

01. Success is Counted Sweetest

Complete Text

Success is counted sweetest
 By those who ne'er succeed
 To comprehend a nectar
 Requires sorest need.

1
2
3
4

L.1. Success is counted sweetest—Success is regarded as the most pleasant and desirable thing by those persons who have never been able to relish the taste of worldly achievements or success etc.

L.2. who never succeed—Mark the use of the present indefinite tense instead of the present tense “have never succeeded.” It is not merely the exigencies of metre that have forced the poet to take to the present indefinite tense, it has lent a certain emphasis to the idea.

L.3. To comprehend—to understand fully.

L.4. Requires sorest need—Requires the most painful requirement (thirst). In other words, to enjoy a nectar in the true sense. One needs the most painful requirement i.e. thirst. Only he can enjoy the taste of a nectar who is so painfully thirsty that he will die if he does not get it.

L.3-4. To comprehend a nectar.....need—In order to enjoy the real flavour of the nectar we should, before that undergo a period of the most pressing need. Nectar here stands for all the pleasant and delightful and delight-giving experiences of human life. Only those who have gone through unpleasant and torturing experiences, know what it is to experience those things that give us delightful satisfaction. The view described in these lines is psychologically sound. There is the law of contrast in the life of external Nature and also in the inner life of man. An occasion of joy is felt by us most intensely only when we have experienced sorrows. Those who have never suffered from sorrows, can never realize the real significance of joy. Joy and sorrow, victory and defeat, failure and success are the twins that the human predicament is made and in order to have satisfying

01. Success is Counted Sweetest

Paraphrase

This short poem of 12 lines is notable for its striking idea. The poet begins by saying that success appears to be sweet only to those who have never achieved it. The real nature of nectar can be experienced only by those who have gone through the bitterest needs of life.

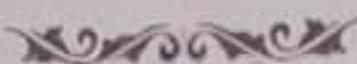


experience of life we must know and feel the real nature of the twins. The heart that feels the exultation is the same that experience agonies. That is why Wordsworth put it most powerfully in one of his poems:

Thy friends are exultations and agonies
And man's unconquerable mind.

William Blake also said very pertinently that "joy and woe are woven fine, a silken thread for the soul divine."

Not one of all the purple host	5
Who took the flag to-day	6
Can tell the definition,	7
So clear, of victory,	8
As he, defeated, dying,	9
On whose forbidden ear	10
The distant strains of triumph	11
Break, agonized and clear.	12



L.5. The purple Host—soldiers participating in a battle.

L.6. Took the flag—won the battle, emerged in a battle.

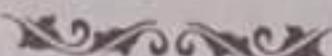
L.5-6. Not one.....to-day—Those persons who are carrying in their arms the flags of victory, those who have won some distinguishing success or victory.

L.7-8. Can tell.....of victory—Only that man can give a clear-cut definition of a thing who knows it fully. To define a thing is a very difficult task indeed and Emily Dickinson emphatically says that those who have never known defeat in their life can never tell others what true victory is. A thing can be known or felt fully only by means of and in the light of its opposite.

L.9-12. As he.....agonized and clear—These lines give the picture of a defeated man who alone is capable of realizing what true victory is. The man in whose honour bands of victory are being played, does not hear them so clearly as the man who lies defeated and in the eye of the world frustrated and despaired. Though the heart of a defeated man is agonized, it is still capable of feeling the real nature of victory. The defeated and wounded soldier, who is on the verge of death and whose ear have been denied the joy and pleasure of listening to the songs and music of merriment of victory clearly understand the meaning and significance of victory.

The present poem—should not be regarded as a didactic one which aims at teaching us fortitude and patient cheer in the midst of failures and defeat. The poem is subtly psychological and it emphasizes the superiority of defeat to victory and frustration to satisfaction. It is not necessary for us to agree with the poet's view in order to appreciate the poem but it is necessary to point out that those who applaud success and achievement and judge a personality only on that basis take a very narrow view of human affairs. The worldly outlook that concentrates on outer achievements and ignores inner motives is very limited.

Those people who are celebrating victory with the great pomp and show do not know what real victory is. It is the defeated man who is able to hear the clear notes of victory from a far-off place, and not the man who has won victory and who is hearing the songs of praise for his achievements.



CRITICAL APPRECIATION

The critical appreciation of the poem demands from us a clear understanding of its subject-matter. Like all well-known poems, the present poem of Emily Dickinson has also a deeper undertone of meaning besides an obvious meaning.

The Obvious Meaning of the Poem

Certainly Emily Dickinson's critics are right in calling this poem an expression of the idea of compensation—of the idea that every evil confers some balancing good, that through bitterness we learn to appreciate the sweet that "water is taught by thirst." The defeated and dying soldier of this poem is compensated by a greater awareness of the meaning of victory than the victors themselves can have: he can comprehend the joy of success through its polar contrast to his own despair.

The Deeper Undertones of Meaning in the Poem

Richard Wilbur agrees with the obvious meaning of the poem given above, but he feels that there is a deeper undertone of meaning also which is generally missed. "On a first reading, we are much impressed with the wretchedness of the dying soldier's lot, and an improved understanding of the nature of victory may seem small compensation for defeat and death; but the more one ponders upon this poem the likelier it grows that Emily Dickinson is arguing the superiority of defeat to victory, of frustration to satisfaction, and of anguished comprehension to mere possession. What do the victors have but victory, a victory which they cannot fully savour or clearly define. They have paid for their triumph by a sacrifice of awareness; a material gain has cost them a spiritual loss. For the dying soldier, the case is reversed: defeat and death are attended by an increase of awareness, and material loss had led to spiritual gain. Emily Dickinson would think defeat as the better bargain."

Similarity with the Thought of Thomas Traherne

Richard Wilbur has pointed out that Dickinson's poem raises the question, in what way desire can define things and what comprehension of nectars it can have beyond a sense of inaccessible sweetness. These questions can best be answered by a quotation from the seventeenth-century divine, Thomas Traherne. Conveniently for us, Traherne is thinking in this brief meditation, about food—specifically, about acorns—as perceived by appetite and by desire.

"The services of things and their excellencies are spiritual; being objects not of the eye, but of the mind; and you become more spiritual by how much more you esteem them. Pigs eat acorns, but neither consider the sun that gave them life, nor the influences of the heavens by which they were nourished, nor the very root of the tree from whence they came. This being the work of angels, who in a wide and clear light see even the sea that gave them moisture. And feed upon that acorn spiritually while they know the ends for which it was created, and feast upon all these as upon a world of joys within it; while to ignorant swine that eat the shell, it is an empty husk of no taste nor delightful savor."

Emily Dickinson could not have written that for various reasons, a major reason being that she could not see in Nature any revelations of divine purpose. But like Traherne she discovered that the soul has an infinite hunger, a hunger to possess all things. (That discovery, I suspect was the major fruit of her introspection). And like Traherne she distinguished two ways of possessing things, the way of appetite and the way of desire. What Traherne said of the pig she said of her favourite insect:

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Auto da fe and judgment—
Are nothing to the Bee
His separation from His Rose—
To Him sums Misery—

The Poem Expresses the Vaster Economy of Desire

Most persons in the world are creatures of appetite and their only aim is to seek satisfaction or fulfilment of their physical desire. The poem can hardly have any appeal for such persons, because it expresses in Richard Wilbur's words "the vaster economy of desire, in which the pain of abstinence is justified by moment of infinite joy and the object is spiritually possessed, not merely for itself, but more

truly as in index of the All. That is how one comprehends a nectar. Miss Dickinson's bee does not comprehend the rose which it plunders, because the truer sweetness of the rose lies beyond the rose, in its relationship to the whole of being; but she would say that Gerard Manly Hopkins comprehends a blue-bell when, having noticed its intrinsic beauties, he adds, "I know the beauty of Our Lord by it." And here is an eight line poem of her own, in which she comprehends the full sweetness of water.

We thirst at first – 'tis Nature's Act –
 And later – when we die –
 A little water supplicate –
 Of fingers going by –

 It intimates the finer want –
 Whose adequate supply
 Is that Great water in the west
 Termed Immortality –

Conclusion

In the conclusion of this critical appreciation of "Success is Counted Sweetest," it remains to be pointed out that if popularity can be regarded as a sign of the artistic merit of a poem, then the present poem can be rated very high. Only a few poems would find such a place of recognition in anthologies and selections of English and American poetry as 'Success is Counted Sweetest.' The poem shows superiority of defeat over victory, of frustration over satisfaction, and of anguished comprehension over mere possession. The poem further manifests Emily Dickinson's belief in the laws of opposition (namely that loss enables one to understand victory).

This is one of her many definition poems which begin "Experience is," "Renunciation is," "Love is," "Ecstasy is." In these poems she relentlessly tried to express the meaning of intangible objects and emotional states, to determine their various properties, and to understand their relation to the human soul. The poem further shows a unique blending of Calvinism and Transcendentalism.



02. "Hope is the Thing with Feathers"

Complete Text

Hope is the thing with feathers	1
That perches in the soul,	2
And sings the tune without the words,	3
And never stops at all,	4
And sweetest in the gale is heard;	5
And sore must be the storm	6
That could abash the little bird	7
That kept so many warm.	8

L.1. Hope is.....with feathers—Hope has been likened to a bird with feathers that can fly about. The suggestion is that just as a bird with feathers can fly about anywhere it likes, similarly hope is something that can reach or does reach very human being.

L.2. That perches in the soul—Hope is born and has its seat in the soul: the suggestion being that hope has nothing to do with conscious intellect and it owes its existence to intuitive perception.

L.3. And sings the tune without the words—The difference between the song of ordinary birds and of the hope imaged as a bird is that while the song of the birds has words, hope's song is not composed of words.

L.4. And never stops at all—The other remarkable difference is that while birds stop singing after sometime, the song that hope-bird sings never stops, the suggestion or inner idea is that hope always inspires and cheers up human beings even when they appear to have lost everything.

L.5. And sweetest in the gale.....is heard—The song of the hope-bird appears to be sweetest and most delightful when some fierce wind is blowing. The idea in this line is that when we are passing through a period of suffering and tribulation, hope appears to us to be the most delightful in the world.

02. "Hope is The Thing with Feathers" (First Published 1891)

Paraphrase

Stanza 1

Hope is like the little bird with feathers. Just as a bird with feathers can fly about anywhere, so can hope reach anywhere to any human being. Hope is born and has its seat in the soul: it has nothing to do with conscious intellect and owes its existence to intuitive perception. The difference between the song of ordinary birds and that of hope imagined as bird is that while the song of the birds has words, hope's song is not composed of words. While birds stop singing after sometime, the song that hope-bird sings never stops. Hope always inspires and cheers up human beings even when they appear to have lost everything.

Stanza 2

The song of the hope-bird appears to be sweetest and most delightful when some fierce wind is blowing, that is to say, when we are passing through a period of suffering and tribulation, hope appears to us to be the most, delightful in the world. The storm that can prevent the hope-bird from singing must, indeed, be very fierce because it stops even that bird which gives warmth to so many human beings. The suggestion is that in the most stormy weather, the hope bird can sing i.e. men can hope even in times of most intense grief and in most depressing circumstances.

L.6-8. And sore.....must so many warm—These three lines form a single sentence. The storm that can prevent the hope-bird from singing must, indeed, be very fierce because it stops even that bird which gives warmth to so many human beings. The suggestion in these lines is that even in the most stormy weather, the hope-birds can sing, the underlying idea being that men can hope even in times of most intense grief and in most depressing circumstances.

I've heard it in the chilliest land,
And on the strangest sea:
Yet, never, in extremity,
It asked a crumb of me.

9
10
11
12



Hope is the thing with feathers—

That perches in the soul—
And sings the tune without the words,
And never stops—at all—

And sweetest—in the Gale—is heard
And sore must be the storm—
That could abash the little bird
That kept so many warm—

I've heard it in the chilliest land—
And on the strangest sea—
Yet, never, in Extremity,
It asked a crumb of me.

—Emily Dickinson

L.9. I've heard it in the chilliest land—The poet says, with implied emphasis, that she has heard the song even in the coldest countries, which are characterized by barrenness all around; "chill" here, and elsewhere, stands for something that is depressing and dreary. The poetess says that she felt the presence of hope even in the most depressing conditions and situations.

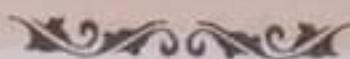
L.10. And on the strangest sea—"The strangest sea" here stands for the most unexpected of circumstances. Hope appears even in those circumstances where it is least expected.

L.11. Yet, never in extremity—Even in the most depressing circumstances and the most oppressive of weather, hope continued to arise in the poet's heart.

L.12. It asked a crumb of me—The hope bird asked nothing in return from the poet. The suggestion of the lines is that it does not require us anything in terms of material objects to nourish hopes in our hearts. We needn't fear anything to have hope in our hearts. We can always "clutch the inviolable hope," to use the phrase of Matthew Arnold.

Stanza 3

The poet has heard the song even in the coldest countries, which are characterized by barrenness all around. Even in the most depressing circumstances and the most oppressive of weather, hope continued to arise in the poet's heart. The hope-bird required nothing in return from the poet. If there is hope in our heart, we need not fear anything.



