

Salient Features of Emily Elizabeth Dickinson's Poetry

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Abstract

Emily Elizabeth Dickinson is one of the most important figures in American poetry. She was born in the year 1830, December 10 in Amherst, Massachusetts and died early in the year 1886. She was unmarried and spent most of her life in isolation and had excellent poetic skills and was also known for her prolific writings. She had only few publications during her lifetime out of her 1700 poems. Her poems significantly fit to conservative poetic rules. Her writings were unique for her period (era). Most of her poems deal with immortality and death themes. The paper is a humble attempt to discuss the salient features of her poems.

Keywords: *Life, Death, Soul, Immortality, Love etc.*

1. Introduction

Emily Elizabeth Dickinson deserves to be acclaimed as an outstanding American poet of striking originality and the greatest woman poet of English. It is a curious point that only ten of her poems came to light during her lifetime and only after her death a slender volume of her verses was published by her admirers. The world waited till 1955 to know about her entire fruits of creativity that comprised more than one thousand seven hundred poems. Emily Dickinson lived in a period when American passed through a major political crisis continuously in the civil war. In addition to the intellectual ferment, there was a fast disintegration of old religious values which were being replaced by the new. Although she remained immune from the impact of many external events of her time, she seems to have observed some puritan beliefs which found outlet in the moral fervor and the study of the human soul. It strikes her that the true value of her life lay not in the outward phenomenon but in the inner reality of the soul. Remaining isolated from the contemporary life and style, she turned within giving herself to introspection and examination of inner life of the soul. Even a cursory glance at Dickinson's themes reveals her

sense of preoccupation with death, nature of soul, the problems of faith and reality of God. It is true that her orbit of study and range of poetry was limited but it showed flashes of her original and profound insight into nature and life. Poets like Serigo (1960) and Anderson (1966) found something majestic in Dickinson's preoccupation with the theme of love and death. In most of her poems Margaret (1957) observes, the focus is often directed at the interior life of the speaker and to the close confines of emotional responses.

1.1.Features of Dickinson's Poetry

One of the most important features of Dickinson's poetry is her perception of death. It is death that obsesses as the greatest reality. Death was a central problem of her life. She saw it all around herself in her family, friends, love, life and conviction. One of the most significant poems on death is "I Felt a Funeral in My Brain" through the imagery of death; Emily Dickinson represents the experiences of a dead person. In the first three stanzas she refers to the movements of the mourners, treading, beating, cracking and tolling which were oppressive to the mind of the dead person; then the silence becomes a problem to him, leaving him wrecked and solitary. In the final stanza the soul becomes separate from the physical body, the world of physical sensations, leaving the speaker to feel like plunging in the abyss. Dickinson's observation with death finds expressions in another great poem "Because I Could Not Stop for Death" She visualizes *Death and Immortality* coming in a chariot and stopping by her to carry away. In this poem, she offers her superlative masterpiece. Here, death is personified, visualized as a person, whom the poet knew and trusted. As she was too occupied with life to stop for the coach-man death. He kindly stopped for her to take her in his carriage. Her ride with death is her last ride together. Her aim is to record the passage from life when everything is tangible to the otherness of death and obscure a mystical realm. Allied to the theme of death is the theme of immortality, the flood subject as she calls in one of her letters.

Her longing for permanent fulfillment of earthly affection reflected in the picture of immortality after death. Immortality brings heaven closer to earthly agonies. It offers a human which is more immediate and secure. The poem "The World is Not Conclusion" is an instance in point. Another poem entitled "A Solemn Things within the Soul" brings out Dickinson's examination of the

subject of immortality, her resignation to God's will. In the poem "The Last Night that She Lived" death is imagined as a graceful departure from this earth to the sublime water of immortality. Pain and loss faded as the dead woman obtained eternal peace. The philosophical and religious implications of death become deeper in the poem of "A Clock Stopped"

Again, love is a recurring theme in Dickinson's poetry. Love, she conveys in a letter is always a safe place but her emotional involvement with a number of persons like Benjamin Newton, Samuel Bowles, Wordsworth reminded unrealized in her life, living behind the essence of love in the recess of her heart and mind, with her deep and passionate feelings, finding no fruition in terms marriage she withdraws herself into her printed world of poetry, seeking sublimation of her lyrics. Her love becomes spiritual in tone, a mystical life free. It becomes a divine feeling in all its intensity.

Dickinson's poetry refers to love for nature, for nature is beauty, harmony. Nature is the medium through which she tries to realize herself. She reveals her affections for the objects of nature in many of her poems. Like Wordsworth, she feels that there lies a mystical bond of connection between man and nature. In the poem "Nature is What We See" brings out Dickinson's love for nature and surroundings.

Crowe Ranson (1938) said that Emily Dickinson is one of the poets who make almost constant use of the first person singular; her lyrics are not characterized by exuberance of emotions but by their intensity. Her ecstasy seems to be conscious by restrained or subdued. But there is a melody in her lyrics, what critics call 'bolt of melody.' What is peculiar about her is her romantic sensibility, behind material appearances and seeks to perceive the divine force, what she calls circumference. Besides, there are many poems which carry her religious feelings, mysticism, her questioning about God and the imperfection of His creations. Her disbelief on Christian rituals can also be highlighted in one of her poems entitled "Some keep the Sabbath going to Church."

Dickinson's poetry is characterized by her astonishing originality in the treatment of its content and form of her poetry. As most of her lines come to her sudden flashes, her style of expression in her poetry appear cryptic, bold without any type of declaration, elaboration and superfluity. It is so terse that sometimes her meaning becomes incomprehensible at our first reading. Her

distinctiveness as a poet lies in her competence and concentration. Her imagery is vivid, her expression is pity. She shows a tendency to repeatedly capitalize nouns, adjectives and adverbs. Her use of dash as a mark of punctuation is also peculiar. Practically all her poems are presented as quatrains, sometimes with rhyme, sometimes with assonance. Conrad Aiken (1924) observes that the lapses in her poetry are inevitably part of her strange and original genius. They turn out to be a positive charm that pleases us.

2. Conclusion

To conclude, in many respects Emily Elizabeth Dickinson is the finest poet in English poetry. Of all the themes that are used in Emily Dickinson's poetry the theme of death is the most consistent and significant preoccupation in her sensibility and creativity. There are many poems which bring out Emily Dickinson's perception about death in various forms and pictures. Her critics have identified nearly five hundred poems which are devoted to the subjects of death. Since her early life she has awakened to the reality of death and developed her keen perceptions inside into this overwhelming truth of human life.

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