**Emily Dickinson Literary Criticism Poems**

**from Part 1: Life**

**SUCCESS is counted sweetest**

By those who ne’er succeed.

To comprehend a nectar

Requires sorest need.

Not one of all the purple host 5

Who took the flag to-day

Can tell the definition,

So clear, of victory,

As he, defeated, dying,

On whose forbidden ear 10

The distant strains of triumph

Break, agonized and clear.

**A WOUNDED deer leaps highest,**

I ’ve heard the hunter tell;

’T is but the ecstasy of death,

And then the brake is still.

The smitten rock that gushes, 5

The trampled steel that springs:

A cheek is always redder

Just where the hectic stings!

Mirth is the mail of anguish,

In which it caution arm, 10

Lest anybody spy the blood

And “You ’re hurt” exclaim!

**THE SOUL selects her own society,**

Then shuts the door;

On her divine majority

Obtrude no more.

Unmoved, she notes the chariot’s pausing 5

At her low gate;

Unmoved, an emperor is kneeling

Upon her mat.

I ’ve known her from an ample nation

Choose one; 10

Then close the valves of her attention

Like stone.

**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, 5

And debauchee of dew,

Reeling, through endless summer days,

From inns of molten blue.

When landlords turn the drunken bee

Out of the foxglove’s door, 10

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 15

Leaning against the sun!

**I BRING an unaccustomed wine**

To lips long parching, next to mine,

And summon them to drink.

Crackling with fever, they essay;

I turn my brimming eyes away, 5

And come next hour to look.

The hands still hug the tardy glass;

The lips I would have cooled, alas!

Are so superfluous cold,

I would as soon attempt to warm 10

The bosoms where the frost has lain

Ages beneath the mould.

Some other thirsty there may be

To whom this would have pointed me

Had it remained to speak. 15

And so I always bear the cup

If, haply, mine may be the drop

Some pilgrim thirst to slake,—

If, haply, any say to me,

“Unto the little, unto me,” 20

When I at last awake.

**WHO never lost, are unprepared**

A coronet to find;

Who never thirsted, flagons

And cooling tamarind.

Who never climbed the weary league— 5

Can such a foot explore

The purple territories

On Pizarro’s shore?

How many legions overcome?

The emperor will say. 10

How many colors taken

On Revolution Day?

How many bullets bearest?

The royal scar hast thou?

Angels, write “Promoted” 15

On this soldier’s brow!

**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, 5

And, supercilious, peer

In shanties by the sides of roads;

And then a quarry pare

To fit its sides, and crawl between,

Complaining all the while 10

In horrid, hooting stanza;

Then chase itself down hill

And neigh like Boanerges;

Then, punctual as a star,

Stop—docile and omnipotent— 15

At its own stable door.

**MUSICIANS wrestle everywhere:**

All day, among the crowded air,

I hear the silver strife;

And—waking long before the dawn—

Such transport breaks upon the town 5

I think it that “new life!”

It is not bird, it has no nest;

Nor band, in brass and scarlet dressed,

Nor tambourine, nor man;

It is not hymn from pulpit read,— 10

The morning stars the treble led

On time’s first afternoon!

Some say it is the spheres at play!

Some say that bright majority

Of vanished dames and men! 15

Some think it service in the place

Where we, with late, celestial face,

Please God, shall ascertain!

**THERE is no frigate like a book**

To take us lands away,

Nor any coursers like a page

Of prancing poetry.

This traverse may the poorest take 5

Without oppress of toll;

How frugal is the chariot

That bears a human soul!

**I HAD a guinea golden;**

My story has a moral: 25

I have a missing friend,—

Pleiad its name, and robin,

And guinea in the sand,—

And when this mournful ditty,

Accompanied with tear, 30

Shall meet the eye of traitor

In country far from here,

Grant that repentance solemn

May seize upon his mind,

And he no consolation 35

Beneath the sun may find.

I lost it in the sand,

And though the sum was simple,

And pounds were in the land,

Still had it such a value 5

Unto my frugal eye,

That when I could not find it

I sat me down to sigh.

I had a crimson robin

Who sang full many a day, 10

But when the woods were painted

He, too, did fly away.

Time brought me other robins,—

Their ballads were the same,—

Still for my missing troubadour 15

I kept the “house at hame.”

I had a star in heaven;

One Pleiad was its name,

And when I was not heeding

It wandered from the same. 20

And though the skies are crowded,

And all the night ashine,

I do not care about it,

Since none of them are mine.

**from Part 2: Nature**

**BEFORE you thought of spring,**

Except as a surmise,

You see, God bless his suddenness,

A fellow in the skies

Of independent hues, 5

A little weather-worn,

Inspiriting habiliments

Of indigo and brown.

