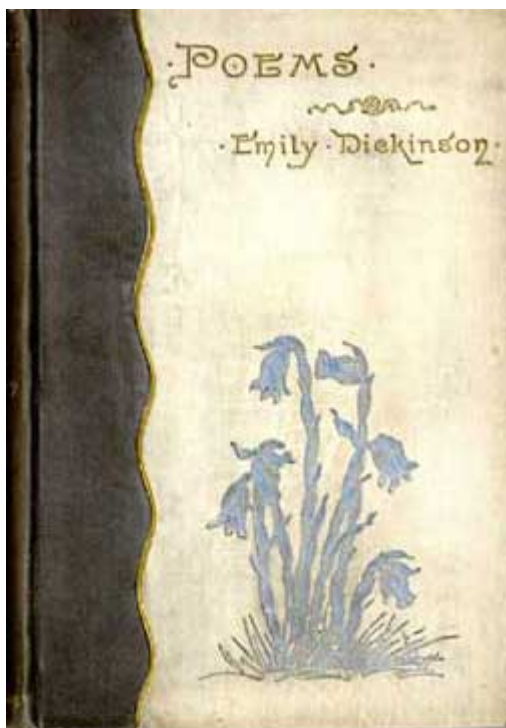


from The Emily Dickinson Reader



Statement of poetic research

One day I decided to rewrite the complete works of Emily Dickinson in "plain speech." She wrote, in an almost foreign English, 1,789 poems about life, death, and who and what she wanted to have sex with. If she was worried about death, I said that she was worried about death. If, for example, she wanted to have sex with the idea of "sex" itself, I simply restated that and called this "translation."

I was in a seminar on Dickinson's poetry in which our discussions of, and reading about, her creative work placed an inordinate emphasis on her biography. Each poem was consistently "unlocked" by the time in which she wrote it—who she had a crush on at the time, which one of her relatives had died most recently, and so on. The minutiae unearthed and recorded by the Dickinson biography industry had become the most important part of every poem—despite the fact that we actually had the poems to read. There was no real harm in it, but we treated the poems more like souvenirs than reading experiences. It was as if the poetry were something the facts of her life had produced, and we, her newly instated audience, having a sort of memoir-driven discussion relatable to *our* lives, were making ourselves the facts of her new life and its heirs.

I started by jotting down notes in the margin, applying a *Cliff's-Notes*-esque reading. Paraphrase is also an act of translation. So I was translating the poems from one history and language to ours.

(#s correspond to the R. W. Franklin edition of *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*)

900. I rented one of my vital organs from the hospital and now I have to give it back.

901. The relationship between the soul and the body is tentative.

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903. Escapism is what makes life worth living.

904. I like to believe that walking under ladders is unlucky because approaching life with a consistent sense of logic is too heartbreaking.

905. By dissecting a bird you can locate its vocal cords.

906. Even though we live in the same city, we're in a long distance relationship.

907. I'm glad I'm dead, but I hope death isn't death.

908. Worms can't wait to eat us. Actually, they can wait. And they are.

909. If you wanted to have sex with a bee, I would dress up in a bee costume, Sue.

910. Once you find something, you'll probably lose it. And then go on an epic exploration looking for a mythical blanket. And then you'll probably not find the magic blanket. And then you'll probably realize that your whole life is a sham.

911. You know it's cold outside when people start dying of overexposure.

912. Things exist no matter where you go.

913. Matter contains potential energy.

914. I was lost, and then I saw a family living in a house. Everyone appeared to be so comfortable and at home there that I felt even worse about being lost. I tried to join them, but they closed the door before I could get inside. I just wanted to live with them. I don't know why they wouldn't let me live with them.

915. It's autumn, and I don't know what to do.

916. Who lives in this mushroom?

917. Ghosts like to haunt familiar places. They're not that into travel.

918. The fact that I'm alive and that other people are alive is very disorienting.

919. I want to be so famous it physically crushes me.
920. I prefer scars to jewelry.
921. I hope it snows so that all the zombie-children can have a snowball fight.
922. I like sunlight unless I'm hungover.
923. I have a small crush on the man who delivers ice to our house. I hope he notices when I'm dead and feels a little sad about it.
924. I better be immortal. Otherwise, I'll be really sad.
925. I don't care if someone kills me as long as they're attractive.
926. I walk funny.
927. Dying's worse than not dying. Just so you know.
928. Nature is only important if humans say it is.
929. Would you still love me if I were a zombie? Would you give me a big sloppy kiss on my rotting-flesh-zombie-mouth?
930. Poets die. Poems, on the other hand, corrode slowly.
931. If the oceans wanted to take over the world again, there's not much stopping them.
932. If God didn't survive on a steady diet of human souls, he would probably kill all of us immediately.
933. I guess maybe Heaven isn't a prison.
934. My friends died and now I don't know where they are. Maybe Vegas.
935. I guess it's autumn now. Summer is a sneaky little bitch.
936. I guess it's nighttime now. Daylight is a sneaky little bitch.
937. You either become a man by going through puberty and gradually aging into adulthood, or you can just skip all of that and go ahead and die.
938. Death is a commie.
939. The only good things that exist in life don't exist.
940. How often do you have sex and where can I go in order to watch you have it, Sue?
941. This guy probably drowned himself. I wonder what it was like. I wonder if

he'd mind if I took his hat. Probably not.

