

# The Wind – tapped like a tired Man –



## POEM TEXT

- 1 The Wind – tapped like a tired Man –
- 2 And like a Host – "Come in"
- 3 I boldly answered – entered then
- 4 My Residence within
- 5 A Rapid – footless Guest –
- 6 To offer whom a Chair –
- 7 Were as impossible as hand
- 8 A Sofa to the Air –
- 9 No Bone had He to bind Him –
- 10 His Speech was like the Push
- 11 Of numerous Humming Birds at once
- 12 From a superior Bush –
- 13 His Countenance – a Billow –
- 14 His Fingers, as He passed
- 15 Let go a music – as of tunes
- 16 Blown tremulous in Glass –
- 17 He visited – still flitting –
- 18 Then like a timid Man
- 19 Again, He tapped – 'twas flurriedly –
- 20 And I became alone –



## THEMES



### THE STRANGENESS OF NATURE

When the speaker of "The wind – tapped like a tired Man" welcomes a [personified](#) breeze into their home, that breeze doesn't sit down for a polite chat like an ordinary guest. Instead, this mysterious visitor roams the room, ruffles the curtains, and puts peculiar visions into the speaker's mind. Both the speaker's striking descriptions of the wind and the surreal image of having a breeze over for a visit suggest that even something so ordinary as a wind at the door can be an invitation to remember that the natural world is strange and wild.

When the wind "tap[s]" at the speaker's door "like a tired Man," the speaker "boldly" invites it in—a word choice that suggests the speaker is consciously (and rather bravely) choosing to step outside their usual way of doing things. Their tongue-in-cheek lines about realizing that they can't treat the wind like a regular old visitor (there's no point in offering it a "chair," for instance) makes it clear that they're choosing to let something out of the ordinary into their everyday life. The usual protocol for neighborly visits just doesn't apply when wandering wind-spirits come to visit.

By the same token, the speaker is treating a totally ordinary natural phenomenon as something strange! The wind tapping at the door could just be a sound, hardly worth noticing; instead of ignoring the wind, though, the speaker behaves as if it's a conscious, living being, and carefully observes it, noting its voice like "numerous Humming Birds" and its elusive "countenance" (or face), which appears only as a "Billow" in the speaker's curtains. Treating the wind like a strange guest allows the speaker to see the everyday world as beautiful, eerie, and wondrous.

Through its tale of a strange visitor, the poem suggests that the natural world is only as ordinary as you make it: pay careful enough attention to a regular old gust of wind and it can seem wild, strange, and fascinating as a wandering spirit.

#### Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-20



### CREATIVITY AND INSPIRATION

The speaker's encounter with a [personified](#) gust of wind can be read as a [metaphor](#) for creative inspiration. The poem's wind could be interpreted as a muse or even the Holy Spirit—both inspiring forces traditionally



## SUMMARY

The wind knocked on the door like a tired man. Rather daringly, I acted like a host and said, "Come in!" So the wind came into my home.

He was a speedy guest, without feet. Offering him a chair would have been as pointless as trying to invite the air to sit down on the sofa.

He had no bones to hold him back. When he spoke, it sounded like a crowd of hummingbirds in a high bush.

His face was only a billow in the curtains. As he went past, his fingers made the shimmery, shivery sounds you hear when you blow over the neck of a bottle or run your finger around the rim of a wet glass.

Always darting here and there, he visited for a moment. Then, like a shy man, he tapped again, quickly and nervously—and I was left alone again.

[symbolized](#) by winds. Read in this light, the poem suggests that inspiration comes and goes as unpredictably as the wind and that poets who know what's good for them must stand ready to "boldly" open the door to such winds when they arrive.

The first stirrings of artistic creativity, the poem suggests, might sound unremarkable to someone who doesn't know how to listen for them. Hearing a wind at the door, the speaker behaves as if it's a "tired Man" who wants to come in, and "boldly answer[s]" its knock. Choosing to open the door to the winds of creativity, this language suggests, might take some courage: inviting the winds of inspiration into the house is the kind of move that could make a person seem a little crazy.

