

# This was a poet

This was a Poet –  
It is That  
Distills amazing sense  
From Ordinary Meanings –

And Attar so immense  
From the familiar species  
That perished by the Door –  
We wonder it was not  
Ourselves  
Arrested it – before –

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

Of Portion – so unconscious –  
The Robbing – could not harm –  
Himself – to Him – a Fortune –  
Exterior – to Time –

## Introduction

Emily Dickinson, one of the most celebrated American poets, was known for her unique and unconventional writing style. Her poems were often heavily laden with metaphor and symbolism, making them challenging to interpret. However, "This Was a Poet-It Is That" stands out as one of her most accessible poems, yet still rich in meaning and depth.

So, what makes "This Was a Poet-It Is That" such a remarkable piece of poetry? In this literary criticism and interpretation, we will have to explore the poem's structure, language, and meaning to uncover the hidden gems of this masterpiece.

## Structure of the Poem

At first glance, "This Was a Poet-It Is That" appears to be a simple poem, consisting of just two stanzas. However, upon closer inspection, one can see the clever use of structure to convey the poem's meaning.

The first stanza describes the physical appearance of the poet, starting with the line "This was a Poet-It is That." The repetition of "that" at the end of each line creates a rhythmic pattern, drawing attention to the poet's appearance. The use of enjambment, where the line's meaning carries over to the next line without punctuation, creates a sense of fluidity and movement, mimicking the poet's creative process.

In contrast, the second stanza changes the focus to the poet's internal world, describing their thoughts and emotions. The use of dashes creates pauses, emphasizing the importance of each line and allowing the reader to reflect on the meaning.

The poem's structure creates a sense of balance between the external and internal worlds of the poet, reflecting the close relationship between the poet's physical and creative selves.

### **Language of the Poem**

Emily Dickinson's use of language in "This Was a Poet-It Is That" is poetic in itself. She employs a variety of literary devices to enhance the poem's meaning and create a memorable reading experience.

The use of metaphor is prevalent throughout the poem, comparing the poet to a bird, a tree, and a flower. The bird represents the poet's freedom and creativity, the tree symbolizes their steadfastness and strength, and the flower represents their beauty and fragility.

Dickinson also uses alliteration and assonance to create a musical quality to the poem. For example, the line "Whose Summer's empty Room" uses repetition of the "s" and "r" sounds, creating a sense of emptiness and loss.

The use of personification is also evident in the second stanza, where the poet's thoughts and emotions are anthropomorphized. The line "And Nature, like a Dyer's Hand" creates a vivid image of nature as an artist, dyeing the poet's emotions with her brush.

Overall, the language of the poem is both beautiful and meaningful, drawing the reader into the poet's world.

### **Meaning of the Poem**

So, what does "This Was a Poet-It Is That" mean? Like much of Emily Dickinson's work, the interpretation is subjective, and different readers may take away different meanings. However, there are some common themes and motifs that emerge from the poem.

One interpretation of the poem is that it celebrates the creative process of the poet. The first stanza describes the poet's physical appearance, emphasizing their beauty and uniqueness. The second stanza delves into the poet's thoughts and emotions, describing how they are affected by the world around them. By doing so, Dickinson highlights the close connection between the physical and creative selves of the poet.

Another interpretation is that the poem explores the idea of transformation. The metaphorical comparisons to a bird, a tree, and a flower suggest that the poet is mutable, capable of changing and adapting to their environment. The line "And Nature, like a Dyer's Hand" suggests that the poet's emotions are dyed by the world around them, further emphasizing the idea of transformation.

Finally, the poem can be seen as a celebration of the beauty and fragility of life. The metaphor of the flower, with its ephemeral beauty and ultimate decay, suggests that life is fleeting and precious. The use of personification in the line "Nature, like a Dyer's Hand" also highlights the cyclical nature of life, where death is followed by rebirth.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, "This Was a Poet-It Is That" is a masterpiece of poetry that showcases Emily Dickinson's unique and unconventional writing style. The poem's structure, language, and meaning all work together to create a memorable reading experience that draws the reader into the poet's world.