THE THEME OF THE POEM

This is one of these small poems of Emily Dickinson in which her reflections of human life have been expressed. In the present poem the poet speaks of hope that has its seat in the soul and that always continues to inspire men without stopping as it were, at any moment. In the times of trouble and difficulties, the song that hope sings appears to be particularly sweet and appealing. Continuing the metaphor from the song of the bird the poet says that she heard it even in the coldest land and the strangest sea and it asked from her nothing in return.



Hope
Is the
thing with
feathers
That perches in the soul
And sings the tune —
Without the
worries
And sweetest in the galore
That could abash the tittle bird
That kept so many warm
I've heard it never
And
Yet, in the chillest land,
never, in extremity,
It asked a
crumb
of me.

That perches in the soul
And sings the tune —
Without the
worries
And sweetest in the galore
That could abash the tittle bird
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CRITICAL APPRECIATION OF THE POEM

In the present poem Emily Dickinson has drawn a sustained metaphor and she has kept it up very happily from the first to the last line. The utter simplicity of the poem is also remarkable. What is most striking about the poem is that every line carries with it a deeper suggestiveness. The idea in the following stanza has been strikingly expressed:

And sweetest in the gale is heard
And sore must be the storm
That could abash the little bird
That kept so many warm.

This poem, which expresses a certain aspect of the poet's reflection of life, is, however, not one of direct statements but of suggestion through image-making and it proves, beyond doubt, that Emily Dickinson is not a didactic poet. Ideas are embedded in her poetry.

The simplicity of language and the conventional nature of imagery in the present poem may give the impression to the reader that Emily Dickinson's language has only this characteristic and that it lacks variety. Readers are advised to read the poem, "After great pain a formal feeling comes" in which a highly figurative language has been employed. Another poem, "The Soul Selects," must also be read in which the images have been used in a strikingly original manner and which the rhythm is not so simple as in the poem on Hope:

The soul selects her own society,
Then shuts the door:

On her divine majority
Obtrude no more.

Unmoved, she notes the chariot's pausing
At her low gate,

Unmoved, an emperor is kneeling
Upon her mat.

I've known her from an ample nation
Choose one:

Then close the values of her attention
Like stone.

In the poem, "Hope is a thing with Feathers," there is only image that has been followed throughout the poem, but in "The Soul Selects," we find a number of images. In stanza two the words "chariots," "emperor" and "mat" suggest images that are most unconventional. The collocation of the emperor and the door-mat may appear to be absurd to an untrained reader, but to those readers who are familiar with the developments of technique in modern poetry, such a collocation would suggest the layers of meaning, the ordinary arrangement of words is incapable of expressing. In the last two lines of the poem, "The Soul Selects": the image of "closing the values of her attention" is also an unconventional one, and though it clashes a little with the rest of the imagery, it does not disturb the general tone of the poem which is one of spiritual calm and poise. It is notable that the tone of the poem is communicated not only by the imagery but also the stanza-form that has been employed.

It is obvious that the full poetic beauty of "Hope is a thing with Feathers" can be realized best only when it is read in relationship with other representative poems.

Quotable Quote

"This is my letter to the world
That never wrote to me"

— Emily Dickinson

03. After Great Pain a Formal Feeling Comes

Complete Text

After great pain, a formal feeling comes -
 The Nerves sit ceremonious, like Tombs -
 The stiff Heart questions 'was it He, that bore,'
 And 'Yesterday, or Centuries before'?

The Feet, mechanical, go round -
 A Wooden way
 Of Ground, or Air, or Ought -
 Regardless grown,
 A Quartz contentment, like a stone -

This is the Hour of Lead -
 Remembered, if outlived,
 As Freezing persons, recollect the Snow -
 First - Chill - then Stupor - then the letting go -



After great pain a dismal feeling comes -
 The nerves sit ceremonious like tombs,
 The stiff Heart questions - Am I a bore?
 As I was yesterday - and the day before?

The mind, mechanical, goes round
 and round . . .

This is the hour of dread,
 Every writer knows . . .

Remembered if outlived,
 First chill, then stupor, then the letting go.

03. After Great Pain a Formal Feeling Comes

Paraphrase

After some great sorrow or mental pain the mind is numbed. The nerves sit ceremonious like tombs over the dead, that is, all faculties and natural sensibilities of humans die after a feeling of pain. The heart gets stiff, nerves become silent and feet mechanical, a living organism is frozen in eternal numbness. Great pain does not bring disorder or hysteria, only a carefully controlled, formal sensation that inspires awe.

The three stanzas of the poem faintly shadow forth three stages of familiar ceremony: the formal service, the tread of pall-bearers, and the final lowering into a grave. Here the soul's numbed response after an enervating shock exemplifies a fundamental law: that pain is an unavoidable aspect of human existence. The poem contains images of ceremony and crystallization, and acute psychological observations present the situation. The stages of pain pass from a funeral atmosphere concentrating on image of ceremony and tombs in stanza one, to the mechanical wooden world of stanza two (where "Quartz contentment" is linked with tombs), and finally to frozen death of stanza three, where leaden images climax in snow's blank desolation.

The second stanza describes the feeling of pain by picturing the body as a mechanical object, a toy puppet, aimlessly dangling on its strings in a terrible parody of life's vitality. A "Quartz contentment" describes the body's state, suggesting quartz's hard, glossy finish as well as its smooth tactile quality that is unpleasantly cold. Yet is this a contentment, since this suspended state signifies the superior rank to which great pain has elevated the soul.

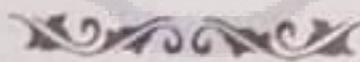
The final stanza completes the crystallization process. The base, dull colour of lead prepares for the image of a person slowly freezing to death in the snow. The final line summarizes the whole poem as this pain progresses from the first sudden chill which retards movement and control to the numbness of wooden motion, until eventually the letting go of death and total inactivity occur. This,

then, is the way one experiences pain, by a complete death of the sense and freezing of all hope and activity. Paradoxically, the poet concludes that the real effect of pain is its absence, the utter numbness that only a severe wound could physically produce.

The first stanza is held rigid by the ceremonious formality of the chamber of death when, after the great pain of its passing, the corpse lies tranquil and composed, surrounded by mourners, hushed in awe so silent that time seems to have gone off into eternity, "yesterday, or Centuries before." The nerves are situated round about the body or the "stiff-Heart" like mourners about the bed of death. These nerves, for example, are not neighbours lamenting with their silent presence the death of a friend. They are sensation itself, but here they are dead, as ceremonious and lifeless as tombs. Consequently, the formal feeling that comes after great pain is, ironically no feeling at all, only benumbed rigidness.

In the second stanza the formal rites of the dead are replaced by a different sort of action ceremoniously performed in a trance, an extension not of the previous metaphor, but of the paradox which informed it. In the third stanza, benumbed, aimless movements through a world of waste, the motions of the living dead are similar to the trance-like, enchanted steps of persons freezing in a blank and silent world of muffling snow.

To conclude, Dickinson wants to say through this poem that a feeling of contentment comes after a feeling of pain.



CRITICAL APPRECIATION

The present poem is not one that deals with death, but the intensity of grief that has been described in this poem has an unmistakable resemblance with the awareness of impending death, the death that is going to cause untold suffering to the members of the bereaved family. In this poem the condition of the human heart suffering from intense grief has been described in a language that is charged with deep feeling and is rich in images. When an extraordinary catastrophe has overwhelmed an individual, his soul lies in a trance, as it were, and his memory seems to have been astrophied altogether so that he remembers nothing about the daily round of existence. "The sufferer moves mechanically as one does in somnambulism and goes through the daily routine of life without living them." In the concluding lines of the poem, the experience of

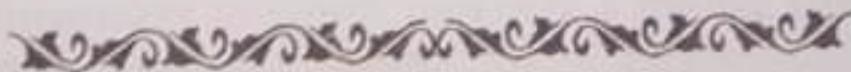
deep grief has been compared to death by freezing. Richard Chase has written about the background of ideas of this poem and an understanding of this background is helpful for us to appreciate the poem. "The process of disintegration has its "economy": "Ruin is formal." Within this economy, nature still allows room for various forms of human well being and fulfilment, various royal "estates" such as are achieved by those who receive an ineffable intuitive experience, by the woman who loves, or by the poet who creates though these estates involve great renunciations, are merely temporary, and gain good deal of their value by being preliminary experiences of the final and absolute estate of immortality.

After great pain a formal feeling comes
The nerves sit ceremonious like tombs,

Pain enlightens us as to the inexorable law, the form, by which we vile and die; it opens out before us the vista of things as they are; it shows us the meagre economy of our lives, which includes, however, certain "ceremonious" occasions, though these take their character from the final accession to immortality.

Some of the imagery used in this poem is very bold. The sitting of "the nerves ceremonious like tombs" suggests the deadening of all the faculties and also the sensibility that men are endowed with by Nature. The first line, which expresses the central idea of the poem governs the imagery. The words "formal," "ceremonious," "tombs," "stiff," "mechanical" and many others in the poem give the suggestion of the stunning effect of grief. The experience of intense suffering has been reinforced by the image of persons frozen to death, who feel the chill, then stupor, then the letting go. The words like "quartz," "wooden way" and "hour of lead" in the second stanza serve to emphasize the heaviness of the grief. "The outer form of the poem which maintains the funeral image in its three stages of death, procession and burial is shaped by the inner mood of the poem and use of exact rhyme in the last two lines of each stanza adds to its technical excellence." This is one of those poems of Emily Dickinson in which she has employed rather difficult and out of the way words but they are not inappropriate. There is a remarkable force in the lines:

This is the hour of led
Remembered if out-lived.



04. She Lay as if at Play

Complete Text

She lay as if at play
 Her life had leaped away --
 Intending to return --
 But not so soon -

 Her merry Arms, half dropt --
 As if for lull of sport --
 An instant had forgot --
 The Trick to start --

 Her dancing Eyes -- ajar --
 As if their Owner were
 Still sparkling through
 For fun -- at you -

 Her Morning at the door --
 Devising, I am sure --
 To force her sleep --
 So light -- so deep --

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04. She Lay as if at Play

Paraphrase & Critical Appreciation

This is a poem on the death of a child. The poem arouses sympathy chiefly by presenting the girl's vitality and elusiveness when she was alive. The child's light movement and whimsical nature produce genuine pathos by mocking death's heavy finality. The effect of lightness and activity is developed by the subtle interplay of metre, rhyme, and imagery. The poem's metre is unusually short and quick-moving. Most of the words are simple, with only a few longer than two syllables. A child's delight in repetitive devices and rapid movement is effectively depicted by these means.

The first view of the little girl emphasizes her hesitant quality, which guides the whole poetic movement. Her death is not a solemn, ponderous thing, but such an abrupt surprise that it can be accepted as final. The next two stanzas further develop this "play" image by emphasizing her "sport" and "trick" qualities and by the somewhat trite, though appropriately childlike, image of "merry arms" and "dancing eyes." These conventional phrases are freshened by the girl's native belief that life is only a special knack or magic key, temporarily lost, but which can be easily found again to start the toy body. The last stanza reworks the Nature-in-mourning tradition of classical elegy with a Dickinsonian twist. Morning is particularly "hers," since its dew quality reflects her personality, and morning becomes a playmate but is puzzled and a bit irritated by her sleeping. So it stands outside the door resolved "to force her sleep." The word "force" darkens the final lines and hints at Nature's relentless rule over man's mortality. (The pun of mourning in "morning" catches the paradox of life and death's close connection). Though her sleep is seen as light and temporary, the poem ends with the heartiness of "deep"; while the exact rhyming couplet and repeated diameter lines break the earlier pattern to stress the finality of death. A skilful handling of imagery and detail here enables the writer to avoid the mawkish sentimentality to which poems of a similar kind are prone. Miss Dickinson achieves true pathos.

05. This is my Letter to the World

Complete Text

This is my letter to the world,
That never wrote to me,—
The simple news that Nature told,
With tender majesty.

Her message is committed
To hands I cannot see;
For love of her, sweet countrymen,
Judge tenderly of me!

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05. This is my Letter to the World

Critical Commentary

This is one of Miss Dickinson's best known poems. Although it is one of the early compositions (1862), yet it is applicable to the whole of her work. Her "letter to the world" is of course her poetry which she dedicates to her audience (the world). The world never wrote to her, she says. This may mean that the world has not taken any notice of her or has neglected and ignored her. The first line of the poem is in the nature of a complaint. The third and fourth lines contain the subject-matter of her letter or her poetry. The subject-matter is "the simple news that Nature told/With tender majesty." In other words the subject-matter of her poetry is her universe, her interpretation of Nature's message. Nature's message is being transmitted by her to those whom she cannot see. And finally she appeals to her countrymen to judge her leniently for the sake of Nature whom they love. She loves Nature and they love Nature. They are, therefore, called upon to be soft or gentle in their judgment of the poetess. Thus this poem is a kind of proclamation to the world of the legacy she is leaving and also appeal to the world not to be too severe towards her work.

