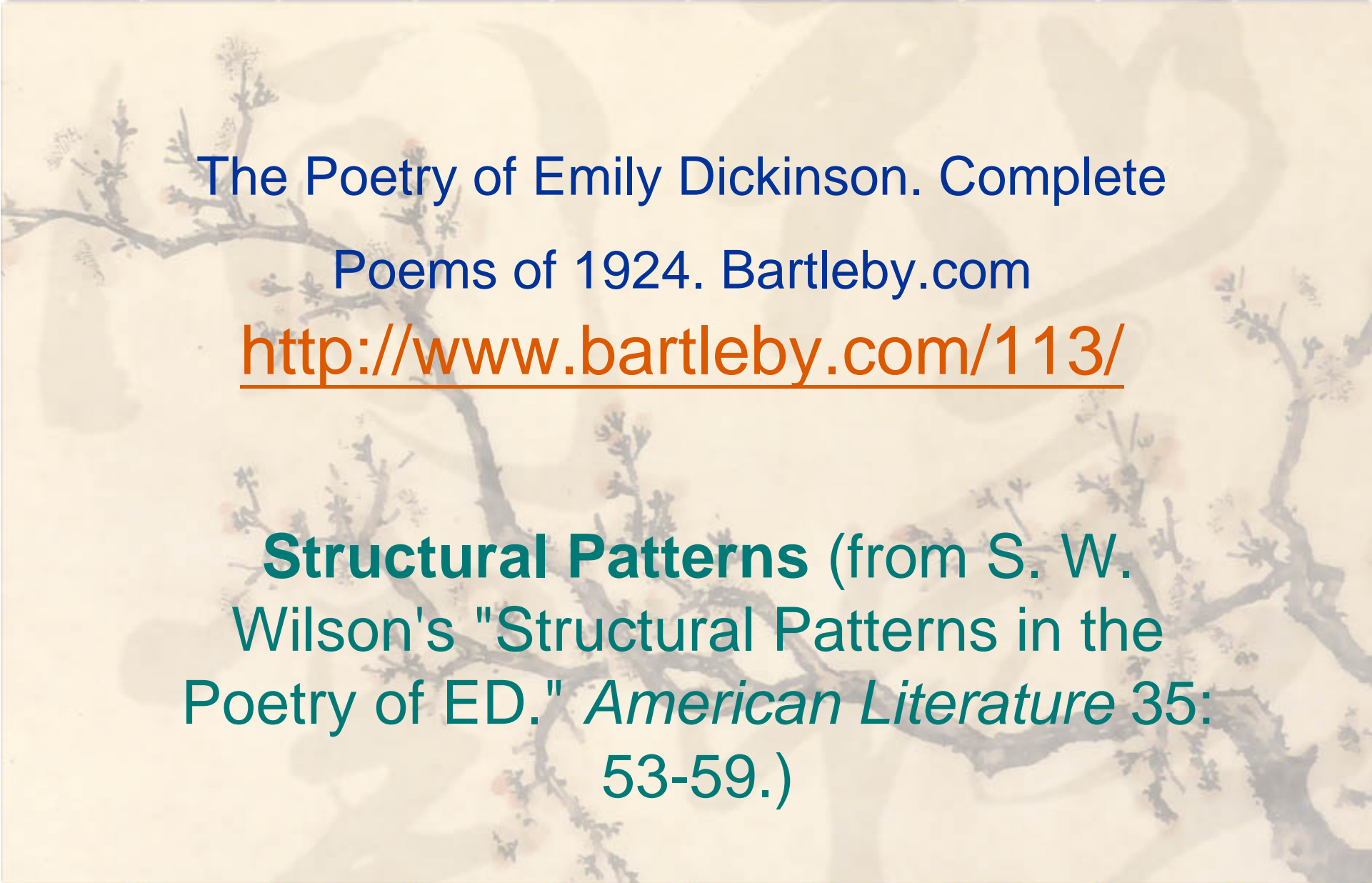

Theme

See <http://www.csustan.edu/english/reuben/pal/chap4/dickinson.html#poems>

- ❖ (a) poems of loss and defeat: 49, 67, 305. (b) poems about ecstasy or vision: 185, 214, 249, 322, 465, 501, 632.
- ❖ (c) poems about solitude: 280, 303, 441, 664.
- ❖ (d) poems about death: 49, 67, 88, 98, 153, 182, 241, 258, 280, 301, 341, 360, 369, 389, 411, 449, 510 529, 547, 712, 784, 856, 976, 1078, 1100, 1624, 1716, 1732.
- ❖ (e) poems about madness and suffering: 315, 348, 435, 536.
- ❖ (f) poems about entrapment: 187, 528, 754, 1099.
- ❖ (g) poems about craft: 441, 448, 505, 1129.
- ❖ (h) poems about images of birds: 130, 328, 348, 824.
- ❖ (i) poems about a bee or bees: 130, 214, 216, 348, 1405.

Themes

- ❖ (j) poems about a fly or flies: 187 and 465.
- ❖ (k) poems about butterflies: 214, 341, 1099.
- ❖ (l) poems about church imagery or biblical references: 130, 216, 258, 322, 1545.
- ❖ (m) poems about love: 47, 293, 299, 303, 453, 463, 478, 494, 511, 549, 568, 640, 664, 907.
- ❖ (n) poems about nature: 12, 130, 140, 214, 285, 318, 321, 322, 328, 33, 441, 526, 630, 783, 861, 986, 1084, 1356, 1463, 1575.
- ❖ (o) poems about doubt and faith: 49, 59, 61, 185, 217, 254, 324, 338, 357, 376, 437, 564, 1052, 1207, 1545.
- ❖ (p) poems about pain and anguish: 165, 193, 241, 252, 258, 280, 305, 315, 341, 348, 365, 410, 510, 512, 536, 650, 675, 772, 1005.
- ❖ (q) poems about after death or afterlife: 301, 401, 409, 413, 615, 712, 829, 964.



The Poetry of Emily Dickinson. Complete
Poems of 1924. Bartleby.com

<http://www.bartleby.com/113/>

Structural Patterns (from S. W.
Wilson's "Structural Patterns in the
Poetry of ED." *American Literature* 35:
53-59.)



Structural Patterns

- ❖ Major pattern is that of a sermon: statement or introduction of topic, elaboration, and conclusion. There are three variations of this major pattern:

(the poem numbers are from the Johnson edition)

<http://www.csustan.edu/english/reuben/pal/c-hap4/dickinson.html#poems>

Structural Patterns

1. The poet makes her initial announcement of topic in an unfigured line (examples: #241, #329)
2. She uses a figure for that purpose (#318, #401).
