

I felt a Funeral, in my Brain, (340)
BY EMILY DICKINSON

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,
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
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,
Wrecked, solitary, here -

And then a Plank in Reason, broke,
And I dropped down, and down -
And hit a World, at every plunge,
And Finished knowing - then -

Commented [A1]: From the beginning, the introspective emphasis on feeling (“felt”, “seemed”) reveals this as a poem largely employing lyrical approaches. A revelation that is (especially through the repeated introspective images) reinforced throughout the poem.

Commented [A2]: Notice the rhyme and meter of this poem—every 2nd and 4th line of each stanza rhymes and the rhythm (the beating of the syllables—the meter) reinforces that rhyme.

Commented [A3]: The rhyme and meter also work (along with line breaks) to highlight a balance between the content and structure. It’s not just what Dickinson’s speaker is telling us, it’s *how* they’re telling us. The rhythm forces us forward into the line while the line break forces us to take a breath. It changes the emphasis we place on the words. Think how this poem might read differently if the sentences simply read across the page without breaks.

Commented [A4]: Pay attention to how Dickinson uses capitalization. Each line begins with a capital (this is a formal tradition in poetry, one that has slowly become less common), but more importantly there are particular words highlighted via capitalization: “Box”/“Soul”/“Boots of Lead”/“Space”. This is another example of how content is working with structure to emphasize different elements in the poem.

Commented [A5]: Look at the word choice here as well as how she uses simile. “Heaven” and “Being” are abstract notions, difficult to reconcile beyond their own definitions. By comparing one to a “Bell” and the other to an “Ear” we can get a better understanding of the connections the speaker is making. We don’t necessarily have a firm understanding (or of the speaker’s understanding) of the relationship between Heaven and Being. But we can make a pretty firm connection between a “Bell”’s relationship to an “Ear.” She doesn’t need to mention the idea of *ring* or *ringing*, but we make the connection and gain a deep insight into the speaker’s point of view.

Commented [A6]: The word choice throughout this poem intuitively sounds (“treading” “breaking” “beating” etc.)—often reinforced through repetition (“treading — treading” or “beating — beating”). Look how both of those techniques are employed here at the conclusion with “broke” and “plunge” and the repetition of “down, and down.”

Commented [A7]: Finally—pay attention to the dash here at the end. The dash throughout the poem maintains the feeling of movement that the sounds and images convey. As a result, that movement becomes never ending in a way that it wouldn’t if she was using a period to stop the line. The dashes throughout this poem push it forward against any firm stop. The dash at the end maintains that feeling of movement and, even in ending, the poem seems like it continues onward even as “knowing” finishes.