

GROUPING EMILY DICKINSON'S SELECTED POEMS

This is a collaborative project being undertaken by Year 12 English Literature A Level students at Clayesmore School, Dorset. References are to the Heinemann edition, currently used for the WJEC A Level syllabus. Dickinson is a set poet in the new OCR syllabus for AS/A Levels from September 2000.

Section 1 : Grouping Poems by Theme

DEATH

Exultation is the going (3) p.2
God permits industrious angels (30) p.16
Heaven is what I cannot reach (32) p.17
I Felt a funeral in my brain (40) p.22
I heard a fly buzz when I died. (68) p.41-42
I died for beauty, but was scarce(67) p.41
One dignity delays for all (8) p.4
I've seen a dying eye (80) p.50
There's been a death in the opposite house (59) p.36
He fumbles at your soul. (48) p.28
A clock stopped. (41) p.23
Good night! Which put the candle out? (37) p.20

LOVE

'God permits industrious angels' (30) p.16
'Going to him' (70) p.42
'He touched me, so I live to know' (73) p.45
'I cannot live with you' (90) p.57
'I envy seas whereon he rides' (72) p.44
'I gave myself to him' (83) p.52
'Wild nights-wild nights!' (34) p.18

NATURE

A bird came down the walk (52) p.31
I dreaded that first robin so (54) p.32
Hope is a thing with feathers (35) p.19
The wind tapped like a tired man (65) p.40

SEA IMAGERY

Whether my bark went down at sea (1) p.1
Exultation is the going (3) p.2
Just lost when I was saved (19) p.10

Section 2: Notes on the poems referred to above

‘A bird came down the walk’ (52) p.31

- A fairly straightforward poem describing a bird. MJH

‘Exultation is the going’ (3) p.2

- Journey taken by the soul at death-use of sea imagery.

‘God permits industrious angels’ (30) p.16

- Angels can be seen as a metaphor for Dickinsons’ friend Benjamin Newton.

‘Going to him’ (70) p.42

- A light hearted poem about the difficulty of trying to communicate to a loved one.

‘Hope is a thing with feathers’

- A poem describing the characteristics of hope and its embodiment.

‘He touched me, so I live to know’ (73) p.45

- A poem of acceptance that the relationship is over, though the person has been touched by love and it’s over, she feels better for it. Feeling able to move on.

‘I cannot live with you’ (90) p.57

- This poem is set out in sections and through these sections, there is an argument carried on during the poem. The first three stanzas are telling us that she can’t reach him and their relationship is very fragile. In stanza 4 and 5, she says that she could not die with him because he wouldn’t be there and nor would she - she couldn’t bare to see him die. The next 2 stanza’s are about resurrection. ‘Nor could I rise with you’, means that she can’t live with him, can’t die with him, so she can’t live again. She would get thrown out of heaven because she feels that he would outshine Jesus.

‘I gave myself to him’ (83) p.52

- This poem is about the relationship of a marriage. During the poem there is a pattern of words relating to money, i.e. pay, contract, wealth, poorer, purchaser, depreciate, buy, cargoes, mutual, debt and insolvent. This represents that love is a gamble – the couple might be lucky but then again, their relationship may disappoint each other.

‘I’ve seen a dying eye’ (80) p.50

- This poem describes the moment of death. The last line suggests the mystery of death.

‘I envy seas wheron he rides’ (72) p.44

- The repetition in this poem emphasises and conveys a frustrated tone. The subject of this poem could be seen as God.

If anybody’s friend be dead (74) p.46

- The memory of a dying friend

‘It sifts from leaden sieves’

- This poem is a riddle, describing snow, with a use of personification.

I've seen a dying eye (80) p.50

- This is about the exact moment of death

'One dignity delays for all' (8) p.4

- This poem describes how the best time in life is when you die.

'Safe in their alabaster chambers'

- A poem describing the tranquility of death using imagery of sleep.

'Wild nights-wild nights!' (34) p.18

- The tone of this poem has a lustful tone and includes characteristic sea imagery and metaphors.

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