3. She repeats her statement and its elaboration a number of times before drawing a conclusion (#324).

Epigram

❖ *THIS is my letter to the world,
That never wrote to me,—
The simple news that Nature told,
With tender majesty.*

*Her message is committed
To hands I cannot see;
For love of her, sweet countrymen,
Judge tenderly of me!*

49

I never lost as much but twice,
And that was in the sod.
Twice have I stood a beggar
Before the door of God!
Angels -- twice descending
Reimbursed my store --
Burglar! Banker -- Father!
I am poor once more!

1. To repay (money spent); refund.
2. To pay back or compensate (another party) for money spent or losses incurred.

Comment

- ❖ As mentioned in the Introduction, it is conjectured that the first two losses Emily Dickinson speaks of in the first stanza are her young friends who encouraged her interest in books and in writing poetry, Leonard Humphrey and Benjamin F. Newton, both of whom died young. Her biographers suggest, however, that the third loss developed in the second stanza is a reference to the Reverend Wadsworth, the man she seems really to have loved, and to his departure from the East for a ministerial position in San Francisco.

Comment

- ❖ The second stanza continues this effective combination of "abstracts" with "concretes." Angels, for example, if mentioned alone, would remain abstract, vague, a "concept"; but when they descend to reimburse someone, the language of the street and the marketplace - of everyday business transactions - has intervened to make the scene seem very real. This method becomes startling in the line "Burglar, banker, father." It is conventional to address God as father; it is unconventional, perhaps irreverent, to call God a burglar and a banker. These words describe God as one who can take away and give back at his own whim and will; this is similar to a more conventional rendering of the thought "the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away," which is surely in the background; but the poet's version of it is entirely original.

130

These are the days when Birds
come back --

A very few -- a Bird or two --
To take a backward look.

These are the days when skies
resume

The old -- old sophistries of June --
A blue and gold mistake.

