

Emily dickinson – theme of love



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Introduction Emily Dickinson's poetry is classified by editors as poems about nature, love, death, religion and others. Though some critics suggest that Dickinson's poetry should be read chronologically, her poems can be read according to their themes. Since she was the daughter of a preacher her poems are often about God and Christianity, and in some of her love poems it is not certain if she is expressing her love for an actual lover or her spirituality.

However, at one point of her life the poet stopped going to church and started satirizing Christian beliefs. Also, Dickinson isolated herself and emphasized her isolation by dressing in white. Her seclusion is present as a motif in some love poems. The death of her father, and nephew, led to an absolute seclusion and these deaths were probably the reason for the darker tone in her later poetry.

Biographers have tried to find the source of this passion and intensity that is found in Emily Dickinson's poems but there is an enigma when it comes to her love life. They have wondered when and how she encountered these lovers, was the love reciprocated and how strong the feelings were.

Dickinson seemed to have several passionate relationships but it is a fact that she remained unmarried. She did apparently always have a need for one close person who would be her confidant, who would keep her in touch with reality and be an inspiraton for her poetry .

In Emily Dickinson's poetry love can cause an exilirating rush of passion, or leave her with a hollow sense of deprivation, sometimes she questions love, touches various subject matters such as the position of a woman in a man's

world, and, for a woman who did not experience the world to its fullest, she wrote with surprising perception and emotion love poetry which left a mark in the history of literature. I decided to analyse some poems in which Emily Dickinson wrote about love from these different stranding points. My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun” A patriarchal society, such as the one Emily Dickinson lived in, had very controlled social norms and rules. One aspect of it Dickinson described in her poem “ My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun”. It centers around a masculine figure, a “ Master” and the speaker, “ a Loaded Gun”. The “ Master” gives the weapon power and allows it to fulfill its purpose. In return, the gun is there to serve the “ Master” and protect him at all times. Undoubtedly, this poem depicts a relationship between an authoritative and a submissive person.

It is with a romanticized tone that it approachesthe theme of love and union, one that can very easily be described by Shakespeare’s “ marriage of true minds” portrayed in his sonnet 116. However, the last stanza of this poem brings this romantic side of it into question. Critics claim that the whole poem is a delusion of the lyrical I, merely a self assurance that it is through a union of power that the master and the servant can be brought to their full potential. “ Though I than He – may longer live

He longer must – than I – For I have but the power to kill, Without-the power to die—“ However, with these lines the poet seems to realize that a life through servitude does not bring one fulfillment, but only the illusion of it.

More than once, Dickinson uses the expression “ Master” to refer to males in her poetry. This can be taken as the way of her time and place, 19th century

America along with the rest of the world, where men were still thought of as superior and the beholders of all power.

With this in mind, it is no surprise that the object of this poem, the gun, is simply taken up by a hunter, and thus bound to him forever. The image of love depicted in the poem, in which the sole purpose of the female – the gun is to serve her lover, seems to be a childish fantasy of submissive love. The lyrical I's need to keep safe her master's head during his sleep shows a prototypical image of a woman whose only aim is to wrap her man in a comfortable cocoon of pleasure, while she neglects her own needs to satisfy him.

Furthermore, the woman in this poem is objectified even more than just being rendered through an inanimate object. This can be seen in the third and fourth lines of the second stanza, where the poetess describes how it is to be speaking “for Him”. The irony is subtle here, and very well masked, for the delightful sentiment that emerges throughout the whole poem, especially stanza number four, is strong enough to keep in shadow the less eminent features. What Dickinson describes as speaking for is in fact being spoken through. As the hunter directs the firearm and shoots at what he likes, so is the woman in a patriarchal setting controlled, in order to be of the most service to the man. In circumstances, the very identity of a woman is to be submerged to the male requirement, and Dickinson manages to incorporate it into her lyric so exceptionally well that the criticism is masked by brilliant characterization. Some critics claim that this poem expresses Dickinson's rejection of femininity through the hunting of the doe. The

female deer stands for all that is womanly, in contrast with the male hunter and the gun that has discarded its gender.

The question of homosexuality has been studied in this context, but it is perhaps the rejection of female traits for the reason that a life of submission to a dominant animalistic hunter is valued to be nobler than the embracing of one's true self. Last, but not least, this poem can also represent the idea of a woman as a poet, one that possesses knowledge and power which make her destructive. Critic Adrienne Rich believes that creation by a woman is aggression, and that it is both "the power to kill" as well as being punishable. The union of gun with the hunter embodies the danger of identifying and taking hold of [the woman's] forces, not least that in so doing she risks defining herself – and being defined – as aggressive, is unwomanly ("and now we hunt the Doe"), and is potentially lethal." (Rich) She continues that this poem is about the female artist of the 19th century, especially as the poet, unlike a novelist, is much closer to their subject. "Poetry is too much rooted in the unconscious it presses too close against the barriers of repression; and the nineteenth-century woman had much to repress. (Rich) "She rose to His Requirement – dropt" As a writer who was not only conscious of her time, but also very active in social critique through her poetry, it is no surprise that Emily Dickinson wrote about the institution of marriage, which practically defined a woman's life. "She rose to His Requirement – dropt" is a poem depicting the idea of a Victorian marriage in which it is the wife's sole purpose in life to satisfy her husband, with her own needs coming last. The first two lines of the first stanza clearly set the terms on which this marriage is built. She rose to His Requirement – dropt The

Playthings of Her Life” The role of the man is very well represented by the capitalization on the word “ His”. This can not only be interpreted as respect for the husband, but it can be related to the poem mentioned earlier “ My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun” where the lyrical I relates to her lover as “ Master”. This image of a husband as an omnipotent pillar of power transcends the worldly abilities of men, and turns into a God of the household and it is to the needs and wishes of this Lord that a wife needs to “ rise”.