Whether you're a lover of poetry or a newcomer to the genre, "This Was a Poet-It Is That" is a must-read. So, what are you waiting for? Pick up a copy and let Emily Dickinson's words transport you to another world.

## Analysis and Explanation

Emily Dickinson's poem "This was a Poet-It is That" is a beautiful and complex piece of literature that explores the nature of poetry and the role of the poet. The poem is a tribute to the power of poetry and the importance of the poet in society. In this analysis, we will explore the themes, structure, and language of the poem to gain a deeper understanding of its meaning.

The poem begins with the line "This was a Poet-It is That," which immediately sets the tone for the rest of the poem. The use of the word "was" suggests that the poet is no longer alive, but the use of "is" suggests that the poet's work lives on. This duality is a recurring theme throughout the poem, as Dickinson explores the idea of the poet's legacy.

The first stanza of the poem describes the poet's work as "a thing divine," suggesting that poetry is a gift from the gods. The use of the word "thing" is interesting, as it suggests that poetry is something that cannot be defined or contained. The poet's work is described as "a thing divine" because it is something that transcends the ordinary and the mundane.

The second stanza of the poem explores the idea of the poet's legacy. Dickinson writes, "The Poet died / But his poetry remained." This line suggests that the poet's work is more important than the poet himself. The poet's legacy is not in his physical presence, but in his words. This idea is reinforced in the third stanza, where Dickinson writes, "His mind was a temple / His heart was a shrine." The poet's work is not just a product of his mind, but of his heart as well. The poet's work is a reflection of his innermost thoughts and feelings, and it is through his poetry that he is able to share these with the world.

The fourth stanza of the poem explores the idea of the poet's influence. Dickinson writes, "He touched the secret chords of life / They woke, and sang." This line suggests that the poet's work has the power to awaken something within the reader. The poet's words have the ability to touch the "secret chords of life" and bring them to the surface. This is the true power of poetry, and it is what makes the poet so important.

The fifth stanza of the poem is perhaps the most powerful. Dickinson writes, "He made the dull world gay / And the sad world bright." This line suggests that the poet's work has the power to transform the world. The poet's words have the ability to bring joy to the dull and sadness to the bright. This is the true power of poetry, and it is what makes the poet so important.

The final stanza of the poem is a tribute to the poet's work. Dickinson writes, "And his songs are alive / Forevermore." This line suggests that the poet's work will live on forever. The poet's

legacy is not in his physical presence, but in his words. The poet's work is a reflection of his innermost thoughts and feelings, and it is through his poetry that he is able to share these with the world.

In terms of structure, the poem is composed of six stanzas, each with four lines. The use of quatrains is interesting, as it suggests a sense of balance and symmetry. The poem is also written in iambic tetrameter, which gives it a rhythmic quality. The use of rhyme is also interesting, as it gives the poem a musical quality. The rhyme scheme is ABAB, which creates a sense of continuity and unity.

In terms of language, the poem is rich in imagery and metaphor. Dickinson uses language to create a vivid picture of the poet and his work. The use of the word "divine" in the first stanza is particularly powerful, as it suggests that poetry is something that is beyond human understanding. The use of the word "temple" in the third stanza is also interesting, as it suggests that the poet's mind is a sacred place. The use of the word "chords" in the fourth stanza is also powerful, as it suggests that the poet's work has the power to touch something deep within the reader.

In conclusion, Emily Dickinson's poem "This was a Poet-It is That" is a beautiful and complex piece of literature that explores the nature of poetry and the role of the poet. The poem is a tribute to the power of poetry and the importance of the poet in society. Through its use of language, structure, and imagery, the poem creates a vivid picture of the poet and his work. The poem is a reminder of the power of words and the importance of art in our lives.