Oh fraud that cannot cheat the Bee -
-

Almost thy plausibility
Induces my belief.

Till ranks of seeds their witness bear
--

And softly thro' the altered air
Hurries a timid leaf.

Oh Sacrament of summer days,
Oh Last Communion in the Haze -
-

Permit a child to join.

Thy sacred emblems to partake --
They consecrated bread to take
And thine immortal wine!

- ❖ **Sacrament**, any of several liturgical actions of the Christian church, believed to have been instituted by Christ to communicate God's grace or power through material objects. Fourth-century theologian Saint Augustine defined sacraments as "outward and visible signs of an inward and spiritual grace."

214

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 --

Reeling -- thro endless summer
days --

From inns of Molten Blue --

When "Landlords" turn the
drunken Bee

Out of the Foxglove's door --

When Butterflies -- renounce their
"drams" --

I shall but drink the more!

Till Seraphs swing their
snowy Hats --

And Saints -- to windows
run --

To see the little Tippler

Leaning against the -- Sun --

❖ * tankard: A large drinking
cup having a single
handle and often a
hinged cover, especially a
tall pewter or silver mug.
= vat

❖ Debauchee: a libertine

❖ Seraphs: angles

❖ Tippler: Alcoholic liquor

258

There's a certain Slant of
light,
Winter Afternoons --
That oppresses, like the Heft
Of Cathedral Tunes --
Heavenly Hurt, it gives us --
We can find no scar,
But internal difference,
Where the Meanings, are --

None may teach it -- Any --
'Tis the Seal Despair --
An imperial affliction
Sent us of the Air --
When it comes, the Landscape
listens --
Shadows -- hold their breath --
When it goes, 'tis like the
Distance
On the look of Death --

287

A Clock stopped --
Not the Mantel's --
Geneva's farthest skill
Can't put the puppet bowing --
That just now dangled still --
An awe came on the Trinket!
The Figures hunched, with pain
--
Then quivered out of Decimals
--
Into Degreeless Noon --
It will not stir for Doctors --

This Pendulum of snow --
This Shopman importunes it --
While cool -- concernless No --
Nods from the Gilded pointers --
Nods from the Seconds slim --
Decades of Arrogance between
The Dial life --
And Him --

- ❖ Importune: To plead or urge irksomely, often persistently.
- ❖ Decades of Arrogance ?

303

The Soul selects her own Society --
Then -- shuts the Door --
To her divine Majority --
Present no more --
Unmoved -- she notes the Chariots -- pausing --
At her low Gate --
Unmoved -- an Emperor be kneeling
Upon her Mat --
I've known her -- from an ample nation --
Choose One --
Then -- close the Valves of her attention --
Like Stone --

Language

- ❖ By virtue of the Dickinsonian touch in language, the soul emerges as a kind of royal princess in this poem. She "selects her own society," as a princess would do. Her selection of the "suitor" or "prince," we presume, amounts to a "divine majority" (monarchs, after all, were once considered to have "divine authority," that is, authority direct from God) which is absolute: "On her divine majority/ Obtrude no more." Obtrude is a better word, for example, than intrude would be, carrying with it more of the idea of opposition, outside pressures.

Language

- ❖ The theme of royalty is continued in the second stanza, as the chariot pauses to solicit her company and the emperor himself kneels entreating her "upon her mat," demeaning himself in a quite un-emperorlike manner. The third stanza returns to the picture of royal princes making her selection: "I've known her from an ample nation/ Choose one." Her decision, again, is absolute: the valves of her attention are closed "like stone." Valves is another instance of the poet's irresistible insertion of a familiar, workaday term into an otherwise rather "philosophical" statement of policy.

