

Literary criticisms of emily dickinson's poetry

[Profession](#), [Poet](#)



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Throughout Emily Dickinson's poetry there are three main themes that she addresses: death, love, and nature; as well as the impact of "the word". When discussing these themes she followed her lifestyle and broke away from traditional forms of writing and wrote with an intense energy and complexity never seen before and rarely seen today. She was a rarity not only because of her poetry but because she was one of the first female pioneers into the field of poetry.

One of the most fascinating things about Dickinson's poetry is her overwhelming attention to detail, especially her "pin-point" insights on death. In "I've Seen a Dying Eye," by Emily Dickinson, is a poem about the nature of death. A sense of uncertainty and uncontrollability about death seems to exist. The observer's speech seems hesitant and unsure of what he or she is seeing, partly because of the dashes, but also because of the words used to describe the scene. As the eye is observed looking for something, then becoming cloudy and progressing through more obscurity until it finally comes to rest, the person observing the death cannot provide any definite proof that what the dying person saw was hopeful or disturbing. The dying person seems to have no control over the clouds covering his or her eye, which is frantically searching for something that it can only hope to find before the clouds totally, consume it. Death, as an uncontrollable force,

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seems to sweep over the dying. More importantly, as the poem is from the point of view of the observer, whether the dying person saw anything or not

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is as significant as what the observer, and the reader, carry away from the poem. The suspicion of whether the dying person saw anything or had any control over his or her death is what is being played on in the poem. The main idea the poem is trying to convey is that death force itself upon the dying leaving them no control, and if something hopeful exists to be seen after death, it is a question left for the living to ponder.

Love is another prevalent theme in Dickinson's poetry. "The Love of Thee-a Prism Be': Men and Women in the Love Poetry of Emily Dickinson," an essay by Adalaide Morris, a feminist critic, examines how Dickinson views love with an allegorical neatness created in her poem "The Love of Thee-a Prism Be" (98). Emily Dickinson believes that it is the prismatic quality of passion that matters, and the "energy passing through an experience of love reveals a spectrum of possibilities" (98). In keeping with her tradition of looking at the "circumference" of an idea, Dickinson never actually defines a conclusive love or lover at the end of her love poetry, instead concentrating on passion as a whole (99). Although she never defined a lover in her poems, many critics do believe that the object or focal point of her passion was Charles Wadsworth, a clergyman from Philadelphia

In her poetry, Emily represents the males as the Lover, Father, King, Lord, and Master as the women take complimentary positions to their male superiors, and many times the relationship between the sexes is seen in metaphor-women as "His Little Spaniel" or his hunting gun. The woman's existence is only contingent to the encircling

power of the man (104). It could be noted that the relationship with her father created some of the associations that Dickinson used in her work-her father being involved in government, religion, and in control of the family.

Dickinson's linked imagery in her male love poetry focuses on suns, storms, volcanoes, and wounds (100). There are always elements of disturbance or extremes and explosive settings. There are also repeated examples of the repression of love causing storm imagery to become " silent, suppressed" volcanic activity-something on the verge of explosion or activity. Of course, in the repressed individual the potential for explosion or action can be very dangerous, and frequently in Dickinson's work this kind of love relationship ends of with someone receiving a wound (100).

Another underlying theme in Dickinson's poetry was nature. The Imagery of Emily Dickinson, by Ruth Flanders McNaughton, in a chapter entitled " Imagery of Nature," examines the way the Emily Dickinson portrays nature in her poetry. Dickinson often identified nature with heaven or God (33), which could have been the result of her unique relationship with God and the universe. Dickinson always held nature in reverence throughout her poetry, because she regarded nature as almost religious. There was almost always a mystical or religious undercurrent to her poetry, but she depicted the scenes from an artistic point of view rather than from a religious one (34).

Dickinson also saw nature as a true friend most likely because of her time spent

alone with it. She describes nature as a show to which she has gained admission. Dickinson saw friendship and entertainment in the world of trees, bees, and anthills. "The Bee is not Afraid of Me" is an excellent example of Dickinson's communion with nature.

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More is achieved through the use of precise description than could be done by examining the philosophical aspects behind a nature. Dickinson always felt as if she were one of them, the creatures of nature, and she felt more at ease with her world of crickets, dew, and butterflies. Even though spending life as a recluse seems like undesirable to most people, our world owes a debt of gratitude to Emily Dickinson for the way she introduced us to her world of nature in such a different and special way.

Another aspect of Emily Dickinson's work that fascinates many critics is the importance and the impact of "the word" in her poetry. In Donald E. Thackrey's essay "The Communication of the Word," he talks about how "the power of the individual word, in particular, seems to have inspired her with nothing less than reverence" (51). Dickinson approached her poetry inductively, that is, she combined words to arrive at

whatever conclusion the patterns of the words suggested, rather than starting out with a specific theme or message. Instead of purposefully working toward a final philosophical point, Dickinson preferred to use series of "staccato" inspirations (51). Dickinson frequently used words with weight in her work, and as a result her works usually cannot be grasped fully in one

reading without dissecting each word individually. Often Dickinson would compile large, alternative word lists for a poetry before she would come to a decision on which word was “ just right” for the impact she wished to achieve (52). For example, this poem displays Dickinson’s use of alternative, thesaurus-like lists: “ Had but the tale a thrilling, typic, hearty, bonnie, breathless, spaciousIt did not condemn”. Eventually, Dickinson came to rest on the word “ warbling,” but one can see the meticulous care that she put into the decision on which word to use.

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Another poem of Dickinson’s that shows her compositional method is “ Shall I Take Thee?” the Poet Said.” In this poem, Dickinson discusses from where the power of the world comes In the poem, one can see the artistic style come through her composition. Emily regarded the words she used as living entities that could have “ being, growth, and immortality” (54).

The idea that the word comes from the experience behind it takes precedence over the notion that a word is wasted when the vocal chords stop moving. Words have connotations that encompass the “ entire circumference” of the idea in addition to its denotative worth (54). The complexity of the single, written word defined the limits of communication between human beings and, therefore, symbolized the isolation of the individual-a concept that can be seen in Dickinson’s personal, reclusive life.

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