

Exploring the Nature of Life in Emily Dickinson's Poems

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Abstract: Emily Dickinson was one of the pioneers of twentieth-century modernist poetry in the United States, and her poetry is rich in subject matter, with poemson the theme of the nature of life being an important part of Emily Dickinson's work and particularly noted by researchers. Through the method of textual analysis, this essay analyzes herlife-theme poemfrom the perspective of content analysis and rhetorical criticism, combined with Dickinson's life experience. Herpoemas explore the issues of life and eternity from many sides, with the significance of finding the true nature of life and revealing the true meaning of life. It is a milestone in the creation of new American poetry.

Keywords: Emily Dickinson, The Nature of Life, Textual analysis.

1. Introduction

Dickinson is widely regarded as one of the greatest American poets of the nineteenth century, known for her unique style and themes. Her poetry reflects her mysterious emotional experiences and the distinctive character that shaped her work. Scholars often categorize Dickinson's themes into nature, love, life, religious beliefs, and the exploration of the human self. Her poems on the nature of life have been the most influential and extensively studied. They make up about one-third of her total output, and researchers consider them to be the most exceptional part of her poetry, closely related to her life experiences.

Dickinson grew up in a devout Puritan family that greatly influenced her religious beliefs. As an adult, she experienced personal setbacks, including the failure to achieve fame and fortune, as well as the successive deaths of friends and relatives. These experiences caused significant changes in her psyche, leading her to produce a large number of poems with imagery of despair, sadness, joy, hope, and confusion. Her poems reflect a paradoxical understanding of the nature of life, which she never fully reconciles.

The value of Dickinson's poems on the nature of life lies in their analysis and examination of life. By placing life within a specificcontext, she interrogates and explores it, transforming despair and anxiety into an eternal pursuit of life. Her poems present a unique perspective on the meaning of life and the search for its true nature, mapping her rich, profound, and mysterious inner world. This perspective, a kind of reverse view on life, contains a wise philosophy of life that future generations should explore and study.

2. The Relationship Between Man and God in The Light of Life

Dickinson's poetry intricately weaves together the themes of God and the nature of life, revealing a multifaceted approach that arises from her ambivalent views on religion. While she ardently believed in the existence of God, her struggle to truly comprehend and find him gave rise to doubts. In her poetic expressions, she oscillated between heartfelt praises, referring to God as a friendly neighbour, and stern rebukes, even daring to call him a thief. However, it is her exploration of the final stage of life and the afterlife that deviates from traditional notions of resurrection, presenting a

world beyond as mysterious and elusive, yet with an underlying yearning for eternity. Throughout her life, Dickinson relentlessly sought to establish a definitive attitude toward God, a stance that mirrored her outlook on the world. Yet, she found herself unable to fully embrace the Christian faith nor wholeheartedly abandon God and religion, as materialists do, subscribing to the belief that the passing of life signifies the simultaneous annihilation of the soul and inner body. Despite her unwavering belief in the existence of God, she persistently questioned his mercy. It is the intricate and ambivalent nature of her relationship with God that ultimately contributes to the complexity and ever-evolving understanding she portrays in her exploration of the nature of life.

Emily Dickinson's religious consciousness is deeply rooted in the Christian cultural milieu of her upbringing. Hailing from a prosperous family, she was blessed with a privileged education during her formative years. Growing up within the embrace of a devout Christian household, guided by her pious parents, she engaged in prayer and worship from the earliest stages of her life. While these religious traditions undoubtedly instilled a profound sense of spirituality within her, Dickinson's curious mind continuously probed and challenged the teachings of Christianity, never succumbing to the pressures of aligning herself with any specific denomination. In her private musings, she recorded the belief that faith, in and of itself, can be a burdensome cross to bear, causing one to stumble under its weight, yet never relinquishing it completely. To her, personal faith stood as an intrinsic birthright of every human being.

However, it was after Dickinson turned 34 that a series of devastating encounters with loss struck her immediate circle of family and friends, leaving her profoundly shattered. These personal tragedies became catalysts for her deep introspection and an intensive exploration of death's ultimate significance in her own life. In the face of these distressing experiences, the tenets of religious doctrine no longer provided satisfactory answers to her profound existential inquiries, leading to a profound dissonance between her internal contemplations and her religious identity. Doubts about the faith she once held dear began to take root. The conventional Christian doctrine, which proclaimed an omnipotent God, failed to offer solace for the premature deaths of those she cherished. In her eyes, God's perceived inaction engendered a profound sense of abandonment, deepening her doubts. Dickinson gradually

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