

ISSN:0976-8165



The Criterion

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL IN ENGLISH

Bi-Monthly Peer-Reviewed eJournal

VOL. 15 ISSUE-1 FEB. 2024

15 YEARS OF OPEN ACCESS

Editor-In-Chief: **Dr. Vishwanath Bite**
Managing Editor: **Dr. Madhuri Bite**

www.the-criterion.com



Impact Factor: 8.67

AboutUs: <http://www.the-criterion.com/about/>

Archive: <http://www.the-criterion.com/archive/>

ContactUs: <http://www.the-criterion.com/contact/>

EditorialBoard: <http://www.the-criterion.com/editorial-board/>

Submission: <http://www.the-criterion.com/submission/>

FAQ: <http://www.the-criterion.com/fa/>



ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal
www.galaxyimrj.com

American Romantic Elements in Emily Dickinson's Selected Poems

Dr. R. Shanthi

Professor & Head,
Department of English,
Paavai Engineering College,
Pachal, Namakkal-637018

Radhakrishnan Rajasekaran

Assistant Professor,
Department of English,
Paavai Engineering College,
Pachal, Namakkal-637018

&

R. Saranya

Associate Professor,
Department of English,
Paavai Engineering College,
Pachal, Namakkal-637018

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10795627>

Article History: Submitted-15/12/2023, Revised-14/02/2024, Accepted-15/02/2024, Published-29/02/2024.

Abstract:

This paper works on the intricate world of Emily Dickinson's poetry, aiming to unveil the unmistakable presence of American Romantic elements her literary contribution to American literature. Though Dickinson is frequently associated with the 19th-century American Romantic movement, her unique voice and unconventional style have urged scholars to assay the extent to which she coheres to or diverges from traditional Romantic ideals. This paper scrutinizes her works based on themes, language, and stylistic features that align with the broader American Romantic tradition.

Keywords: Individualism, Nature, Emotional Intensity, Transcendentalism, Inner World, Sublime, lyrical Style.

Introduction:

Emily Dickinson, an enigmatic figure in American literature, is notorious for her inventive and unconventional poetry that challenges the morals of her time. The American Romantic movement, starting from the early to mid-19th century, emphasized primarily on individualism, nature, imagination, and the supernatural. This paper is to explore how Dickinson's poetry reflects and reinterprets these themes within the environment of American

Romanticism. Dickinson's life, identified as a recluse and self-contemplative, focuses on the Romantic emphasis on individual experience. Her works, often characterized by crispness and unconventional punctuation, disdain the conventional morals of her period. Despite her unique and recalcitrant voice, Dickinson's poetry contains echoes of the broader American Romantic tradition. One magnificent point of American Romanticism is the festivity of individualism and the preternatural life. Dickinson's poems basically by and large, focus on the complications of the mortal psyche, examining feelings, identity, and empirical questions.

Here, five of her poems have been taken to explore American romantic elements and to justify that she was more of a romanticist than what she had been considered by her contemporaries.

1. American Romantic Elements in "I'm Nobody! Who are you?"

*I'm Nobody! Who are you?
Are you – Nobody – too?
Then there's a pair of us!
Don't tell! they'd advertise – you know!*

*How dreary – to be – Somebody!
How public – like a Frog –
To tell one's name – the livelong June –
To an admiring Bog!*

It's a sarcastic and introspective work penned by her. The speaker begins the poem protesting the obscurity over societal recognition, as being "notoriety" brings unwarranted attention and concession of particular identity. The lyric explores themes of individualism, disagreement, and the quiet rebellion against societal prospects.

In this poem, Emily suggests that those who are considered "notabilities" lead a life of constant scrutiny and pretence. In inconsistency, the "Nobodies" can enjoy the freedom of being unnoticed, allowing them to observe the world without the burden of societal prospects. Dickinson uses humour and irony to convey the idea that the true tone indications in obscurity. It also subtly reviews the superficiality of social relations, presenting the notion that authentic connections are more likely to those who embrace their 'nothing' status. The tone of the lyric is light, and the cadenced inflow of Dickinson's language, adds to the sportful and reflective nature of the verses. Eventually, "I'm Nobody! Who are you?", wrapped with Dickinson's

profound expression in brevity of diction, invites readers to reflect on the balance between conforming to societal morals and embracing one's individuality.

