



DEATH AS AN INGENIOUS MUSE IN EMILY DICKINSON'S POETIC FANCY

PARAMVEER CHAHAL^{1*}, Dr. TARUN PATEL²

¹Research Scholar (Humanities-English), Gujarat Technological University, Ahmedabad.

²Assistant Professor, Government Engineering College, Gandhinagar, Gujarat

*Email: paramveerchahal6051@gmail.com



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Abstract

The present research paper examines how Emily Dickinson, a well-known American poet of the 19th century, was profoundly influenced by death as an ingenious muse. This study tries to reveal the transformational impact of death in creating Dickinson's distinctive creative vision and her imaginative investigation of existential concerns through a careful analysis of the poet's chosen poems. The current study examines death as a recurrent theme in her poetry, illuminating the numerous ways in which she depicts death as an energizing force. Dickinson created a unique, intellectually and emotionally compelling picture of death as a result of her acute observation of the natural world and her profound reflection.

The study looks at the many facets of death in Dickinson's writing, including its function as a springboard for introspection, a way to ponder the mysteries of the hereafter, and a source of inspiration for pondering the fleeting aspect of existence. The essay also examines Dickinson's poetic devices, including her distinctive use of language, metaphors, and imagery, all of which contribute to the nuanced depiction of death in her poems. This research study analyses Dickinson's lyrical portrayals of death in order to shed light on her complex connection with mortality and demonstrate the ways in which she skillfully turns the morbid into the sublime. It reveals how death's omnipresence inspired her poetic fancy, which led to a thorough examination of the human condition that touched on issues like love, faith, and life's inherent ambiguity.

Keywords: Death, Emily Dickinson, Imagery, Metaphor, Poetic Fancy.

Discussion

Death has remained one of the most recurrent themes in the poetry of Emily Dickinson. Her writings and letters frequently refer to death, including her own passing. Dickinson's innovative ideas on the alleged "dread of death" have made her an indelible poet. She is undoubtedly superior to many English and American poets thanks to these ideas. Whitman, Longfellow, Whittier, and Bryant were unable to express death in literature the way Dickinson did.

More than half of Dickinson's approximately two thousand poems focus on death as their main theme. Studying this poetry demonstrates her singular perspective on death. She seems to be tormented by death because so many of her poems are about it. Thomas H. Johnson notes that "Emily Dickinson did so in hers to an unusual degree" (203). Other 19th-century poets with a primary focus on mortality and immortality include John Keats and Walt Whitman. According to Richard Chase, "in the large majority of Emily Dickinson's poems, from the

least impressive to the most, there are intimations of Death" (230). This statement refers to the recurring topic of death throughout Dickinson's poetry. Death and immortality, according to Charles R. Anderson, are "the two profound themes that challenged her poetic powers" (284).

In the annals of American poetry and literature, Emily Dickinson's distinctive approach to death is noteworthy. Dickinson is regarded as one of the most well-known poets who throws a great lot of light on the subject of death despite having lived a very brief life. Dickinson is described as "incomparable because her originality sets her apart from all others, but her poems shed the unmistakable light of greatness" by George and Barbara Perkins in their book *The Perkins Letters* (972).

The poem "Because I could not stop for Death" by Emily Dickinson, in which Dickinson personifies Death as a gentleman who politely stops to collect the speaker in his carriage, best captures the idea of death as something to be embraced. However, in this case, the action has mostly already begun to die, and its physical qualities are merely hinted at.

Because I could not stop for Death –
He kindly stopped for me –
The Carriage held but just Ourselves –
And Immortality. (Dickinson, Lines 1-4)

In his analysis of the poem, James Reeves writes: "This is one of the best of those poems in which Emily wins over death by accepting calmly, civilly, as befits a lady receiving a gentleman's attentions. It is a piece on passing away in life (20). The poem, according to Jane Crosthwaite, is a chronicle of the poet's experience with the fact or inevitability of death and the effects of that realisation on the life still to be lived (90). This poem reflects several aspects of Emily's mystical obsessions with mortality and immortality. It portrays death as a concrete reality. It shows the morbidly irrational attempt to project her into that hypothetical future objective condition. Here, death is also perceived subjectively as deprivation and reduced possibilities, while objective death, the burial, serves as a metaphor.