The position of women is especially shown through the phrase “—dropt The Playthings of Her Life”. Not only is a woman expected to spend her life in marriage through servitude, but she is to be rid of all that gives her pleasure. Perhaps this poem can be interpreted as Dickinson’s fear of commitment, her being frightened of losing her own “ Plaything” – her poetry. “ In considering the opposition of “ Requirement” and “ Playthings” (mature duty versus childish frivolity), we would do well to remember how important play was to Dickinson. For Dickinson the poet, the play of language and imagination was primary.

She believed that her father’s tragedy was his inability to play, and she once wrote, “ Blessed be those who play, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ” Something in her recoiled from adult womanhood and made her wish she could remain a child. In a famous letter to her friend Susan Huntington Gilbert Dickinson (who later married Emily’s brother, William Austin), she anticipated with a mixture of fascination and dread the prospect of being consumed by the blazing sun of a husband’s demands. Certainly, she had ample opportunity to observe in her parents’ marriage a union in which the

man's requirements dominated. (Leiter 173) In the second stanza of the poem Dickinson tells, ironically, what exactly the taking on of "honorable work" costs a wife. Not only does she sacrifice her pleasure, but also any chance of greatness – "Amplitude", the sensation of fulfillment – "Awe" and finally, she sacrifices her "Gold" which represents her youth and her potential which are now spent from being used for Him. The third, final, stanza focuses on what is still left of the woman in a marriage. Her true self – her thoughts and opinions remain unmentioned, uncared for by the husband.

Dickinson uses the sea to illustrate her point. The ideas and beliefs of a wife are not only hidden deep within the unexplored sea, but they are also mixed, covered with weeds. A man catching a clam must first go through the barrier, in this case society's limitation of a woman's freedom, in order to get to the treasure that is inside – the pearl. Finally, the last two lines of the third stanza demonstrate the lonesome position of a constrained woman. "But only to Himself – be known The Fathoms they abide—" It is only the oyster, or the woman, who truly knows its inner self.

Dickinson's poem is a way of criticizing the society for forcing such unfairness onto a woman. She, however, chose a different way of life. Foregoing the possible joys of marriage, Emily Dickinson chose to pursue "the poetic calling that enabled her to set her own "Requirement" and to retain her "Playthings" as essential tools of her art." (Leiter 174) "If you were coming in the fall." This is a love poem in which Dickinson writes about her loved one who is away from her. The distance between her and her lover is not an obstacle for her feelings, and she is yearning to meet with him.

She refers to herself as a housewife in the first stanza, as a woman waiting for a man. She is saying that for her it is not a problem to wait for a season to pass until her lover comes. She would simply chase the summer away like a fly and she would do it with “ a smile and a spurn” (bartleby. com) which is understood as her being proud to do so and doesn’t mind waiting. A season becomes a year in the second stanza. However, even this is not a problem for she will simply “ wind the months in balls and put them each in separate drawers” (bartleby. om) and make it easier for her to bare the length of time and just wait until it is time for them to meet. She makes it easier for herself to wait for this moment, by diminishing a year into months. A year turns into centuries in the third stanza. Her lover is only lingering, but she believes he will certainly come. In the fourth stanza, time is not limited anymore but becomes eternity, meaning that she will wait for her lover forever. She implies that she doesn’t mind dying and casting her life away if it means being with him in the end. She would toss away her life “ like a rind,”(bartleby. com) as something that is not important.

While the first four stanzas start with “ If” which implies something hypothetical and something that is only a possibility the final stanza begins with “ But now,” which is a return to reality and the poet is not sure how long she must wait for her lover now. Furthermore, she is not sure if they will meet at all, or is he even coming. Time is annoying her like a “ goblin bee” (bartleby. com) representing something bad, or evil. This “ goblin bee” is not “ stating its sting” (bartleby. com) and this unveils her uncertainty, She actually doesn’t know what the future brings. What if I say I shall not wait? This poem is about separation as well.

Lovers are here apart because of others, and not their own will. The “ I” of this poem is very eager to see her lover and she will break free by force if needed from those who are keeping her away from him. It seems as if she is threatening to escape and asking her lover what will happen if she manages to escape and come to him. She writes that she will break down the gates that are confining her, flee away from the guard and set herself free to come to her loved one. Further she conveys that now that they are together no one can separate them anymore. The guard may call her and the guns may beg her to come back but she will not.

Everything else is meaningless and unimportant now that they are together. Conclusion Dickinson’s love poetry is thought of as her most passionate and emotional. From her standpoint, of a socially isolated woman in a literary predominantly man’s world, we are able to read, analyse and enjoy her fascinating metaphors and views on marriage, love, longing, heartache and crippling loneliness. What I personally found endearing in her poems is the belief and inestructible hope she expresses in some poems, and the acceptance of the harsh reality which she manages to take in, resorting to eligion, spirituality an philosophy. Progressive thinking and ideas on marriage and the position of women in society and literature colour her poems about the dinamics of relationships between men and women. She did not refrain from conveying her deepest thoughts and sentiments, but also her attitude towards literary conventions and social norms and expectations. Considered as one of the greatest American poets of all time, Emily Dickinson’s legacy and views on love will always provide readers and writers with inspiration and enlightenment.