The compensations for such artistic courage, however, are great. Once inside, the wind rewards the speaker for opening the door by wandering around the room making its strange music. The images the speaker uses to describe the wind might also suggest how the *speaker* feels when visited by inspiration. Watching the wind move around, the speaker hears its voice as the sound of "tunes / Blown tremulous in glass" (that is, like the quivery sound of blowing across the mouth of a bottle) or the sound of "numerous Humming Birds" hovering in a bush. The speaker observes, too, the wind's wild freedom: it has "No Bone" to "bind" it to one spot. All of these images suggest that artistic inspiration feels liberating, delicate, and fleeting: light and airy as a spirit without a body, energetic as a bush full of hummingbirds, fragile as glass.

The inspiring wind's visit turns out to be brief and ephemeral. Like a "timid Man," the wind ducks out as suddenly as it came, and the speaker "bec[omes] alone" again. Inspiration, the poem thus suggests, is something like a visit from a wandering spirit—a spirit whose comings and goings that artists have to accept. This poem itself can be read as both a description and a record of such a visitation.

#### Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-20



## LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

### LINES 1-4

*The Wind – tapped like a tired Man –  
And like a Host – "Come in"  
I boldly answered – entered then  
My Residence within*

In the first lines of this poem, the speaker makes the "bold" decision to take a [simile](#) quite literally. When the wind taps on the door "like a tired Man"—an everyday noise evoked by those [alliterative](#) /t/ sounds in "tapped" and "tired"—the speaker doesn't just ignore it, but makes "like a Host" and invites it in.

Listen to how this [personified](#) wind comes in the door:

[...] entered then  
My Residence within

At a first glance, these lines might seem redundant: if the wind "enters" the house, of course it's "within." Read another way, though, these words suggest that the wind is entering the speaker's "Residence within" in a more intimate sense. Entering the house and *then* going "within," the wind might also be entering the speaker's *internal* residence, the speaker's inner world.

This will be a poem about what it means to invite such strange visitations. To this speaker, the most ordinary wind at the door can be an object of fascination, a guest well worth hosting. What's more, paying this kind of attention to the natural world can also mean inviting something new "within"—that is, being inspired. "Inspiration," remember, is airy: [at its roots](#), the word means "breathing in."

Dickinson will smuggle this poem's wild vision in the plain brown paper wrapping of [ballad](#) stanzas: [quatrains](#) rhymed ABCB, written in alternating lines of [iambic](#) tetrameter (lines of four iambs, metrical feet with a da-DUM rhythm) and iambic trimeter (lines of *three* iambs). Here's how that meter, also known as [common measure](#), sounds in the poem's first two lines:

The Wind | – tapped like | a ti- | red Man –  
And like | a Host – | "Come in"

Common measure is called common measure because it's, well, common. This solid, familiar old form will contain the poem's mysteries just as the speaker's ordinary house contains its strange visitor.

### LINES 5-8

*A Rapid – footless Guest –  
To offer whom a Chair –  
Were as impossible as hand  
A Sofa to the Air –*

As the [personified](#) wind enters the house, the speaker takes its measure, trying to figure out how best to host a guest that one can't even invite to sit down.

The speaker's bemusement (and amusement) with their visitor appears in a [pun](#): this "Rapid – footless Guest" is also a rapid, footless *gust* blowing around the room. The peculiar word "footless" underscores this gusty guest's strangeness. The speaker personifies the wind just enough that it has a character, but not so much that it has a human body; it's like and unlike a person at once, in a funny in-between place.

That in-betweenness leaves the speaker with this dilemma:

To offer whom a Chair –  
Were as impossible as hand  
A Sofa to the Air –

Here, the speaker is trying to play the polite "Host," thinking about what they'd normally do if a neighbor dropped by for a visit. (Note that to "hand" someone a sofa here means "invite them to sit down," not "pick up the sofa and give it to them.") The rules of inviting the wind in, however, just work differently.

Besides creating a moment of delicate comedy, these lines [characterize](#) the wind, making it clear that this "rapid – footless Guest" is not going to be a mannerly visitor—or one whom the speaker can count on to sit down and stay awhile. Its visit will be stirring but brief; all that the speaker can do is watch it going about its strange business.

