

The Expression of Love and Death in Emily Dickinson's Poetry

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Abstract

The twentieth century English poetry is celebrated for uniqueness of thought and expression. The brilliant themes of modern platform attribute Emily Dickinson to be the greatest poet of twentieth century. She chose to advocate a distinctive approach to punctuation, capitalisation and verse variety. Her poetry is known for originality, precision of words and phrases. An emotional appeal, imaginative treatment of facts, pithy expression and vibrant imagery is the true essence of her poetry. The treatment of love and death occupy an imperative place. The circuit of natural world has brought the thought of love. The insight in the appearance of love was incredible for her. The human obsession found an exceptional expression in her poetry. Most of her poems passionately deal with the effects of human soul. She describes the anticipation of lover's visit, meeting of the lovers and promise of divine bliss in an effervescent way. In the meantime, she observes death as the free agent and mysterious courtier. The sensation of a dying person with crisp objectivity is articulated in her poetry. This article concentrates on the expression of love and death in Emily Dickinson's poems 'The Soul Selects Her Own Society' and 'I Heard A Fly Buzz – When I Died'.

Keywords: Expression, Love, Death, Human Soul, Emily Dickinson.

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Introduction:

Emily Dickinson's era was troubled by differences between custom and evolution. It was considered as a broken age. America was the terrain of prosperity for the refugees of Europe. Emily Dickinson is called the born poetess because she started writing poems at an early age. She has made a philosophy and tradition in writing poems. Her poems reveal puritan ideas. To American poetry, she adds the enigma which can be seen in different images. As Prof. T. W. Higginson points out, she creates a contradiction and problem not yet solved. In his own words,

“The impression of wholly new and original poetic genius was distinct on my mind at the first reading of those form poems as it is now, after thirty years of further knowledge, and with it comes the problem never yet solved, what place ought to be assigned in literature to what is so remarkable, yet so elusive of criticism”. (*Emily Dickinson's Letters*, 1891)

The poetic approach of Emily Dickinson is marked by its brevity and simplicity. She prefers to follow a distinctive approach to punctuation, capitalization, word practice, imagery and verse variety. The images of natural world around her are depicted. The poems deal with the expression of love and death. Her poetry contains the most emotional and imitative love lyrics. The poems also concentrate on erotic prospects, employing the bee-flower image to express the sensual aspiration. The imagined visits of longing suggest her ecstasy and triumph. She lives in a world of hallucination, calls herself a true wife and thinks herself a passionate woman in her poetry.

Most of her love poems are composed with the concrete gathering of the lovers. The lovers meet, separate and realize that they cannot live together passionately as they would imagine. The poetess speaks about her lover in the poems and utters that she cannot live a complete life with the male partner. But in the mean time she can't imagine them aging and dying. The poetess finds no promise in conservative religions. Her straight appeal to god for comfort remains a distant reality. The love poems of Dickinson portray not only happiness but also frustration in love. She writes about her dream male with greater aspiration. But in the course of time she says about the result of separation from him has seemed finally to fade away. She realizes and opines that their relationship was inspiring and scarce their love for Divine. Her treatment of love is vital and can be elucidated in a passionate manner.

The Treatment of Love:

The love poems of Emily Dickinson focus on the passionate effects of the human soul. Her poetry is regarded as the fervour of the lover's prospects. The assemblage of lovers, division and the sublimation of human obsession in a heavenly nuptial is portrayed in a poignant manner. This can be observed in her poem 'The Soul Selects Her Own Society'. It has its own rhythm and metre. An analysis of the poem classifies into a simple love lyric. She says that,

"The Soul selects her own Society

Then - shuts the Door". (303)

It seems the poetess is suggesting each individual in a society, where there is no distraction and violence. After selection, she does not like anybody's venture. Her own divinity and purpose in that place are expressed in the poem. She wants to see, witness the situation and offer prayer to God. Here, love combines with deity and takes the form by divinity and becomes eternal.

The middle part of the poem clearly emanates the view for the 'pausing chariots' and the 'kneeling emperor'. It suggests future suitors being rejected because of the 'chosen one'. The poetess sees the Chariot's pause and an emperor kneels in front of her. This emperor is her companion God himself. The emperor and the poet would enter into her society and the valves are closed.

The society of Emily Dickinson is an ideal nation. Like a stone, both are united and become one. The image of 'Stone' vividly explains her belief in perfection. As she likes forlorn, she wants to walk more and more inside herself. This poem is remarkable because it makes constant all ideas. Her puritanical notes are exposed here. The poem is perfect and meaningful when it ends as follows. She says and ends the poem;

"I have known her from an ample nation

Choose one;

Then close the valves of her attention

Like stone". (303)

Prof. T. W. Higginson concludes the poem, "The Society Emily Dickinson selected was the society of eternity, and her intimacy with it was paradoxically such as to increase her neighbourly sympathy with the 'Freckled Human Nature', she appeared the shun". (*Emily Dickinson's Letters*, 1891)

In order to express love, the poetess feels earth would have become more magnificent than paradise. The creative and passionate love poems of Dickinson deal with brides and marriage. She imagines death as the lover and herself as the bride in 'Because I Could Not Stop For Death'. As the insight of the lover's loss triggered and as his appearance became mere remembrance, she slowly sublimated her inner passion into a divine practice. The expression 'Bride' is scrutinised from different standpoints. First of all it is regarded as an actual woman being married and then as the bride of death. It permits her to perforate the third stage as wedded to god in heaven.

