

Subject: Emily Dickinson poems

Date: October 13, 2005 3:27:02 PM MDT

To: Boulder Great Books Discussion Group

Here are the poems you should read for the Oct 26 Emily Dickinson discussion.

Numbers are in the pdf document you can download.

The T H Johnson (ed) [Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson](#) uses the same numbering. Just in case you have a different book of her poems, I've copied the first line from each poem on the list in bold before its number. We can discuss other favorites but I wanted to be sure everyone had at least read a common core. The Willis handout which I'll have at next week's Freud discussion if you did not get it at the [Pi](#) discussion, "The Soul Selects Her Own Society" can be found in [War of the Worlds](#) and I've also left a copy at the Meadows front desk for use in the library.

October 26, 2005 **Emily Dickinson**, Selected Poems - 178, 216, 216A, 303, 435, 486, 520, 640, 712, 754, 911, 919, 985, 997, 1078, 1123, 1417, 1537, 1669, 1723, 1647 from

Dickinson <http://sackett.net/EmilyD.pdf> or T H Johnson's [Complete Poems](#) and
Willis Connie Willis, "**The Soul Selects Her Own Society**" (9 pages)

The poems:

**I cautious, scanned my little life --
178**

I cautious, scanned my little life --
I winnowed what would fade
From what would last till Heads like mine
Should be a-dreaming laid.

I put the latter in a Barn --
The former, blew away.
I went one winter morning
And lo - my priceless Hay

Was not upon the "Scaffold" --
Was not upon the "Beam" --
And from a thriving Farmer --
A Cynic, I became.

Whether a Thief did it --
Whether it was the wind --
Whether Deity's guiltless --
My business is, to find!

So I begin to ransack!
How is it Hearts, with Thee?
Art thou within the little Barn
Love provided Thee?

**Safe in their Alabaster Chambers –
216**

Safe in their Alabaster Chambers --
Untouched by Morning
And untouched by Noon --
Sleep the meek members of the Resurrection --
Rafter of satin,
And Roof of stone.

Light laughs the breeze
In her Castle above them --
Babbles the Bee in a stolid Ear,
Pipe the Sweet Birds in ignorant cadence --
Ah, what sagacity perished here!

216A

Safe in their Alabaster Chambers --
Untouched by Morning
And untouched by Noon --
Lie the meek members of the Resurrection --
Rafter of Satin -- and Roof of Stone!

Grand go the Years – in the Crescent – above them --
Worlds scoop their Arcs --
And Firmaments – row --
Diadems – drop – and Doges -- surrender --
Soundless as dots – on a Disc of Snow --

**The Soul selects her own Society –
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 --

**Much Madness is divinest Sense --
435**

Much Madness is divinest Sense --
To a discerning Eye --
Much Sense -- the starkest Madness --
'Tis the Majority
In this, as All, prevail --
Assent -- and you are sane --
Demur -- you're straightway dangerous --
And handled with a Chain --

**I was the slightest in the House --
486**

I was the slightest in the House --
I took the smallest Room --
At night, my little Lamp, and Book --
And one Geranium --

So stationed I could catch the Mint
That never ceased to fall --
And just my Basket --
Let me think -- I'm sure --
That this was all --

I never spoke -- unless addressed --
And then, 'twas brief and low --
I could not bear to live -- aloud --
The Racket shamed me so --

And if it had not been so far --
And any one I knew
Were going -- I had often thought
How noteless -- I could die --

**I started Early -- Took my Dog --
520**

I started Early -- Took my Dog --
And visited the Sea --
The Mermaids in the Basement
Came out to look at me --

And Frigates -- in the Upper Floor
Extended Hempen Hands --
Presuming Me to be a Mouse --
Aground -- upon the Sands --

But no Man moved Me -- till the Tide
Went past my simple Shoe --
And past my Apron -- and my Belt --
And past my Bodice -- too --

And made as He would eat me up --
As wholly as a Dew
Upon a Dandelion's Sleeve --
And then -- I started -- too --

And He -- He followed -- close behind --
I felt his Silver Heel
Upon my Ankle -- Then my Shoes
Would overflow with Pearl --

Until We met the Solid Town --
No One He seemed to know --
And bowing -- with a Mighty look --
At me -- The Sea withdrew --

**I cannot live with You --
640**

I cannot live with You --
It would be Life --
And Life is over there --
Behind the Shelf

The Sexton keeps the Key to --
Putting up
Our Life -- His Porcelain --
Like a Cup --

Discarded of the Housewife --
Quaint -- or Broke --
A newer Sevres pleases --
Old Ones crack --

I could not die -- with You --
For One must wait
To shut the Other's Gaze down --
You -- could not --

And I -- Could I stand by
And see You -- freeze --
Without my Right of Frost --
Death's privilege?

