

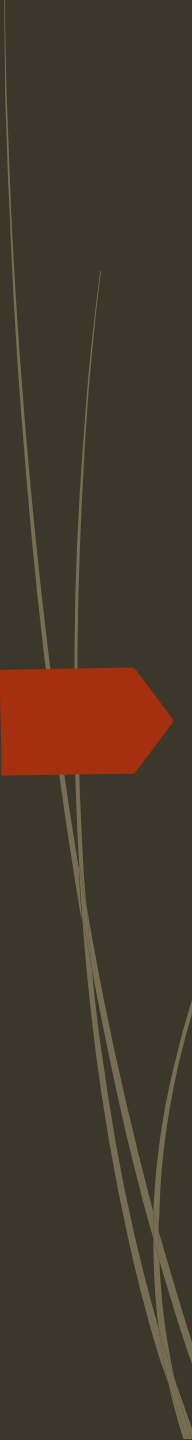


"I heard a Fly buzz - when I died" by Emily Dickinson - Comprehensive Analysis



Context

- ▶ Emily Dickinson's **I heard a Fly buzz - when I died** is one of her most well-known meditations on death, immortality, and the nature of human existence. Written in her characteristic short, compact style, the poem reflects on the moment of death, presenting it in a deeply personal and quiet manner. Through the intrusion of a fly, Dickinson highlights the tension between the grand expectations of death and the seemingly mundane or insignificant details that accompany it. The poem explores themes of mortality, the afterlife, and the inevitability of death, while also questioning the meaning and significance of the final moment.



Stanza by Stanza Analysis



Lines 1-2

- "I heard a Fly buzz - when I died - / The Stillness in the Room"
- The poem opens with the speaker recalling the moment of death, beginning with the unexpected detail of hearing a "Fly buzz." The juxtaposition of the seemingly trivial presence of a fly with the monumental event of death creates an immediate tension between the ordinary and the extraordinary.



Lines 3-4

- "Was like the Stillness in the Air - / Between the Heaves of Storm -"
- Here, Dickinson compares the stillness in the room to the "Stillness in the Air" that occurs "Between the Heaves of Storm." This simile evokes a sense of tension and anticipation, as though the room is suspended in a moment of quiet before something significant happens.



Lines 5-6

- "The Eyes around - had wrung them dry - / And Breaths were gathering firm"
- The poem shifts to the people gathered around the speaker's deathbed, who have been weeping ("wrung them dry") but are now preparing for the final moment. The "Eyes around" are those of loved ones or mourners, and their tears have been exhausted.



Lines 7-8

- "For that last Onset - when the King / Be witnessed - in the Room -"
- In these lines, the speaker refers to the "last Onset," meaning the moment of death, which is expected to reveal "the King." The "King" likely refers to a divine presence, such as God, who is believed to appear at the moment of death to take the soul or pass judgment.



Lines 9-10

- "I willed my Keepsakes - Signed away / What portion of me be / Assignable -"
- In these lines, the speaker reflects on the act of preparing for death by signing away their possessions ("Keepsakes") and determining what parts of their life can be "Assignable." This process of willing away earthly belongings emphasizes the practical aspects of death.



Lines 11-12

- "and then it was / There interposed a Fly -"
- Just as the speaker is reflecting on the solemnity of the moment and the division of their worldly possessions, a fly suddenly "interposed," interrupting the scene. The fly's unexpected appearance disrupts the solemn atmosphere, creating a sense of absurdity or irony.



Lines 13-14

- "With Blue - uncertain - stumbling Buzz - / Between the light - and me -"
- The fly is described as having a "Blue" and "uncertain - stumbling Buzz," highlighting its clumsy and erratic nature. The fly positions itself "Between the light - and me," symbolizing its interruption of the speaker's final passage into death.



Lines 15-16

- "And then the Windows failed - and then / I could not see to see -"
- In the final lines, the speaker describes the "Windows" failing, which likely represents the speaker's vision fading as they pass from life into death. The repetition of "and then" creates a sense of gradual decline, as the speaker's perception slowly diminishes.



Key Themes

The Mundanity and Absurdity of Death

- One of the central themes of the poem is the contrast between the expected grandeur of death and the mundane reality of it. The presence of the fly at the moment of death highlights the intrusion of the ordinary into the profound.

The Tension Between the Material and Spiritual

- The poem reflects on the division between the material world, represented by the speaker's "Keepsakes" and possessions, and the spiritual realm, symbolized by the anticipated appearance of the "King." The speaker prepares for death by assigning away their material belongings.

The Uncertainty of the Afterlife

- Throughout the poem, there is a sense of uncertainty about what comes after death. The speaker and the mourners expect the arrival of the "King" at the moment of death, but this is subverted by the presence of the fly, which distracts from the anticipated spiritual experience.



Mood of the Poem

- The mood of *I heard a Fly buzz - when I died* is one of quiet tension and irony. The anticipation of death is built up through images of stillness, mourning, and the expectation of a profound spiritual experience. However, this tension is undercut by the intrusion of the fly.



Literary Devices



Metaphor

- The "Fly" serves as a central metaphor in the poem, representing the intrusion of the ordinary or mundane into the moment of death. The fly's presence disrupts the expected solemnity and raises questions about the nature of death and the afterlife.



Imagery

- Dickinson uses vivid imagery to describe the stillness of the room, the anticipation of death, and the buzzing of the fly. The contrast between the quiet atmosphere and the fly's "stumbling Buzz" creates a sense of tension and irony.



Simile

- The comparison of the stillness in the room to the "Stillness in the Air - / Between the Heaves of Storm -" emphasizes the quiet tension before death, suggesting that something significant is about to happen.



Alliteration

- The use of alliteration in phrases such as "Blue - uncertain - stumbling Buzz" adds a musical quality to the poem, reflecting the erratic and unpredictable nature of the fly's presence.

Conclusion

- ▶ Emily Dickinson's **I heard a Fly buzz - when I died** is a powerful meditation on the nature of death, the afterlife, and the contrast between expectation and reality. Through the central image of a fly interrupting the moment of death, Dickinson explores the tension between the mundane and the profound, highlighting the uncertainty and unpredictability of the final moments of life.