

BOLTS OF MELODY

NEW POEMS OF
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NEW YORK AND LONDON
HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS

1945

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PART ONE

PART ONE

NOTHING reveals the scope of Emily Dickinson's insight more than the variety of her themes. This I have attempted to bring out by the arrangement of the poems in this book.

The poems in Part One have been grouped in such a way that the subject matter progresses toward a climax. First comes the world without, nature in its various aspects; the circuit of a day, of a year; weather; animals and plants. So great is the renewal of spirit gained from nature that Emily could exclaim in some surprise,

I thought that nature was enough
Till human nature came!

So next are the Ages of Man: childhood; the awakening of emotion, of romantic love; some poignant stanzas about other human beings, and finally meditations on the mystery of death. All the foregoing lead up to three groups of philosophical poems which open vistas into the significance of life. These culminate in "An Ablative Estate," a section in which more than half of the poems, among them the greatest, were written during the last years of Emily's life.

The poems are arranged under twelve main headings.

The Far Theatricals of Day

Dawn, sunrise, noon; the bland quiet of a summer afternoon; the marshaling of cloud, the rising wind, the beat of rain; lightning, thunder, the "conflict of the upper friends," subsiding at last as "the day fades from the firmament away" into slow-moving night—moon, stars, will-o'-the-wisps and all "the apparatus of the dark."

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The Round Year

"The transient, fragrant snow" of late winter is followed by spring, "the period express from God"; "the pomp of summer days"; "September's baccalaureate," harvest time and Indian summer; the "early, stooping night" of November and winter with "his hoar delights."

My Pageantry

Garden "pageantry" sown in May, "bestowed a summer long," is finally overtaken by "the frost, himself so comely," which "dishevels every prime."

Our Little Kinsmen

Emily contemplates "several of nature's people," frogs, birds, spiders, squirrels, rats, angleworms, and insects—"the most important population"—"with modesties enlarged."

Once a Child

Except for a few written in the first person, most of these poems in and about childhood deal with small boys.

The Mob within the Heart

Many of these poems were written comparatively early in life when personal desire loomed large and other people had the power to "mangle." Dealing with personal emotion as it does, the section is frankly autobiographical, beginning with the quality of childhood loneliness, devotion to girlhood friends, disappointment in a too-much-loved woman friend, "bandaged moments" and the effort to forget, followed by two or three poems on the anatomy of disenchantment. After the passage of time comes emancipation from the feeling of loneliness, and with it a sense of escape and the exhilaration of discovery that

The staple must be optional
That an immortal binds.

In this release from dependence on "mortal company" Emily found the friends who do not fail, and in so doing achieved that

confidence and mellow humor which is in reality a sense of proportion. Her detachment was not completely successful, however, for the final poem, a cry of exasperation, is in the very latest handwriting.

Italic Faces

These poems describe specific persons, some of them historical.

The Infinite Aurora

First among these love poems are those written in youth—the awakening of romantic love, exultation in it, the torture of separation—all with a very special person in mind. After a while, Emily is able to dissect the vital experience, to define what it is, how it happens. Youthful rhapsodies gradually give way to a sense of “the royal infinity,”

Love is the fellow of the resurrection
Scooping up the dust and chanting “Live!”

The White Exploit

In this section the Ages of Man come full circle. From the time when Emily Dickinson first began to write poetry until her last fading pencil marks on tattered bits of paper, the mystery of death absorbed her. Her poems about death are divided into six parts:

THE FINAL INCH: These poems deal with the physical fact—ways in which a man may die. In early handwriting, most of the poems are concerned with a specific individual and “the manner of its death.”

THE SILVER RETICENCE: Here is the expression of personal feeling aroused by the spectacle of death. Some of these poems appear to have been written in its very presence—at her mother’s bier. Even Emily’s deepest emotions sought refuge in words.

REPEALED FROM OBSERVATION: These are meditations on the great gulf that separates us from loved ones who have “ceased,” and the yearning for an answer from “kindred

as responsive as porcelain." The final poem in this group might well stand as the valedictory of the present crisis in human history.

LIDS OF STEEL: This is the grave—"the finished feeling" experienced when the "lid" has closed upon a friend, but somewhat depersonalized in speculation concerning the stranger-dead.

CONCLUDED LIVES: A few poems in this section express grief for "the finished creatures departed me," but on the whole they seem strangely detached, written during the pause allotted after the death of a friend in which "our faith to regulate."

CREATURES CLAD IN MIRACLE: These are they who "go up by two and two" to meet the "torrents of eternity." Beginning with doubt as to the reality of heaven and the inhabitants thereof, the section culminates in a mighty certainty, confidence in a time "when questions are not needed for answers." To accentuate Emily's gradual change of attitude toward the hereafter I have placed near the end a youthful rhapsody, "There is a morn by men unseen," among poems of the latest period. Written in pencil on crumpled scraps of paper, these short, late poems bear an affirmation as serene and steady as the Psalms.