Emily in this poem, just mocks at the people who lost among the crowd without understanding their self and uniqueness, and the ways of living. The tone of the poem is sarcastic and stresses on the point that most of us lead our lives deprive of the essential purpose of it. She also stresses the point that how meaningless the life would be if one has lost among the crowd. This poem has a transcendental aspect because, she says that we all are nobody but can be a flock of such "Nobodies". Besides, such "Nobodies" would be unique to the world so, they have to live recluse as their freedom can be ravaged by the "civilised" ones who may pull them to the Bog they enjoy living in. she calls such people as the frog and the life among themselves is like the long June in the bog.

This poem is too brief but effective in the meaning and the careful presentation of the words to simplify the idea of being from the routine and living a life away from the normalcy. Dickinson also challenges societal expectations, embracing a sense of individual identity outside the constraints of societal norms. This rejection of conformity aligns with the individualistic tendencies of American Romantic literature.

2. American Romantic Elements "Because I couldn't stop for Death"

It's an emotional address of the unavoidability of death and the endless trip that accompanies it. The poem, written in six quatrains, takes us on a thoughtful ride with Death as a patient and courteous guide. In this poem, the speaker narrates her encounter with Death, embodied as a carriage driver. "Because I couldn't stop for Death," sets the tone for the poem, indicating an unresistant acceptance of mortality rather than a voluntary choice to confront it. Death, portrayed as a patient suitor, arrives in a carriage to accompany the speaker to her final resting place.

The carriage ride takes her on a journey metaphorically. and is considered to be passing through the various stages of life, and the figures that accompany death, are personified as the representations of various life phases highlighting the inevitability and universality of death. The three passengers shown in the poem are the reminiscent of one's life's significant moments; she says that, "We passed the School, where Children strove. At Recess – in the Ring – We passed the Fields of Gazing Grain – We passed the setting Sun – ". School, the place where the knowledge is gained; the Grain fields, talk about productivity in adulthood; and the setting sun represents the conclusion of life. With the time, the journey takes a slow pace and the life becomes slow and dull. So, the carriage moves in a relaxed way accepting the fact that

death is an inevitable, gradual process rather than an abrupt end. The imagery of the setting sun buttresses this concept, suggesting the end of life and the approach of eternity.

Despite the inevitability of death, the poem maintains a tranquil and thoughtful tone. The speaker seems acquiescent to the natural order of life, considering Death as not a fearsome adversary but as a patient-companion. The serene progress of the life journey towards death is not as the traditional way of looking at it as a sudden and terrifying event.

The poem closes with the speaker's arrival at her final destination with the concluding words..." *Since then – 'tis Centuries – and yet, Feels shorter than the Day, I first surmised the Horses' Heads Were toward Eternity –.*" the grave which is depicted not as a place of fear or darkness but as a soothing place, marking the end of the journey. The grave, a symbol of tranquillity, where the speaker is convoyed by Death and Immortality, resides for eternity. It is a contemplative exploration of the human experience, offering an inimitable standpoint on mortality. Her intense imagery, watchful use of symbolism, skill in blending of themes and insightful tone make this poem an everlasting exploration of the universal and unavoidable human experience of mortality.

Furthermore, it reconnoitres the individual's journey into the afterlife, highlighting the personal experience of mortality. Emily Dickinson in this poem, narrates a carriage ride with Death, personified as a considerate and patient driver. The journey is a leisure-ride that takes the speaker through various scenes, including a school, a grain field, and a setting sun. Her meditative exploration, apparent in her portrayal of death, line up with the individualistic tendencies of American Romantic literature, demonstrating her inner workings of the human soul. While Dickinson is not a typical representative of the Romantic movement, her work does contain elements that align with some key characteristics of American Romantic literature. Here are a few American Romantic elements that can be identified in this poem:

American Romantics often found inspiration in nature and the sublime. In Dickinson's poem, the speaker takes a carriage ride with Death through various natural scenes, such as fields of grain and a setting sun. Nature is not just a backdrop but is involvedly laced with the theme of the poem.

American Romanticism stressed the individual and the festivity of exceptional personal experiences. In this poem, Dickinson presents a highly personal encounter with Death. The journey is idiosyncratic and the speaker mirrors her own life and the route to death in a deeply individualistic manner.

Dickinson was deeply influenced by transcendentalist ideas, which were predominant in American Romantic literature. The idea of transcending the physical world and discovering

mystical realms is evident in the poem as the speaker moves from life to death and possibly into an afterlife.

