

The power of hope in hope is the thing with feathers

[Literature](#), [Poem](#)



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Introduction

“ Hope Is The Thing With Feathers” was one of 1800 poems written by Emily Dickinson in 1862 (Spacey). In her poem, the speaker compares hope to a bird that is always present in the human soul and never stops singing its tunes. The bird is able to sing no matter the obstacles it faces, and it never asked the speaker for anything in return for its songs. According to the speaker, hope is an eternal good that never asks for anything in return. Through her use of metaphor, syntax, and symbolism, the poem serves as a reminder of the power of hope and how little it requires of people.

Metaphors

The poem begins with a metaphor, comparing hope to an elusive bird. Dickinson has many poems who seek to define an abstract idea. By comparing hope to a bird, she seeks to define this idea and explore its significance. However, in the opening lines, Dickson does not immediately compare hope to a bird. Instead, Dickinson says, “ Hope is the thing with

feathers.” It does not explicitly state that this thing with feathers is actually a bird, making the opening of her poem somewhat in ambiguity. This ambiguity is represented in people’s conception of the idea of hope. As the poem progresses to the second stanza, it is explicitly stated that the thing with feathers is a bird, and it is done so by explaining that the birds songs sound sweetest “ in the Gale,” and that only the most powerful of storms could “ abash the little bird.” The inclement weather in Dickinson’s poem are symbolic of the difficult times that people go through. By stating that the storm must be sore in order to abash the bird, Dickinson implies that only the most horrific of circumstances could have an impact on the hope felt by the individual. The poem finishes with the speaker stating that she has “ heard it in the chilliest land” and “ on the strangest sea.” This serves two main functions. The first function is to present the idea that hope is heard when one feels most isolated. In this case, hope is an ever present treat that follows the individual anywhere they may go, and as aforementioned, no matter where they might go, sore must be the storm to disrupt their hope. The second function is to present the idea that hope is found when the individual most needs it. This function is explored in the second stanza as well, as when one does go through very difficult times, the sweet tunes on hope perched in the human soul are heard. Hope follows people, it is heard when it is needed, everywhere. The poem finishes by explaining that hope “ never asked a crumb” of the speaker. This serves to explain that one can experience the incredible fortitude of hope with little work required. This corresponds well to the third and fourth stanza of the poem, who read that the tune of hope never stops at all. This all serves to present a theme of

everlasting hope. There is little that can disrupt hope, for hope thrives when one feels most distant and vulnerable, where the beautiful sound of hope resonates in the human soul.

Syntax

Dickinson also explores many stylistic techniques, such as dashes and anaphora to add emphasis to the idea that hope is eternal.. David Porter adds that the stylistic techniques present in Dickinson's work adds a richness of statement to her poetry. Another academic, Sean Robisch, sought a more objective reason for Dickinson's dashes. Robisch explains that the dashes serve as a period, adding a grammatical "sleight of hand" to her poetry. While this seems to be correct, Porter's assertion makes more thematic sense. There are many instances in "'Hope' is the thing with feathers" where Dickinson chooses to isolate specific phrases with dashes. Dickinson chooses to isolate specific phrases that explore the theme of the eternal power of hope, and it serves as an emphasis on the underlying meaning of each line. For example, in the first stanza, the words "at all" are isolated with dashes. By emphasizing this phrase, Dickinson expands on the idea that the sweet tunes of hope that perches in peoples soul never stops chirping; hope is eternal. As aforementioned, Dickinson also explains that hope is a tune that is heard even in the most dire circumstances. Dickinson seeks to add great emphasis to this idea by isolating "in the Gale" in the second stanza. The second stanza's main function is to present the idea of hope reaching people in their greatest struggles, isolating "in the Gale" with dashes serves to assert that hope is heard especially in these circumstances.

In the final stanza, Dickinson hopes to finish with the idea that hope requires little of people in return by stating that the metaphorical bird that defines hope has “ never asked a crumb” of her. In this line, the word “ never” is isolated. This serves to really set in stone that should be thought of as a gift, and not necessarily something that needs to be worked for. Because of this, Dickinson’s syntax, while serving the poem grammatically, is more geared toward putting emphasis on the idea that ‘ hope’ has never left this speaker, and is heard in the most dire circumstances. Aside from Dickinson’s use of dashes in “‘ Hope is the thing with feathers” to add emphasis to the theme of the work, she also utilizes anaphora to point out that hope is impossible to thwart. There are several lines in her poem which begin with the word “ And,” and then proceed to describe a powerful and persevering trait about the bird. Phrases like “ And never stops,” “ And sore must be the storm,” and “ And on the strangest sea” all point towards the strength of the bird. In other words, the anaphora helps build a sense that hope gives people the strength to persevere, or to move forward. There is so much that hope does for people that when looking at everything it does, it seems to pile up. Hope can be found anywhere, for it lives inside the human spirit, as hope is perched in the soul. Figuratively, Dickinson’s use of rhymes further demonstrate hope as a driver for perseverance. The rhyming in this poem adds emphasis to the idea that hope sings sweeter in people’s most vulnerable times. In the second stanza, Dickinson rhymes ‘ heard’ with ‘ bird’ when describing that it swings sweetest in violent storms to solidify this idea. This idea is intensified when the speaker rhymes ‘ sea’ and ‘ me’ to give further emphasis to her realization that hope has never demanded anything

from her while always being present, even in the most difficult times in her life. This gives a further feeling of the strength and resilience that hope gives to people. All of the rhyming done in this poem is to add emphasis to hopes ability to sing sweetly, drowning out any terrible noise.

Symbolism

In this case the bird is presented as hopeful, however, there are other works where Dickinson takes an approach when using bird as a symbol or metaphor. Such is the case with Dickinson's "A bird, came down the Walk." In this poem, the speaker is observing a bird who bites a worm in half. The bird proceeds to drink dew from grass and notices the speaker. Fearful, the bird flies away. In this case, the bird is very aware of the dangers of the world around it. It is fearful, anxious, yet purposeful. There are many ways in which this poem contrasts "" Hope is the thing with feathers." For one, it demonstrates that life is not something that can endure anything. " Hope is the thing with feathers" seems to explain that people are able to endure many circumstances through the resilience that hope offers them. However, in " A bird, came down the Walk," the bird is very thoughtful of the potential dangers of its world. It moves very anxiously when being observed, for any moment could be its last. Just as the worm lived its last moments as it ventured into a world that was bigger than it. Indeed, there are obstacles that people may not be able to cross, there are circumstances that are bigger than what people can stop themselves. Although contrasting in these ways, the poems are also very similar. In the final stanza, the birds beauty is compared to a butterfly, and it said to move " splashless" through the air.

Similarly, in “ Hope is the thing with feathers,” the bird is described to sing sweetly, and the adjective “ little” when used to describe the bird evoke a sense of grace that the bird has. Although it is small, it is able to withstand the large world around it.

Conclusion

With the use of metaphor, clever syntax, and symbolism, the speaker defines the word “ hope.” The extended metaphor of the bird as a definition for hope illustrate that although people may be vulnerable and small, they are able to withstand much through hope, as illustrated by the little bird withstanding a storm. When all is done, this bird never asks a crumb of the speaker, further showing that hope is more of a gift, rather than something that must be taxing on the individual. The syntax present in her poem is able to effectively convey the idea that hope is eternal and is always present within the human soul through isolating specific absolute words such as “ never” and “ at all.” Generally speaking, this poem hopes to explain that hope is eternal within one’s soul and spirit, and that it is strongest when times are rough, giving many the physical and emotional fortitude to be resilient.