Taking Off Emily Dickinson’s Clothes

Billy Collins

* Use this assignment sheet as a template and write a paragraph of **five or more sentences** in response to each prompt.
* Write your response in the color of your choice, as long as it isn’t too light and hard to read, such as yellow.
* Use your own words to respond to each question. Do NOT quote or paraphrase sources from the internet.
* Leave a blank line between the question and the response. Leave a blank line after your response and before the next question.
* Upload to the appropriate folder on turnitin.com
1. Collins’ poem references a number of images and ideas in Dickinson’s poems, including Dickinson poems we read for class. Identify at least two lines in Collins’ poem that allude to Dickinson poems. Name the Dickinson poems and explain how the Collins’ lines allude to the Dickinson poems.
2. In the fifth stanza, Collins describes “[t]he complexity of women’s undergarments / in nineteenth-century America.” Why might Collins have chosen to use the metaphor of “a polar explorer… sailing toward the iceberg of her [Emily Dickinson’s] nakedness”? How might this metaphor reflect important historical achievements by adventurers in the 1800’s, as well as what we know about Dickinson’s personal life?
3. How would you describe the tone of the poem? Is Collins making fun of Dickinson? Is the poem pornographic? Is the poem sexist? Is Collins a misogynist?
4. Does the speaker literally want to undress Dickinson and have sex with her? How might “Taking Off Emily Dickinson’s Clothes” be read as a metaphor? What does the speaker actually want to “undress”?