Just as death frequently appears in the poems that focus on pain, suffering plays a key part in her poetry on death and immortality. Particularly in her early poems, Dickinson did not really believe in eternity. She had her doubts about immortality since she was too self-reliant to consider other people's perspectives. She referred to heaven as a "uncertain certainty" and immortality as a "House of Supposition." She favoured the mortal life over the afterlife:

Their Height in Heaven comforts not –
Their Glory – nought to me –
'Twas best imperfect – as it was –
I'm finite – I can't see –

The House of Supposition –
The Glimmering Frontier that
Skirts the Acres of Perhaps –
To Me – shows insecure –

The Wealth I had – contented me –
If 'twas a meaner size –
Then I had counted it until
It pleased my narrow Eyes –

Better than larger values –
That show however true –
This timid life of Evidence
Keeps pleading – "I don't know." (Poem
696)

Emily Dickinson depicts death in some of her poems as a vicious enemy and a killer who assaults his victims without showing any mercy or consent. The poet depicts how her protagonist suffers in the final moments in "A Clock stopped." In this poetry, death is portrayed as a fierce foe who strikes the helpless victim and causes her excruciating anguish.

A Clock stopped -
Not the Mantel's -
Geneva's farthest skill
Can't put the puppet bowing -
That just now dangled still -

An awe came on the Trinket!
The Figures hunched -with pain -
Then quivered out of Decimals -

Into Degreeless noon - (Dickinson, Lines
1-9)

The analogy used to describe the halted clock is that of a stopped heart. The second hand of the clock and the heart are metaphors used by the poet. The readers can clearly see when the heart has ceased beating and when death has occurred thanks to the use of the dead clock as a symbol for the heart. The increasing torment of the disappearing person from mild to severe suffering makes this death image awful. The poem explores the intellectual and spiritual significance of death. The poem makes a comparison between life and a timepiece. Once more, Dickinson uses the analogy of a stopped clock to represent the moment of death of a person. Death is viewed as a strong adversary that attacks someone and results in their death, which leaves others in great pain.

Similar to when the heart stops beating, the clock's hands cease to move. Death occurs now, and no amount of expertise could make the clock work again in the same way that a doctor could not bring a dead person back to life. Both the doctor and the clockmaker make unsuccessful attempts at revival. The moment Dickinson depicts in "A Clock Stopped" is the final second of a person's life, which cannot be delayed or postponed by anyone.

Dickinson makes an attempt to explain the passage between life and death in her other poem, which begins, "I heard a Fly buzz - when I died." The doubt about an afterlife or immortality is conveyed. The poem concentrates on the actual moment of death and is told from the viewpoint of the speaker, who is already deceased. Since no one has yet been able to describe how they feel at the moment of actual death, this is why the poem is paradoxical and enigmatic. The speaker's final words are cut off by a buzzing fly, and it is then that we see that "the king" is not present, contradicting any assurances about the afterlife. The speaker is unable to enter into the state of spiritual reflection that would appear more appropriate for this situation because of the bothersome fly's buzzing sound. So it might be claimed that in the most spiritually crucial moment of life, the speaker is preoccupied by a fly. The fly is

"a perfect symbol for spiritual doubt," according to one author:

I heard a Fly buzz — when I died —
The Stillness in the Room
Was like the Stillness in the Air —
Between the Heaves of Storm —

The Eyes around — had wrung them dry —
And Breaths were gathering firm
For that last Onset — when the King
Be witnessed — in the Room —

I willed my Keepsakes — Signed away
What portion of me be
Assignable — and then it was
There interposed a Fly —

With Blue — uncertain stumbling Buzz —
Between the light — and me —
And then the Windows failed — and then
I could not see to see— (Poem 465)

Dickinson had always been interested in the resurrection because she was curious about what happened to us after we pass away. Although she had attended sermons on this topic, she was not yet ready to fully accept the idea of eternity. Many detractors believe that Dickinson is either too obstinate in her approach to religion or too meticulous in her search for the things that will satisfy her. The clergymen of her time were unwavering believers in the existence of God. Dickinson was not yet prepared to accept the views of the pastors and their adherents, even though they did hold a belief in the process of salvation and eternity. Why? The response has been expected by Paul J. Ferlazzo:

Her attitude was not the result of her feeling intellectually superior to them; it was rather a matter of her perceiving the limitations of the human mind and of how it works to seek comforting and sometimes illusory assurances. Knowing these characteristics made her, in fact, humble; and, while it prevented her from self-confidently affirming her faith; it also preserved her from complete despair. (32)

People who understand the challenges posed by an inquisitive mind can relate to Dickinson. They do not criticise her but instead try to grasp the limitations of her strategy. According to Ferlazzo:

If she did not know the truth, she did not deny that the truth might exist; and, as a result, it is possible to find in her poetry almost every aspect of doubt and belief about religious subjects. While she desired salvation and immortality, she denied the orthodox view of paradise; she wondered, in fact, if merely oblivion lay beyond the grave. Although she believed in a Creator, she sometimes doubted His benevolence. Sometimes in jest, sometimes in mockery, she denies the Bible, sin and orthodox piety. (32)

