

Emily Dickinson

(1830-1886)

#241 (c.1861)

I like a look of Agony,  
Because I know it's true –  
Men do not sham Convulsion,  
Nor simulate, a Throe.

The Eyes glaze once – and that is Death –  
Impossible to feign  
The beads upon the Forehead  
By homely Anguish strung.

#### ANALYSIS

“I like a look of Agony’ strikes us by the way it works out justification for the shocking callousness of the opening line. The poem’s residual attitude is not cynicism but rather simple candor in the recognition that death is the ultimate novelty and cannot be feigned. The cruel opening is immediately retrieved by the second line, and then justified in the third and fourth lines.... In the poem as a whole, death finds its precise definition by the homely details of its physical appearance.”

David Porter  
*The Art of Emily Dickinson's Early Poetry*  
(Harvard 1966)