

Emily Dickinson: The Predominance of Pain in Her Poetry

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Abstract

Emily Dickinson is one of those few literary artists of America who have both tantalized and inspired the critics. She gave herself to poetry as a sage gives himself to meditation. She has written poems on Melancholy and depression. She did this because she came to the conclusion that pain and suffering are the lot of the entire mankind. Her faith was that pain and sufferings are as integral to life as bliss and ecstasy. Emily went to the extent of thinking that it is pain and agony in life that leads to our enlightenment.

Keywords: Emily Dickinson, Pain, Poetry.

INTRODUCTION

Each art has its own medium the Painter his pigments, the musicians his sound and the writer, words the difficulty of the writer is that words are used for all everyday purposes, so that they become warm. Like coins rubbed by long use. The poet more than any other writer, tries to look at words afresh. In a poem he so arranges words that they give pleasure such as we may have from music or from pictures much of that pleasure comes from the words themselves, but part of it comes from their rhythmical arrangement. The words are so arranged that their sounds please.

EMILY AS A POET

Poets have used poetry to express their knowledge of love, death and their aspirations. They have also used poetry to tell stories, the comedy, the pathos and also the tragedy of life.

Emily Dickinson together with wall Whitman represent the farthest point in the 19th century, American poetry in regard to the adventures of the spirit is beautifully reflected in poetry. Her technique is simple and realistic.

THEMES IN HER POETRY

Emily Dickinson wrote on myriad human problems. Her grasp of life and her understanding of life's complexities were so complete and thorough that no significant sphere of human experience escaped her "compound vision". Sometimes critics of Emily Dickinson wonder how a woman who lived a starved life of a recluse could write with an authority on the vast themes of life. But the fact is that her retreat into a private world of her own, her detachment and isolation from the active and real experiences brought her closer to mankind and its problems. Those who live an active and restless life do not find time to understand it. But Emily, who was apparently a fugitive from life, had the luxury of living it imaginatively in all its intensities of pain and ecstasies of pleasure. The cloister of her father's room upstairs did not prevent her from contemplating on life.

Life as is it lived and imagined is one of the favourite themes of Emily Dickinson poetry. There are hundreds of poems on human problems and human emotions, mankind fears and hopes, its moments of frustration and its ecstasies of joy. It is not suggested that she passed through all the varied experiences that are described in her poetry, but that she either contemplated or lived them imaginatively.

Speaking of success and defeat Emily Says
Success is counted sweetest
By those who never succeed,
To comprehend a nectar
Requires sorest need

AS A PHILOSOPHICAL POET

Emily Dickinson did not reflect on life in the way of a philosophical poet, because she was in no sense a metaphysical philosopher. Her unresolved metaphysical ponderings were the results of the determination that she had to know, rather than of logical thinking or of an active interest in philosophy. This life in the world is like a little brook overflowing perennially.

Life is permanent but the very existence on this earth is short. This worldly existence should not be wasted away but should be utilized in realizing the spiritual light. Worldly existence of all either the low or the great is of equal importance. This existence on this earth is full of languor, pain and drowsiness. One is never satisfied in one's life as one's deserves can never be fully satisfied. One feels drowsiness and pain when one's soul does not get spiritual food.

Poetry became for her the medium to give an outlet to her sufferings and anguish:

After a great pain, a formal feeling comes –
The Nerves sit ceremonious, Like Tombs

PREDOMINANCE IN HER POETRY

Emily Dickinson did not dislike or lament life rather on the other hand she enjoyed it in her inner self, accepted it and admired it. Worldly life does not extinguish but after death merges into the immortal life, as it is a part of perennial life there is no cause to lament it. Some romantic poet like Keats and Shelley lamented life.

Shelley also in "O Time, O Life, O World" laments the worldly existence. Lord Byron, another romantic poet writes in "youth and Age".

Victorian poets, the contemporaries of Emily did not think this life to end, but on the other hand they believed in the continuity of life. They regarded life as immortal. For Emily Dickinson this world is

not the conclusion but there is a perennial and eternal life going on forever. Life is a spiritual fact, there is no cause to lament, it is to enjoy and exalt.