American Romantic writers repeatedly used symbolism and allegory to convey profound meanings. In Dickinson's poem, the journey with Death is not merely a literal event but serves as a metaphor for the life-journey and the certainty of death. The carriage ride becomes a representational exploration of the human experience. Romantic literature often assigns a priority to emotion and imagination over reason. American Romantics were frequently drawn to mystical and supernatural elements. The personification of Death as a companion, and the depiction of the journey beyond the grave, presents a mystical and supernatural dimension to the poem.

Even though Emily Dickinson's work may not fit fully and perfectly into the conventional categories of American Romanticism, it does contain features that connect to the broader themes and characteristics of the movement. Her exploration of nature, individualism, transcendentalism, symbolism, emotion, and the supernatural in this poem, reflects her connection with the spirit of American Romantic literature.

3. American Romantic Elements "A Bird came down the Walk"

It is a brief yet intense poem that captures a transitory moment of nature's beauty and the intrinsic wildness of the natural world. The poem opens with the arrival of a bird, gracefully descending to a path. The bird's communication with its environment is detected with keen attention.

The poet describes the moment with, " ... *A Bird, came down the Walk - He did not know I saw - He bit an Angle Worm in halves And ate the fellow, raw...*". The bird's feasting on an unsuspecting worm, an act that blatantly contrasts with the bird's initial appearance of gentleness. This sudden shift emphasizes the predatory nature of the bird, exemplifying the inherent violence in the cycle of life in the wild.

The poem employs rich and corporeal language to depict the scene, emphasizing the bird's movements, the lustrous of its eyes, and the contrast between its delicate appearance and the brutality of its actions. The bird's casual consumption of the worm suggests a natural, instinctive behaviour, devoid of sentimentality.

As the bird finishes its meal, " ... *He glanced with rapid eyes, That hurried all abroad - They looked like frightened Beads, I thought, He stirred his Velvet Head.* - ... It becomes aware of the spectator, the poet. It pauses momentarily, and in that instant, the poet and the bird share a moment of mutual awareness and then... *Like one in danger, Cautious, I offered him a Crumb, And he unrolled his feathers, And rowed him softer Home* - The bird then takes flight,

and the poem completes with the image of the bird.... *Than Oars divide the Ocean, Too silver for a seam, Or Butterflies, off Banks of Noon, Leap, plashless as they swim...* soaring away the poet to reflect on the brief, intense encounter with nature.

Dickinson's poem serves as a miniature of the natural world, portraying the beauty, violence, and passing moments that define the intricate balance of life. Through its concise and haunting verse, the poem invites readers to anticipate the delicate yet unpredictable nature of the wild and the complex interrelation of all living beings.

In this poem, Dickinson's observation of a bird becomes a metaphor for the connection of nature and life. The poem captures the inspirational beauty of the bird's existence and highlights Dickinson's keen sensitivity to the natural world. Similarly, "There's a certain Slant of light" explores the transformative power of light, suggesting a spiritual dimension to nature. These instances demonstrate Dickinson's incorporation of nature as a vehicle for conveying emotional and existential truths, aligning with the Romantic emphasis on the sublime.

In her poem, the bird and its interactions with nature, such as the grass and the beetle, highlight the significance of the natural world. Dickinson describes the bird's behavior in a way that conveys a sense of wonder and emotion. The speaker observes the bird with a keen sensitivity, highlighting the sensitive experience of the encounter. American Romantics often emphasized the importance of the individual and subjective experience, and Dickinson's exploration of the bird's actions reflects this focus on individual perception.

In this poem, the bird itself can be seen as a symbol of nature's wild beauty and mystery. It encourages readers to engage their imagination to interpret the symbolic elements. The bird's flight and the intense descriptions of nature in the poem evoke a sublime quality, emphasizing the transcendent and overwhelming aspects of the natural world. The poem also reflects a connection with Transcendentalist ideas through its celebration of nature and the suggestion of a spiritual connection between the observer and the bird. It exhibits these American Romantic elements besides, it's important to note that Emily Dickinson's work often confronts easy categorization, and her unique voice and style set her apart from other poets of her time.

Besides, American Romantics often embraced the power of imagination and the idea of transcending the limitations of reality. Dickinson's poems exhibit a fondness for the fantastical and the metaphysical, blurring the lines between the concrete and the eerie expressions.

