

What Shall Do with the Body They Gave Me: Exploring Emily Dickinson's Existential Enigma

In the realm of American poetry, Emily Dickinson stands as a towering figure, her enigmatic verses echoing with profound existential questions and unconventional perspectives on life, death, and the nature of existence. One of her most enigmatic and thought-provoking poems, "What Shall Do with the Body They Gave Me," confronts the complexities of our physicality, the limitations of the human form, and the eternal quest for meaning in a finite existence.

The poem opens with a provocative question, "What shall do with the body they gave me?," setting the stage for an exploration of the multifaceted relationship between the self and the physical vessel it inhabits. The question itself suggests a sense of unease and alienation, as the speaker grapples with the duality of mind and body, and the inherent limitations imposed by the latter.



Physical Actor Training: What Shall I Do with the Body They Gave Me? by Alisa Solomon

★★★★☆ 4.5 out of 5

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Text-to-Speech : Enabled
Screen Reader : Supported
Enhanced typesetting : Enabled
Word Wise : Enabled
Print length : 224 pages



Dickinson's imagery throughout the poem is both striking and unsettling. She compares the body to a "canoe/Leaking in every seam," a frail and unreliable vessel that threatens to sink beneath the weight of its own existence. The body is also likened to a "book...not the book the teacher taught," a cryptic and inscrutable text that defies easy interpretation or understanding.

The speaker's existential angst is palpable as she contemplates the ephemeral nature of the body and the inevitable decay that awaits it. She questions the purpose and meaning of a physical existence that is ultimately doomed to perish, asking, "Can it see across the marshes?" and "Can it look a tongueless noon in the face?" These rhetorical questions highlight the limitations of human perception and the body's inability to fully grasp the vastness of existence or confront the ultimate mysteries of life and death.

Yet, amidst the existential despair, there is also a glimmer of resilience and defiance in the speaker's voice. She refuses to be defined solely by her physicality or the constraints it imposes. Instead, she asserts her own agency, declaring that she will "sit and wait the Whimsey round," patiently enduring the uncertainties and absurdities of life until the inevitable end.

The poem concludes with a haunting image of the body as a "tent" that the speaker will "take on and off" with ease, suggesting a detachment from her physical form and a recognition of its transience. The use of the word "tent"

also evokes a sense of impermanence and the temporary nature of our earthly existence.

In "What Shall Do with the Body They Gave Me," Emily Dickinson weaves a tapestry of existential themes, exploring the complexities of our physicality, the limitations of the human form, and the eternal quest for meaning in a finite existence. Through her unconventional imagery and provocative questions, she invites us to contemplate the nature of our own existence, the boundaries of our understanding, and the resilience of the human spirit in the face of inevitable decay.

Dickinson's poem serves as a profound meditation on the human condition, challenging us to confront the existential questions that have plagued humanity for centuries. It is a testament to her poetic genius and her enduring ability to capture the complexities of the human experience, leaving readers to ponder the profound implications of our own mortality and the search for meaning in an enigmatic and often incomprehensible universe.



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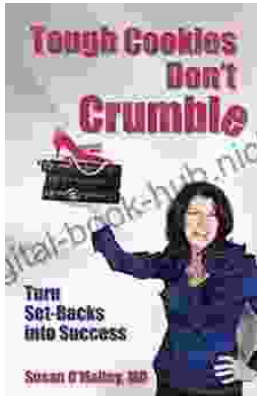
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