With specimens of song,

As if for you to choose, 10

Discretion in the interval,

With gay delays he goes

To some superior tree

Without a single leaf,

And shouts for joy to nobody 15

But his seraphic self!

**A ROUTE of evanescence**

With a revolving wheel;

A resonance of emerald,

A rush of cochineal;

And every blossom on the bush 5

Adjusts its tumbled head,—

The mail from Tunis, probably,

An easy morning’s ride.

**A BIRD came down the walk:**

He did not know I saw;

He bit an angle-worm in halves

And ate the fellow, raw.

And then he drank a dew 5

From a convenient grass,

And then hopped sidewise to the wall

To let a beetle pass.

He glanced with rapid eyes

That hurried all abroad,— 10

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 15

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.

**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, 5

A spotted shaft is seen;

And then it closes at your feet

And opens further on.

He likes a boggy acre,

A floor too cool for corn. 10

Yet when a child, and barefoot,

I more than once, at morn,

Have passed, I thought, a whip-lash

Unbraiding in the sun,—

When, stooping to secure it, 15

It wrinkled, and was gone.

Several of nature’s people

I know, and they know me;

I feel for them a transport

Of cordiality; 20

But never met this fellow,

Attended or alone,

Without a tighter breathing,

And zero at the bone.

**NO brigadier throughout the year**

So civic as the Jay.

A neighbor and a warrior too,

With shrill felicity

Pursuing winds that censure us 5

A February day,

The brother of the universe

Was never blown away.

The snow and he are intimate;

I ’ve often seen them play 10

When heaven looked upon us all

With such severity,

I felt apology were due

To an insulted sky,

Whose pompous frown was nutriment 15

To their temerity.

The pillow of this daring head

Is pungent evergreens;

His larder—terse and militant—

Unknown, refreshing things; 20

His character a tonic,

His future a dispute;

Unfair an immortality

That leaves this neighbor out.

**from Part 3: Love**

**THE ROSE did caper on her cheek,**

Her bodice rose and fell,

Her pretty speech, like drunken men,

Did stagger pitiful.

Her fingers fumbled at her work,— 5

Her needle would not go;

What ailed so smart a little maid

It puzzled me to know,

Till opposite I spied a cheek

That bore another rose; 10

Just opposite, another speech

That like the drunkard goes;

A vest that, like the bodice, danced

To the immortal tune,—

Till those two troubled little clocks 15

Ticked softly into one.

**from Part 4: Time and Eternity**

**ONE dignity delays for all,**

One mitred afternoon.

None can avoid this purple,

None evade this crown.

Coach it insures, and footmen, 5

Chamber and state and throng;

Bells, also, in the village,

As we ride grand along.

What dignified attendants,

What service when we pause! 10

How loyally at parting

Their hundred hats they raise!

How pomp surpassing ermine,

When simple you and I

Present our meek escutcheon, 15

And claim the rank to die!

**I DIED for beauty, but was scarce**

Adjusted in the tomb,

When one who died for truth was lain

In an adjoining room.

He questioned softly why I failed? 5

“For beauty,” I replied.

“And I for truth,—the two are one;

We brethren are,” he said.

And so, as kinsmen met a night,

We talked between the rooms, 10

Until the moss had reached our lips,

And covered up our names.

**AFRAID? Of whom am I afraid?**

Not death; for who is he?

The porter of my father’s lodge

As much abasheth me.

Of life? ‘T were odd I fear a thing 5

That comprehendeth me

In one or more existences

At Deity’s decree.

Of resurrection? Is the east

Afraid to trust the morn 10

With her fastidious forehead?

As soon impeach my crown!

**IT was not death, for I stood up,**

And all the dead lie down;

It was not night, for all the bells

Put out their tongues, for noon.

It was not frost, for on my flesh 5

I felt siroccos crawl,—

Nor fire, for just my marble feet

Could keep a chancel cool.

And yet it tasted like them all;

The figures I have seen 10

Set orderly, for burial,

Reminded me of mine,

As if my life were shaven

And fitted to a frame,

And could not breathe without a key; 15

And ’t was like midnight, some,

When everything that ticked has stopped,

And space stares, all around,

Or grisly frosts, first autumn morns,

Repeal the beating ground.

**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, 5

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 10

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, 15

Wrecked, solitary, here.

**I HEARD a fly buzz when I died;**

The stillness round my form

Was like the stillness in the air

Between the heaves of storm.

The eyes beside had wrung them dry, 5

And breaths were gathering sure

For that last onset, when the king

Be witnessed in his power.

I willed my keepsakes, signed away

What portion of me I 10

Could make assignable,—and then

There interposed a fly,

With blue, uncertain, stumbling buzz,

Between the light and me;

And then the windows failed, and then 15

I could not see to see.