This is how an eminent critic Richard B. Sewall, who is Miss Dickinson's biographer comments on this poem : "Her famous poem *This is my letter to the world*, too often regarded as a tearful complaint about being neglected, is actually a statement of the difficulty of conveying what she calls the message of Nature. Her concern is for communicating truth.....Her form is not from Donne or Herbert or Vaughan or Francis Quarles (1592–1664) but from that hymnologist to New England Congregationalism, Isaac Watt. By miracle of metaphor, or rhythm or sound, even her tightest little apothegms became poems."

06. The Last Night That She Lived

Complete Text

The Last night that she lived.
It was a common night,
Except the dying; this to us
Made nature different.

We noticed smallest things,—
Things overlooked before,
By this great light upon our minds
Italicized, as 't were.

That others could exist
While she must finish quite,
A jealousy for her arose
So nearly infinite.

We waited while she passed:
It was a narrow time,
Too jostled were our souls to speak,
At length the notice came,

She mentioned, and forgot;
Then lightly as a reed
Bent to the water, shivered scarce,
Consented, and was dead.

And we, we placed the hair,
And drew the head erect;
And then an awful leisure was,
Our faith to regulate.

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06. The Last Night That She Lived

Critical Appreciation

In this poem death is imagined as a graceful departure into the sublime waters of immortality. Pain and loss recede as the dead woman obtains eternal peace.

In the opening stanzas, death's piercing light illuminates important things, besides radiating grace and salvation. The middle stanzas present the mixed responses of the dying woman's friends and relatives. They are grieved that she will die when others are still living. Yet they resent her escape into infinity when they must endure more of life's pain. The next stanzas describe her death with the beautiful image of a slender fragile reed gently bent by the winds. The reed shudders momentarily as it touches the cold waters of eternity; then, as if in glad response, consents to go with death. The final stanza conveys with funeral arrangements and wait to face endless pain of time's separation. Even the hope that their religious belief will control this pain is tinged with irony, for emotions cannot be so confidently ordered. The finality of death leaves one helpless and even shakes faith's consolation.

Pathos is the keynote of this poem. There are psychological touches here and there. The poem gives us a peep into how the human mind works. As death approaches its intended victim, Nature acquires a different look in the eyes of the victim's friends and relatives who notice the smallest things, things overlooked before.

The style and language of the poem are simple. As in other poems, capitalizations and dashers are used abundantly and without much justifications. The poem, according to a critic, contains two grammatical blunders, in addition to a little awkward inversion.

According to James Reeves, in "The Last Night that She Lived" it is evident that the poetess is acutely involved, and for that reason she is careful to overstate nothing: the poem begins almost casually.

In comparison with most conventional elegies its tone is off-hand. Then with the utmost economy of language, the changing emotions of the watchers are described as the moment of death approaches. When the moment comes, the watchers are temporarily ignored: four lines are given to the supreme instant —

She mentioned, and forgot;
Then lightly as a reed
Bent to the water, struggled scarce,
Consented, and was dead.

The simile in the second and third lines is chosen with a skill or insight which cannot be analysed — we recall that to Emily water was usually a symbol of eternity. Then in the final stanza the unspoken feelings of the onlookers are again expressed. I doubt if a death-bed has ever been more indelibly realized in word. Emily's own phrase "a nearness to tremendousness" comes to mind; always when she is nearest to tremendousness she speaks most quietly. At the death-bed the feeling of awe is uppermost: the sense of loss will come later, but for the present all purely human feeling is numbed. After reading such a poem as this, one does not speak of technique.

"The Last Night that She Lived" describes the death of Laura Dickey who died at her parents' home in Amherst in a house next to Dickinson homestead. Perhaps it is not right to restrict the poem to a particular event and this claim does not seem so unreasonable that the poem transcends the particular and merges into the universal.

Quotable Quote

"I dwell in possibility..."

— *Emily Dickinson*

Chapter 02

Important University Questions with Answers

Q. 1. Account for the great popularity that Emily Dickinson enjoy today.

Or

Bring out the main features and aspects of Emily Dickinson's poetry.

Or

Discuss Emily Dickinson as a poetess.

Her Popularity

Emily Dickinson is a great American poet of the nineteenth century. She was "the most perfect flower of New England Transcendentalism," and anticipator of metaphysical poetry, a smeller of modernity, and an upholder of romanticism. In her wit she was metaphysical, in her attitudes a Romantic and in her poetics, a modern. A.C. Ward has called her "Perhaps next to Whitman the greatest American poet of the last century."

Variety of Her Subjects

Although isolated from active life of hurly and burly, secluded from the practical experiences of life, living in her ivory tower, she wrote on a great variety of subjects. She wrote on life, on death, on contemporary social scene, on mortality and immortality, on pain and pleasure, on hope and fear, on love, Nature, God, religion, and virtue. Like Blake she could see eternity in the grain of palm, in the blade of grass, in the chirp of birds and the sound of the stream. Her was a richly romantic soul that found strange beauty and startling suggestion in the simplest elements of experience—the glance of a

friend, a sentence in a book, a bee's hum, a stone in the road, or the slant of light on winter afternoons.

Her Originality

The first thing that strikes us on reading the poems of Miss Dickinson is their great originality. She belonged to no school of poets and hardly cared to imitate anyone's style. Higginson of *The Atlantic Monthly* to whom she sent her poems asking if they were "alive," thought that she was influenced by Whitman's style, and that her poems were "too delicate." But, this is not quite true. Whatever there may be in Emily Dickinson's poetry that bears resemblance to that of Whitman it is not certainly the result of imitation. In fact we have the assertion of Emily Dickinson that she never read Whitman and she had been told that "he was disgraceful." There is greater truth in the suggestion that her poems smack of Emerson's poetry. A comparative study of Emerson's and Emily Dickinson's verse makes this clear. Accounting for this, one of Emily Dickinson's critics writes: "What she actually represents is the last surprising bloom of New England's flowering time..... She was a child of the Golden Day and never lost the impress of the period. Three of its strongest currents came into a confluence in which she was nurtured; the Yankee, or more broadly, American humour that was just coming out of the ground; and the spiritual unrest typified by Emerson which everywhere was melting the frost of custom..... Each was implicit in her surroundings and was absorbed from the atmosphere of her time. Blended, they gave her a style that was both original and native."

Her Poetic Creed

In the form of scraps, letters and her scattered observations, she framed a poetic creed which is not systematic. According to her, poetry is an expression of her private griefs. In a letter she wrote: "If I read a book and it makes my whole body so cold no fire can warm me, I know that is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off. I know that is poetry." Great poetry is identified by its soothing effect. She describes the poet in the following manner:

This was a poet—it is that
 Distills amazing sense
 From ordinary meanings,
 And alters so immense
 From the familiar species
 That perished by the door,

We wonder it was no ourselves
Arrested it before.

She measures every grief she meets with analytic eyes, and she finds "a phrase to every thought that she ever had." To her a poet is an embodiment of wisdom and representative of eternity. She writes:

I reckon when I count at all—
First — poets — Then the sun —
Then Summer — the list I done —
But looking back — the first so seems
To comprehend the Whole —
The Others look a needless show —
So I write — Poets All.

In her poetry opposites co-exist in harmony. Her miniature poems absorb the cosmic and comic, the physical and Psychic, experiences.

Her Lyricism

Emily was a romantic at heart. She was a great lyrical poet like the great romantic poets. In her poetry too we find the major qualities of the great romantic lyrical poets. We have the same love for nature, same personal and emotional note, same pessimism and melancholy, same musical craving to express the grief hidden, and the same richness of imagination as found in the great romantic poets of the nineteenth century. She also has the usual spontaneity. Her themes are also romantic by and large. In her techniques and in her revolt against the Calvinistic tradition of her times she is very much unromantic. Her mysticism and love of beauty is also akin to romanticism.

In short, hers is a lyric genius, not dramatic nor narrative. She wrote about 100 lyrics. She has the precision and economy of expression needed for a lyric. She brought freshness, vivacity, wit and restraint into the lyric form. Her poems are rightly called "bolts of melody," tinkling piano tunes. Hers are the poems of "self."

Her recurrent themes are life, death, soul and love. About one third of her total poetic output relates to death. She is the poet of the limitless reaches of the inward mood and consciousness. She explores the human soul and grasps the essence of human experience. She is the master of epigram too. She makes capital out of capitalization of letters and use of dashes and punctuation. One of her most notable abilities is her skill in giving concrete expression to abstract idea. For example the poem 'Chariot.'

Metaphysical Elements in Her Poetry

Emily Dickinson anticipated Donne, Cowley and metaphysical poets' revival. Like the poetry of the metaphysical school of poetry, her poetry also is a union of thought and emotion and is full of startling images. It possesses Donne's wit and epigrammatic quality. It has the metaphysical brevity and compactness. Like theirs hers is also a poetry of intelligence, wit and controlled emotion rather than as an index to the homilies of religious and political thought. In her metres and broken rhythms too she resembles the metaphysical poets. She is also the mistress of the metaphysical paradox and poignancy.

Modernity in Her Poetry

Emily Dickinson was a modern poet, and she anticipated Hopkins and Pound. Her conceits and jottings, her technical innovations and brevity show her modernity. As the editors of *The American Tradition in Literature* observe, "Readers of the Twentieth Century would understand her better, for it was their idiom that she spoke." In the words of Norman Forester, "Emily Dickinson seems to have experienced, far in advance, something like the spirit of revolt, the scepticism, the freedom of expression that flourished after the First World War." Like the moderns she discovered that sharp, intense image is the poet's best instrument. She also anticipated the modern enlargement of melody by assonance, dissonance, and "off rhyme," the utility of the ellipsis of thought and the verbal ambiguity. In her images and symbols also she is like the modern poets. The lines such as "I Felt a Funeral, in my Brain," the image of box and boot, sink city, the decayed house, coughing goat, sneezing woman and peevish gutters are modern and symbolize spiritual decay and impotence of the present age.

Autobiographical Element in Emily's Poetry

Emily Dickinson's poetry is a confessional document of the eccentricities of the poet's mind. It is a record of her reactions to some unnamed events in life. She lacks the pure objectivity of the modern poets, especially that of Eliot who says that poetry is not an expression of personality but an escape from personality. The picture of Emily Dickinson that emerges from her poems is that of a saintly recluse who defied the conventions of society and who rebelled against the tenets of formal religion. Her egotistical defiance of society and her nearly blasphemous attitude to religion are not the

results of immature adolescence. Many of her poems reveal her frustration and her death poems reflect many of the death scenes she witnessed.

Image and Symbol in Emily Dickinson's Poetry

Tell all the truth
But tell it slant.

So wrote Emily. According to her poetics, direct statement of ideas or direct communication of emotions is not useful. "Her poetry is fundamentally oblique where an idea is communicated, or an emotion recreated not by direct verbal statement but through evocation of appropriate images. Thus, in effect, the image becomes the medium of the poet's communicating process." the image, therefore, has an important role to play in her poems.

Most of her images are drawn from flowers, bees, spiders, wars, voyages of exploration, lightening and volcanoes. There are geometrical and surrealistic images too.

Just mark a few of images:

1.a Maid
Always a Flower would be.
2. Essential oils— are wrung—
The Attar From the Rose
Be not expressed by Sungs— alone—
It is the gift of screws.
3. Because the Bee may blameless hum
For Thee a Bee do I become
List even unto Me.
4. A sepal, petal, and a thorn—
And I'm a rose.
5. The reticent volcano keeps
— His never slumbering plan.

As mentioned by Albert. J. Gelpi, the rose symbolizes natural phenomena; the sun, the transcendent fertilizing power; and the attar, the artistic distillation. The spider is the symbol of the artist, who spins around him a world of imagination. The poetess calls the spider "the neglected son of genius." The images of the sea, voyages and

exploration symbolize the poet's yearning to explore the mysterious continents of her inner self.

Her imagery is complex and functional. In extreme flights of imagination she uses images which seem surrealistic in their content. For instance in the poem, "I'll tell you how the sun rose," the poetess speaks of the sunrise in terms of 'a ribbon at a time.' So is the images of 'the hills untying their bonnets.' Her most frequent metaphor for ecstasy is circumference.

Her Technical Peculiarities

Strange use of capital letters, frequent use of dashes, use of synonyms, repetition of metres, use of irregular metres and rhythms, slanting manner of expression, brevity and conciseness of expression, use of colloquial expressions, grammatical irregularities, are some of her well-known technical popularities.

Q. 2. Discuss the Language, Technique and Style of Emily Dickinson's poetry.

Or

Write a short critical essay on how Emily Dickinson has "charged her style with life."

Or

Emily Dickinson's "precision of vocabulary and condensed statement anticipated the twentieth century." Discuss.

Or

What are the main ingredients of Emily Dickinson's poetic style? Illustrate your answer.