Dickinson refers to God as a "burglar, banker, and father" in one of her poems. The poet does not agree with many of God's activities when she considers Him in the context of man. She mocks God's requirement that Abraham offer his brother Isaac as a sacrifice:

Abraham to kill him —
Was distinctly told —
Isaac was an Urchin —
Abraham was old —

Not a hesitation —
Abraham complied —
Flattered by Obeisance
Tyranny demurred — (Dickinson, Lines 1-8)

But eventually she grew old enough to overcome her fear of dying. She began to think of death as "the gateway to immortality" and realised that it frees the human soul. The most significant aspect of Emily Dickinson's psychology was her view of death, which was not one to fear people but rather the tragic conclusion to their sad experience on this earth. She also saw the grave as a place of eternal rest. According to her, human life is safest in tombs since retribution doesn't play out in all its dramatic splendour here or in the face of nature's wrath. In this citation, she states:

'Tis not that Dying hurts us so —
'Tis Living — hurts us more —
But Dying — is a different way —
A Kind behind the Door — (Dickinson,
Lines 1-4)

She has written about the existence of God from both the viewpoints of a theist and an atheist. She wrote about God with mockery, impiety, and disbelief despite her profound trust in his existence. The core of Dickinson's poetry is the belief that is opposed by the casual disbeliefs as depicted in poem 338:

I know that He exists.
Somewhere — in Silence —
He has hid his rare life
From our gross eyes. (Dickinson, Lines 1-4)

Dickinson is not an atheist despite her misgivings and disbeliefs. She has written a large number of poems that introduce us to the type of relationship she has with the Eternal. Her belief that man's salvation depends on his unconditional submission to God's will demonstrates her care for the Eternal. According to her, people should travel fearlessly to eternity since they will always find God to guard them against all threats. She confided in her friend Abiah Root when she was just sixteen years old, saying, "I have perfect confidence in God and His promises, yet I know not why I feel that the world holds a predominant place in my affections." (Gupta 59)

The poet depicts death in "All but Death can be Adjusted" as a predestined and definite end, something that is fixed for every person. Death is a fate that only God has the power to alter. "They dropped like Flakes" portrays death in a favourable light. Although it is thought of as commonplace matter, God nevertheless has authority over it.

They dropped like Flakes —
They dropped like Stars —
Like Petals from a Rose —
When suddenly across the June
A wind with fingers — goes —

They perished in the Seamless Grass —
No eye could find the place —

But God can summon every face
Of his Repealless — List. (Poem 409)

The poem describes how death has a personality that shifts just like snowflakes, stars, and flower petals. All of these organic materials are displayed to represent how frail and precious human life are. The poet emphasises that death is a natural occurrence and a respectable subject matter by utilising these organic features. Both the grass and the daisy are metaphors for death. The usage of these two plants can aid in enabling the readers to view death positively because their colours encourage a tranquil attitude and their outward manifestations render the subject of death common and lovely. The two natural sources that give the imagery of death in this poem its familiar and intelligible quality are these two plants.

Conclusion

This research study has examined Emily Dickinson's poetry inclination and the significant influence of death as a clever muse. We have discovered the transformational influence of death in creating the poet's distinctive aesthetic vision and her investigation of existential topics through a rigorous analysis of her chosen works. In her poetry, Emily Dickinson effectively integrates the idea of death into the fabric of her rhymes, revealing her close affinity with death. She was able to explore the depths of mortality due to her introverted personality and intense introspection, which led to the creation of a unique, intellectually and emotionally charged picture of death. She successfully catches the essence of death and lifts it to a sublime level by utilising literary tactics including dense language, powerful metaphors, and vivid images. Death is also more than just a theme in Dickinson's writing. It serves as a spark for introspection, leading her to consider the enigmas of death and the essence of existence. Through her exploration of death, the poet is able to navigate the complexity of the human condition and address important issues like love, faith, and the fleeting essence of life.

Dickinson challenges the idea that death is a taboo topic by encouraging readers to reflect on the beauty and significance of mortality via her poems.

Instead, she uses tragedy as a motivating factor, imploring us to face our own mortality and cherish the brief moments of existence. In essence, this research paper has offered a thorough examination of Emily Dickinson's poetic imagination's creative use of death as a muse. We have learned a great deal about her particular viewpoint on mortality by examining her poetry and her artistic processes. Dickinson's candid examination of death serves as a reminder of the lasting influence that poetry has on human existence as well as the deep impact that mortality has on it. Dickinson's poetic imagination entwined with death will likely continue to inspire and evoke thought as readers and academics engage with her work, providing a lasting witness to her brilliance and her ability to turn the grotesque into the sublime.

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