

Exploring Emily Dickinson

Success is counted sweetest
 By those who ne'er succeed.
 To comprehend a nectar
 Requires sorest need.

Not one of all the purple host
 Who took the flag to-day
 Can tell the definition,
 So clear, of victory,

As he, defeated, dying,
 On whose forbidden ear
 The distant strains of triumph
 Break, agonized and clear.

I like to see it lap the miles,
 And lick the valleys up,
 And stop to feed itself at tanks;
 And then, prodigious, step

Around a pile of mountains,
 And, supercilious, peer
 In shanties by the sides of roads;
 And then a quarry pare

To fit its sides, and crawl between,
 Complaining all the while
 In horrid, hooting stanza;
 Then chase itself down hill

And neigh like Boanerges;
 Then, punctual as a star,
 Stop—docile and omnipotent—
 At its own stable door.

One dignity delays for all,
 One mitred afternoon.
 None can avoid this purple,
 None evade this crown.

Coach it insures, and footmen,
 Chamber and state and throng;
 Bells, also, in the village,
 As we ride grand along.

What dignified attendants,
 What service when we pause!
 How loyally at parting
 Their hundred hats they raise!

How pomp surpassing ermine,
 When simple you and I
 Present our meek escutcheon,
 And claim the rank to die!

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.

I heard a fly buzz when I died;
The stillness round my form
Was like the stillness in the air
Between the heavens of storm.

The eyes beside had wrung them dry,
And breaths were gathering sure
For that last onset, when the king
Be witnessed in his power.

I willed my keepsakes, signed away
What portion of me I
Could make assignable,—and then
There interposed a fly,

With blue, uncertain, stumbling buzz,
Between the light and me;
And then the windows failed, and then
I could not see to see.