Emily experimented with language and style of poetry. Some critics condemn and reject her stylistic modes. They characterize them as unpardonable, barbarous lapses of diction and rhythms. They call her punctuation erratic and her grammar, incorrigible. They attribute all these lapses to her intellectual arrogance or lack of maturity of style and content. But such an approach is not fair, for Emily was a frank experimentalist. She innovated syntax. She is fond of short monosyllabic word. Economy of expression and suggestiveness are the hallmarks of her style. Most of her poems are microscopic

structures that can accommodate into them the whole range of microscopic experience in the life of the poet. Her common metre is eight-syllabic iambic followed by one of eighty syllables. She uses odd rhymes. Her style is uniquely her own. It has vividness, freshness and originality. She can minimize big things. God becomes 'Papa above,' 'a noted clergyman,' death 'a supple suitor' or a gentleman who gives a courteous ride to a lady. Just mark the mastery of her paradox: "We lose because we win," "a wounded Beer—leaps highest," "Tell all the Truth but tell it slant," or

Success—is counted sweetest
By those who ne'er succeed....

She can convey more meaning through her metaphors, symbols and images.

The technical imperfections of Emily Dickinson's verse have imperfect rhyme, she takes liberties with grammar and rhyme and makes a habit of packing her lines with cryptic meanings. What she has said about the letter in her poem "Going to Him! Happy Letter" may be said about her poetry:

I only said the syntax
And left the verb and the pronoun out

This of course, left slow readers perplexedly fumbling for an omitted connection. Fastidious critics are annoyed by her carelessness of rhyme and lapses of grammar, but her readers find it a delightful experience to grape for the meaning of the poet. Nine tenths of her supposed lapses of grammar are to be accounted for by a stenographic terseness of expression which eliminates customary connectives and suffixes as in her poem "A Secret":

A secret toll
Ceases to be a secret then
A secret kept—
That can appeal but one.

Better of it
Continual be afraid
Than it and whom
You told it to, beside.

Emily Dickinson habitually resorts to the subjunctive use of the verb, which is no longer common in the English speech. Thus in her self-revealing poem we get this:

Publication is the auction
 Of the mind of man
 Poverty by justifying
 For so foul a thing.

Even about the theme, Emily Dickinson can at times be delightfully vague. One of her poems runs thus:

It dropped so low in my regard
 I heard it hit the ground,
 And go to pieces on the stones
 At bottom of my mind

Let blamed the fate that fractured, less
 Then I reviled myself
 For entertaining plated wares
 Upon my silver shelf.

We do not know what the "it" means. But this vagueness, instead of spoiling the poem, actually enhances its beauty. The sense is clear, the moral is conveyed. Along with these enigmatic usages and expressions, we get in Emily Dickinson's poetry a quaint love of paradoxes. For instance, she writes:

A death-blow is a life-blow to some
 Who, till they died, did not alive become,
 Who, had they lived had died, but when
 They died, vitality begun.

In spite of all these, defects of style they are, the final impression of her work is of astonishing integrity and originality. Summing up the qualities of her work Marcus Cunliffe writes: "Despite her interest in death, she exhibits a quick sensibility to the world around her, and to the materials of her craft. Technically a poor poet, she does most effective violence to vocabulary. Terms from many sources—law, geometry, engineering—are used to suit her purpose. Commonplace words come alive in new contexts and she never hesitates to substitute parts of speech.

Kingdom like the orchard
 Flit russetly away.

Sometimes her economy is that of New England idiom: "And 't was like midnight some"—The laconic 'some' could only have been used by an American poet.

One critic comparing her with Whitman has said that both write as though no one had written poetry before. The remark is both a fair criticism, and a great and merited compliment. In her finest lines, she has all the magic of a major poet. The words,

Father in summer that the birds,
Pathetic from the grass,

to take one example from hundreds, wonderfully defy analysis. The magic of her verse eludes definition. The charm, slender and delicate as gossamer, that makes her poems so appealing is as elusive as the elusive thought that the poetess describes in one of her poems:

Nor where it went, nor why it came
Nor definitely what it was
Have I the art to say.

Q. 3. Discuss the recurring themes in Emily Dickinson's poetry.

Emily Dickinson, though a refugee from practical life and its experiences, understood very well life and its problems. She wrote on myriad human subjects like life and death, God and Nature, time and eternity, human emotions like love, hope and fear, the trivial and the sublime, the cosmic and the comic, the finite and the infinite. "She was a child of the Golden Day and never lost the impress of the period. Three of its strongest currents came into a confluence in which she was nurtured; the Yankee, or more broadly, American humour that was just coming out of the ground; and the spiritual unrest typified by Emerson which everywhere was melting the forest of custom....."

The Theme of Life

PUACP

Emily writes of mankind's fears and hopes, its moments of frustration and its ecstasies of joy. Here are her opinions on success:

Success is counted sweetest
By those who never succeed.
To comprehend a nectar
Requires sorest need.

And on defeat and victory:

Life is but life, and death but death!
Bliss is but bliss and breath but breath!

And, if indeed, I fail,
At least to know the worst is sweet:
Defeat means nothing but defeat
No drearier can happen.

For her life is a blend of tears and smiles; every smile is mingled with a pearl of tear:

For each ecstatic instant
We must an anguish pay
In keen and quivering ratio
To the ecstasy.

And

Delight becomes pictorial
When viewed through pain.....

Hope is like a sweet little bird perching on the soul of every man. It keeps on pouring its melody of hope in every life and even life of chill suffering is made warm by the sweet music of hope:

Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches on soul,
And sings the tone without words,
And never stops at all.

The spirit of man strengthened by hope is superior to Fate. Man should never lose his faith in himself:

To lose one's faith surpasses
To lose of an estate,
Because estates can be,
Replenished,—faith cannot.

And the inner life of man is more valuable than any other thing:

The brain is wider than the sky,
For, put them side by side,
The one the other will include
With ease, and you beside.
The brain is deeper than the sea
The brain is just the weight of God.....

Emily Dickinson's views of life are philosophic and healthy.

The spirit of Emily Dickinson's poems has been compared with that of the great metaphysicals, John Donne and William Blake; she is

indeed like them in her ability to expand the little particularities of her everyday existence into ideas that are timeless and universal. For Emily these particularities of life were birds, flies, frogs, sunrises and sunsets, cups, saucers, door, even a snake, that "narrow Fellow in the Grass." Broadening these simple subjects, the poetess expresses her feelings about God, death, and immortality.

The Theme of Nature

"A great deal of Emily Dickinson's poetry bristles with nature themes. There are frequent references, direct and indirect, to various phenomena of Nature. Emily Dickinson wrote on flowers and bees on birds and spiders, on caterpillars and butterflies, on lightning and volcanoes, on mountains and daisies, and hundred other things found in nature."

Defining her view of Nature she wrote in one poem:

Nature is what we see—
The Hill—the Afternoon—
Squirrel—Eclipse—the Bumble bee—
Nay—Nature is Heaven—

Nature is what we hear—
The Bobolink—the sea—
Thunder the Cricket—
Nay—Nature is Harmony—

The Theme of Love

A very large number of Emily's poems deal with the theme of love. These love poems which are among the best poems ever written on the subject sound the whole gamut of love. Poems evincing a romantic attitude to love, poems that frankly depict a turbulent passion, poems that ring with the anguish of separation from the loved one, and poems exalting the theme of renunciation of love and the spiritual victory thus won, have all come from the pen of this strangely powerful poet. Her own burning experience of love may be discerned from the frankly passionate and highly anguished poems she wrote. She always reckoned love as a very great thing and in more poems than one she comments upon the importance of love. One of her well known poems is a triumphant rhapsody of love:

Love can do all but raise the dead:
I doubt if even that

From such a giant were withheld
Were flesh equivalent.

Another poem celebrating love is also worth quoting:

Love is that later thing than death,
More previous than life,
Conforms, it at its entrance and
Usurps it of itself.

Emily wrote about 100 poems of love during 1861-63. Critics have variously related them to her different lovers—Benjamin Newton, Henry Vaughan, Emmons and Charles Wadsworth. Knowledge about such affairs is unconfirmed. There are scholars who say that her love poems are based only on theoretical propositions. They have nothing or very little to do with her practical love affairs. Both views are prevalent in literary circles. Love to Emily was like a boundless ocean which puts minor streams to rest. Love taught her immense patience and fortitude. The toil of love led her to explore the undiscovered continent of divine love and she associated sometimes this particular element with Death and Immortality.

Her love poems indeed deal with many facets of love, from rapture to despair, from the physical to metaphysical, from earth to heaven. Sometimes she gives an imaginative treatment of love. Love divested of all its earthly voluptuousness becomes a mystic life-force. As her lovers have always Eternity in view where they might thrive "unmolested" by the pangs of death, their love never comes to fruition in this world. In the poem, "I cannot live without you," the beloved says that she would rather endure the agony of Hell where she would be ultimately consigned to after the judgment day than suffer pangs of separation from her lover. She knows that she cannot live a "life" with him now—she is denied that pleasure. But she can meet him after death and then be with him until Judgement-day. The pleasure of association she would thus derive will invest her with power enough to endure the pains of Hell.

This theme of reunion after death recurs in a series of poems like "'Twas a long Parting—but the time," "You taught me Waiting with Myself," "Fitter to see him I may be," etc. In the poem "There came a day at Summer's full," the lovers plan a marriage in the after world. Love is spoken of as being immortal in the following lines:

I live with Him—I hear his voice—
 I stand alive—today—
 To witness to the Certainty
 Of Immortality—

The Theme of Mortality and Immortality

A good deal of Emily Dickinson's poetry is filled with themes of mortality and immortality. It has been estimated that nearly a third of the bulk of her poetry concerns the theme of death. She once wrote to Higginson: "death gave me awe for friends, striking sharp and early, for I held them since in a brittle love, of more alarm than peace." Death was central problem of her life. She faced it almost every day. She lived at a place which fell in the way to a cemetery, and funeral processions passed by her family friends, love, life and convictions. She was moved by the deaths of babies and women. She accepts death as a physical fact, as a material truth, and though this acceptance leads to philosophical and theological ruminations, her immediate interest in the poems is to dramatize the event to bring out the tension, conflict or inner drama that such a catastrophic event will have on the minds of an audience. Her obsession with death is due to her Puritan surroundings.

Her death-poems are divided into four groups by Thomas Welborn Ford: (i) poems dealing with death and immortality; (ii) poems dealing with the physical aspects of death; (iii) poems which personify death; and (iv) poems with an elegiac note. Her poems "Because I Could Not Stop for Death" is a characteristic poem in which the idea that calm acceptance of death is a way of conquering death. Just as the diver is rewarded with the pearl after taking a plunge into the depth of the ocean and just as the seraph has been raised to the first rank, similarly immortality is the reward for human beings who face death calmly and boldly.

Her poems on immortality record the progress of the poets' journey from doubts and questionings to an ultimate faith, immortality. Just see the following lines:

1. Death is a dialogue between
The spirit and the dust.....
2. The life we have is very great
The life that we shall see
Surpass it, we know, because

It is infinity
 But when all space has been beheld
 And all Dominion shown
 The smallest human heart's extent
 Reduces it to none.

3. Behind Me—Dips Eternity
 Before Me—Immortality—
 Myself—the Term between—
 Death but the Drift of Eastern Gray
 Dissolving into Dawn away
 Before the vast begin.

The Theme of God and Religion

In spite of her preoccupation with the themes of death and immortality, Emily shows an obsession with Time. She views time as experienced in this life as a "brief term" linking the two miracles—the miracle of Eternity and the miracle of Immortality. "Using the Bible as her chief source of inspiration and the rhythms of the hymn books as a metrical starting point." Emily Dickinson wrote a number of poems of religious themes or God. Her relationship with God is an interesting one, for even in her childhood she could not force herself to be orthodox. As a school girl she had great difficulty in professing herself to be a Christian. The harsh God of the old Testament—the God who created man in His own image, restricted him with all sorts of "thou shall nots," and then destroyed the image with death—had little appeal to Emily. In her poems her God is very personal one, to be treated like a friend, praised for his good deeds and chided for his faults. Pompous piety has no place in any of her religious poems and when her feelings of intimacy led her to address the Deity as "Papa above" we are charmed rather than shocked by poetry that lets us become a part of a delightful woman who the trivialities of existence and the untouchable varieties are of equal importance.

Emily sometimes gives a humorous treatment of God. She treats God as an intimate kinsman and calls Him "Jupiter my father" and "burgler and banker." She sometimes calls him her "old neighbour" and sometimes as "Papa above." Her attitude to God and religion is basically ambivalent. She believes in God, yet she does not believe. She has intense faith in immortality, but her doubts about immortality are equally intense. She wavers between Paganism and Puritanism.

Miscellaneous Themes

A small section of her poetry reflects the social scene and contemporary incidents from balloon ascensions to circuses and railroads. When the first train arrived in Amherst, she recorded the event in a poem, which is interesting despite its conceits. A group of poems satirizes the sterile minds and small petty outlook of the Amherst ladies. The soft conventional lives of the ladies are ridiculed by the poet thus:

What oft-cherubic creatures—
 These Gentlewomen are—
 One would as soon assault a Plush—
 Or violate a star—
 Such Dimity convictions—
 A Horror so refined
 Of freckled Human Nature—
 Of Duty — ashamed —
 It's such a common — Glory
 A Fisherman's — Degree.

Though poems on social themes and with satirical intent appear among the collected pieces of Emily Dickinson, yet these are not her best poems. For the best poetic output of this strange genius, we have to turn to those poems which repeatedly make use of themes that lay closest to her heart—themes like Nature, Love, Death and Immortality. It is in these poems that her genius is aglow and it is these poems that form the seclusion of her life she bequeathed to the world as her best offering.