Vital Light

These poems have to do with the nature of inspiration and its elusiveness, the "bequest of wings." It is the "vital light"—in beauty, in truth, in poetry, in all creative art. Here is another of those great affirmations of Emily's last years compacted in four lines:

Estranged from beauty none can be
For beauty is infinity,
And power to be finite ceased
When fate incorporated us.

The section concludes with the assurance that when genius is true to itself, it eventuates in fame. It "cannot escape her."

That Campaign Inscrutable

Emotion in the abstract is depicted here, the complement of similar feelings narrowed to a person in the section entitled *The Mob within the Heart*. But though expressed in generalizations the feeling does not lose in intensity. Here are whole areas of experience: hope, joy, happiness, gratitude, loneliness, patience, and their interrelationships; the rôle of silence and of escape, grief, anguish, and the nature of failure and despair.

An Ablative Estate

"The web of life" is here surveyed by an onlooker, by one who stands "on the tops of things and like the trees" looks down, but who looks through "triple lenses." The "magical extents" of life are explored with a fine detachment, as though from beyond a battle fought through. The generalizations are objective and impersonal, dealing with such realms as the enticement of mystery and the dullness of certainty; the danger of over-indulgence in memory "shod with adamant"; also with the nature of various ingratiating traits, each summed up in a few words—wonder, faith, surprise, suspense, the joy of risk and experiment which "escorts us last." The everlasting anomalies of life are somewhat mitigated by the unescapable presence of the soul. In bygone years the faith of the Puritans held firm. The final poem in Part One summarizes in eight lines the ebbing strength which follows loss of faith such as theirs.



The Far Theatricals of Day

The things of the world
I would not have them
For I am not a man
To have them
The things of the world
I would not have them
For I am not a man
To have them

The things of the world
I would not have them
For I am not a man
To have them

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The things of the world
I would not have them
For I am not a man
To have them

. I .

THE fingers of the light
Tapped soft upon the town
With, "I am great and cannot wait,
So therefore let me in."

"You're soon," the town replied,
"My faces are asleep.
But swear, and I will let you by,
You will not wake them up."

The easy guest complied,
But once within the town,
The transport of his countenance
Awakened maid and man.

The neighbor in the pool,
Upon his hip elate,
Made loud obeisance, and the gnat
Held up his cup for light.

. 2 .

THE birds begun at four o'clock—
Their period for dawn—
A music numerous as space
And measureless as noon.

I could not count their force,
Their voices did expend
As brook by brook bestows itself
To magnify the pond.

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Their listener was none
Except occasional man
In homely industry arrayed
To overtake the morn.

Nor was it for applause
That I could ascertain,
But independent ecstasy
Of universe and men.

By six the flood had done,
No tumult there had been
Of dressing or departure,
Yet all the band was gone.

The sun engrossed the east,
The day controlled the world,
The miracle that introduced
Forgotten as fulfilled.

• 3 •

THE pattern of the sun
Can fit but him alone,
For sheen must have a disk
To be a sun.

• 4 •

A DAY! Help! Help! Another day!
Your prayers, oh, passer-by!
From such a common ball as this
Might date a victory!

From marshalings as simple
The flags of nations swang.
Steady, my soul—what issues
Upon thine arrow hang!

• 5 •

WHEN I have seen the sun emerge
From his amazing house
And leave a day at every door,
A deed in every place,

Without the incident of fame
Or accident of noise,
The earth has seemed to me a drum
Pursued of little boys.

• 6 •

How good his lava bed
To this laborious boy
Who must be up to call the world
And dress the sleepy day!

• 7 •

WHO saw no sunrise cannot say
The countenance 'twould be;
Who guess at seeing, guess at loss
Of the ability.

The emigrant of light, it is
Afflicted for the day,
The blindness that beheld and blest
And could not find its eye.

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. 8 .

MORNING that comes but once
Considers coming twice.
Two dawns upon a single morn
Make life a sudden price.

. 9 .

THE sun is one, and on the tare
He doth as punctual call
As on the conscientious flower,
And estimates them all.

. 10 .

THE bird did prance, the bee did play,
The sun ran miles away,
So blind with joy he could not choose
Between his holiday;

The morn was up, the meadows out,
The fences all but ran—
Republic of delight, I thought,
Where each is citizen.

From heavy-laden lands to thee
Were seas to cross to come,
A Caspian were crowded—
Too near thou art for fame.

. 11 .

THE sun and fog contested
The government of day.
The sun took down his yellow whip
And drove the fog away.

• 12 •

LIGHT is sufficient to itself.
If others want to see,
It can be had on window panes
Some hours of the day,

But not for compensation—
It holds as large a glow
To squirrel in the Himmaleh
Precisely, as to you.

• 13 •

NOON is the hinge of day,
Evening the folding door,
Morning, the east compelling the sill
Till all the world is ajar.

• 14 •

RESTS at night the sun from shining,
Nature,
And some men;

Rest at noon some men, while nature
And the sun
Go on.

• 15 •

A CLOUD withdrew from the sky.
Superior glory be,
But that cloud and its auxiliaries
Are forever lost to me.