

meter of emily

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 09 Aug 2005

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4486>

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aramini1 at cox.net — 09 Aug 2005, 10:25

The interesting thing about a lot of these Dickinson poems to me is that they always seem to have that old hymn rhythm:

a thousand ages in thy sight
are like an evening gone
short as the watch that ends the night
before the rising sun

Now pick an Emily Dickinson poem at random and scan around it - at least half of her poems fit that syllable scheme

Perhaps the music of the church had a larger influence on her than we can say.

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 13 Aug 2005, 15:20 · in reply to aramini1 at cox.net

Sorry if this has already been said, but I'm catching up on a week-and-a-half worth of email (just back from Alaska).

Emily Dickinson's poems are generally written in the same meter as a lot of old hymns, because both use what's known as "ballad meter." Ballad is either ABCB or ABAB, with an optional internal rhyme in the third line; odd-numbered lines are four and three beats -- not quite iambic, as unstressed syllables can be added or dropped as needed without violating the ballad scheme.

This leads to the famous (but not quite true) claim that "every poem Emily Dickinson wrote can be sung to the tune of 'The Yellow Rose of Texas,'" as revealed to Mr. Garibaldi by a ghost in Neil Gaiman's episode of the television program BABYLON 5. Other good examples of ballad meter are "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (which varies the meter significantly) and many hymns and TV theme songs.

Try singing "Amazing Grace" to the tune of the Gilligan's Island theme ... it's scary. Also, singing the chorale from Beethoven's Ninth to Clementine -- and vice versa (the reversal doesn't work so well with AG/GI).

--Dan'l

On 8/9/05, aramini1 at cox.net <aramini1 at cox.net> wrote:

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