



Erasmus+

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EXERCISE

In today's session, you will be invited to think about one of Dickinson's poems as a starting point to write a poem of your own in a similar fashion. You will not have to provide an analysis of her poem, though you will find some questions below to guide your thinking in that respect. Needless to say, you are strongly encouraged to consider them thoroughly before you start.

You are expected to work with at least one of the themes in the poem provided. You should try to emulate the effect that the poetic voice has on you as a reader and use some of the formal features that differentiate Dickinson's work from that of other poets (her style is rather unique, so, when possible, try to emulate it to the best of your ability). You may use images and motifs of your own, as well as paint the theme in a different light if you so wish.

You are welcome to provide a brief commentary on your poem at the end if you think that will help us understand your take on the exercise better.

You may provide a title for your poem, but (in Dickinson's own fashion) it is not mandatory that you do so.

Wild Nights—Wild Nights! (249)

Wild Nights – Wild Nights!

Were I with thee

Wild Nights should be

Our luxury!

Futile – the winds –

To a heart in port –

Done with the compass –

Done with the chart!

Rowing in Eden –

Ah, the sea!

Might I moor – Tonight –

In thee!

Note: In most analyses of poetry, we would comment on the title first, examining how it shapes expectation and relates to the poem at large. As you know, Emily Dickinson did not provide



titles for her poems, which are often known after their first verses (this is commonly linked to her intentions not to have her literary production be published, as well as to her understanding of her craft as a private affair, though you may have hypotheses of your own on why she decided against it). Therefore, and even though you would normally be expected to, we will not be commenting on the title here.

1. Briefly reflect on the content of the poem. What is it about? What are the main themes? (Theme: framing idea informing a given text, often in the form of an abstraction—i.e., love, death, time...).
2. Reflect on how the speaker or poetic voice is presented, as well as on whether the poem has an addressee. What can we infer about each of them by reading? (Be reminded of the danger of equating the poetic voice in a given poem with its author. A lyrical “I” need not correspond with the poet herself, and thus should not be treated as such unless presenting specific justification).
3. Think about imagery and motifs. (Motif: a recurring, concrete idea, be it in the form of an image or an action, that shapes a given literary text or the work of an author at large). What particular images, be they recurring or otherwise, can you find in the poem? What purpose do they serve? What do they evoke? How is diction (diction: choice of words, use of language) important in this poem?
4. Reflect on the form of the poem. How is it structured? Are there any specific techniques that pertain to its composition? If so, how are they put to use, and to what effect?
5. Consider rhythm, meter, and stress. How does the poem sound? What literary devices relating to sound can you spot?

CRITERIA FOR REVISIONS

The main things that will be taken into consideration here are the following three:

- (a) Whether you have incorporated at least one of the running themes in Dickinson’s poem when composing your own, and hence have understood her piece in terms of content (“I heard a fly” – death, isolation, scrutiny; “Wild Nights” – sexuality, longing, the ephemerality of good times past).
- (b) Your work on emulating the poetic voice (a confessional, reflective first person, written in the past-tense, is expected).
- (c) Your ability to spot and replicate Dickinson’s most distinctive stylistic features, primarily:
 1. the use of the dash as an extremely idiosyncratic type of pause.
 2. the capitalisation of non-initial words that carry specific meaning within the context of the poem.
 3. the deliberate imperfection of her rhyming patterns, which have recurrently been described as “slant” or “approximate” by virtue of their experimental nature, and her metric, which is “almost” perfect throughout but refuses itself the solace of mathematical precision).