### LINES 9-12

*No Bone had He to bind Him –  
His Speech was like the Push  
Of numerous Humming Birds at once  
From a superior Bush –*

Realizing that there's no way to invite their strange guest to sit down, the speaker settles in to observe its behavior—or, rather, "His" behavior. This wind might not have feet, but it does, apparently, have a gender.

At first, the speaker seems most struck by what the wind lacks:

No Bone had He to bind Him –

In other words, the wind is bodiless, with not even a knucklebone to weigh him down. The word "bind" here suggests that the poor earthbound speaker feels a touch of envy over such lightness and freedom: bones only hold you back! Landing with a thump, the [alliterative](#) /b/ of "Bone" and "bind" evokes that frustrating weight.

Without a body, the wind can still have a voice, one so striking that no simple adjective will do to describe it. Instead, the speaker builds this [simile](#):

*His Speech was like the Push  
Of numerous Humming Birds at once  
From a superior Bush –*

The image is vivid and immediate: the reader stands right next to the speaker under that "superior Bush," satisfied by both its superior height and its superior quality—for what better bush than one full of "numerous Humming Birds," and of the flowers that feed them?

This image is also deeply strange. What *is* the "Push" of hummingbirds? This odd word conjures up a whole hatful of sensations at once: the "push" of the low *whumm* sound of

hummingbird wings as it emerges from that bush, the "push" of wing-breeze against one's face, the "push" of the little birds' bodies against gravity as they hover in the air.

Describing the wind's "Speech" with this rich simile, the speaker doesn't just tell readers what it sounded like. There's a whole *mood* here. Notice that the speaker is interested in what floats and what hovers, what manages to escape from ordinary gravity. Free of the bindings of bone, the wind makes the sound of creatures whose hovering defies their tiny weight.

Readers themselves might feel a kind of hovering, suspended fascination in the [imagery](#) here—and so might the speaker. Inviting the wind in and paying close attention to the way the wind works, these lines suggest, might be one way of sharing in its footless freedom.

### LINES 13-16

*His Countenance – a Billow –  
His Fingers, as He passed  
Let go a music – as of tunes  
Blown tremulous in Glass –*

In the previous stanza, the speaker used a rich [simile](#) to summon up the light-as-air hum of the wind's "speech." But only a [metaphor](#) will do to describe his face:

His Countenance – a Billow –

This "Countenance" isn't *like* a billow, it *is* a billow—an image that reminds readers the wind *has* no countenance, no face of its own. The only way one can see it is to see the shape it makes in something else: here, perhaps the speaker's curtains, "billow[ing]" up like sails as the wind rushes around the room. The halting [caesura](#) in the middle of this line suggests that the speaker only gets a glimpse of that fleeting face.

This metaphor suggests that part of what the wind does is animate *other* things. Just as it entered the speaker's "Residence within" in the first lines, it here enters a drape and gives life to it, transforming it into its own face. Once again, there's something creative going on here.

That creativity becomes explicit in another elaborate simile:

*His Fingers, as He passed  
Let go a music – as of tunes  
Blown tremulous in Glass –*

Here, the wind is a musician: its mere touch creates "music" and "tunes," words whose [assonant](#) /oo/ sounds just like the wind-song they describe. More particularly, the wind makes the sound of tunes "Blown tremulous in Glass"—another simile that gets stranger and richer the closer one looks at it.

The first image these words summon up is the "tremulous," quavery, fluting hoot a bottle makes when you blow across its

mouth. But the idea that these tunes are "Blown [...] in Glass" also raises the possibility that they, themselves, feel like blown-glass ornaments, just that delicate and just that fragile.

All the [imagery](#) the speaker has summoned so far, from thrumming wings to billowing fabric to fine glass, presents the wind as something gorgeous, light, and transient. The speaker is richly rewarded for paying such close attention to what, after all, is "just" a breeze whisking round the room. But as the earlier lines about the "Sofa" [foreshadowed](#), this magical visit will be unavoidably brief.