Emily Dickinson proposes farewell to the night as she pay attention to the deeds of angels in the course. Here night refers to the ages of her spiritual darkness of worldly survival and the morning represents her awakening from the midnight of earthly life and her transfer to the heavenly life after death. The poetess feels that a day would come in summer where she expresses about two lovers bind on each other's crucifix. It clearly tells that they are each the other's appliance of death. This nuptial composes a spiritual marriage in paradise. The change in the idea of a divine lover is gradual. Initially, she insists that after a long separation the heavenly lovers will rejoice a divine nuptial before angelic hosts. The human life is inter

woven and shows the fundamental difference between worldly lives. George Perkins and Barbara Perkins write,

“Dickinson is incomparable because her originality sets her apart from all others, but her poems shed the unmistakable light of darkness”. (*The American Tradition in Literature*, 1999)

The Treatment of Death:

Emily Dickinson dedicated much of her thought on the subject of death and the afterlife. She came across many tragedies in her childhood. The death of friends in childhood, parents, a beloved nephew and the people in the Civil War has engaged Dickinson in a quest to understand death and what it brings in her life. The matter of immortality, eternity and the supremacy of God seemed to preoccupy her. Dickinson planned to reveal her feelings, experiences and beliefs in her poetic work of art. This has helped her to trace out the images of death and makes her multifaceted.

The poems of Emily Dickinson revolve round the theme of death. Her contribution to American Literature is her poetic insight into the nature of death. Being a spiritualist she affirms the deathlessness of death. In fact she assigns death next to God. Death is always powerful, evergreen and the free agent of God. The man made creations and kingdoms depart permanently with the passage of time except death. It is evident that death is immortal and holds a divine place in nature.

Emily Dickinson clearly examines the relation of death with love and considers it as a physical process in her poetry. Most of her poems deal with the theme of death. This theme begins in her early poetry and continues in her later poetry. She does not portray death in the same manner in all the poems. It varies in tone from elegiac despair and confident belief. She considers death as a hidden mystery. She says,

“Death leaves us homesick, who behind,
Expect that it is gone
Are ignorant of its concern
As if it were not born”. (935)

Most of the critics classify the concept of death in Dickinson poetry into various headings. Johnson opines,

“The poems based on death fall into three groups. There are those which are concerned with the physical demise of the body, some describing the act of dying with clinical detachment, with emotional vehemence”. (*Emily Dickinson: An Interpretative Biography, 1955*)

Emily Dickinson's poetry deals with death, immortality, physical aspects and personifies death. The poetess has lived and experienced various features of life intensely. The initial poems of Dickinson deal with death-immortality, later poems embellish the physical aspects of death and the last poems are considered elegiac in nature. In a way her poetry potted her personality and provided the required balance in her poetic journey. Isolation and suffering helped her to introspect the hidden aspects of the soul. Instead of escaping from the clutches of life, Dickinson tried to battle her own spirit and experienced it through her poetic work of art.

The poetess Emily Dickinson fashions an anxious situation by complementing the condition of the dead by the condition of living and external escalation of Nature. Her poem 'I Heard a Fly Buzz' compares the prospects of death with its pragmatic occurrence. A delicate and small fly quashes the conventional Christian faith that leads to ceaseless cheerfulness. The words *signed* and *assignable* satirically exemplifies death's superlative power. Here insignificant documents, blank phrases, interested momentous and a humiliating body can be left at the back. The satire enhances as the inner voice quietly arranges everything and lingers assertively for death. The readers can witness this grand moment, but regrettably a fly disrupts the ritual:

“I heard a Fly buzz – when I died
The stillness in the Room
Was like Stillness in the Air
Between the Heaves of Storm”. (465)

I Heard a Fly Buzz can be considered as symbolic of Dickinson's religious faith. The death of body dole out as a reason to muse over the perpetuity. The poet sneaks into the

kingdom of the Absolute when the soul achieves a transitory insight into the Perpetuity. The poem highlights both success and failure. A man must go back to actuality after knocking down all obstructions of intellect into perpetuity.

Furthermore a factual fly is black and not blue. But the soul departing the body understands the blue of the devout eye through which fly must trek. The *Buzz* sound would be the resonance of the fly of spiritual vigour as it starts to travel in the spine. In other words, the spiritual progression of the poetess might be depicted as a buzz. Although the poetess Dickinson did not cram philosophy, but her poems reflect on the perfect images of the dying course and after death experiences advocate that she had some normal spiritualist aptitude. In her view, death is not dead but it is beautiful, fantastic and mystical.

Conclusion:

The literary works of Emily Dickinson clearly exhibits that poetry influenced her thinking and way of writing. In fact, the poetry of Emily Dickinson on the subject of love and death encloses maturity about various aspects of life. To the core, all her observations are spiritual. It is clear that Dickinson employs different figures of speech like personification, symbolism and metaphors in order to express the concept of love and death in her poetry. It makes her expression of love and death not only intricate but also imaginable. DiYanni opines,

“Dickinson’s writing was complex because she uses unusual grammar, peculiar rhythm, distinctive punctuation and various figures of speech. All these devices made her poems difficult to read but meaningful and profound”.

(*Modern American Poet: Their Voices and Visions*, 1994)

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