Q. 4. Discuss Emily Dickinson as a poet of death.

Or

Analyse critically the theme of death in the poetry of Emily Dickinson.

It has been estimated that nearly a third of the bulk of her poetry concerns the theme of death, which has attracted largest critical attention. Throughout her life she was preoccupied with death. She referred to death not only in her poems but also in her letters to her friends, sometimes her attitude towards death is that of awe and fear; at other times she seems to be in love with death and regards it as a gateway to eternal and permanent rest. She saw death

all around herself, in her family, friends, love, life and convictions. On one occasion she explained why her ideas were rather dark: "I have just seen a funeral procession go by of a negro baby, and if my ideas are rather dark you need not marvel." She accepts death as a physical fact, as a material truth. Her pre-occupation with death may largely be owing to her Puritan surroundings. In the Puritan doctrine of existence death theme occupied a solemn place. For the Puritan, death is the climax of living, and it must be taken in a solemn way.

Thomas Wellborn Ford has grouped her death poems into four categories:—

- (i) Poems dealing with death and immortality;
- (ii) Poems dealing with the physical aspects of death;
- (iii) Poems which personify death; and
- (iv) Poems with an elegiac note.

In "Adrift! A little boat adrift" the poetess compares death with night and her life with a boat. In "I haven't told my garden yet—" there is the tone of mockery and death is talked of as something that does not deserve one's attention:

I will not name it in the street
For shops would stare at me—
That one so shy—so ignorant
Should have the face to die.

There are poems which simply dramatize death, observing the dying or the dead from specific angles, studying character psychology before or after the climatic point, that is death. Some of the poems are reflections on cemeteries, funeral processions or acts of burial. "Bless God" death is spoken of as a person with a 'musket of his breast, and who would charge the bravest of all the martial blest.' Poems like "Just lost, when I was saved," "How many times these low feet staggered," present death as moving to a pre-chosen destination to take possession of the objects it has decided on, in a cool, calculated manner. In "A Visitor in Marl," death is spoken of as something inevitable:

As Visitor in Marl—
Who influences Flowers—
Till they are orderly as Busts—
And Elegant—as Glass—

Who visits in the Night—
 AND JUST BEFORE THE SUN—
 Concludes his glistening interview
 Caresses—and is gone—

Poems like "I want to thank Her," "It feels a shame to be Alive," "I think I was enchanted," "Her sweet turn to leave the Homestead", etc. are elegiac in tone, and recapture in words the moods of the speakers as they confront death. The gap between life and death is unbridgeable, but this realization comes only when one is betaken by death:

'Our journey had advanced
 Our feet were almost come
 To that odd Fork in Being's Road—
 Eternity—by Term—
 Our pace took sudden awe—
 Our feet—reluctant—led—
 Before—were—Cities—but Between—
 The Forest of the Dead—
 Retreat—was out of Hope—

At last she walked between belief and disbelief, yet was always obsessed by death:

Of Paradise's existence
 All we know
 Is the uncertain certainty.

"Because I Could Not Stop for Death" is one of her best poems on death. It is also remarkable for its imagery. In this poem, the poetess suggests that the best way to overcome death is to conquer it:

Because I could not stop for Death,
 He kindly stopped for me,
 The carriage held but just ourselves
 And Immortality.

We slowly drove, he knew no haste,
 And I had put away.
 My labour, and my leisure too,
 For his civility.

We passed the school where children played
 At wrestling in a ring;
 We passed the fields of gazing grain,
 We passed the setting sun.

We passed before a house that seemed
A swelling of the ground
The roof was scarcely visible,
The cornice but a mound

Since then 't is centuries, but each
Feels shorter than the day
I first surmised the horse's heads
Were toward eternity.

The idea that death is a gateway to immortality has been expressed frequently by Emily and in one of her poems she likens death to a pilot which takes the human soul to the shores of Eternity.

On this wondrous sea,
Sailing silently,
Knowest thou the shore
Ho!pilot ho!
Where no breakers roar
Where the storm is o'er?
In the silent west
Many sails at rest,
Their anchors fast,
There I pilot thee,—
Land, ho! Eternity!
Ashore at last.

Just as the diver is rewarded with the pearl after taking plunge into the depth of the ocean and just as the seraph has been raised to the first rank, similarly immortality is the reward for human beings who face death calmly and boldly. Our attention should be focussed on immortality rather than on death:

Pearls are tha Divers 'farthing
Extorted from the sea—
Pinions—the Seraph's wagon
Pedestrian once—as we—

Night is the morning's Canvas
Larceny — legacy —
Death, but our rapt attention
To Immortality.

My figures fail to tell me
How far the Village lies —

Whose peasants are Angels—
Whose Canton dot the skies—

My classics veil their faces—
My faith that Dark adores—
Which from its solemn abbeys
Such resurrection pours.

- Q.5. Trace the Puritan influence on Emily Dickinson's poetry.

Or

Discuss Emily as a poet of New England or Amherst.

Emily Dickinson is part of a stark tradition—one that includes philosophers and poets from Edward Taylor to Robert Frost. In her work one can discern several things that were peculiar to the puritan mind. She was in many respects a child of puritan New England, though the great fact remains that she rose above her time and her immediate environment by her sheer genius.

The influence of New England on the poet was strongly felt, and her poetry reflects whatever was good or bad about Amherst. This fact has struck her critics and one of them George Whicher in his books, *This Was a Poet* says: "To an extraordinary degree she absorbed into herself the atmosphere of the countryside where she was born.....she made it her business to embody in her poems the quintessence of New England ways of thinking and feeling. In her, the region became articulate."

Born in Amherst she lived and died in the house in which she was born and except for a few short trips never left it. It is not surprising therefore that New England should have shaped her thoughts and habits. Even in her poetic technique her terse poetic shorthand, we find New England traits of frugality. And as for the rhythms of her poetry, they are based of the New England hymn tunes.

The atmosphere in the town of Amherst into which Emily Dickinson was born was one of brooding Calvinistic, religious consciousness. The thought of Doomsday and God's vengeance obsessed the people. Religious fervour was the most popular sentiment. Though Emily Dickinson's was a quietly rebellious personality, she shared the great religious awareness of her

community as is evident from her poetry. Her themes include immortality, Resurrection and Eternity, and religious experience. Her constant exploration of religious experience to the dead is the result of the Calvinistic tendencies. Nineteenth century Amherst was a cradle of Calvinistic beliefs rigidly enforced. Among the prominent and cherished ideals were the doctrine of justification of Divine Grace coming to a person and that of sanctification that is, a man proving himself worthy of grace by living the acceptable Christian life. These ideas were real and important to the people. Church membership was a test of the good life. But Emily Dickinson rebelled against all these. She stopped attending church by 1810 and she observed that all her family were religious but herself. She once wrote that she "has no particular objection to becoming a Christian," adding in mock-seriousness, "I am one of the bad ones." She rejected many of the Calvinistic doctrines like man's innate depravity and predestination. She went a step further and satirised many of these orthodox beliefs. In poems such as "Abraham to kill him" and "of God we ask one favour," we find her poking fun at the idea of original sin. She does not spare God either, whom Calvinistic dogmas pictured as an unforgiving tyrant, quick to punish but reluctant to forgive, and indifferent to human suffering. The paradox of original sin and man's incurring the wrath of God because of this, is ironically commended upon by Emily Dickinson in a poem called "Heavenly Father—take to thee." Here she accuses God of duplicity for putting the unavoidable original sin into man and then taking him to task for the very same sin.

Though Emily Dickinson took such privileges with the name of God, she had great reverence for God, and a firm, unwavering trust in His existence. The question of immortality hovered forever in her consciousness and many are the poems where she has affirmed her faith in the immortality of the soul. Even when she turned away in distaste from the religious professions and avowals of her contemporaries, she was intensely concerned with the salvation of the soul and deeply aware of spiritual reality. It was not that Emily Dickinson was not truly religious; it was that her attitude was strikingly unorthodox. Sanctimonious attitudes were not for her. Unlike most other Americans, Emily Dickinson was religiously oriented. Her poems repeatedly make use of the themes of the nature of the soul, problems of immortality, the possibility of faith and the reality of God. Her poems typified the moral earnestness of the old Puritans. She was also a mystic in the sense that she was forever

trying to experience and perceive the Divine force, which she, in her typically enigmatic way described as "Circumference."

Emily Dickinson's inordinate pre-occupation with Death and pain and suffering is also a puritan streak. Pain and anguish fascinated the poet. Time and time again she dwelt on the question of anguish. One of her startling poems on pain begins:

I like a look of agony.
Because I know it's true.

The effect of suffering on the soul is depicted by her beautiful poem "After Great Pain a formal feeling comes,"

After great pain a formal feeling comes—
The nerves sit ceremonious like tombs;
X X X
This is the hour of lead
Remembered if outlived
As freezing persons recollect the snow—
First chill, then stupor, then letting go.

Among the eighteen hundred poems that Emily Dickinson composed more than five hundred deal with the theme of death. She views death from all possible angles, depicting all its varied aspects. Death is treated lightly in one of her poems—'Death of a child,'

She lay as if at play
Her life had leaped away—
Intending to return—
But not so soon....
Her Morning at the door—
Devising. I am sure—
To force her sleep—
So light—so deep—

'Because I could not stop for Death' is easily the best poem that Emily Dickinson wrote on the subject of death. Immortality also creeps it to the poem and is pictured as the third person in the carriage, mentioned in the first stanza.

Because I could not stop for Death—
He kindly stopped for me—
The Carriage held but just Ourselves—
And Immortality.

To Emily Dickinson, Death appeared in varied guises. At times she treats death as a courtly lover, at times as the dreadful assassin. Sometimes death is the physical corrupter, and sometimes the only free agent in nature. Poems like 'Because I Could Not Stop for Death' and 'A Clock Stopped' deal with the inexorable power of death. These poems underline also the physical transformation and the final isolation that death involves. Sometimes Emily Dickinson has emphasized the grim aspects of death by her deliberate use of the funeral and religious imagery. Death and immortality were thought of together by the poets who even interchanged these terms. She rather thought of death as the threshold of the new state of immortality. Thus the introspective Puritan conscience that Emily Dickinson inherited, may be found in her intense preoccupation with pain, death and immortality. With her incessant searching with the recesses of the spirit, she reminds us of Thoreau. Her soul's infinite capacity for awareness is found in everything that she wrote.

That Emily Dickinson was a product of Puritan New England atmosphere is agreed upon by all her critics. **Allen Tate** in his article "New England Culture and Emily Dickinson" argues with great eloquence that she was born into a perfect literary situation. His idea is that the role that fell on Emily Dickinson was to look at the old invalidated traditions of the community and to examine critically these traditions in the light of her own experience and to 'discover anew their enduring values.' **Allen Tate** says that Emily Dickinson's task was one of defining culture, that is rediscovering the source of ideas and standards which had become obscured by dogma and practicality. One thing is certain and it is that the best poems that Emily Dickinson wrote are those which reveal "the clash of her perceptive, inquiring mind with the rigidly orthodox community."

Q. 6. Discuss Emily Dickinson as a love poet.

The strange young woman who shut herself away from the world in the most mysterious manner possible has been the subject of a great deal of conjecture. It has been agreed among critics that a disappointment in love, a searing and devastating emotional experience has been the reason behind Emily Dickinson's withdrawal from the world. Many names touch as Benjamin Newton, Henry Vaughan, Emmons and Charles Wadsworth have been suggested by critics and biographers as possible lovers of Emily Dickinson. However the identity of the person who caused indescribable anguish to the sensitive poet, cannot be established beyond the

shadow of a doubt, for she has very carefully covered up her personal life. There is no doubt at all about the fact that there was an emotional crisis in her life the white heat of which was to forge her untempered spirit. From her letters and her poems it may safely be gathered that some climatic emotional experience occurred, during 1860-1862.

Emily Dickinson's brother Austen once remarked that his sister was often in love and responded emotionally to many men. Many of her early love lyrics are sentimental and are general expressions of a young girl's awareness of the male. But gradually we find the tone changing. Clearly the love poems at this stage mirror an ardent love, full of desire and erratic anticipation couched in allegorical language. Poignantly the poems go on to reveal the anguish of parting and then they become the record of severe schooling of her emotions and renunciation of a physical love, only to have it transformed into something spiritual. From the early sentimental love-lyrics to the religio-mystical love-utterances we find a wide range in Emily Dickinson's love poetry. They afford very frank pictures of her own passionate longings and also psychological studies of repression and emotional desire. One who is acquainted with the entire range of her love poems can only marvel at the fact that even after reading some of them Higginson, her literary Guide and mentor, declared that no American writer had ever written great love poetry and that "the American poet of passion is yet to come." The truth of the matter however is that few American poets before Emily Dickinson or after her have given such a probing analysis of love in its varied aspects or described with such unforgettable effectiveness, the effects of love and passion.