## LINES 17-20

*He visited – still flitting –  
Then like a timid Man  
Again, He tapped – 'twas flurriedly –  
And I became alone –*

The wind's visit ends as suddenly as it began. The poem's closing stanza mirrors its first. Now, after "flitting" around the room, the wind "tap[s]" again, in a "flurr[y]" that makes him sound more like a "timid Man" than a "tired Man." With that, the speaker "bec[omes] alone": a strange turn of phrase that suggests this aloneness is something that happens *within* the speaker, something that changes them rather than a change in the outside world.

Looking back to the first stanza, readers can see how that would make sense! If the wind has entered the speaker's "Residence within," their imagination as well as their room, then the speaker *is* changed when the wind leaves.

These closing words, in the light of the rich, complex [figurative language](#) and [imagery](#) that have come before, suggest that this poem isn't *just* talking about seeing what's extraordinary in the everyday natural world—though it certainly is doing that. There's also a [symbolic](#) reading here. Consider:

- This wind taps quietly, sounding "tired" or "timid"—but it takes "bold[ness]" to let it in.
- Once it's inside, it gives the speaker a feeling of intense, disembodied *creativity*, making faces from billows and music from nothing. Its airy presence suggests wild freedom.
- But its airiness is also delicate, light as a hummingbird and fragile as glass. This wind disappears as quickly as it comes.

This story of admitting a wind to one's house could thus also suggest admitting creative inspiration into one's "Residence within": inspiration, like this wind, taps quietly and unassumingly, feels like flight and freedom, disappears as quickly as it appeared, and takes real courage to embrace.

The speaker wouldn't be the first to see the wind this way. Wind and breath have always been associated with creativity, from the [biblical story of creation](#) to the later Christian notion

of the Holy Spirit, the spirit of God that inspires prophets ("[spirit](#)" means "[wind](#)," too!).

The speaker's fascinated, weightless experience with this wind might thus suggest the airy delight of getting swept up by artistic inspiration, making this poem both a record and a description of such a visitation.

Making art, this poem suggests, means being alert to all that's strange and lovely in the everyday world—and being wise and bold enough to open the door when the inspiring wind taps.



## SYMBOLS



### THE WIND'S VISIT

The wind's visit to the speaker might be read as a [symbol](#) of artistic inspiration.

Wind, air, and breath are ancient symbols of creativity; even the word "inspiration" comes from a [root meaning "breathing in."](#) In Dickinson's own Christian faith, the inspiring Holy Spirit itself was often imagined as a wind (which is what "[spirit](#)" [originally meant](#)).

When the speaker invites the personified wind into the house, then, it's no surprise that "He" seems to give the speaker all sorts of ideas: the speaker's observations of the wind's "Speech" and "Countenance" are vivid, strange, and striking. In a sense, one could say that the wind of creativity inspires the speaker to write this very poem!

The wind, in this reading, is like a muse or a god, paying a visit and spurring the speaker to create; when it departs, the speaker is "alone" once more. Feeling artistically inspired, in this vision, is rather like hosting an unexpected visitor from who-knows-where—a visitor who comes and goes just as they please.

#### Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-20



## POETIC DEVICES

### PERSONIFICATION

By [personifying](#) the wind, the speaker finds a new way of looking at an ordinary phenomenon.

When the speaker hears the wind knocking at the door—as the wind sometimes seems to—they take this "tap" more seriously and more literally than people usually do. To the speaker, the wind is a "tired Man" who just wants to come in and rest for a moment.

Opening the door to this tired man, though, the speaker finds

he's not so weary after all. This "Rapid – footless Guest" rushes around the room, making strange music: one moment he sounds like "Humming Birds" in a bush, the next like "tunes / Blown tremulous in glass"—like the quavery sound of blowing across a bottle's mouth. He disappears as quickly as he appeared: no longer a "tired Man" but a "timid Man," he swoops away and leaves the speaker "alone."