Nor could I rise -- with You --
Because Your Face
Would put out Jesus' --
That New Grace

Glow plain -- and foreign
On my homesick Eye --
Except that You than He
Shone closer by --

They'd judge Us -- How --
For You -- served Heaven -- You know,
Or sought to --
I could not --

Because You saturated Sight --
And I had no more Eyes
For sordid excellence
As Paradise

And were You lost, I would be --
Though My Name
Rang loudest
On the Heavenly fame --

And were You -- saved --
And I -- condemned to be
Where You were not --
That self -- were Hell to Me --

So We must meet apart --
You there -- I -- here --
With just the Door ajar
That Oceans are -- and Prayer --
And that White Sustenance --
Despair --

**Because I could not stop for Death --
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, my Gown --
My Tippet -- only Tulle --

We paused before a House that seemed
A Swelling of the Ground --
The Roof was scarcely visible --
The Cornice -- in the Ground --

Since then -- 'tis Centuries -- and yet
Feels shorter than the Day
I first surmised the Horses' Heads
Were toward Eternity --

My Life had stood -- a Loaded Gun -- 754

My Life had stood -- a Loaded Gun --
In Corners -- till a Day
The Owner passed -- identified --
And carried Me away --

And now We roam in Sovereign Woods --
And now We hunt the Doe --
And every time I speak for Him --
The Mountains straight reply --

And do I smile, such cordial light
Upon the Valley glow --
It is as a Vesuvian face
Had let its pleasure through --

And when at Night -- Our good Day done --
I guard My Master's Head --
'Tis better than the Eider-Duck's
Deep Pillow -- to have shared --

To foe of His -- I'm deadly foe --
None stir the second time --
On whom I lay a Yellow Eye --
Or an emphatic Thumb --

Though I than He -- may longer live
He longer must -- than I --
For I have but the power to kill,
Without -- the power to die --

**Too little way the House must lie
911**

Too little way the House must lie
From every Human Heart
That holds in undisputed Lease
A white inhabitant --

Too narrow is the Right between --
Too imminent the chance --
Each Consciousness must emigrate
And lose its neighbor once --

If I can stop one Heart from breaking
919

If I can stop one Heart from breaking
I shall not live in vain
If I can ease one Life the Aching
Or cool one Pain

Or help one fainting Robin
Unto his Nest again
I shall not live in Vain.

The Missing All -- prevented Me
985

The Missing All -- prevented Me
From missing minor Things.
If nothing larger than a World's
Departure from a Hinge --
Or Sun's extinction, be observed --
'Twas not so large that I
Could lift my Forehead from my work
For Curiosity.

Crumbling is not an instant's Act
997

Crumbling is not an instant's Act
A fundamental pause
Dilapidation's processes
Are organized Decays.

'Tis first a Cobweb on the Soul
A Cuticle of Dust
A Borer in the Axis
An Elemental Rust --

Ruin is formal -- Devil's work
Consecutive and slow --
Fail in an instant, no man did
Slipping -- is Crash's law.

**The Bustle in a House
1078**

The Bustle in a House
The Morning after Death
Is solemnest of industries
Enacted upon Earth --

The Sweeping up the Heart
And putting Love away
We shall not want to use again
Until Eternity.

**A great Hope fell
1123**

A great Hope fell
You heard no noise
The Ruin was within
Oh cunning wreck that told no tale
And let no Witness in

The mind was built for mighty Freight
For dread occasion planned
How often foundering at Sea
Ostensibly, on Land

A not admitting of the wound
Until it grew so wide
That all my Life had entered it
And there were troughs beside

A closing of the simple lid
That opened to the sun
Until the tender Carpenter
Perpetual nail it down --

**How Human Nature dotes
1417**

How Human Nature dotes
On what it can't detect.
The moment that a Plot is plumbed
Prospective is extinct --

Prospective is the friend
Reserved for us to know
When Constancy is clarified
Of Curiosity --

Of subjects that resist
Redoubtablest is this
Where go we --
Go we anywhere
Creation after this?

**Candor -- my tepid friend --
1537**

Candor -- my tepid friend --
Come not to play with me --
The Myrrhs, and Mochas, of the Mind
Are its iniquity --

**In snow thou comest --
1669**

In snow thou comest --
Thou shalt go with the resuming ground,
The sweet derision of the crow,
And Glee's advancing sound.

In fear thou comest --
Thou shalt go at such a gait of joy
That man anew embark to live
Upon the depth of thee.

**High from the earth I heard a bird,
1723**

High from the earth I heard a bird,
He trod upon the trees
As he esteemed them trifles,
And then he spied a breeze,
And situated softly
Upon a pile of wind
Which in a perturbation
Nature had left behind.
A joyous going fellow
I gathered from his talk
Which both of benediction
And badinage partook.
Without apparent burden
I subsequently learned
He was the faithful father
Of a dependent brood.
And this untoward transport
His remedy for care.
A contrast to our respites.
How different we are!

**Of Glory not a Beam is left
1647**

Of Glory not a Beam is left
But her Eternal House --
The Asterisk is for the Dead,
The Living, for the Stars --

Thanks,
Bill

For a list of all readings done by the Boulder Great Books group:
<http://sackett.net/GreatBooksAll.htm>. Search that file for "Dickinson"
to find other poems of hers the group has discussed over the years.

This is <http://sackett.net/EmilySelections.pdf>.