

Course: English Literature (2023/2024)

Level: Second Year

Semester: One

Lesson: Nine

Lecturer: Dr Nihad Laouar

"I am Nobody, are you nobody Too?" by Emily Dickenson

I'm Nobody! Who are you?

Are you - Nobody - too?

Then there's a pair of us!

Don't tell! they'd advertise - you know!

How dreary - to be - Somebody!

How public - like a Frog -

To tell one's name - the livelong June -

To an admiring Bog!

I. Author and context of the study

Emily Elizabeth Dickinson (December 10, 1830 - May 15, 1886) was an American poet hailing from Amherst, Massachusetts. Despite being part of a well-known family deeply connected to the community, Dickinson spent a significant portion of her life in seclusion. After attending the Amherst Academy for seven years during her youth, she briefly enrolled at the Mount Holyoke Female Seminary before returning

to her family's residence in Amherst. Regarded as an eccentric figure by locals, she gained attention for her preference for white clothing and her reluctance to engage with visitors. This inclination persisted as she grew older, extending to a point where she seldom left her bedroom. Remaining unmarried, Dickinson's most meaningful connections with others were often maintained through written correspondence. In the later years of her life, she became increasingly reclusive.

II. Summary

The speaker exclaims that she is "Nobody," and asks, "Who are you? / Are you—Nobody—too?" If so, she says, then they are a pair of nobodies, and she admonishes her addressee not to tell, for "they'd advertise—you know!" She says that it would be "dreary" to be "Somebody"—it would be "public" and require that, "like a Frog," one tell one's name "the livelong June— / To an admiring Bog!"

III. Analysis:

The title of the poem "I'm nobody! Who are you" suggests a theme of anonymity and a rejection of societal connections or expectations.

In the first stanza of the poem, the speaker begins with the declaration, "I'm nobody." This statement challenges conventional notions of importance and individual identity, suggesting a preference for isolation and anonymity. However, an apparent paradox arises; by proclaiming "I'm Nobody," the speaker asserts their existence, contradicting their idea of seclusion and anonymity. This is also evidenced in the second line of the poem, where the speaker poses a question to the addressee: "Are you Nobody too?" This creates a sense of camaraderie, inviting the addressee to consider a shared experience of not conforming to societal norms. However, this

statement also suggests that the speaker reveals a desired connection with another "Nobody" like them. In addition, the statement of "they'd advertise" means that the speaker is wary of conforming to societal expectations and losing the freedom of being Nobody.

The second stanza contrasts with the first one which celebrates the idea of anonymity and isolation. Here, the speaker expresses the dreariness of being "Somebody". The speaker considers that societal expectations and attention placed on those deemed as "Somebody" as burdensome or unappealing. The speaker uses a metaphor of "the frog" in which they compare people who talk too much to a frog constantly croaking in a long day of summer. This implies that the speaker seems to critique the idea of constant self-promotion and public exposure.