Treating a gust of wind as an odd, musical visitor, the speaker opens up all sorts of [metaphorical](#) possibilities for the poem. Readers might, for instance, interpret this curious "Guest" as a spirit of artistic creativity, a muse who comes to give the speaker a moment of inspiration (a reading supported by the fact that the word "inspiration" has roots in Latin words that mean wind and breath). Such muses, the poem suggests, are capricious and delicate: artists have to learn to be ready for their arrivals and resigned to their sudden departures.

#### Where Personification appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "The Wind – tapped like a tired Man –"
- **Line 5:** "A Rapid – footless Guest –"
- **Line 9:** "No Bone had He to bind Him –"
- **Line 10:** "His Speech"
- **Lines 13-14:** "His Countenance – a Billow – / His Fingers, as He passed"
- **Line 17:** "He visited"
- **Lines 18-19:** "like a timid Man / Again, He tapped"

## SIMILE

This poem is positively riddled with [similes](#)—vivid comparisons that suggest it's impossible to capture the wind either in one's house or one's words.

Supporting the similes which [personify](#) the wind as a strange "Man" (treated in their own entry above), the poem's [figurative language](#) gets at what's peculiar and particular about this visitor. The speaker seems compelled to try to say what the wind's voice and actions were "like," reaching for images that are as hard to grasp as the wind itself.

For example, the speaker describes the wind's "Speech" as:

[...] like the Push  
Of numerous Humming Birds at once  
From a superior Bush –

This is a vivid comparison: readers can imagine the buzz and thrum of all those little wings in the "Bush," and perhaps even see the "superior," towering bush itself, full of flowers from which the birds drink. This is also a *strange* comparison: what is the "Push" of hummingbirds? This odd word invites readers to *feel* this simile in their bodies rather than unpicking it with their minds, sensing the upward "push" and lift of the hummingbirds' flight, the "push" of their humming sounds out into the air, the

"push" of the "superior" bush's growth, and the "push" of the visiting wind itself against the speaker. To get anywhere close to understanding this wind, this simile suggests, readers must imagine with their whole bodies, not just their minds' eyes. This isn't just a simile, but a moment of potent [imagery](#).

There's something similarly weird and sideways going on in the speaker's second description of the wind's sounds:

His Fingers, as He passed  
Let go a music – as of tunes  
Blown tremulous in Glass –

Those "tunes / Blown tremulous in Glass" immediately suggest the mournful, quavery hoot an empty bottle makes when you blow across its mouth. But the idea that these tunes are blown "in Glass" might also suggest something stranger: that the wind's song is itself like a delicate blown-glass vessel. The wind becomes its own instrument here!

Note, too, that the speaker uses a single [metaphor](#) amongst these similes, in an effort to describe the wind's face:

His Countenance – a Billow –

By choosing the direct link of a metaphor (the face *is* a billow) over a likeness-driven simile (the face *is like* a billow), the speaker makes it clear that the wind ([very like a whale](#)) doesn't really *have* a face: the only face it has at all is the shape it makes in a billow of fabric, perhaps a blown curtain.

All the poem's figurative language thus suggests that the speaker's experience of the wind *can't* quite be captured in language. Getting at all close involves using simile and metaphor in disorienting, surprising ways.

#### Where Simile appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "The Wind – tapped like a tired Man –"
- **Lines 2-3:** "And like a Host – "Come in" / I boldly answered"
- **Lines 10-12:** "His Speech was like the Push / Of numerous Humming Birds at once / From a superior Bush –"
- **Lines 14-16:** "His Fingers, as He passed / Let go a music – as of tunes / Blown tremulous in Glass –"
- **Line 18:** "Then like a timid Man"

## CAESURA

Emily Dickinson loved a [caesura](#); strong midline pauses are part of her distinctive poetic voice. In this particular poem, caesurae help to evoke both the speaker's efforts to capture the visiting wind and the wind's own unpredictable movements.

For instance, listen to the caesurae in the first stanza:

The Wind || – tapped like a tired Man –  
 And like a Host || – "Come in"  
 I boldly answered || – entered then  
 My Residence within

The characteristic Dickinson dash in the first line evokes the stop-and-start "tapp[ing]" of the wind at the door. Then, it's as if the speaker hesitates for just a moment before inviting it to "Come in," gathering their courage to make this "bold" invitation. The caesura in line three again creates a tiny moment of suspense: perhaps the wind has fallen for a moment, only to gather and rush past the speaker into the house.

