

THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF EMILY DICKINSON'S EARLY POETRY

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ABSTRACT

Emily Dickinson occupied a very prestigious position in the field of American literature. Her poetry deals with a unique and large number of thematic expressions. This article focuses on the analysis of Emily Dickinson's poems, the main ideas of her poetry are discussed separately. First of all, in this article, the unique features of the poet's work are emphasized, and the movements in which the poet wrote are expressed in sequence. Many researchers and critics have spent their great exertion to trace out these themes and they became successful in this regard. It is hoped that this study will also be a part in this line of contribution and serve the purpose at which it is aimed.

Keywords: Solitude, Death, Love, Nature, Immortality, Pain and Suffering, Romanticism, Transcendentalism.

INTRODUCTION

Emily Dickinson is regarded as a well-known American figure who has already earned a place in American Literature in the early twentieth century. Her interests were wide and varied which encompass transcendental, meditative, romantic, metaphysical and mystical themes. Large numbers of her works was written on subjects of popular and universal solicitude. The concreteness of Dickinson's images and visions has been drawn from her own observation and experience which impressed the scholars and critics. She claimed transcendentalism as her sphere and contested conventional definitions of poetry and the task of the poet. Like authors like Walt Whitman, Henry David Thoreau, and Ralph Waldo Emerson, she experimented with expression to liberate it from socially prescribed boundaries. She created a novel kind of first-person identity, much like authors like Charlotte Bronte and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Like

the characters in Bronte's and Browning's works, the speakers in Dickinson's poems are keen observers who notice the unavoidable constraints of their societies as well as their imagined and hypothetical escapes. Although Dickinson was influenced by Bible, Shakespeare, Emerson and other sources, she has come to be known as being one of American's major poets in the twentieth century.

In the present time the poet continues to fascinate and captivate readers. Although she was destined to become a semi-private poet, she seems to have experienced a surfeit of mystical presence that menaced at different times in her life to overwhelm her. "Far from the little figure of frustrations and renunciations and regrets, we will come to see her as a poet of great strength, courage, and singleness of purpose." [5,8]. As a result, her thinking was suffused with abnormally heightened spiritual and mental awareness which she struggled to contain within the limits of her creative outpouring. Emily Dickinson's singularity as a poet resides not in what she believes – for her interests and her convictions are not original – but rather in the way she speaks to us: her voice is unique. The importance of the study is concerned with her themes than with her artistic techniques.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

In covering the main topics of this article, we referred to the articles and scientific works of many literary experts and critics. Generally speaking, the main themes or ideas of her poems were related with her own life. In particular, crucial motives and ideas were highlighted in the poetry of Emily Dickinson using works of Warren Austin, Reeve James, Ransom Hohn, Arnold Matthew and others. In addition, some notable poems of Emily Dickinson were analyzed to find out the main themes.

Since our article is aimed at analyzing the main themes and ideas of her poetry, the method of contextual analysis was taken as the method of the work. Because with the help of this method, we analyze and define the parts of certain works.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

As her poems reveal, her significant life was passed in the interior of her love. The life and personality of Emily Dickinson speak clearly through her poems. "She preferred the world of her own creation to the objective world of observable fact". [7,67]. She belonged to no school but in a way, she belonged to almost every school of poet. "Her poetry is a magnificent personal confession, blasphemous and, in its self-revelation, its honesty, almost obscene. It comes out of an intellectual life toward which it feels no moral responsibility. " [6,213]. The problem with Dickinson is that she thought of questions which had no answers. This was the reason for the embarrassment. In a poem "We introduce ourselves" she writes:

We introduce ourselves
To Planets and to Flowers

But with ourselves
Have etiquettes
Embarrassments
And awes

This seeking for answers where there were none was also the reason for many paradoxes found in Dickinson's poetry. Undoubtedly, Emily Dickinson is a popular lyric poet and she is "perhaps next to Walt Whitman the greatest American poet of the last century." [8, 43]. The themes, thought and philosophy in a poem are as important and valuable as are the art and craft of it. One can identify four major themes in Dickinson's poetry-death, nature, love, and relationship to God. She tackles death in many ways. Sometimes she personified it, and sometimes she afraid of it, and sometimes she faced it with challenge. In a large number of her poems e.g. "Because I could not stop for Death", "There has been a Death in the Opposite House" and in the poem "Tie the string of my life, My Lord" Dickinson associates death with a horse driven carriage which symbolizes death.