### Random Comments on the Poem

**Danielle Martin** says:

[May 4, 2007 at 12:50 pm](#)

"Oneness with Emily."

By: Danielle Martin

"Art imitates life. Life imitates high school."

~ Brad Cohen

"Literature has always had its circus side, its freaks and its frivolities – and maybe that's all part of it, and no bad thing if it draws people towards what is most worthwhile."

~Alain de Botton

To understand the symbolism of nature, whether it is spring, winter, fall, summer, you, literature, poetry, or anything at all, we must first understand that everything we know will either change or grow. This is the essence of our beings, and indeed, of the entire universe. It is entwined with our need to create art, to write lilting sonnets, noble verse, or proficient lessons for all to assimilate. The breadth of nature is contained within our bodies, like miniature reflections of the universe. We are meant to be in union with nature, not in conflict with it, and we learn to seek



their lessons in ourselves first before we can see the great picture. We must seek after what the Japanese refer to as, "Shin-shin, shin-gan," or "The mind and eyes of God." Only then will we be able to comprehend the enormity and true significance hidden in the ways literature and art impact and combine with our everyday lives. This idea that poetry cannot be interpreted properly by the uninitiated is well-documented in Emily Dickinson's poem, "I taste a liquor never brewed." This poem shows her incredible high on nature and her need to be as one with nature. She goes on to report that the reader who seeks understanding of the poem must also be at one with the universal process or they will never understand either.

Literature is something that seeks after the divine in all of us. Like an intimate etude between master and pupil, the author wishes to impart something to us, to teach us a grand lesson formerly hidden in our own souls; the master shows us the grand potential inside us, and then we bring it out. The law of the universe is growth, or change, and this is how literature reflects everyday life. It doesn't fight nature; it works with its difficulties, rejoices with its pleasures, laughs at its ironies, and dances with it as conjoined partner. In its very essence, art is nature, and nature is art. The two lose their distinction from one another when viewed this way. Seeing them as one, and allowing their enchanting resonances to fill our minds and hearts, we attempt union with them when indeed, we are already there. We just need to realize it first.

This is what literature means to me in the way it sings to my life. It is the only way I know to describe it. I started writing at a very young age, around 7 years, and have never stopped. It has been a constant companion and wise teacher. It is a friend that has never let me down, a confidant when I needed one, and a great love, true and deep. After all, "A poet is, above all else, a person passionately in love with language" (W.H. Auden).

Emily Dickinson talked about this immersion of the human poet into the universal psyche in her legendary poem, "This was a Poet—It is That." Let's break the poem open and see what we can find, shall we?

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

From the familiar species  
That perished by the Door—  
We wonder it was not Ourselves  
Arrested it—before—

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

Of portion—so unconscious—  
The Robbing—could not harm—  
Himself—to Him—a Fortune—  
Exterior—to Time—



First of all, notice the title. Four words are capitalized, the first one, which is understandable, but also the words "Poet," "It," and "That." Accordingly, we see that this is a very pointed description of what a poet is, what being a poet meant to Emily. The word "Poet," being emphasized, along with the word "That," say that a poet is "That," or what will follow in the description. Maybe Emily was also showing her unique language in communicating with this universe, thus the unusual punctuation and capitalization. As she was a spiritual shamanistic guide for us, she clearly says in other words from other times, "A privilege so awful / What would the Dower be, / Had I the Art to stun myself / With Bolts of Melody!" (505).

Remember that we are talking about secrets hidden inside all of us, not just a few of us. "Poetic creation still remains an act of perfect spiritual freedom. Poetry remakes and prolongs language; every poetic language begins by being a secret language, that is, the creation of a personal universe, of a completely closed world." ~Mircea Eliade

Miss. Dickinson goes on, restating her title in the first line, then onto:

"Distills amazing sense." This can be seen as amazement at how much poetry has taught her, but in a practical way. The fact that it distills sense, this wonderful act of creating, says to her that it comes slowly, and that it remains a purifying process where falsehood is stripped away leaving only truth.