The love poems of Emily Dickinson can be examined in different groups or stages. The first grouping consists of her most sentimental and early love lyrics. But when her ardent soul throbbed to the magnetism of one man, the poems got filled with images of shipwreck, drowning and suicide thus proving the devastating effect the passion has on her. One of the poems belonging to this period is "I started Early—Took My Dog," which tries to analyse the complex and powerful emotional influence exerted by the male upon the passive female. The theme of powerful physical attraction is treated here long with the idea of running away from this frightening and fascinating experience. Within the allegorical framework we have these two themes. The poem apparently deals with the visit of a young girl to the sea-shore:

I started Early — Took my Dog —
 And visited the Sea —
 The Mermaids in the Basement
 Came out to look at me —

The word 'Early' holds the key to the interpretation of this poem. It means that the young girl is on a journey unattempted before. Gradually the tone changes from one of childlike innocence to a deep awareness. The young girl fascinated by the Sea's advances expressed in a number of mild sexual images. The newly awakened emotions of the girl and her fear at the thought of the Sea's complete possession of her are expressed in verse that is suggestive of shock:

And He — followed — close behind —
 I felt his Silver Heel
 Upon my ankle — Then my Shoes
 Would overflow with Pearl —
 Until we met the Solid Town —
 No one He seemed to know —
 And bowing — with a Mighty look —
 At me — the Sea withdrew.

Examining all the associations clustered about the Sea, his beauty, freedom, haughtiness, made power, and the shy fearful repressed qualities of the female and the land we can assume that the poem is meant to express the emotional physical effects of a lover's advances. She nearly succumbs but her life of control and suppressions proves stronger than this temptation and she returns to the solid town. "The basic theme is the rejection of one of life's prime forces — love, sex, beauty or death for a weak conventional existence."

PUACP

(John B. Pickard).

Another poem that is even more powerful as a Pre-Freudian "In Winter in My Room." The poem begins on a note of child-like simplicity describing a worm that is found in the room of a woman and which is taken by her to be something quite harmless. She ties it to her apron string:

In Winter in my Room
 I came upon a Worm —
 Pink, lank and warm

 Secured him by a string
 To something neighbouring.

The worm stands for the male Force which she feels confident she can cope with. But very soon the Worm changes its aspects and becomes something commanding and dominating. The woman is at once fascinated by and terrified of this altered presence. The transition of the worm into something else is expressed thus:

A Snake with mottles rare
 Surveyed my chamber floor
 In features as the Worm before
 But ringed with power—

In the end we find the woman breaking herself loose from this spell and withdrawing into isolation, banishing her desire and the memory of it with the words: "This was a dream."

Yet another poem that is frank in its analysis of passion's effect upon her is "My Life had Stood—a Loaded Gun." —The central imagery of the loaded gun needing the help of another to let it go symbolises the passive woman awakened by the active male hunter:

My life has stood—a Loaded gun—
 In Corners till a Day
 The Owner passed—identified—
 And carried Me away—
 And now We roam in sovereign Woods
 And now we hunt the Doe—
 And every time I speak for Him—
 The Mountains straight reply.

The emotional force in her nature has to be released by the owner. This idea that she is senseless and inert without his love is indicated by the last stanza of the poem:

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—

While these poems deal with repression and subdued passion quite a large number of her poems depict passion openly. Poems such as "Come slowly—Eden!" and "Wild Nights Wild Nights!" are openly erratic. The acknowledged passion of these poems, is repeated in her Master letters also written in the late 1850s. The passionately phrased letters throw much light upon the poems. The agony of the soul is revealed in a letter such as this, written with abandoned passion, "I

am older—tonight, Master—but the lover is the same—so are the moon and the crescent. If it had been God's will that I might breathe where you breathed—and find the place—myself—at night—if I (can) never forget that I am not with you—and that sorrow and frost are nearer than I—if I wish with a might, I cannot repress—that mine were the Queen's place... What would you do with me if I came "in white?" Have you the little chest to put thee Alive—in? I want to see you more—Sir—than all I wish for in this world—and the wish—altered a little—will be my only one—for the skies."

Poems like "Come slowly—Eden" I and "A Bee in his Furnished Carriage" employ the conventional bee flower imagery to convey physical desire. The exultation and thrill she experiences at the thought of his visit find expression in "If you were coming in the Fall" and "Tis so much joy!" Mixed with her passionate out-bursts we get the tone of triumph and exultation in poems like "I've stopped being Their" and "Dare you see a soul at the White Heat?" The poem challenges the reader to view her glowing searing passion without himself being blinded by its dazzling brightness. She asserts that though red is usually the colour of love, her passion has rendered it white.

The theme of lovers' union also finds expression in the poetry of Emily Dickinson. The largest group among her love poems consists of those dealing with the actual meeting of lovers. "Again—his voice is at the door" is typical of the group of poems, as it recaptures the sublime emotional experiences that the lovers get when they meet. The same intensity appears in another famous poem, "There came a Day at Summer's full;" but here we find the poet's assumption that the lover's earthly renunciation will gain for them heavenly bliss. It gives us the philosophy that denial here on earth entitles the lovers to perfect bliss in Heaven. But this mood of joy at renunciation is not always sustained. The anguish of separation can be felt in her poems, when faith in God also fails to comfort her, "I got so I could take his name," enables us to feel this agony. The first three stanzas portray the pains of renunciation and tensions of the final meeting better than any other lover poems.

In her later poems there is a marked change and a more definite reliance on God and religion. Her efforts to sublimate her human passion into a divine experience have inspired her most artistic love poems. It is here that the mystic in Emily Dickinson appears. She constantly refers to herself as the Bride of Christ and rationalises her

frustration here on earth. The religious explanation that she gives for it is that God deliberately denied the lovers happiness here on earth so that they may be given a chance of enjoying spiritual happiness. These poems celebrate a heavenly marriage with her lover, but at times the figure of the earth fades and the marriage assumes the mystical overtones of a celestial union with God. In this group of poems the poet 'fuses the sacred and profane aspects of human passion. The term 'bride' itself is used in varying meanings. At first the term is used meaning an actual woman being married, then as the bride of death, and finally as the bride of God in Paradise, Charles Anderson has thrown light on this aspect of Emily Dickinson's poetry: "The struggle between earthly and heavenly love remains central to the most successful poems in the marriage group. More accurately it is the source of tension she set up by embodying the heavenly theme in earthly terms, then making these into images with celestial reference.....Two strategies of languages are responsible for the success, the language of Status and the Signs which denote the elevation from one level to another."

A poem in which the human passion is transformed into divine love is "Title divine—is mine!"

Title divine—is mine!
 The Wife—without the Sign!
 Acute Degree—conferred on me—
 Empress of Calvary!

The bulk of Emily Dickinson's poems on the theme of love in all its varied aspects and moods prove the great weight she attached to the subject. Viewing the subject of love from her own personal experience and also from a philosophical point of view, she was convinced of the great importance of love. She once declared "love is all there is" and equated it with God himself. Convinced that even God needed love and that love is meaningless unless reciprocated, she argued that God was dependent upon man's love for complete happiness. Her poems afford the most rapturous glorification of love and also her affirmation that love triumphs over both life and death and achieves divine status. Though her love poems are based on her close examination of her own deep experience of love and passion, yet they transcend their particular contexts and boundaries to become a universal account of any human soul that has suffered and endured. This is what guarantees immortality to Emily Dickinson's love poetry.

Dickinson's poems like "The Morning after Woe" and "I Dreaded that First Robin, so" analyse Nature's betrayal of those hearts that loved her best. Taking the case of the frost's beheading a flower she writes a poem entitled "Apparently with No Surprise" where she questions the belief that Nature has some meaning. She seems to suggest such wanton deeds of destruction.

This is not the only instance where Emily Dickinson is preoccupied with the destructive aspects of Nature. The violent, destructive powers of Nature like storms and lightning impressed her. And some of her best poems stress Nature's decaying and corruptive power. She had a keen eye also for the repulsive and the ugly in Nature. One of her important Nature poems is "A Narrow Fellow in the Grass" dealing with the feeling of terror and awe that the snake's presence in the midst of the grass causes.

"The Mushroom is the Elf of Plants" is remarkable for its blending of humour and fairy element, and its suggestion of mystery and elusiveness found in nature:

Tis vegetation's juggler
 The germ of alibi;
 Doth like a bubble antedate
 And like a bubble die
 I feel as if the grass were pleased
 To have it intermit;
 The surreptitious scion
 Of summer's circumspect
 Has nature any outcast face
 Could she a son contemn,
 Had nature an Iscariot,
 That mushroom,—it is him.

Emily's eyes are open to the beauties of Nature. One of the natural phenomena that attracted Emily Dickinson — was sunrise and sunset, e.g. "I'll tell you how the sun rose." A number of images give a vivid idea of the splendour and the sudden surprise of sunrise. Another poem about the same subject makes use of a daring comparison that is at once original and arresting

Blazing in gold and quenching in Purple
 Leaping like Leopards to the sky
 Then at the feet of the old Horizon
 Laying her spotted face to die.

Another thing that filled Emily Dickinson with wonder and awe was the coming of summer rains and lightning storms. The magnificent display of power behind these won her admiration which is evident in poems like "The Wind Begin to Knead the Grass," and "There came a wind like a bugle."

Emily Dickinson's favourite things in Nature were flowers. She loved flowers dearly and her knowledge of them was deep and wide. She has written poems on the rose, the buttercup and the daisy. But these are all written in the conventional way. A poem on the arbutus has the best traits of her poetry, economy of expression, precision and novelty:

Pink – small – and punctual –
 Aromatic – low
 Covert – in April –
 Candid – in May –

Descriptions of birds form a considerable part of Emily Dickinson's nature poetry. In "One of the ones that Midas Touched" she sings about the oriole and the blue joy is the subject of "No Brigadier throughout the fear." Her portrait of the humming bird is more famous than these. The Ruby-throated little singer is described thus:

A Rout of Evanescence
 With a revolving wheel –
 A resonance of Emerald –
 A Rush of cochineal –
 And every Blossom on the Bush
 Adjust its tumbled Head
 The mail from Tunis probably.

Here description is less important than evocation of the mystery and elusiveness in Nature.

In her nature poetry Emily Dickinson almost always passes beyond more physical description either to consider the ambivalence of Nature's beauty or to give a hint of the mystery and puzzle behind Nature's appearance. She loved little things in nature – best birds and insects and her playful fancy has produced some of the best genre poems about them. She has given very interesting caricature of bees and their ceaseless activity:

Bees are Black with Gilt Surcings –
 Buccameers of Buzz.

Ride abroad in ostentation
And subsist of Fuzz.

The seasons occupy considerable space in the nature poetry of Emily Dickinson. In the repetition of the season cycles, the dead of winter and the renewal of life in spring Emily Dickinson saw something intriguing and captivating. Of all seasons she loved spring best as it symbolises rebirth. Breathless with excitement she watched the stirring of life in spring appear in a thousand little ways and with the magic of her words she has celebrated these things in poems like "An Altered Look about the Hills" and "New feet within my garden Go." It is not always joy alone that spring arouses in the poetess's mind. For all its beauty spring reminds the poetess that its hopes and promises are deceptive as winter is bound to follow. One of the best poems about Spring that Emily Dickinson has written is "A Light exists in Spring."

Summer also has been treated poetically by Emily Dickinson though her poems of summer are not as successful as those on spring. Whenever she has written about summer, it is the death of summer that seems to fill her mind. In a memorblae poem about the departure of summer she writes:

As imperceptibly as Grief
The summer lapsed away—
Too imperceptible at last
To seem like perfidy.

Winter exercised no fascination on the poet, though she has written a few poems of winter, the most remarkable among them being "It sifts from Leaden Sieves" and "Like Brooms of steel." "There's a certain slant of Light" also describes the slanting winter rays that have a depressing effect on the soul.

To sum up, Emily Dickinson's nature poetry is vibrant with vitality. There has been nature poetry before her and since. But it must be said to her credit that she revitalized the old clichés about Nature and drew our attention on much in Nature's bewildering variety that was formerly ignored and neglected. Today the idea of juxtaposing the ugly and the beautiful is not considered as something novel or revolutionary. But in the time of Emily Dickinson it was not tried by any one else. Emily Dickinson's nature poetry will never cease to inspire sensitive reader. The last word about it can never be

said for with each reading will discover in them new ideas and fresh nuances. Even of the casual reader, the merits of these poems are evident—a unique approach to things in Nature, a minute observation, a thorough grasp of the evanescent and fleeting and dramatic in Nature, a readiness to portray the unusual, the grotesque and the ugly, and the halo of mystery and strangeness that only Emily Dickinson could invest the most commonplace object with.

Q. 8. Consider Emily Dickinson as a mystic poet.

Or

Comment on Emily Dickinson's treatment of God and Religion.

When Emily Dickinson shut herself away from the world and lived as a recluse, the world brought forward the explanation that she was taking flight from an unhappy love affair. It is sensible to assume that frustration in love was not the reason that made the sensitive soul of Emily Dickinson to retire from the active world around her. The explanations must be sought for in the deeply serious nature of the poet, the deep fountain within, capable of nourishing and sustaining her. Her poetry reveals her as a mystic in the true sense of the word, a person of far keener perceptions than the people of the mundane world around her.

