

## Emily Dickinson

1. According to the speaker in the "Much Madness is Divinest Sense," what are the main criteria for "madness" and "sense"? Salsabeel

*All of us, one way or another are mad.*

*Much Madness is divinest Sense* is a short yet one of the most intriguing and oft quoted poems written by Emily Dickinson. The poem **revolves around** a paradox that the behavior that is usually deemed as sane or sensible is actually madness and vice versa. The poem was written in 1860s and published in 1890s and very much resonates with the ideas and treatment that unconventional people were subjected to at the time. The poem promotes the non-conformist behavior and going against the flow. **Dickinson** believes that madness is actually the most profound form of sanity as she writes,

***Much Madness is divinest Sense***

***To a discerning Eye -***

***Much Sense - the starkest Madness -***

Dickinson blames the status quo of society that accepts whatever idea is supported by the majority. According to **her**, since majority does not have an acute sensibility and deep thinking behavior, their notion and standard of sanity must not be a standard. As per convention,

***A lot of people think that something is right, and so that thing becomes right.***

Dickinson very coldly treats the universal subject of **societal oppression**. The notion that what is popular and largely accepted is true is openly challenged by Dickinson who believes otherwise. The subject of the poem is very suiting since she herself, being a women writer in 1860s could not get her work published in her lifetime. So, the concluding lines of the poem become even more personal and impactful that state the cruelty and suppression of dogmatic society and does not support subjectivity, creativity and individuality. It is unconventional and unorthodox behavior **that** brings innovation and ultimate growth in any society. This short yet extremely lofty and thought provoking poem celebrates, in a way, the idea of rebellion against popular believes that eventually end up being dictating the norms of a society.

***Demur - you're straightway dangerous -***

***And handled with a Chain -***

Hence, according to Dickinson, whoever conforms to and submits to popular ideas without giving them any personal thought is mad and the only sensible people are those who think for themselves no matter how society treats them.

***Everyone is indeed crazy, but that craziest are ones who don't know they are crazy; they just keep repeating what others tell them to.*** (Paulo Coelho)

**Q 2: Thematic Analysis of Emily Dickinson's poems: Fakiha**



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### *This was a poet – It is that*

Emily Dickinson was one of the most influential and eminent American intellectuals of the nineteenth century. Emily was one of the great poets of all time, perhaps, the greatest of all American women poets. She wrote about 1800 poems, only seven of which were published during her lifetime. She wrote her poems without any limitations, and nothing could curb her. The most **frequent themes** in her poems are the teaching of **Jesus Christ, nature, love, God, Religious pain, identity, immortality, separation, the inner world of a person, pain and suffering, and obviously death**. Themes and imagery of her poems are borrowed from ordinary life and the ordinary things around her.

Dickinson has always challenged the established norms of her life. Many of her poems were written in reaction against the literary critics of her time. *This was a Poet—It is that* was written in reaction to **Ralph Waldo Emerson's** statement that *poets are thus liberating gods*. Dickinson questions the popular Emersonian views. In particular, this poem is a reaction to Emerson's belief that *the poet is the sayer, the namer, and represents beauty*. Basically, it is a reaction to the idea that the poet is the creator of beautiful words, liberating the common people by giving them words they would not have access to. Dickinson does not consider herself a robber baron of words. She also chooses to deny that the poets are liberating gods because she feels that the poet is in fact dominating the ordinary person, not liberating them. Instead, Dickinson chooses to categorize herself with the ordinary people. She is criticizing Emerson's obvious belief that the poet is above the ordinary man.

Dickinson in *This was a Poet—It is that* talks about the immense power she feels as a poet. **She talks** about this immersion of the human poet into the universal psyche in her legendary poem, "This was a Poet—It is That." The pronoun 'It' in line 1 shows that Emily **sets** out to speak about poets in general, both male and female, but in fact the poem gives a brilliant, brief account of her own poetic practice and achievement. Main theme of **the** poem is power of poetry.

*This was a Poet – It is That  
Distills amazing sense  
From ordinary Meanings –  
And Attar so immense*

The *amazing sense* and *attar so immense* stress how novelty and compressed expression give new significance to transient beauty and thereby create both envy and surprise about one's own limited vision. The idea that poetry helps us see the familiar **things freshly** by presenting **them** strangely or with novelty is at least as old as Aristotle's Poetics. The **third stanza** stresses the pictorial quality of poems, as one might expect from an image-maker like Dickinson no matter how generalized her own picturing **is**.

*Of Pictures, the Discloser –  
The Poet – it is He –  
Entitles Us – by Contrast –  
To ceaseless Poverty –*

The somewhat puzzling notion that the poet entitles others to poverty may be an ironic pun on "entitling," as giving others a low status, but more likely it means that they can endure their own poverty because they can borrow the poet's riches, although both meanings may be intended.



The last stanza seems to refer back to the poet a little cryptically and not to those who suffer poverty. The poet's portion is so deep and permanent that he is unconscious of it and will feel no resentment about how much others take from him. Of course, poets are usually pleased and not even unconsciously resentful at lending their vision, so one assumes that Emily Dickinson's overstatement is designed to suggest some strangely personal apprehension about feeding on the spirit of poets possibly a serious or playful concern with an emotional parasitism in herself, or even in those who will not recognize her ability.

### ***Much Madness is Divinest Sense***

Emily Dickinson, one of the distinguished American poets, wrote *Much Madness is divinest Sense*. It's a short poem and yet thought-provoking. The poem is about divine wisdom and madness towards religion. It was first published in 1890. The poem illustrates how society deals with spiritual people who do not follow their norms. Written in the nineteenth century, 'Much Madness is Divinest Sense' is an eight-line poem that expresses the feelings of every individual who has at least once thought of living a life free from the servility of the society. "Much Madness is Divinest Sense" is the criticism on the judgmental society.

The speaker states that much of what is considered to be crazy is actually the opposite—clear-sighted, truthful sanity. That said, only those who can look at the world objectively and independently will see this. Similarly, much of what is considered normal and sensible is actually the worst kind of madness. The speaker says this is the fault of the majority, the status quo of society which, on this issue, as with all others, always wins out. If one agrees with society's norms, one is accepted into society and considered to be rational. But if one disagrees with these norms, one is immediately seen as a threat and is restrained and restricted, whether physically, emotionally, psychologically, or economically. Dickinson believes that madness is actually the most profound form of sanity as she writes,

***Much Madness is divinest Sense***

***To a discerning Eye -***

***Much Sense - the starkest Madness -***

This poem, like many others, deals with incredibly important themes. These include madness/sanity, society, and conformity. The theme of this poem can be rebellion either against the so-called sane society that wouldn't mind its own business interfering into the lives of people they call insane, or the revolution their thoughts can bring into the minds of people causing them to abandon the whole idea of a society.