Then, as the wind makes its way around the living room, caesurae suggest the speaker's struggle to say just what the wind was *like*:

His Countenance || – a Billow –  
 His Fingers, || as He passed  
 Let go a music || – as of tunes  
 Blown tremulous in Glass –

The dashes here mark pauses in which the speaker seems to search for the right [metaphor](#) or [simile](#): *his countenance was—it was a billow in the curtains; his fingers made the sound of... it was like blowing over the neck of a bottle!* Trying to capture the wind in language, these little pauses suggest, is as tricky as trying to capture it in one's hands. The gentler comma in line 14, meanwhile, creates some swaying rhythm.

#### Where Caesura appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Wind – tapped"
- **Line 2:** "Host – "Come"
- **Line 3:** "answered – entered"
- **Line 5:** "Rapid – footless"
- **Line 13:** "Countenance – a"
- **Line 14:** "Fingers, as"
- **Line 15:** "music – as"
- **Line 17:** "visited – still"
- **Line 19:** "Again, He," "tapped – 'twas"

## ALLITERATION

[Alliteration](#) gives the poem music and atmosphere, evoking the sounds and sights of the wind's visit.

At the beginning and end of the poem, the wind alliteratively "tap[s]": first like a "tired Man," then like a "timid Man." That /t/ sound, in both instances, mimics what it describes. (It doesn't hurt that the word "tapped" is [onomatopoeic](#), either.) Readers can hear the wind tapping in the speaker's very words.

And listen to what happens as the wind makes its way around the speaker's house:

No Bone had He to bind Him –  
 His Speech was like the Push  
 Of numerous Humming Birds at once  
 From a superior Bush –  
 His Countenance – a Billow –

This strong /b/ alliteration evokes, not the wind's sounds, but the *shapes* it makes in the things around it. The "Billow" of its "countenance" (or face), for instance, paints a picture of a curtain or a drapery bulging out like a sail as the wind fills it. Running through all these lines, this round /b/ sound might also suggest that the wind makes the whole room seem to swell, just as the curtain does.

The wind doesn't just tap and swell: it also makes music. The delicate /t/ sound the speaker uses to describe its "tunes," which sound as "tremulous" as the sound it makes when you blow over the mouth of a bottle, suggests that the wind's melodies can feel as fragile as forceful.

#### Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "tapped," "tired"
- **Line 9:** "Bone," "bind"
- **Line 11:** "Birds"
- **Line 12:** "Bush"
- **Line 13:** "Billow"
- **Line 15:** "tunes"
- **Line 16:** "tremulous"
- **Line 17:** "flitting"
- **Line 18:** "timid"
- **Line 19:** "tapped," "twas," "flurriedly"



## VOCABULARY

**Superior** (Line 12) - Here, the word "superior" suggests two things at once:

- The bush is superior in the sense that it's tall: the speaker imagines hearing the sound of hummingbirds from high overhead.
- The bush is superior in the sense that it's better than other bushes: after all, not every bush has a whole host of hummingbirds to recommend it!

**Countenance** (Line 13) - Face.

**Billow** (Line 13) - The swelling shape of something filled or pushed by wind, like a sail or a curtain.

**Tremulous** (Line 16) - Trembling.

**Flurriedly** (Line 19) - Quickly and as if flustered.



## FORM, METER, & RHYME

### FORM

"The Wind – tapped like a tired Man" uses a classic Dickinson form. Its five four-line stanzas (technically known as [quatrains](#)) use steady [common meter](#) and an ABCB [rhyme scheme](#)—both favorites for Dickinson.

These simple, folksy shapes perfectly match what she's up to in this poem. The predictable rhythms and sounds of these stanzas feel as familiar as the speaker's simple house; the wild images that rush through the poem's language are strange and surprising as the visiting wind.