305

The difference between Despair
And Fear -- is like the One
Between the instant of a Wreck
And when the Wreck has been --
The Mind is smooth -- no Motion --
Contented as the Eye
Upon the Forehead of a Bust --
That knows -- it cannot see --

328

A Bird came down the Walk --
He did not know I saw --
He bit an Angeworm in halves
And ate the fellow, raw,
And then he drank a Dew
From a convenient Grass --
And then hopped sidewise to the
Wall
To let a Beetle pass --
He glanced with rapid eyes
That hurried all around --

They looked like frightened Beads,
I thought --
He stirred his Velvet Head
Like one in danger, Cautious,
I offered him a Crumb
And he unrolled his feathers
And rowed him softer home --
Than Oars divide the Ocean,
Too silver for a seam --
Or Butterflies, off Banks of Noon
Leap, plashless* as they swim.
❖ With no splash

341

After great pain, a formal feeling comes --
The Nerves sit ceremonious, like Tombs --
The stiff Heart questions was it He, that bore,
And Yesterday, or Centuries before?
The Feet, mechanical, go round --
Of Ground, or Air, or Ought --
A Wooden way
Regardless grown,
A Quartz contentment, like a stone --
This is the Hour of Lead --
Remembered, if outlived,
As Freezing persons, recollect the Snow --
First -- Chill -- then Stupor -- then the letting go --

- ❖ Ceremonious: Strictly observant of or devoted to ceremony, ritual, or etiquette; punctilious
- ❖ Contentment: A source of satisfaction
- ❖ Stupor: A state of mental numbness, as that resulting from shock; a daze

465

I heard a Fly buzz -- when I died --
The Stillness in the Room
Was like the Stillness in the Air --
Between the Heaves of Storm --
The Eyes around -- had wrung them
dry --
And Breaths were gathering firm
For that last Onset -- when the King
Be witnessed -- in the Room --
I willed my Keepsakes -- Signed away
What portion of me be
Assignable -- and then it was

There interposed a Fly --
With Blue -- uncertain stumbling
Buzz --
Between the light -- and me --
And then the Windows failed --
and then
I could not see to see --
❖ Onset: **1.** An onslaught; an
assault. **2.** A beginning; a start:
the onset of a cold.

501

This World is not Conclusion.

A Species stands beyond --

Invisible, as Music --

But positive, as Sound --

It beckons, and it baffles --

Philosophy -- don't know --

And through a Riddle, at the
last --

Sagacity, must go --

To guess it, puzzles scholars
--

To gain it, Men have borne

❖ **Sagacity: wisdom**

Contempt of Generations

And Crucifixion, shown --

Faith slips -- and laughs, and
rallies --

Blushes, if any see --

Plucks at a twig of Evidence --

And asks a Vane, the way --

Much Gesture, from the Pulpit -

-

Strong Hallelujahs roll --

**Narcotics cannot still the
Tooth**

That nibbles at the soul –

❖ Rally: to tease good-humoredly

❖ Vane: One of the metal guidance or stabilizing fins
attached to the tail of a bomb or other missile.

585

I like to see it lap the Miles --
And lick the Valleys up --
And stop to feed itself at
Tanks --

And then -- prodigious step
Around a Pile of Mountains --
And supercilious peer
In Shanties -- by the sides of
Roads --

And then a Quarry pare

To fit its Ribs
And crawl between
Complaining all the while
In horrid -- hooting stanza --
Then chase itself down Hill --
And neigh like Boanerges --
Then -- punctual as a Star
Stop -- docile and omnipotent
At its own stable door --

❖ Speaker, preacher, pulpiteer

613

They shut me up in Prose --
As when a little Girl
They put me in the Closet --
Because they liked me 'still' --
Still! Could themselves have peeped --
And seen my Brain -- go round --
They might as wise have lodged
a Bird
For Treason -- in the Pound --
Himself has but to will
And easy as a Star
Abolish his Captivity --
And laugh -- No more have I--

- ❖ In her poetry, she uses childhood as a metaphor for conveying an attitude toward a kind of pain that may have had nothing to do with childhood itself, but of frustration of any sort, the experience of being excluded, or the frustration she always felt as an unrecognized poet. Never straying far from home, she used not only childhood but domestic living for the symbols she used in her poetry.
- ❖ Childhood was a serious matter to her, and indeed she loved all children and was a great favorite among the children in her family and in her neighborhood.

632

The Brain -- is wider than the Sky --
For -- put them side by side --
The one the other will contain
With ease -- and You -- beside --
The Brain is deeper than the sea --
For -- hold them -- Blue to Blue --
The one the other will absorb --
As Sponges -- Buckets -- do --
The Brain is just the weight of God --
For -- Heft them -- Pound for Pound --
And they will differ -- if they do --
As Syllable from Sound --

664

Of all the Souls that stand create --
I have elected -- One --
When Sense from Spirit -- files
 away --
And Subterfuge -- is done --
When that which is -- and that
 which was --
Apart -- intrinsic -- stand --
And this brief Drama in the flesh --
Is shifted -- like a Sand --
When Figures show their royal
 Front --
And Mists -- are carved away,
Behold the Atom -- I preferred --
To all the lists of Clay!

