

Three Poems To Consider on Emily Dickinson's Birthday:
December 10th, 2013

Today is the birthday of "the Belle of Amherst", Emily Dickinson, born in Amherst, Massachusetts, on this date, December 10, 1830. She spent most of her adult life in her corner bedroom in her father's house. The room contained a writing table, a dresser, a Franklin stove, a clock, a ruby decanter (pitcher), and pictures on the wall of three writers: George Eliot, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and Thomas Carlyle. Her favorite author was Shakespeare. She eventually wrote more than 1,700 poems. In the year 1862, she wrote 366 poems – about one per day.

Most people think of Emily Dickinson as a recluse (loner), but she was in fact very outgoing in her younger years. As she became more passionate about writing poetry, she went out less and devoted her life to her verses. Emily Dickinson said: "If I read a book [and] it makes my whole body so cold no fire ever can warm me, I know that is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry."

If I Can Stop

*If I can stop one heart from breaking,
I shall not live in vain;
If I can ease one life the aching,
Or cool one pain,
Or help one fainting robin
Unto his nest again,
I shall not live in vain.*

VIII

Look back on time with kindly eyes,
He doubtless did his best;
How softly sinks his trembling sun
In human nature's west!

HOPE

Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune without the words,
And never stops at all,

And sweetest in the gale is heard;
And sore must be the storm
That could abash the little bird
That kept so many warm.

I've heard it in the chilliest land,
And on the strangest sea;
Yet, never, in extremity,
It asked a crumb of me.