

## DEATH THEME IN THE POETRY OF EMILY DICKINSON

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### Abstract:

In the magnificent gallery of literature female writers cherish a specific space for themselves among these one is Emily Dickinson. Though the intellectual climate into which Emily Dickinson was born in 1830 had the features of a transition, the period was also a crisis culminating in the war between states.

**Key words:**Poetry ,Death Theme ,intellectual climate.

### INTRODUCTION:

A generation before the war of 1861-65 the transformation of New England had begun. Theocracy was on the decline and industrialism was rising. As Emerson puts it, "Things are in the saddle." Soon the nineteenth century New Englander, lacking a genuine religious fervor, began to be a social conformist. As Allen Tate says,

**"The common idea of the Redemption was replaced by the conformist idea of respectability among Neighbors whose spiritual disorder, not very Evident at the surface, was becoming acute"**

Emerson came upon the scene to start the new age in poetry. After Emerson the New England literature tastes like a sip of cambric tea. On the one side the writer in Hawthorne was looking back and on the other side Emerson, was looking not too clearly at anything ahead. In between came Emily Dickinson, who had something in her of both the above mentioned writers.

Dickinson was a recluse; still her poetry is rich with a profound and varied experience. Her moral image stands out in account for the fact that the death theme looms large in her poetry. At every step, we find the poetess probing into the mystery of death. Death is the snapping of all human relationship, between the living and dead, between the visible world and the eternal from which no traveler returns. Those who have been dead for years and those who die today go equally out of our lives. Death is like a 'Hypen between man's mortal life and his desire for immortality. In her poems on death there is the universal craving for establishing communion with the dead. Perhaps it was this craving which gave rise to the belief in the immortality of the soul or in the life after death. This belief has softened the pangs of separation from the dead. In Emily there is also such softening of sorrow. She finds comfort in the knowledge that the bustle of life in its variety would continue-

**T' is sweet to know that stocks will stand  
When we with Daisies lie-  
That commerce will continue-  
And Trades as briskly fly-  
It makes the parting tranquil  
And keeps the soul serene**

In most of her poems she describes Death by its external appearance, and in others she imagines her own death, and gives an account of her own experiences. In both cases her account of death is such thing from which no one can return. In one of her poems she writes-

**Today or this noon  
She dwelt so close  
I almost touched her  
Tonight she lies  
Past neighborhood  
And bough and steeple  
How past surmise.**

In her most faithful observation of detail and in her great descriptive beauty, she often transcends the particular and rises to the universal. With a similar respect for the details and with equal detachment, she reproduces the situations where she imagines her own death. In one of her early poems she simply muses whether anybody would.

Would really notice, if she fell from her chair or slept too soundly, the slept of death-

**For chancleer to wake it  
Or stirring house below  
Or giddy bird in orchard  
Or early task to do?**

In her famous poem "I Heard Fly Buzz- When I died." It combines the description of death both from outside and inside. The poem records the experience of the speaker during the period between the last moments of life and death. The account of dying and death reveals the horrors of death. The description of death is realistic. The whole poem is nothing but description of a dying person till her death. In this poem Light stands for 'Life' and darkness stands for 'death'. The light comes through the windows fail to allow light and darkness covers the speaker. Again, Miss Dickinson's poem "I Felt Funeral in My Brain" the poetess found the funeral the saddest experience of life. Here Miss Dickinson gives expressions to the sensations of a dead person. Through the imagery of death, the poetess works up the experience of death.

It is true that Miss Dickinson's themes are universal, but her particular vintage points tend to be very personal, she rebuilt her world inside the products of her poetic imagination. It is not surprising, her world was insular and small, and she was highly introspective. Her work has its roots in the culture and society of her times, but though these can be explored extensively and many parallels can be established between her statements and various literary and religious documents. For Dickinson the crucial religious question was the survival of the soul after death. She rejected absolutely the idea of man's innate depravity; she favored the Emerson an partial

reversal of Puritanism that conceived greatness of soul as the source of immortality. In some sense, Miss Dickinson is always a religious poet- if her concerns with human death and immortality. These concerns are as important for her as are human perception, suffering and growth.

Since Miss Dickinson was child of rural nineteenth century New-England, it is not surprising that the natural scenes and figurative language drawn from it loom very large through out her work. The New-England country side of her time was still largely untrammled, and she was fascinated by its changing seasons and their correspondence to her own inner moods. Her nature poems divided into those that are chiefly presentations of scenes appreciated for their liveliness and beauty, and those in which aspects of nature are scrutinized for keys to the meaning of the universe and human life. She has written nature poems in which there are vivid colors and moments of ecstasy, but indirectly she seems to suggest that the outer loveliness of nature in no way constitutes the knowledge of nature's mysteries. She seems to say that it would be a grave error to mistake the outside for inside.

**We spy the forests and the hills  
The Tents to Nature's show  
Mistake the outside for the real  
And mention what we saw.**

It should be noted that a storm is often used by Emily as a symbol of the soul's storm, just as winter is used as symbol of death.

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