I felt a Funeral, in my Brain

Emily Dickinson

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 —

And then a Plank in Reason, broke,
And I dropped down, and down —
And hit a World, at every plunge,
And Finished knowing — then —

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Dive in:

1. What’s the mood of the speaker? Does it shift before the poem ends? Where?
2. How does sound appear throughout the poem? What are your associations with drums? What about bells?
3. There are different interpretations of what is happening in this poem — what’s your take? Do you think the experience the speaker describes sounds terrible or exciting?
4. In what ways is this poem about a connection to something mysterious? In what ways does it seem to be about the rupture of connection?
5. Do you think this poem says more about death or life?
6. Where would you pause if you were reciting this poem? What tone would you use, and where might you change the tone?
7. Imagine what it might feel like for your consciousness to be disconnected from your body — what would that feel like? And what would it feel like to return abruptly to everyday life? Write a short poem about this imagined experience. Think about the sound and rhythm of the words you choose.

HELPFUL LINKS:

Here’s a peppy video about Emily Dickinson:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R4WwhOdk_Eg
Here’s a six-minute breakdown on the poem by a prof online who calls this a “ceremony of transformation”:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q9ISE11zqic

Gossip:
http://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/feb/13/emily-dickinson-lyndall-gordon

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