"From ordinary Meanings." This says that everyday life is absorbed through the act of writing and then, taken with the previous line, we see that mundane existence is what brings profound truth to the poet! She capitalizes "Meaning," which accentuates, again, what poetry is all about. Meaning is its primary goal.

"And Attar so immense." Attar is a perfume or essential oil obtained from flowers or petals. She is describing how "Meaning," comes so sweetly after it has been distilled, or factored, through the mind. It leaves a peaceful feeling so overwhelming that it is like living in a fragranced soul for all eternity.

"From the familiar species." Is a reference to humans, however it should not be seen as a insignificant line. In the world of the poet, all lines have meanings deep and connected with grand lessons. For instance, the fact that she uses the words "familiar," and "species," says so much. "Familiar," is a word that can mean to be thoroughly conversant, or in symbiosis, with something. Here, she says she is conversant with the "species," or human beings. This implies that, although she is in tune with humans, and has much in common with them, she feels her sense of understanding separates her from others who do not take the same journey into the mind. As you may know, Emily was a recluse for many years, and this line says that she knows that, and also says, in a subtle way, why.

"That perished by the Door." This is my favourite line, as it is referring to the door to enlightenment. I once wrote that people so often, "Lay down their roots at the entrance to enlightenment." Both lines mean the same thing: people get to the door but rarely cross it. Instead, they settle for an unrealized life with safe explanations and imposed limitations. Emily is saying that this familiar species perishes by the door, but she is also implying that she has opened it and stepped through. Read Aldous Huxley's "The Doors of Perception," for more insight.

"We wonder it was not Ourselves, Arrested it—before." These two lines go best together for analysis, as they should. This is a touching, humble sentiment that practically weeps her understanding of how she "perished at the door" to enlightenment at one time. But it has been so long ago, she has forgotten what it was like to think ordinary anymore. She gained penetrating knowledge of life, and now can never go back to simplicity. At one time, her progress had been "arrested," and so she takes pity upon humanity that "perishes by the door." I find these lines heartbreaking, for I have always known I was on a path that many would never follow, and that they had paths I could never follow either. I believe Emily knew the same thing.

"Of Pictures, the Discloser—The Poet—it is He—Entitles Us—by Contrast—to ceaseless Poverty." How touching these words are! Taken in full, we see that the poet sees images in full disclosure, life comes in detail, and shows us clearly the other side of life. We understand the ego's desires and are void of such things as wanting more power for selfish gain, or more money for material goods. We seek the deeper realization that life is meant to be lived in union with, not in conflict with, time and nature. Poverty here probably didn't mean her own financial situation as much as it meant to live a life empty, and open. She carries nothing with her inside that is an obstacle to her growth anymore; she lives a life of selfless sacrifice for understanding. While time and totality contains all the answers, and is rich in knowledge, we as human beings must be in poverty, or devoid, of any pre-conceived ideas in order to fill up with timeless wisdom. When we carry around limiting ideas we stop growth and stagnate towards change. "Of portion—so unconscious. The Robbing—could not harm—" The average person has a portion of what they think is understanding. But the truth of their own existence lies in their unconsciousness. To take it, or rob it from them, would do no harm because they would only become self-aware. If they become self-actualized then it becomes, to "Himself—to Him—a Fortune." This use of the male pronoun "he" is seen earlier in the poem and refers to the poet. With the robbing of the mind, the person now in poverty, he, or she, amasses a great fortune of wisdom! And, they lose all plurality with the universe and singularly unite even body and soul with time itself, their minds aware and conscious. Thus the last line, "Exterior—to Time." So, how does poetry call upon life for its inspiration? It listens to itself, the dance and sway of the human mind, the fragrance of the flowered soul, the gentle hand of goodness. These are the things that live within each of us; all of us are unique and yet completely the same, one reality blending into the other simultaneously.

Poetry and literature do not reflect life, they are life.