Emily Dickinson was a poet of romantic sensibility. Her sensitive soul throbbed to the song of the oriole, to the ray of light in winter and to the thousand little things that made her world glow with beauty. The relationship between herself and nature is expressed by her in her letter to Mr. Higginson whose 'scholar' she was. "You ask of my companions. Hill Sir, and the sundown, and a dog large as myself, that my father brought me. They are better than beings because they know, but do not tell: and the noise on the pool at noon excels my piano." The poetess who could think thus certainly had the spirit of romanticism in her.

To Emily Dickinson ours is a 'remarkable world' and everything in it smacks of the heavenly:

To hear an oriole sing
May be a common thing
On only a divine.

The difference is in the person's power of perception.

The "tune is in the tree"
The sceptic showeth me;
"No, Sir! In thee."

The slant of light in winter, the humming of the bird, the bird that came down the walk, eyes like frightened beads, the bee, the clover, the moor and the praise all fill her with exultation and rapture. She could very well say with Wordsworth that to her

The meanest flower that blows
Can give thoughts that often lie
Too deep for tears.

When Emily Dickinson speaks of the common things of life, it is as if we share the shock of insight, the sudden shift from the Manifold into the One. For she has the rare ability to see the 'world in a grain of sand and Heaven in a wild flower.'

The great mystic need not be conventional in religion. Often it is the other way. In their clear perception of truth, mystic poets do not require the help of dogma. One important thing that strikes the reader of Emily Dickinson's poetry is her spirit of religious unorthodoxy. She shared Emerson's individualism and in the poem "Keeping the Sabbath" she makes it clear that she relies more on her soul to lead her to Heaven and to God than all the sermons and church-goings that conventional religion recommends.

Like the romantic poets, Blake and Coleridge, Emily Dickinson discarded the way of Reason and relied more on intuition and imagination. The poet Blake asserted: "The world of Imagination is the world of Eternity.....The world of Imagination is Infinite and Eternal." This imagination leads on to the vision of truth.

A critic of Emily Dickinson's—Conrad Aiken suggests that her mystical isolation or individualism may be traced to her not finding in her immediate environment one of her own stature, with whom she could admit or discuss the things that were important to her. He argues that "she lacked the energy or effrontery to voyage out into the unknown in search of such companionship; and that lacking this she became easily a prey to the current Emersonian doctrine of mystical individualism. In this connection it is permissible to suggest that her extreme self-seclusion and secrecy was both a protest and a display—a kind of vanity masquerading as modesty. She became

increasingly precious of her person as of her thought. She believes that anything she says however brief will be of importance; however cryptic will be deciphered." But it does not seem quite relevant to attribute vanity to a poet who did not care to have her poems published.

There is a playfulness and irreverence about Emily Dickinson's attitude towards God that runs contrary to the Puritan attitude towards Him. In "Papa Above" she mocks our anthropomorphic concept of God. In her poems she refers to him as "a noted clergyman" and flippantly salutes him as "Burglar, banker father." In a poem 'Drowning' she says:

The Marker's cordial visage.
However good to see,
Is shunned, we must admit it
Like an adversity.

But in spite of her scornful attitude to the traditional picture of the Puritan's God, we find in her true piety and a deep faith in Heaven and Immortality. This faith is given expression to in the poem:

I never saw a moor,
I never saw the sea;
Yet know I how the heather looks
And what a wave must be.
I never spoke with God,
Nor visited in heaven;
Yet certain am I of the spot
As if the chart were given.

"Her real reverence, the reverence that made her a mystic poet of the finest sort, was reserved for Nature, which seemed to her a more manifest and more beautiful evidence of Divine will than creeds and churches. This she saw, observed, loved with a burning simplicity and passion which nevertheless did not exclude her very agile sense of humour." For a clear understanding of Emily Dickinson's greatness as a mystical poet one has to go to her poem entitled 'Life, time and Eternity.' The idea of immortality hovered round the poet and saved her musings on death from becoming morbid. Her evolution as a poet is marked by her early leaning towards graveyardism, and then her gradual shift towards the Emersonian belief in the largeness and harmony of nature. At times she seems to be filled with terror, contemplating her destiny. Out of anguish caused by her

contemplating of life has come the poem "My life has stood a loaded gun," a great poem, an allegory, whose reverberations are infinite, as in great music. With this power to say the unsayable, to hint of the unknowable, Emily Dickinson remains among the seers of literature.

In trying thus to express what defies expression, the mystical poet often resorts to the use of symbols, as in the beautiful poem the 'Hound of Heaven' by Francis Thompson. Emily Dickinson too finds terrible symbols to convey her profound impressions. She compares the experiences of suffering to dying of the cold. Escaping from suffering is like getting away from the clutches of a fierce monster more dead than alive. Two pieces where her power of using symbols is at its finest are "My life had Stood a Loaded Gun" and "The Chariot." Indeed Emily Dickinson was a visionary to whom truth came with exclusive finality and who sought to give expression to these truths in images of startling clarity.

Q. 9. 'The sharp, intense image is the poet's best instrument.' Discuss with reference to the poems of Emily Dickinson.

Or

Write a note on Emily Dickinson's imagery.

Emily Dickinson wrote to a friend: "Do you look out tonight? The moon rides like a girl through a topaz town." This brief descriptive sketch is a telling example of Emily Dickinson's unique gift—the gift of evoking unforgettable pictures in the minds of the readers. This unique ability to suggest pictures, this felicitous use of images makes a reading of her poetry aesthetically rewarding.

As Shakespeare puts it:

The poet's eye in a fine frenzy rolling
Doth glance from heaven to earth from earth to heaven,
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothings
A local habitation and name.

It is this imaginative faculty that Emily Dickinson as a poetess had in abundance. All the great poets of the world make use of images, and have become immortal for their imagery. So is Emily.

Nature—flowers, birds, animals, hills, mountains, sea-life—is the chief source of her imagery. In "A Bird Came Down the Walk" the bird is described with accuracy. None of its little movements escapes the loving notice of the poet. Hence we have a picture startlingly vivid:

He glanced with rapid eyes
that hurried abroad—
That looked like frightened beads, I thought
he stirred his velvet head.

Poets sometimes make use of strange exotic images to describe something ordinary as Shelley does in "Ode to the West Wind." Describing the profuse fall of autumn leaves Shelley says that the 'pestilence-stricken multitude' fled from the presence of the West Wind "like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing." This trick of investing the ordinary everyday objects with a halo of the strange and the distant is found in Emily Dickinson's verse also. The humming bird, a visitor to her little garden is described thus:—

A route of evanescence
With a revolving wheel
A resonance of emerald,
A rush of cochineal;
And every blossom on the bush
Adjusts its fumble head.—
The mail from Tunis, probably,
As easy morning's ride.

Here Emily Dickinson was reaching out to distant places and remote scenes of flights of fancy for her images. Her imagination even leapt up to heaven and drew celestial images as in the poem beginning "To Fight Aloud is Very Brave" where she is of opinion that those that "charge within the bosom the cavalry of woe" are worthier far than those that flight around:

We trust, in plumed procession,
For such the angels do,
Rank after rank, with even feet
And uniforms of snow,

The charm of Emily Dickinson lies in her unrivalled ability to convey varied states of mind through suggestive pictures. Abstractions lend themselves to pictorial treatment at the hands of this woman who was a genius. Speaking about the brain that runs efficiently, the

poetess suggests that the slightest damage remains unremediable. This is, expressed in a powerful though homely image:

The brain within its groove
 Runs evenly and true;
 But let a splinter swerve,
 'T were easier for you
 To put the water back
 When floods have slit the hills,
 And scooped a turnpike for themselves,
 And blotted out the mills!

In the "Chariot," every image is precise and, moreover, not merely, beautiful, but fused with the central idea. Every image extends and intensified every other. The third stanza especially shows Miss Dickinson's power to fuse, into a single order of perception a heterogeneous series: the children, the grain, and the setting sun (time) have the same degree of credibility, the first subtly preparing for the last. The sharp 'gazing before grain' instils into nature a cold vitality of which the qualitative richness has infinite depth. The content of death in the poem eludes explicit definition. There is a gentleman taking a lady out for a drive. The terror of death is objectified through this figure of a genteel driver, who is made ironically to serve the end of immortality. This is the heart of the poem. Another great poem dealing with the question of death has remarkable images:—

I started early, took my dog,
 And visited the sea,
 The mermaids in the basement
 Came out to look at me,

And frigates in the upper floor
 Extended hempen hands,
 Presuming me to be a mouse
 A ground, upon the sands.

But no man moved me till the tide
 Went past my simple shoe,
 And past my apron and my belt,
 And past my bodice too.

And made as he would eat me up,
 As wholly as a dew
 Upon a dandelion's sleeve—
 And then I started too.

And he—he followed close behind;
I felt his silver heel!
Upon my ankle,—then my shoes
Would overflow with pearl.

Until me met the solid town,
No man he seemed to know;
And bowing with a mighty look
At me, the sea withdrew.

This is allegorical, the sea is here the traditional symbol of death. Moral and mystical experiences, the power of love and the agony of suffering are all vividly conveyed through powerful images. Yet another example of her startling use of images is her description of suffering : one who comes of suffering is like one coming out of the grip of monster. The poem is remarkable for sea-imagery.

And here are images describing either the lover or God:

My life has stood — a Loaded Gun
In corners — till a Day —
The Owner passed — identified
And carried me away

And now we roam in Sovereign Woods —
And now we hunt the Doe —
And every time I speak for Him
The Mountains straight reply —

And do I smile such cordial light
Upon the valley glow —
It is as Vesuvian face
Had let its pleasure through —

And when at Night — our good Day done —
I guard my Master's head —
'T is better than the Elder — Duck's
Deep Pillow — to have shared —

To foe of His — I'm deadly foe —
Name stir the second time —
On whom I lay a Yellow Eye —
Or an emphatic thumb —

Though I than He — may longer live
He longer must — than I —

For I have but power to kill,
Without—the power to die,

"This power to say the unsayable—to hint of the unknowable is the power of the seer", says Louise Bogan about Emily Dickinson. Having in reality withdrawn from this world, Emily Dickinson doubted if her poetry was "alive." She wanted Mr. T.W. Higginson to tell her if it breathed, if it was alive. The answer is a most emphatic yes and the reason for the poems being alive is the teeming images in them. Some one has said of her, "she kept in touch with reality by the clearest and finest of the senses—the sense of sight. Perhaps the great vitality of contact by vision is the essence in part of her originality.

Q. 10. Comment on the technical peculiarities found in the poetry of Emily Dickinson.

Emily Dickinson's unique poetic method was as puzzling to readers and publishers as the mystery surrounding her personality. Thomas Wentworth Higginson to whom Emily Dickinson sent her poems with all his literary background was totally unprepared to accept their originality and was absolutely unable to appreciate their artistic perfection. Convinced that good poetry had to show regular metres and exact rhymes, he was unable to appreciate the authentic poetic talent of Emily Dickinson. One of the very first poems of Emily Dickinson that were sent for the critical appraisal of Higginson went thus:

Safe in their Albaster Chambers—
Untouched by Morning
And untouched by Noon—
Lie the meek members of the Resurrection
Rafer of Satin—and Roof of Stone !

The inexact rhyme of 'Noon' and 'Stone,' the irregular iambic pentameter, the strange use of dashes, and the erratic capitalisation are all distinct features that Emily Dickinson's poetry retained. The fact that she never meant to publish her poems made her shrug off the suggestion of Higginson regarding the irregularities of her verse.

Emily Dickinson was primarily interested in the thought or content of poetry and not in its perfect phrasing or musical cadence. As John Pickard points out: "What Emerson wrote in 'Merlin' defining a poet's task may be applied to the delicate young woman

who practised the art in the seclusion of her room. This is what Emerson wrote about the function of poetry:

Its chords should ring as blows the breeze
Free, peremptory, clear,
No Jingling screnader's art

The kingly bard
Must smite the chords rudely and hard
As with hammer or with mace,
That they may render back
Artist thunder which conveys
Secrets of the solar track.

Though Emily Dickinson started writing poetry as a remedy for her soul's illness, she no doubt believed in the higher significance of poetry. In one of her poems "Tell all the Truth, but tell it slant"! she gives expression to her idea of what poetry should attempt and how. While claiming that poetry must seek to illuminate hidden areas of knowledge and beauty and Truth, she believes that indirection is the method of poetry. In her emphasis on what poetry should do to a person, or the response it should evoke from a sensitive soul, she was apt to ignore the total organisation of a poem or conventional rules regarding poetry. She described the emotional response to poetry thus: "If I read a book (and) it makes my whole body so cold no fire ever can warm me. I know that it is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off I know that is poetry. These are the only ways I know it. Is there any other way?"

The high esteem in which she held the art of poetry is evident in her poem "essential oils—are wrung" where she compares the poetic process to the extraction of perfume from rose buds. The poem asserts that the artist's fragrant creation will outlast the rose and even the mortal artist.

Emily Dickinson's poems are difficult partly because of her peculiar fascination with words. She often used words in their root meanings and enriched the association and implication of words by employing subtle connotations. Her great concern was to select the most appropriate word from among list of words having approximately the same meaning. The manuscripts of her poems show her repeated efforts to select the most appropriate word from among a list of variants. For a line that was finally edited as "In eddies of the sun" she had given the following variations:

In fathoms in the sun
 In rapids of the sun
 In gambols with the sun
 In frenzies with the sun
 For frenzies of the sun
 In antics in the sun.