942. Now that you're my slave, you don't get two weeks paid vacation.

943. I'm really upset that my slave got away, because you can't buy them anymore.

944. Nature's kind of gaudy.

945. If someone's trying to kill you, the best thing to do is hide until they give up, and then give yourself away. That way you're the one in control.

946. Dying is only unfortunate if you have friends. Luckily, I don't have any. Take that, death.

947. I put my money in a savings account, so it could earn interest.

948. God lets it all hang out in spring.

949. Death always ruins a party.

950. It's been two years and the raspberry bushes I planted in the backyard haven't produced any fruit. Come on.

951. If nobody loves you, you should probably just go ahead and die already. Thanks, Sue.

952. It's more noble to die at sea than to go on a cruise.

953. God likes it when people make castles, because he enjoys making ruins.

954. If you want my V-card, you have to give me yours.

955. I sing when I'm scared.

956. Everyone's beautiful. It just takes a lot more effort to see the beauty in certain people who aren't as attractive as the people who are actually beautiful.

957. People should be allowed to hate their jobs and not get shit about it.

958. It's spring. There are daffodils. Someone is sexually reproducing at this very moment.

959. My dead mother finds me embarrassing.

960. My heart isn't good at long-range planning.

961. Dying people are pretty laid-back.

962. Society distracts me from my precious hallucinations.

963. It's hard to control nature. Nature or human nature will eventually destroy us.

964. Zombies get no respect.

965. I can't find Heaven. I couldn't find it in Connecticut, so it must be in Maine, or else Canada. I hear that Hell is located somewhere in the Midwest.

966. Death is good because it cheers up people who really wanted certain people dead and who can now move on with their lives, happily ever after.

967. Two lovers are dying of cold. The first lover says to the second: I think this is it. We're goners. The second one replies: No big deal, now we get to go to Heaven. So they did. And their friends slowly joined them, one by one. (I'm not very good at telling jokes.)

968. Fame is nice but is also limited by the short span of human existence. I'm sorry, famous people.

969. God's kind of like an old aunt who wears a lot of rhinestones and hugs you a little too hard. It's difficult to get away from her. Sometimes I wish I could go to the beach and be by myself. But it doesn't really matter where you go, she'll follow you there, because she's creepy like that.

970. Mountains are like really old fat people.

971. Peace and God are great, but I don't actually believe in any of that crap.

972. You either get into heaven or you don't. It doesn't really matter what you do. It's all politics.

973. When I die and death tells me I have to stay dead, I'm going to be like, "No thanks," and see what happens.

974. This entire town was on fire, so I called the fire department, and they told me it was just the sunset.

975. Someone died and I'm sad about that. Based on how sad I am, he was probably the most important person to ever have existed.

976. I don't know where they put the month of May now that it's over. Though they might've put it somewhere about eleven months in the future.

977. I wish I was good at something like climbing mountains, so I could feel like I was better than other people.

978. You have to believe in things that don't exist, like yourself.

979. Bees have a really good sense of style.

980. Love is important because it encourages sexual reproduction and a general resistance to the natural human urge for death. Except if it's with Sue.
981. The Virgin Mary has enough magic up her sleeves to cure cancer. She's just a lazy witch.
982. I want to help people so I can feel good. I'll start with myself.
983. Hurry up. I want to have weird sex with you.
984. I can't get any satisfaction, and I prefer it that way.
985. When I lie down on the grass, the grass is probably screaming silently to itself.
986. I'll have sex with you unless you're scary.
987. I wish I was as sexy and as dead as my ex-girlfriend.
988. Death wanted to have sex, but everyone turned him down, so he gave up trying. He's not looking so good these days. He kind of let himself go.
989. Sometimes I forget that air exists.
990. Woodpeckers burrow holes into trees in order to eat insects that live inside of them.
991. Trying is more important than succeeding unless it isn't.
992. I didn't see her for three weeks and then I found out she was dead. I hate the 19th century.
993. Dead famous people don't care when famous people die.
994. This guy I know shot himself in the head.
995. I don't care about things because I care about things that don't exist.
996. I've never lived so good as I have since I became a zombie.
997. People who are in Heaven are generally happier than people who go to Hell.
998. Happiness is nice, but I still want to suffer at least a little bit.
999. Spring isn't spring unless I'm getting laid.

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