- ❖ A deceptive stratagem or device: *“the paltry subterfuge of an anonymous signature”* (Robert Smith Surtees).
- ❖ About the last judgment?
- ❖ A very rich double irony: GRACE v.s. DISGRACE

709

Publication -- is the Auction
Of the Mind of Man --
Poverty -- be justifying
For so foul a thing
Possibly -- but We -- would rather
From Our Garret* go
White -- Unto the White Creator --
Than invest -- Our Snow --
Thought belong to Him who gave it -
-

Then -- to Him Who bear
Its Corporeal illustration* -- Sell
The Royal Air --
In the Parcel -- Be the Merchant
Of the Heavenly Grace --
But reduce no Human Spirit
To Disgrace of Price --

- ❖ A room on the top floor of a house, typically under a pitched roof; an attic.
- ❖ Corporeal: 肉體

712

Because I could not stop for Death

--

He kindly stopped for me --

**The Carriage held but just
Ourselves --**

And Immortality.

**We slowly drove -- He knew no
haste**

And I had put away

My labor and my leisure too,

For His Civility --

**We passed the School, where
Children strove**

At Recess -- in the Ring --

**We passed the Fields of Gazing
Grain --**

We passed the Setting Sun --

Or rather -- He passed Us --

The Dews drew quivering and chill --

For only Gossamer游絲, my Gown --

My Tippet披肩 -- only Tulle 薄紗--

We paused before a House that
seemed

A Swelling of the Ground --

The Roof was scarcely visible --

The Cornice飛簷 -- in the Ground --

Since then -- 'tis Centuries -- and yet

Feels shorter than the Day

I first surmised the Horses' Heads

Were toward Eternity --

789

**On a Columnar Self --How ample
to rely
In Tumult -- or Extremity --
How good the Certainty
That Lever cannot pry --
And Wedge cannot divide
Conviction -- That Granitic
Base --
Though None be on our Side
Suffice us -- for a Crowd --
Ourselves -- and Rectitude --
And that Assembly -- not far
off
From furthest Spirit -- God --**

- ❖ At the time she felt her difference as painful, but some years later (1863) she was able to say, "There is always one thing to be grateful for -- that one is one's self and not somebody else."
- ❖ In many ways she had quite a normal early life. There were a few contacts with young men. Amherst was a college town and the place was awash in undergraduates some of whom visited Emily's brother, Austin, at the family home.
- ❖ What mention there is of these boys in her letters is unenthusiastic compared to her enthusiasm for the friendships with the young women of her acquaintance.
- ❖ Her friendships all tended to fade away; the young women went on to marry and have children, quite a few of them even had careers as teachers before they married.
- ❖ None of these experiences were for Emily who hated leaving home for any reason.

Bio Notes

- ❖ E's early letters to Sue are rapturous. Seward says that "the letters to Sue, even discounting the romantic style then in fashion and her own flair for rhetoric, are nothing short of love letters."
- ❖ An example: "I miss you, mourn for you, and walk the Streets alone -- often at night, beside, I fall asleep in tears, for your dear face, yet not one word comes back to me from that silent West, If it is finished, tell me, and I will raise the lid to my box of Phantoms, and lay one more love in; but if it lives and beats still, still lives and beats for me, then say so, and I will strike the strings to one more strain of happiness before I die."
- ❖ By the age of 20, E had narrowed her circle of friends, male and female, and she began to see Sue and Austin as all the company she needed.

A Letter

- ❖ You need not fear to leave me lest I should be alone, for I often part with things I fancy I have loved, -- sometimes to the grave, and sometimes to an oblivious rather bitterer than death --thus my heart bleeds so frequently that I shant mind the hemorrhage, and I only add an agony to several previous ones, and at the end of day remark -- a bubble burst! Few have been given me, and if I love them so, that for idolatry, they are removed from me -- I simply murmur gone"
- ❖ This letter (1854) indicates Emily's continuing grief at Sue's increasing coldness.