In some of her poems nature is a source of pain, suffering and death "nature may thus be a symbol of death, representing much the same idea as the corpse in the poem beginning" "Twas warm at first, like us," but involving a more complex range of association. [11,292]. Happiness in the living life becomes a part and parcel of the soul after death. The poem, "If I should Die", suggests that prosperity and riches become a source of restlessness to soul posthumously. This is the ideology which the poet conveys to us through the poem:

If I should die
And you should live
And time should gurgle on,
And morn should beam,
And noon should burn,
As it has usual done;
If birds should build as early,
And Bees as bustling go,-
One might depart at option
From enterprise below!
"T" is sweet to know that stocks will stand
When we with Daisies lie,
That Commerce will continue,
And Trades as briskly fly.
It makes the parting tranquil
And keeps the soul serene,

That gentlemen so sprightly
Conduct the pleasing scene!

People take birth, grow up, pass through old age and die. Does their death create a gap or void which will never be occupied by someone from among the living ones? The answer to this question is probably “No” according to the poet. Austin Warren writes, “Emily’s most characteristic difficulties are with the morals of the Bible., she neither rejects nor accepts the Bible without question and reservation.” [9,573].

In Emily Dickinson’s philosophy of love, we can trace the impact of her paradoxical views in religion and spirituality. She was both a Christian and a Pagan side by side. She had full faith in Christian values of life, but she showed little faith in dogma, blind faith and false traditions. It is very likely that she could not get satisfactory answers to her searching question, and thus, her “only playmate was poetry” and this poetry proceeded experimentally to sing of love and nature and tried to formulate a philosophy of love. In this way she anticipates Mathew Arnold, her British contemporary. Her love poems are full of illuminating love passions and she often sings about love-dreams, flowers, love letters, surrounding of the lover and the beloved etc. Her love lyrics have been enriched with eroticism, sexual passions, sensuous enjoyment, passionate experiences, as in the poem:

The world – stand – solemner – to me-
Since I was wed – to Him-
A modesty befits the soul
That bears another’s – name-
A doubt – if it be fair – indeed-
To wear that perfect – pearl-
The man – upon the – woman – binds-
To clasp her soul – for – all
A prayer, that it more angel – prove –
A whiter Gift – within –
To that munificence, that chose-
So unadorned – a Queen-
A Gratitude – that such be true-

She talks about the wedding ring, beautiful diamond fitted to the wedding ring, white marriage gown. The treatment that she meets out to the poems embodying the theme of love reminds us of the marriage in Roman Catholic tradition.

There are number of reasons which could be cited for the existence of the themes of suffering and pain in her poetry. Her personal experience may be one of the main reasons. Her secluded life within closed quarters where she suffered isolation may be one of the reasons for such themes of pain and suffering. Her own ill health and

melancholy may also be a contributing reason. Wilbur remarks “for her there were three major privations: she was deprived of an orthodox and steady religious faith; she was deprived of love; she was deprived of literary recognition” [10, 54]. Dickinson relates the themes of pain and suffering with the death, but it is not always so. She links the theme of pain and suffering with love also. In the following lines of poem she finds love distilling uncertain pain:

The Love a Life can show Below
Is but a filament, I know,
Of that diviner thing
That faints upon the face of Noon-
And smites the Tinder in the Sun-
And hinders Gabriel’s Wing-
‘Tis this – in Music – hints and sways-
And far abroad on Summer days-
Distils uncertain pain-

On the theme of nature, Dickinson’s moralistic views differ from the other American writers who lived in the ninetieth century such as Emerson and Bryant. Her nature poems include birds, flowers, insect and natural process which are rarely didactic or don’t insist upon divine analogues. “Nature is no longer a friend, but often an inimical presence. Nature is a haunted house, art a house that tries to be haunted”. [3, 236].

CONCLUSION

Finally, on the basis of the study of her poetry about love, death and nature, it can be said that Emily Dickinson is essentially a poet, not a thinker or philosopher. The different themes of love, death, nature and the vision inherent there are not new themes but she has inculcated and infused a new life and luster into these themes with her singular craftsmanship of poetic genius and her extraordinary power of perception and fine freshness and originality of expression. Thus we see that in order to shape and formulate her poetic attitude towards nature, love, death, pain and suffering Dickinson borrowed images and concepts from her predecessors and the contemporaries.

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