Uniting the same rhythms and sounds one would find in a hymn or a [ballad](#) with her own visionary imagination, Dickinson packed the extraordinary into the ordinary—and, as so many of her poems are about *discovering* the [extraordinary in the ordinary](#), this feels just right.

### METER

This poem is written in Dickinson's most characteristic [meter](#): [common meter](#). That means that the poem alternates between [iambic](#) tetrameter and iambic trimeter. To say a poem is "iambic" means it's written in iambs, metrical feet with a da-DUM rhythm. "Tetrameter" and "trimeter" mean that the lines use four iambs in a row or three iambs in a row, respectively.

Here's how this all comes together in the poem's first two lines:

The Wind | – tapped like | a ti- | red Man –  
And like | a Host – | "Come in"

This steady, regular, predictable meter is as "common" as its name suggests; it turns up a lot in hymns and folk songs (which is why it's also sometimes known as [ballad](#) meter). Dickinson liked this meter for its deceptive simplicity. Just like the humble home in which this poem takes place, common meter made an everyday container for [extraordinary visions](#).

### RHYME SCHEME

This poem uses one of Dickinson's favorite [rhyme schemes](#). It runs like this:

ABCB

Dickinson often used this reliable old pattern (adopted from hymns and [ballads](#)) to smuggle strange visions in a plain brown paper wrapping. Here, the simple, steady rhyme scheme contains the uncontainable wind itself.

The rhymes here aren't altogether straightforward, though. In the last stanza, Dickinson uses slant rhyme—one of her favorite tricks. Listen to the difference in the closing rhyme:

He visited – still flitting –  
Then like a timid Man  
Again, He tapped – 'twas flurriedly –  
And I became alone –

That not-quite-a-rhyme between "Man" and "alone" mirrors what it describes: as the wind departs, it takes perfect rhyme with it, leaving the speaker standing all "alone."



### SPEAKER

The poem's speaker is far more interested in telling the reader about the wind they invited into the house than giving a self-portrait. All the reader learns about this speaker is that they're a curious, imaginative person who notes with interest all the little movements and sounds of their breezy guest. Perhaps they're also rather solitary. When the wind departs and leaves the speaker "alone," readers might get the feeling that the wind was the first guest the speaker has bothered to host for some time.

In this anonymity and curiosity, the speaker here is a lot like [many](#) of [Dickinson's speakers](#): a nameless watcher fascinated with the world and its workings.



### SETTING

The poem is set in the speaker's house. While the speaker doesn't say much about the house directly, their description of the wind gives a sideways portrait of a modest, ordinary home: the speaker, for instance, realizes that they can't offer the wind a "chair" or a "sofa," and the wind's "Billow" of a face might suggest a living-room curtain puffing out in the breeze. Even the idea that the wind comes and taps on the door in the first place suggests a neighborly visit.

This ordinary backdrop makes the speaker's portrait of the wind as a ghostly, murmuring visitor all the more striking. The everyday world, this poem suggests, is full of strangeness; one need only open the door and let it in.



### CONTEXT

#### LITERARY CONTEXT

Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) published almost nothing during her lifetime, and after 1865 she rarely even left her family home in Amherst, Massachusetts. But from within her small, circumscribed world, she explored the heights and depths of human experience through her groundbreaking poetry.

No one else sounds quite like Dickinson. Her poems use simple, folksy forms—[ballad](#) stanzas, for instance—to explore [profound philosophical questions](#), [passionate loves](#), and the [mysteries of](#)

[nature](#). "The Wind – tapped like a tired Man," with its [common meter](#) and its eerie-but-amused portrait of a [personified](#) wind, is classic Dickinson.

While Dickinson didn't get too involved in the literary world of her time, she was still part of a swell of 19th-century American innovation. Her contemporary [Walt Whitman](#) (who became as famous as Dickinson was obscure) was similarly developing an unprecedented and unique poetic voice, and the Transcendentalists (like [Emerson](#) and [Thoreau](#)) shared her deep belief in the spiritual power of nature.

Dickinson herself was inspired by English writers like [William Wordsworth](#) and [Charlotte Brontë](#), whose works similarly found paths through the everyday world into the sublime, terrifying, and astonishing.