959

A loss of something ever
felt I --
The first that I could
recollect
Bereft I was -- of what I
knew not
Too young that any
should suspect
A Mourner walked among
the children
I notwithstanding went
about
As one bemoaning a
Dominion
Itself the only Prince
cast out --

Elder, Today, a session wiser
And fainter, too, as Wiseness
is --
I find myself still softly
searching
For my Delinquent Palaces --
And a Suspicion, like a Finger
Touches my Forehead now
and then
That I am looking oppositely
For the site of the Kingdom of
Heaven --

- ❖ This poem may refer to what she considered a spiritual lack. In her circle of pious school friends she was the only one not to be able to accept Christ as her personal savior. She was very troubled by her inability to respond as they did.

986

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 --

And then it closes at your feet

And opens further on --

He likes a Boggy Acre 沼澤

A Floor too cool for Corn --

Yet when a Boy, and Barefoot --

I more than once at Noon

**Have passed, I thought, a
Whip lash**

Unbraiding in the Sun

When stooping to secure it

It wrinkled, and was gone --

Several of Nature's People

I know, and they know me --

I feel for them a transport

Of cordiality 熱忱 --

But never met this Fellow

Attended, or alone

Without a tighter breathing

And Zero at the Bone --

Commentary

- ❖ This poem is a good example of Dickinson's treatment of nature. Here she describes a snake, and the description is obviously prompted by accurate knowledge of her subject. She ends the poem, however, not with the snake itself, but with an acknowledgement of the feeling of apprehension which he inspires. Throughout the poem the snake is never named; he simply remains "a narrow fellow," riding in the grass and appearing without warning. The further descriptions make it clear, however, that it is a snake which is being described.

Commentary

- ❖ The poet calls him a "spotted shaft," an unbraided whiplash opening and closing the grass as soundlessly as a comb would do. She goes on to describe the kind of habitat the snake likes; when a child, she found him in cool, boggy ground, where corn could not grow. The last two stanzas push the meaning of the poem further than description. The poet states that she feels positively delighted when she meets most of the animals she knows; she never sees the snake, however, whether alone or with others, without feeling a chill in the marrow of her bone and a tightening of her chest.

Commentary

- ❖ In this poem the poet simply describes and acknowledges a situation, without giving any indication of why it should be so. The situation is the fear which she, and most other people, feels when she sees a snake. This fear is a common one, and much has been written about it; Dickinson's description of it, however, is particularly powerful because of her technique.

- ❖ She does not simply state that she is frightened of snakes and that many other people are too; she spends the first four stanzas of the poem describing the snake as one might any other animal of which he was fond. The very phrase "narrow fellow" is a friendly sort of name. The fifth stanza also makes the shock of the last more powerful; the poet is not unacquainted with nature, not afraid of snakes because she hasn't seen many animals in her life.

- ❖ She is, in fact, on good terms with most of "nature's people" - they know her and she them. It is this preparation - a guileless description by a confirmed nature-lover - which makes the last stanza so effective. This fear of snakes is not a rational thing, the poet says; there is simply a feeling of menace connected with snakes which goes beyond reason and knowledge. Why this should be so, the poet does not say; she simply makes her observation.

1078

The Bustle in a House

The Morning after Death

Is solemnest of industries 勤勞

Enacted upon Earth --

The Sweeping up 掃起 the Heart

And putting Love away 收起

We shall not want to use again

Until Eternity.

1624

Apparently with no surprise
To any happy Flower
The Frost beheads it at its play --
In accidental power --
The blonde Assassin passes on --
The Sun proceeds **unmoved**
To measure off another Day 區劃
For an Approving God.

*verbal irony, dramatic irony, irony of situation, irony of fate (universal irony)

Poems That Indicate a Break Down, Perhaps Psychosis

- ❖ #280 (1861) I felt a funeral, in my Brain,
- ❖ #252 (1861) I can wade Grief --
- ❖ #937 (1864) I felt a cleaving in my mind
- ❖ #341 After a great pain, a formal feeling comes --

What was this great pain? Some of the theories are

- 1) Rejecting mother.
- 2) Dominating father
- 3) Austin and Sue -- a double sexual loss
- 4) Religious crisis
- 5) Love tragedy -- as indicated by the Master letters
- 6) Homosexual longings -- grief at understanding this aspect of herself, an aspect always to be denied in the conventional trappings of life in Amherst, Mass. in the nineteenth century.
- 7) Failure to publish

