

Two Versions of "The Wind Begun to Rock the Grass"

Poem 796, "The Wind begun to rock the Grass," by Emily Dickinson, has been changed from its original writing when Dickinson wrote it. The poem tells a story of a storm happening on or near a farm. Dickinson paints a picture with the poem, using imagery, and personification. Editors have corrected and changed certain things from the original poem to make it better. However, these changes have in some ways have had a negative effect on the poetry because they have actually changed the original intent of the poem which is that the storm was not doing things to certain objects; the objects were doing things to themselves to hide from the storm.

One very important change from the original poem is word choice. Many words have been changed from the original. For instance, in line four, "*Another, at the sky -*" is changed to "*A Menace at the Sky.*" Here, this line serves to repeat "A Menace" on the next line instead of saying "Another." Changing "Another" to "A Menace," makes this section of the poem seem repetitious. Again, words have been changed on line eight when "*And throw away the road -*" has been changed to "*And threw away the road.*" It is clear that the reason this change has been made is because it is grammatically correct to say "threw" in the past tense. However, in context of the poem, the word "throw" seems to give a special personification to the dust." In line fourteen, the line "*The Cattle clung to Barns -*" is changed to "*The cattle fled to Barns -*". "Clung" is describing what the cattle did to the barns. When the verb used to describe what the cattle are doing, it effectively changes the meaning of the line. In this line, "clung" is meant to say that the cattle stayed closed up in the safety of the barn, while "fled" implies that they were outside and ran into the cover of the barn as the storm began. "Clung" gives a much stronger emotion to the action of staying close to safety than "fled." This change is a change to the intent of the story that Emily Dickinson was trying to tell.

Another interesting edit to this poem is the change in line breaks. The original, is written as one stanza. However, in the edited version, the poem is broken up into five, four line stanzas. It seems that this was done because at the time, most poetry followed a very formulaic order and was written in stanzas, usually of four lines. Although this change seems reasonable, when reading the poem, the reader will pause after each line break. This upsets the fluidity of the poem. It does not seem that each stanza is a separate idea, but rather one large idea of the storm. This is especially pertinent going from line 16 to 17. When reading,

*"...The Birds put up the Bars to Nests --
The Cattle fled to Barns --
There came one drop of Giant Rain
And then as if the Hands
That held the dams had parted hold..."*

There is a pause, but these two lines are very connected, and thus should be read as one continuous idea. When broken up, the poem does not read as well because going from certain lines to the next, there is an inherent pause in the reading and takes away from the overall meaning of the poem.

An additional important change to this poem from the original is the changes in dashes and capital letters out of place. Most of the dashes in the original were changed to double dashes, and the dashes at the end of stanzas were changed to periods. This change serves to create more breaks in the poem which disrupts the flow of the original poem. With periods instead of dashes, the poem seems more broken up into sections. Also, the edited version changes some of the out of place capital letters, not correctly but differently. For instance, the edited version changes "*The Wagons quickened on the streets*" to "*The Wagons quickened on the Streets.*" "Streets" has been made capital. Although this is not grammatically correct, it seems to be a correction to following a pattern of having the last word of the first, third, and fourth line capitalized. However, a seemingly more accurate reason is that she capitalizes words having to do with nature. In line 15, "*Then came one Drop of Giant Rain,*" was changed to "*Then came one drop of Giant Rain.*" "Drop" was made lower-case. This may have been made lower-case because it is a word in the middle of line and does not seem to warrant the need for an upper-case letter. But when looking at words having to do with nature, "Drop" fits perfectly. Words that were originally capitalized were also words that Dickinson tried to give more importance to when they were diminished by the storm. The editor changed "*The Waters wrecked the Sky,*" to "*The Waters Wrecked the Sky.*" "Wrecked" was capitalized, but it did not need to be because "wrecked" is something that the storm is doing. They changed "*But overlooked My Father's House -*" to "*But overlooked my Father's house -*". "My" was made lower-case in line 19, but "My" is part of the phrase, "My Father's House," and her father's house could have been severely damaged by the storm. In this poem, it seems that Dickinson capitalized words that she saw as things that were affected negatively by the storm.

The edits that certain editors have made to Emily Dickinson's works of poetry have largely been disputed and scrutinized. While many of the corrections may seem to add to the experience that the reader gets from the poem, in actuality, they subtract from it. There are many occasions when taking a closer look at the "incorrectness" of Dickinson's poetry reveals a greater meaning.