Emily Dickinson was a recluse. She limited her relations and contacts with society she was a poet of inner life and highly given to introspection. Outer life and outward events did not much concern her. Her life was singular in dearth of outward events. Her life was contained within, but not bounded by the parochial, theocratic society of small New England town.

It is true the society or age spoke negatively in her poems as the entire complex of human society with its characteristics institutions has little or no relevance for her work. But to say that society has no concern for her is wrong. She was affected by the society of her time. "Deeply personal and highly individualistic as her thinking is, it by no means loses touch with society. People in the mass and in their public relationship concerned her less, to be sure, than the more intimate chambers of soul. But the former did concern her."

She actually turned primarily to the personal rather than to the public life. But occasionally she was keenly objective and socially minded. Just as her descriptive poetry affords an unsurpassingly honest picture of nature, free from romantic sentiment and distortion, so her glimpses of society however rare, are clear-sighted and on the whole revolutionary

It was the age of puritan religion of New England upon Emily's poetry is obvious. However the influence did not result in a pious, orthodox point of view.

She caricatured Amherst taught preachers who lectured about truth and values without any insight into spiritual. He preached upon breadth till it argued him narrow, is a clear picture of preachers. The shocking public event in Emily's life time was the civil war. Emily approaches such political and social subjects more forcefully and frequently than her critics have cared to note.

Her emphatic gesture of seclusion, her dread of publicity, her love of nature, and her passionate devotion as a poet to the themes of love and personal immortality, all read to the abrupt conclusion that there is altogether personal or metaphysical and her introspective art is confined to a narrow expression of self. Thorough examination of her poems shows that she was no weak social critic and had her eyes about her. Her most searching explorations within the human spirit deal with death and Immortality. She portrays death from every possible aspect, as the courtly lover, the dreadful assassin, the physical corrupter and the one free agent in nature.

Miss Emily appears in her poetry to have been a very sensitive person. A poet is by nature always a sensitive person, but some poets like Shelley are hypersensitive and so was Miss Dickinson. Her poetry expresses both extremes- the extreme of joy and the extreme of sadness. The note of ecstasy is unmistakable in some of her love poems, while the note of despair is apparent in some of her poems on human pain and suffering. She was equally sensitive to pain and suffering. Indeed, the pleasure-pain antithesis runs through many of her poems. There is a wide range of pain in her poetry. She separates the lesser pain, that will heal, from the greater pain that will not, and she chooses the latter category as her special concern. Her obsession with the theme of extreme pain has given rise to the feeling that some personal experience of unusual intensity was at the root of it.

Love in this world is not fulfilled and realized not because of the lover's absence or living at a distant place but because of impermanence and transiency of time which undermines weakens and disrupts all human ties. After death there is infinity and eternity and love becomes immortal. Death is not death it is entering into another life that is permanent life, immortal life.

Her seclusion was not the result of Wadsworth's departure from Amherst but rather a mean of defying an unfriendly universe where men are generally strong and dangerous. She adopted White dress to flaunt her innocence and to protect herself against any wicked attacks.

Love is not central to her life. She is hardly at her best when she is dealing with the amorous passions. Soul, immortality and death attract her more than love. Love theme is rather her weakest theme. It is not wrong to say that love relationship itself is kept secondary to the thought of love's impermanence. She treated love just a traditional theme. She wrote the anticipation of lover's future visit the possible marriage, the meeting of the lovers and their separation and the sublimation of the human passion in a celestial marriage. Her lovers have no hope to be united in this world; their love is to merge with immortality.

According to Emily Dickinson the range of the poet is the totality of his experience plus his imagination. In a platonic frenzy of divinest sense the caste his net very wide. She tells of herself, "I measure every grief I meet in the analytic eyes" and she finds a phrase to every thought that she ever had. Great poets comprehend in them the universal and the macrocosmic. They are as prolific and rich as nature and as creative and beautiful as God and Heaven.

CONCLUSION

As a poet, Emily Dickinson was far ahead of her time she was close to the twentieth century. Moralising was not for her either as a poet or as a private individual. Despite the simplicity and austerity of her life, her poetry is full of complexities of human psyche and the realities of human life. Her standards for poetry set by Emily Dickinson are undoubtedly lofty and whether she succeeded in attaining them is another matter but it must be recorded that she had been conscious of them all the time and strove to active them.

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