280

I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,
And Mourners to and fro
Kept treading -- treading -- till it
 seemed
That Sense was breaking through -
-
And when they all were seated,
A Service, like a Drum --
Kept beating -- beating -- till I
 thought
My Mind was going numb --
And then I heard them lift a Box

And creak across my Soul
With those same Boots of Lead,
 again,
Then Space -- began to toll,
As all the Heavens were a Bell,
And Being, but an Ear,
And I, and Silence, some strange
 Race
Wrecked, solitary, here --
And then a Plank in Reason, broke,
And I dropped down, and down --
And hit a World, at every plunge,
And Finished knowing -- then --

252

I can wade Grief --
Whole Pools of it --I'm used to that --
But the least push of Joy
Breaks up my feet --
And I tip -- drunken --
Let no Pebble -- smile --
'Twas the New Liquor --
That was all!

Power is only Pain --
Stranded, thro' Discipline,
Till Weights -- will hang --
Give Balm -- to Giants --
And they'll wilt, like Men --
Give Himmaleh --
They'll Carry -- Him!

937

**I felt a Cleaving in my Mind --
As if my Brain had split --
I tried to match it -- Seam by Seam --
But could not make them fit.**

**The thought behind, I strove to join
Unto the thought before --
But Sequence unravelled out of Sound
Like Balls -- upon a Floor.**

341 After Great Pain

After great pain, a formal feeling comes--
The Nerves sit ceremonious, like Tombs--
The stiff Heart questions was it He, that bore,
And Yesterday, or Centuries before?

The Feet, mechanical, go round--
Of Ground, or Air, or Ought—
A Wooden way
Regardless grown,
A Quartz contentment, like a stone--

This is the Hour of Lead--
Remembered, if outlived,
As Freezing persons, recollect the Snow--
First--Chill--then Stupor--then the letting go—

❖ (Emptiness, nothingness)



Web Resources

Web Resources

- ❖ Audio recordings of Julie Harris reading some of her poems and letters.
http://town.hall.org/Archives/radio/IMS/HarperAudio/012794_harp_ITH.html
- ❖ Poetry, Word Play, and Intellectual Pleasure: Emily Dickinson's Manuscripts in the Undergraduate Classroom
<http://ebbs.english.vt.edu/cath/dickinson.htm>
!

Links

- ❖ Three essays from *The Atlantic Monthly* entitled The Poetry of Emily Dickinson, Emily Dickinson's Letters, and Emily Dickinson (Un)discovered.
- ❖ <http://www.theAtlantic.com/atlantic/atlweb/poetry/emilyd/shackfor.htm>
- ❖ <http://www.theAtlantic.com/atlantic/atlweb/poetry/emilyd/edletter.htm>
- ❖ <http://www.theAtlantic.com/atlantic/atlweb/poetry/emilyd/EDintro.htm>

❖ Emily Dickinson - The Academy of American Poets

Emily Dickinson: The Academy of American Poets presents biographies, photographs, selected poems, and links as part of its online poetry exhibits. Some pages also include RealAudio clips of the poet...

<http://www.poets.org/LIT/poet/edickfst.htm>

❖ Dickinson Homestead

Welcome to the Dickinson Homestead Website. This site has information about touring the Homestead and the Evergreens, special events having to do with Emily Dickinson, and links to sites about...

<http://www.dickinsonhomestead.org/>

❖ Emily Dickinson International Society

... the second year, The Emily Dickinson International Society ... support for research on Emily Dickinson at institutions such ... application packet. The Emily Dickinson International Society ... for appreciation of Emily Dickinson's life and writings ..

<http://www.cwru.edu/affil/edis/edisindex.html>

Other Books

- ❖ **Richard B. Sewall. The Life of Emily Dickinson. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1974.**
- ❖ Reuben, Paul P. "Chapter 4: Early Nineteenth Century - Emily Dickinson." *PAL: Perspectives in American Literature- A Research and Reference Guide*.
[URL: http://www.csustan.edu/english/reuben/pal/chap4/dickinson.html](http://www.csustan.edu/english/reuben/pal/chap4/dickinson.html)