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Unit 1: American Poets Project

Stylistic Analysis:

Emily Dickinson is one of the world's most prominent and influential poets of the 19th century. Dickinson was born in Amherst, Massachusetts, on December 10, 1830 to Edward and Emily Dickinson (Habegger, "Emily Dickinson"). She was then sent to the Amherst Academy where she met her first master whose death led to Dickinson's growth in her poetic interest. One element that made the work of Dickinson unique was the fact that she targeted many different audiences. Her main audience were her friends, most of which were part of the women's literary culture in the 19th century. In 1858, Dickinson had put together her manuscript-books. Over the course of seven years she had put together forty books filled with roughly eight hundred of her poems. However, only about ten of her poems were published during her lifetime out of nearly 1,800 poems (Habegger, "Emily Dickinson"). They did not exactly save her financially. The Dickinson family was not rich per say. Her father had built the Homestead, a large mansion on the town's Main Street. This is where Dickinson had secretly written her bundles of poetry and letters. Her poetry became more appreciated after her death once they were published. The major topic and theme that was in Dickinson's poems was death, either her own or the concept as a whole. Dickinson's obsession with death seemed to be drawn from her desire to understand the nature behind it, and her obsession only seemed to grow after the death of her nephew

as she realized death could come at anytime and any age. It is said that her poem, “Because I could not stop for Death,” was inspired because of her nephew, Gib’s, death. Throughout her poems, Dickinson uses many different poetic devices. However, three that were used most frequently were: metaphors, symbolism, and personification.

Metaphors are quite commonly used within poems, for example the English poet John Donne was quite famous for using metaphors. Dickinson’s use of metaphors only further added to uniqueness as a poet. For example, “The carriage held but just ourselves - And immortality,” (Dickinson “Because I Could Not” 3-4). Here she is comparing the journey and resting place of death. Another example is “hope” is the thing with feathers (Dickinson “Hope is: 1). The metaphor here is where hope is being compared to a bird, this is probably because hope is a belief that what we desire could happen while a bird’s feather take them where they desire. A bird without its wings or feathers, is about as helpless as a person without hope.

Now metaphors were only one of her commonly used poetic devices, another was symbolism. Symbolism is the use of abstract ideas to portray something beyond its actual meaning. One example is, “And then, he drank a Dew; From a convenient Grass - (Dickinson “Hope is” 5-6). Here, the bird had come down to satisfy its hunger needs and leaves without causing any harm to Earth. It is just describing the beauty that is nature. Another example of symbolism is, “Then — shuts the Door —; To her divine Majority —” (Dickinson “The Soul Selects” 2-3). Here, the door seems to symbolize people’s ideas, no matter how important the narrator chose the life of complete seclusion.

Personification is where inanimate objects are given human qualities. An example is, “Because I could not stop for Death - He kindly waited for me -” (Dickinson “

Because I Could Not” 1-2). Here Emily Dickinson represents death as something kind as it was inevitable. She also portrayed death as almost human, that it stopped for her when it was time. Another example of personification is “My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun” (Dickinson “My Life” 1). Here, life is personified to give the affect that it is also the reason of death.

Emily Dickinson always conveyed a sense of inquisitiveness toward life, well more specifically death. I always found that quite beautiful as she managed to take a dark concept such as death, and made it seem almost kind. Through her poetry, she showed us the different aspects in nature, religion, law, music, commerce, medicine, fashion, the wonders of nature, the identity of the self, death, immortality, and love. Her readers gain a new perspective on so many different topics, which is why Dickinson’s poetry is crucial.

Stylistic Imitation:

Mirror Mirror on the Wall–

Tell me Why was I always meant to Fall?

The Knives of those who have hurt Me,

Are still there on my Back–

Why can't this Pain leave me Be,

Why are so many peoples hearts Black–

In people I only see a Dying light,

In you my Mirror I see nothing but my Reflection and my Fright.

None of My answers have been Found–

I Guess my only option is to Retreat,

To go Rot under the Ground–

That does sound Bittersweet,

On one hand– I will be rid of the Rottenness that is humanity,

On the other– my family– will need to learn of how I Drowned,

How this world drove me to Insanity.

Mirror Mirror I need an answer–

I need to know that this World isn't a growing Cancer,

My Head has had enough–

My Heart will no longer have to be tough,

My Lungs will no longer have to take in this polluted air–

My Eyes won't have to see people and how they Stare,
Still no answer I see,
Thank you my Mirror for this time—
I will now leave you Be,
And with that, it is the end of my lifetime.

Poetic devices used in stylistic imitation:

1. Metaphor
2. Personification
3. Symbolism

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