In his book, *Emily Dickinson's Poetry: Stairway of Surprise*, Charles Anderson writes: "Substitution of concrete terms for the abstract ones actually intended was her strategy for achieving vivid immediacy, and the opposite for giving transcendent value to the homely juxtaposition of words out of different connotative spheres she employed for ironic contrast as with the legal and amorous; and abrupt changes from one level of discourse to another for rhetorical shock, as from the serious to the comic, from eloquence to bald statement.

Conciseness was a passion with Emily Dickinson and this may be traced to the economy and frugality that was inherent in the Puritan community of Amherst. In this pursuit of brevity she ruthlessly cut through syntax and ignored grammar. Often verbs are left out and as for conjunctions and prepositions they are hardly ever used. Sometimes she employed the local pronunciation of a word instead of the standard pronunciation. She never made her poems long or smoothly flowing. Because of her extreme and rigorous economy her poems at times read like shorthand notations rather than poetry. But their very brevity gives them a peculiar vibrancy that is exciting.

One of the factors that give to her poetry a quaint flavour is her use of colloquial expressions. She would prefer the local spelling to the standard spelling of a word. As examples we may take 'bouquet' and 'February.' Difficulty is also caused by her unique use of the subjunctive voice to create a continuing present tense as in the line "Eclipses be predicated." Grammatical lapses are also frequent as in 'at you and I' and "It is Him." These verbal peculiarities of Emily Dickinson have outraged those critics who insist on meticulous observance of rules. But these very imperfections of Emily Dickinson's verse are the source of much delight to her readers.

She had also an enormous fondness for dashes, and her use of dashes is highly perplexing. She used dashes indiscriminately in preference to formal or conventional punctuations. Her dashes come in to indicate a metrical pause or where commas are to be used and

sometimes even in the place of semicolons or period. Her abundant use of dashes often puts the meaning of the poem in jeopardy and it makes interpretation of the poems extremely difficult. In some cases the dashes are highly effective and enhance the meaning. The following verse of Emily Dickinson illustrates both the strength and weakness of her use of dashes:

Some—Work for Immortality—
The chiefer part, for Time—
He—compensates—immediately—
The former—checks—on Fame—

Slow Gold—Everlasting—
The Bullion of today—
Contrasted with the Currency
Of Immortality.

In this poem the poetess expresses her idea that a few select people create for immortality rather than for immediate recognition or fame, the idea is made clear in some lines by the dashes. But some of the dashes seem arbitrary and tending to obscure the meaning. There is no doubt about the fact that the uses of dashes meant something important to the poet and was part of a campaign against the rigidity of conventional form of poetry.

The passage quoted above illustrates yet another peculiarity of Emily Dickinson's verse—her erratic use of Capitals. She used capitals for nouns, adjectives, adverbs and verbs. When she capitalized a word, it was as if she was emphasizing these words or lending new dignity to them. Sometimes capitalization seems to be having neither rhyme nor reason. Generally speaking the use of capitals is an expression of her tendency to overstate.

In metrical pattern Emily Dickinson did not make any innovation. She did not consciously try to be metrically shocking or daring and never made use of 'vers libre.' She clung to a metrical pattern that was familiar to her from childhood—four iambic lines, alternating three and four stresses a line with the second and fourth lines rhyming. This was her favourite metrical pattern though she altered this and formed endless variations in order to avoid monotony. She used eight-line stanzas at times and changed the iambic for trochaic metre. She introduced flexibility into the traditional set metres and loosened them and gave them the easy natural flow of conversational prose. Though she did not discard rhyme altogether. "She abandoned the stiff limitations of exact

rhyme, where the final sound and accent were precisely repeated, returning to the much older poetic practice of approximate rhyme, 'identical and vowel rhyme,' (as in "move-remove," "see-buy") imperfect rhyme (same vowel sounds followed by different consonants, as in 'thing-in' "us-dust") and suspended rhyme (different vowel sounds, followed by the same consonant sounds, for example 'star-door' reach-touch). These rhymes were selected at will, and she freely varied the pattern within a single poem or stanza. Besides adding a great suppleness to her poetry these approximate rhymes often capture the jarring discords and painful doubts expressed by the thought. However the balance of content and form is not always so harmonious. Often the unusual rhymes seem unnecessary: metre frequently becomes monotonous while the subject matter remains too intense.

Emily Dickinson's efforts to pack verse with intense meaning reminds us of Hopkins' poetry with its breaking loose from all fetters of conventions. Her violation of the rules of grammar and syntax and her ruthless omission of words have enabled her to capture the spontaneity and excitement of her thoughts. The genuineness of her inspiration and the tremendous vitality of her poetic force and her lively imagination have made the objections raised by her fastidious critics irrelevant.

Chapter 08

Emily Dickinson As a Lyricist

Mainly a Lyrical Poet

If we keep in mind the elements of the lyric, we have to recognize the fact that Emily Dickinson is mainly a lyrical poet. No other poet would be so entirely as lyrical as Emily Dickinson because no one else wrote so consistently and persistently in the personal, subjective vein as she did. In all her poems she wrote only about her own self, her own experience whether it was concerning human love, or divine love, her attitude to immortality or any other aspect that she chose to write about it. Whatever be the theme Emily Dickinson is always present in her poems. Many readers of her poetry would like to ask the question whether Emily Dickinson is any other thing besides being a lyrical poet. It is not difficult to answer this question. In poetry she is nothing else besides being a lyrical poet.

The Brevity of her Poetic Inspiration

If brevity of poetic inspiration, resulting in shortness of composition, could be described as an important characteristic of lyric poetry, then Emily Dickinson would undoubtedly be considered to be the most inveterate lyric poet. There is hardly any other who has not written poems other than short lyrics but Emily wrote nothing but short lyrics and among her near about two thousand poems, there is not a single narrative poem. The reason why Emily's poems are short has been well analysed by **Douglas Duncan** in these words. The fragmentary nature of her imagination is the obvious reason why her poems are so short. Their thought substance was determined accordingly, not by cogitation on particular themes which she set apart as worthy of poetic treatment, but only by the most remote and fugitive of causes, the accidents of her moment-to-moment

experience. This is merely a reminder that Emily Dickinson was one of those writers who create almost entirely out of themselves the quality and interest of their passing experiences being heavily responsible for the quality and interest of their writings.

Her Lyrics of Love

Emily Dickinson wrote more than a hundred lyrics on love and it has been pointed in the chapter on Treatment of Love as how in her poems she has described a wide gamut of feelings and emotions. Though in many of her love lyrics she gave an imaginative handling to her personal experience of love, it would be wrong to believe that her personal experience played no part in her poetic creativity or that it did not express itself in her poetry. In some of her lyrics she gave expression to her felt emotions with persuasive directness. Duncan advises her readers not to regard her as a disappointed spinster. They suggest nothing if not honestly, as readers find out for themselves. In whatever context they were conceived, passages like

As if I asked a common calms,
And in my wondering hand
A stranger pressed a kingdom
And I bewildered stand—

It might be easier
To fail with land in right
Than gain my blue peninsula
To perish of my delight—

They say that Time assuages;
Time never did assuage.
An actual suffering strengthens.
As sinews do with age—

show how aware Emily Dickinson was of the difference between guessed at emotions and those proved on the pulse. In her ability to convey emotions with persuasive directness she ranks with Catullus, whom she would surpass in subtlety of what she conveyed. Indeed we shall note a common cause of failure in her poems that immediacy of experience was apt to overmaster artistic control.

Objectification of a Personal Emotion

As a lyricist it was natural for Emily Dickinson to express her felt emotions or feelings and it is undeniable that by and large she is a

subjective par excellence but one notable quality of her lyrics is that in them she succeeded in objectifying her personal emotion while at the same time she conveyed its full immediacy. The following poem and its critical analysis by Douglas Duncan will enable the reader to understand this quality of Emily's lyricism:

As far from pity as complaint,
As cool to speech as stone,
As numb to revelation
As if my trade were done.

As far from time as history,
As near yourself to-day
As children to the rainbow's scarf,
Or sunset's yellow play.

To eyelids in the sepulchre,
How dumb the dancer lies,
While color's revelation break
And blaze the butterflies!

"I feel far from you" is what she is saying, the sixth line tells us with a suddenly moving simplicity ("near" for a moment suggests intimacy but is soon seen to be ironic). The feeling is both more formal and more intense by the series of parallels that are adduced and by the image syntactically disconnected, in the last three lines. Two of the parallels ("As far from pity as complaint" and "As far from time as history") are entirely abstract and impersonal. They do relate to the poet's state of mind, in so far as the first suggests as state of self-centredness and negation and second one of the restriction and incompleteness, but the immediate effect is to objectify the emotion described. At the same time, the associations of the rhymed words "stone" and "bone," chilling and bleakly elemental, universalise the writer's unreceptiveness to the life or words and her insensitivity to the workings of the spirit. This impression of living death is heightened in the striking chiasmus of lines seven to nine, where life and death are further linked against a background of the permanent vitality and unattainable splendours of nature, children at play cannot reach up to wear "the rainbow's scarf any more than sunset's yellow play can amuse the closed eyes of the dead. "Sepulchre" leads naturally to the fine image of the entombed dancer, in which the force of the earlier parallel is concentrated. The sudden use of a disconnected image here enables the writer once again to distance her

predicament, but its applicability to herself is poignantly obvious since the dancer, like the poet and the woman in love, senses and embodies a revelation of the significance or "color" of living, and must lose her purpose in life when that revelation is withheld.

Some Lyrics Express Her Agonies and Inner Struggle

In several of her lyrics Emily Dickinson gave a pointed and powerful expression to the agonies and inner struggles that assailed her mind. The following lyric is a fine example:

I felt cleavage in my mind
As if my brain had slipt;
I tried to match it, seem by seem,
But could not make them fit.

The thought behind I strove to join
Unto the thought before,
But's quence ravelled out of reach
Like balls upon a floor.

No Morbidity of Tone Even in Lyrics of Despair

The majority of Emily's poems deals with grief, despair and death but such poems do not leave on the reader's mind depressing effect. The reason for such a quality of her lyrics lies in her capacity to objectify a personal emotion which enabled her to attain a complete mastery of tone. Archibald MacLeish dwelt at length on this aspect of Emily's poetic art. Any one who will read Emily's poems straight through in their chronological order in Thomas H. Johnson's magnificent Harvard edition will feel, I think, as I do, that without her extraordinary mastery of tone her achievement would have been impossible. To write constantly of death, of grief, of despair, of agony, of fear is almost to insure the failure of art, for these emotions overwhelm the mind, and art must surmount experience to master it. A morbid art is an imperfect art. Poets must learn Yeast's lesson that life is tragedy but if the tragedy turns tragic for them they will be crippled poets. Like the ancient Chinese in "*Lapis Lazuli*" (are like our own beloved Robert Frost who has looked as long and deeply into the darkness of the world as a man well can), "their eyes, their ancient glittering eyes" must be gay, English eyes, colour of the sherry the guests leave in the glass, had that light in them:

Dust is. the only Secret
Death the only One

You cannot find out all about
In his "native town."

Nobody knew "his Father" –
Never was a Boy –
Hadn't my playmates,
Or "Early history" -

Industrious! Lacomic!
Punctual! Sedate!
Bold as a Brigand!
Stiller than a Fleet!

Builds, like a Bird, too!
Christ robs the Nest,
Robin after Robin
Smuggled to Rest!

Conclusion

As a lyricist Emily Dickinson's place among American poets is assured. Though her lyrics do not possess variety of artistic achievements and they often lack lyric rapture of joy and intensity of feelings, they are a class by themselves for the genuineness of experience that they express.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

1. All her poems are deeply suggestive of her personal self and she wrote about no experience or episode that did not pertain to her own personal self.
2. She can be described as the most inveterate lyrical poet, in the sense that all her poems are personal and short.
3. She wrote more than a hundred lyrics on love and these express a wide gamut of feelings and emotions. In many of her lyrics she gave expression to her felt emotions with an extraordinary persuasive directness and Duncan advises the readers not to regard her as a disappointed spinster.
4. Her poems show clearly that she was aware of the difference between the emotions that were not felt directly and those that proved on the pulse.

5. She expressed the felt emotions not only with a persuasive directness but also with a marked subtlety.
6. She not only communicated her personal emotions with a surprising objectivity but also conveyed their full immediacy.
7. In many of her lyrics she gave pointed expression to the struggles and conflicts that agitated and assailed her mind.
8. Her capacity to objectify a personal emotion enabled her attain a complete mastery of tone so that even her poems of Death and despair do not produce a defective effect on the mind of the readers.
9. To write constantly of Death, of grief, of despair, of agony, of fear is almost to insure the failure of art but Emily's poems on such themes show her remarkable mastery of tone.
10. Her lyrics do not have rapture of joy and intensity of feeling but they have an appeal of their own.

Quotable Quote

“Morning without you is a dwindle dawn.”

— Emily Dickinson