4. American Romantic Elements in "Wild Nights – Wild Nights!"

It is a passionate and intense exploration of the theme of love and desire. The poem is characterized by its rich and evocative language, expressing the tumultuous emotions associated with Romantic longing.

In the poem, the speaker imagines and yearns for nights of wild and unrestrained love calling... *Wild nights - Wild nights!... Were I with thee...Wild nights should be...Our luxury!...Futile - the winds -To a Heart in port -Done with the Compass -Done with the Chart!* The phrase "Wild Nights" suggests a sense of abandon and ecstasy, indicating a longing for passionate and uninhibited moments of intimacy.

The sea is used as a metaphor for this intense love, with the notion of circumnavigating or crossing it suggesting a journey or union with a lover. The sea becomes a symbol of both the vastness and depth of the emotions the speaker experiences. The repetition of the phrase emphasizes the intensity of the speaker's desire. *..Rowing in Eden -Ah - the Sea!...Might I but moor - tonight -In thee!.*

The poem conveys a sense of urgency and longing, as the speaker expresses a desire for a reunion with his/her beloved. The exclamation points throughout the poem contribute to the heightened emotional tone, emphasizing the fervidness and excitement of the speaker's feelings. While the poem is relatively short, Dickinson's use of language and imagery creates a powerful impact. "Wild Nights – Wild Nights!" captures the essence of romantic passion and the yearning for intimate connection, showcasing Dickinson's ability to convey profound emotions in a concise and redolent manner.

In this poem, Dickinson explores the intensity of emotional experience, transcending the boundaries of conventional expression. The poem's language and imagery convey a sense of liberation and ecstasy, embracing the Romantic notion of transcending the ordinary. Besides, there is a sense of intense longing and desire. The use of repetition in the title and the exclamation points conveys a heightened emotional state. While this poem doesn't clearly refer nature, the use of the sea as a symbol for passion and the idea of "Wild Nights" suggests a connection to the natural world as a backdrop for intense emotional experiences.

The poem also captures the essence of quixotic longing and the powerful, almost transcendental, nature of intense emotions. In this poem, Dickinson is expressing a personal and intense emotional state, suggesting the importance of individual feelings and desires. The sea and the metaphorical ship in the poem can be interpreted as symbols of adventure, passion, and the unpredictable journey of life. Dickinson often used symbolism to convey deeper meanings and evoke emotions.

Romantic literature often digs into the depths of the unconscious mind and explores the mysteries of human emotions. The passionate and almost dreamlike quality of "Wild Nights –

Wild Nights!" suggests an exploration of the inner world and the complexities of the human spirit. It is also known for its inscrutable and unconventional style. While it exhibits some elements of American Romanticism, Dickinson's work often confronts strict categorization, and her unique voice backs the stable appeal of her poetry. The elements of transcendentalism, which emphasize the inherent goodness of people and nature, can be found in Dickinson's poetry.

Conclusion

This research paper concludes by producing the findings from the analysis of Emily Dickinson's poems, stating that her work indeed involves significant American Romantic elements. Her works contribute to the uniqueness of her style, challenging conventional poetic norms of her time like the British Romantics Wordsworth, Keats. Despite her parting from conventional norms and her typical voice, Dickinson's engagement with individualism, nature, imagination, and the supernatural solidifies her place within the rich tapestry of American Romantic literature. Through this study, a deeper understanding of Dickinson's contribution to the Romantic tradition emerges, emphasizing her enduring relevance in the landscape of American literary history. Dickinson's unique mixture of introspection, nature appreciation, imaginative prowess, and investigation of universal themes, establishes her as a distinctive voice within the broader American Romantic movement, contributing to its richness and diversity.

Works Cited:

- Habegger, Alfred. *My Wars Are Laid Away in Books: The Life of Emily Dickinson*. Random House, 2001.
- Martin, Wendy, editor. *The Cambridge Companion to Emily Dickinson*. Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Vendler, Helen. "Analyzing Dickinson's Poetry." *Emily Dickinson: Selected Poems*, edited by Helen Vendler, Belknap Press, 2010, pp. 1-15.
- Wu, Duncan, editor. *Romanticism: An Anthology*. Blackwell, 1998.
- Franklin, R. W. *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Reading Edition*. Belknap Press, 1999. JSTOR.