After Dickinson died, her sister Lavinia discovered a trunk of nearly 1,800 secret poems squirreled away in a bedroom. Published at last, Dickinson's poetry became internationally famous and beloved. Dickinson's work and her life story still influence [all kinds of artists](#).

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Dickinson's most fertile creative period coincided with the American Civil War, which ran from 1861 to 1865. This bloody conflict began when southern states, fearing that an abolitionist upswelling in the federal government would disrupt their slavery-based economy, seceded to form the Confederacy. Battles between the southern Confederacy and the northern Union would kill hundreds of thousands.

Dickinson, born and raised in Massachusetts, was firmly on the Union side; one of her letters records her amusement at the rumor that the defeated Confederate president Jefferson Davis was ignominiously captured disguised in a woman's skirt. But she didn't directly address the war (or contemporary events generally) in her poetry, preferring to look deeply into the world on her doorstep. Between her [front garden](#) and the [outer reaches of her imagination](#), she had plenty of material to work with.

(<https://www.emilydickinsonmuseum.org/>)

- [A Brief Introduction to Dickinson](#) – Read a short article on what makes Dickinson's work special and important, and on how she stood out from the literary world around her. (<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/jun/11/emilydickinson>)
- [Dickinson's Bedroom](#) – Watch a short video about Emily Dickinson's bedroom, the room where she wrote the bulk of her poetry—like the house in this poem, a normal backdrop for something extraordinary! (<https://youtu.be/PU8XijqmnT0>)

## LITCHARTS ON OTHER EMILY DICKINSON POEMS

- [A Bird, came down the Walk](#)
- [After great pain, a formal feeling comes –](#)
- [A narrow Fellow in the Grass](#)
- [An awful Tempest mashed the air –](#)
- [As imperceptibly as grief](#)
- [Because I could not stop for Death –](#)
- [Before I got my eye put out](#)
- [Fame is a fickle food](#)
- [Hope is the thing with feathers](#)
- [I dwell in Possibility –](#)
- [I felt a Funeral, in my Brain](#)
- [If I can stop one heart from breaking](#)
- [I heard a Fly buzz - when I died -](#)
- [I like a look of Agony](#)
- [I like to see it lap the Miles](#)
- [I measure every Grief I meet](#)
- [I'm Nobody! Who are you?](#)
- [I started Early – Took my Dog –](#)
- [I taste a liquor never brewed](#)
- [It was not Death, for I stood up](#)
- [I—Years—had been—from Home—](#)
- [Much Madness is divinest Sense -](#)
- [My Life had stood - a Loaded Gun](#)
- [One need not be a Chamber – to be Haunted](#)
- [Publication – is the Auction](#)
- [Safe in their Alabaster Chambers](#)
- [Success is counted sweetest](#)
- [Tell all the truth but tell it slant –](#)
- [The Brain—is wider than the Sky—](#)
- [There came a Wind like a Bugle](#)
- [There is no Frigate like a Book](#)
- [There's a certain Slant of light](#)
- [There's been a Death, in the Opposite House](#)
- [The saddest noise, the sweetest noise](#)
- [The Sky is low – the Clouds are mean](#)
- [The Soul has bandaged moments](#)
- [The Soul selects her own Society](#)
- [They shut me up in Prose –](#)
- [This is my letter to the world](#)
- [We grow accustomed to the Dark](#)
- [Wild nights - Wild nights!](#)



## MORE RESOURCES

### EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- [The Poem in Dickinson's Hand](#) – See an image of a manuscript of the poem. ([https://www.edickinson.org/editions/4/image\\_sets/12168876](https://www.edickinson.org/editions/4/image_sets/12168876))
- [The Poem as a Song](#) – Listen to the poem set to (appropriately odd and unpredictable) music. ([https://youtu.be/tJOX-IUse\\_0](https://youtu.be/tJOX-IUse_0))
- [The Emily Dickinson Museum](#) – Visit the website of the Emily Dickinson museum to find a wealth of resources on Dickinson's life and work.





## HOW TO CITE

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