Emily Dickinson

Brief Biographical Note.

Her poetry.

Main Poetic features:

* Content.
* Form.

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Brief Biographical Note:

She was born in Massachussetts on December 10th, 1830. She lived in a Calvinist environment that affected her education, as she grew up listening to sermons. 1847: she spent a year studing in Mount Holyoke Female Seminary. Suffering a severe religious crisis at the age of 17. Then she decided that she was not going to be converted, but she had not a very strong Christian faith. Gradual withdrawal from the world: she started just going around the house and the garden; then just the house; after just upstairs, and finally she passed most of the time in her bedroom. Death: May 15th, 1886. Her poems were not published until her death: 1890: “*Poems by Emily Dick*i*nson*”. She was not acclaimed until the 1920s.

Her poetry:

Her poetry is mysterious, and it is especially difficult for external circumstances, as we do not have contextual information about her poem.

* No explicit poetic theory.
* No titles.
* The poems do not have date or order of composition.
* No central idea.
* No knowledge about the surrounding circumstances.

Main Poetic features:

Content:

* Religious feelings:
* Influence of Calvinistic doctrines.
* + Religious crisis: Christian but no Christian relief.
* = Poems on death, eternity, God, religious experiences…
* God and faith: God’s inscrutability, God’s power, God’s indifference.
* Death: different interpretations of death and eternity 🡪 GRIEF (intense emotional experience):
* Experience: link with the human and natural world.
* Emotional: source of poetic strength and inspiration.
* Withdrawal from the world: remaining at home:
* Domestic environment to concentrate on her poetic interests.
* Not to recreate traditional womanhood.
* Bridalled = Bridled.
* Nature: garden.
* Source of joy and pleasure but mysterious (and even dangerous).
* Rejection of fame: private poems only published after her death 🡪 showing just the negative aspects of fame and success.

Susan Gilbert was Emily Dickinson’s sister in law, and she let her read some of her poems. Susan sent to published one of the Dickinson’s poems, and she was very angry.

Lavinia Dickinson, Emily’s sister. Emily told her to burn all her papers after she died. Lavinia was going to do it but then, she read some of the poems and she realized that she should not burned them. Thanks to her we can read these poems.

* Love.
* The self and identity:
* Influence of Emerson’s self-reliance.
* Individualism: the personal individual experience over the collective one.
* The poet as a seer.

Form:

* Elyptical style: sometimes difficult for the reader, as they have to fill the gaps.
* Ambiguity of meaning and syntax: while we are reading sometimes, we do not know if a word is the subject or the object.
* Conciseness.
* Suggestiveness, understatement.
* Abstract ideas in concrete images.
* Dashes: sometimes used to connect sentences and other times so separate sentences. They give uncertainty. Sometimes are used to give emphasis, to indicate an interruption…
* Free use of hymn meter (iambic tetrameters, iambic trimeters) and ballad rhyme (XAXA XBXB).