I Felt A Funeral In My Brain.

By Emily Dickinson.
I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,
And Mourners to and fro,
Kept Issuing — Issuing — 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 Flank in Reason, broke,
And I dropped down, and down —
And hit a World, at every plunge,
And Finished knowing — then —

— Emily Dickinson
I felt a Funeral, in my Brain, (340)
BY EMILY DICKINSON.
I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,
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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JO-fBHrvmIE
Emily Dickinson very rarely gave titles to her poems.

Her poems are usually titled after their first lines.

The most obvious explanation for the non-titling of her poems would be that she did not publish. Poems are given titles when they are intended for publication: Dickinson very rarely offered her work for publication.
This poem has no title. Actually, none of Dickinson's poems have titles. One reason is that she never intended to publish most of them. This is not to say that she never intended for them to be read: she shared some of her poems with her family and with a publisher named Thomas Wentworth Higginson. But she didn't expect to see them in books. For some reason, we can't stand things without titles, so publishers usually title the poem with the first line, "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain."
5 highly regular stanzas. This is in conflict with the irregularity of her mind. She is grappling with insanity in this poem and the structure suggests she is frantically trying to cling onto structure and normality.
The speaker feels a funeral inside her brain.
The funeral is just starting, and the people who have come to mourn the dead person are milling around aimlessly, as people tend to do at tense social gatherings.
It goes without saying that you can’t actually host funerals in your brain. We’re in the world of symbolism here.
There are two other interesting things about this opening. First, the speaker doesn’t want us to think she is comparing some other feeling to a funeral. She doesn’t say, “It felt like a funeral in my brain.” No, she says, “I felt a Funeral.” In other words, the funeral seems totally real and not just the product of an overactive imagination.
Second, she uses the anatomical word, “brain.” The funeral starts out as a physical sensation. We’ll see where she goes with this.

The mourners keep walking inside the speaker’s brain until it feels like sense is breaking through. That is, until she begins to experience the funeral as a physical sensation – as something she can perceive with her five senses.
She repeats the word “treading” as if she’s not happy about all this pacing back and forth.
Also, “tread” suggests that the mourners are somehow violating her space..” Well, the mourners are treading on the speaker.
The mourners sit down so the funeral service can begin.
This poem, however, skips all the details of the service. For the speaker, the whole event feels like a drum.
Thump, thump, thump. The funeral service feels like the steady beat of a drum.
We’re going to go out on a limb and say this probably isn’t a pleasant feeling.
She repeats the word "beating" in the third line of this stanza, just as she repeated "treading" in the third line of the first stanza.
that the speaker is feeling the pounding of her own heart, or the pulsing of blood into her head, as people get with bad headaches.
In the first stanza, the repeated treading caused the speaker to feel the physical sensation more strongly, but now she’s pretty much maxed out on feeling. Her mind starts to go numb. It's like when a person gets so cold they actually stop shivering – not a good sign.
Also, she shifts to the word "mind," which is associated with intelligence, from "brain" in the first stanza. The funeral started out as a physical experience but is now an intellectual one.
The funeral service is over

The Soul, apparently, is the floor or ground where the funeral is being held. The word "creak" leads us to think that the Soul must be made of wood – old, creaky wood.

The mourners who carry the casket seem to be wearing boots made of lead, a very heavy metal.

After they have walked across the speaker's soul, "Space" begins to "toll" like a bell. Church bells often toll at the end of a service, so we're still in religious territory here. She imagines that her mind or soul is like an entire universe containing a vast empty space.
The "Space" from line 12 turns into the "Heavens" that ring like a bell. Dickinson has zoomed way, way out from the funeral scene.

"Being" is a generic term for existence. We say "human beings," for example, to refer to human existence. If Being is an ear, that makes us into passive receivers of the noise of the universe. We can't control what we hear.

The tolling of the bell is a repetitive sound that reminds us of the "treading–treading" of the first stanza or the "beating–beating" of the second.

These are difficult lines. In lines 13-14, the speaker described being a passive listener to the great big bell in the sky. Now she expands on the feeling of isolation that goes along with the idea of a big, empty world filled only by sound.

She says that she and Silence belong to the same "Race," or type of individual. We don't know why Silence would be in a world filled with the sound of a bell, but Silence is the passive or negative side of sound. Both the speaker and Silence are passive and empty.

So, we've got quite a party developing here. The speaker and Silence are hanging out, alone as if they have been "wrecked" on an island.
The floor that the speaker is standing on literally drops out from beneath her. This floor is made of planks, so it must be wood. The idea of a wooden floor fits with the descriptions of creaking and breaking earlier in the poem. The floor is described as "Reason," a word you might interpret as intelligence, rationality, or sanity. Whatever it is, reason is the only thing that has been supporting her all this time. When reason breaks, she falls "down, and down."

Our two cents are that the speaker has inhabited one particular world – the world of Reason – through most of the poem. But now that she has broken through reason, she comes into violent contact with other, "irrational" worlds. Of course, lacking reason, she can’t describe them!

The word "then," like the word "here" in the fourth stanza, seems tacked-on and not very helpful. It leaves the poem in an open-ended place, because you could also read "then" as the beginning of a new experience that we'll never get to read about. She has this huge fall, and then...and then?

Critics have interpreted this ending in many ways. It could be that she blacks out at the end of a traumatic experience and loses her power to remember what happened. It could be that, she passes into death, this being a funeral and all. Or maybe she has been dead the whole time and now the casket is dropping into the grave. Or she has gone insane.

There are many more interpretations that you could think up. What's yours?
Poetic Techniques.

- **Rhyme Scheme**: The second and fourth lines of every verse have masculine end rhyme.

**Figurative Language:**
- *Alliteration* - 'felt a funeral', 'silence some strange'
- *Onomatopoeia* - 'creak'
- *Repetition* - 'treading, treading', 'beating, beating'
- *Metaphor* - 'heavens were a bell'
I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,
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Kept treading — treading — till it seemed
That Sense was breaking through —

And when they all were seated,
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— Emily Dickinson
This poem looks at Dickinson’s struggle with her descent into madness and despair.
Tone

- Strong sense of despair as Dickinson struggles with her insanity.
- Sense of panic as she is overcome by this ailment.
- In places the poem becomes surreal.