Themes In The Poetry Of Emily Dickinson

Emily Dickinson is arguably one of the greatest poets of all time. Her poetry is so abstract and meaningful that every reader gets a different view of each poem, each person has a different opinion on what the poem is about. Emily Dickinson wrote about what she knew, and as a recluse, a lot of it ended up being about nature. But each poem also has a deeper meaning behind it, relating to issues we all go through and emotions we all feel at some point in our lives. This essay will attempt to break down a few poems of Dickinson's in the hopes of showing how diverse the interpretations of each one are. In turn, you'll see just how transcendental and forward-thinking her mind truly was.

"Tell all the truth but tell it slant-" is one of Dickinson's better poems. The beginning line, the title line, basically just means tell the truth but tell it in a way that is gentle and kind. not abrupt and with a lack of empathy for emotion. The third line in this poem states, "Too bright for our infirm Delight" (Dickinson, "Tell All the Truth But Tell It Slant"), which ties back into wanting to be polite with telling the truth because if we don't, it could be too much all at once and it will blind the individual we are speaking with. The last two lines in this poem also tie into the meaning of the poem, proving the analysis laid before you to be correct.

Because Dickinson was a recluse for the majority of her life, she didn't have very many friends or lovers, most of her contact was with family. Due to this, Dickinson probably held people close to her and was a big supporter of being honest and true with people. We can see that as a big theme in her poem "Tell all the truth but tell it slant –". At the same time, in this poem Dickinson is also arguing that humans cannot handle too much truth, whether direct or not, due to the nature of our emotions and responses to what is generally something shocking or even unpleasant. She is stating that humans, in their nature, want to hear the truth, but cannot always handle what that truth is. Possibly, Dickinson was a recluse because she couldn't trust anybody and that is what reflects in this poem.

Another poem that mirrors a big aspect of human life is the poem titled, "Success is counted sweetest." This poem is about the need people have for fame and notoriety. The first four lines speak about how success is never truly appreciated until someone has gone through failure. The last eight lines of the poem tell a story about how fighting for something does not always mean you will get what you want, but that you may be defeated and forced to hear your competitor rejoice in their victory. This poem relates back to Dickinson's own life through the fact that she never chose to publish her works. Because of the last eight lines of this poem, we can tell Dickinson is fearful of the fact that she may publish her works and instead of being praised, she would be chastised and ridiculed for being a woman poet and for attempting to be anything but what society was telling women they needed to be. Clearly, Dickinson knew what failure was like and knew that success and fame through her poetry would be great but she also knew that it came with a price and would not be easy, and because of this she was unwilling to show her brilliant mind to the world.

Another poem closely relating to the theme of the last poem referred to is a poem titled, "I'm Nobody! Who are you?" This poem speaks of fame and wanting to be someone who is unknown and cannot be spoken about instead of being somebody that everyone can gossip

about and constantly watch. The line “Don’t tell! they’d advertise – you know!”(Dickinson, “I'm Nobody! Who Are You?”), confirms the fact that if you want to stay out of the limelight then you must not show yourself and who you really are to the world or else you may end up being the center of their attention. This line also helps us understand why Dickinson was a recluse for most of her life. She did not want to be known so she instead stayed to herself so no one would ever see her true mind or read her works and know what she was really up to in that room.

This poem also reflects on human nature in a similar way as the other poems discussed but in a more prominent way. Telling the truth in a respectful manner and not wanting to be in the public eye are two very important aspects of human nature. But where this poem is different is the fact that people DO want to be recognized for their achievements, but they would rather be praised by someone else who is an unknown individual like themselves, instead of someone who could possibly throw them into the world of fame to be recognized and bombarded with attention from every person they ever meet. A lot of people just want to belong but not be known in a way that they could potentially be the butt of a joke, and that is exactly the human emotion that this poem represents.

There is one certain intuition that all humans feel and that is: hope. Emily Dickinson touches on that in her poem “’Hope’ is the thing with feathers-“. She conveys in this poem that hope is a sensation, or intuition if you will, that every human ever feels. And that even though we go through sorrows and sometimes even failures, hope is always there inside us, moving us along through our lives and getting us through all of our trials stronger than ever. In the last two lines of this poem, Dickinson is stating that even though hope can get us through so many downfalls and failures and bring us out stronger on the other side, it never asks us for anything in return. There is no being or karmic favor we can answer to as a repayment to hope, it’s just a feeling that is always there, cheering us on.

Mental illness or mid-life crisis, we are all afraid of losing ourselves, our minds, and who we are. “I felt a funeral in my brain,” tells the story of the writer’s loss of self or loss of sound mind. The metaphor of the funeral shows the writer’s loss of consciousness and her slip into irrationality. As a human, our nature is to want to be safe and free of the inability to be ourselves or to find ourselves when we do. In plain, we all just want to be “not crazy” and free to make our own decisions of sound mind. Dickinson does a perfect job of presenting us those emotions in the story of a funeral that represents a loss.

Indeed another terrifying thought for most, if not all humans, is death. Dickinson speaks on this in the poem, “Because I could not stop for Death –“. In this poem, a person who is already dead is telling the story of death. She states that is watches you as you go through all the stages of your life (our childhood, our primes, and our decline to old age). This represents the very fear we have of death because it’s storytelling us that death is always near and always waiting. It tells us that we could be taken away by death at any moment and then we would be just like the spirit telling the story, just looking back at our lives.

Emily Dickinson tended to write about death quite a lot, as she did in “I heard a Fly buzz – when I died”. This poem continues the emotion of fear of death felt in the previous poem. Both poems are told from the view of a speaker who is already dead but the two key points spoken of in this poem that showcase our fear of death, are located in the second and fourth stanzas. The second stanza touches on humans’ fear that people will cry for you at your deathbed, but after you die are only interested in your belongings, while the fourth stanza showcases our fear of

what is in the afterlife if anything. Dickinson really makes us think about how scared of death we really are, that even after we die, we'll still be stumbling around like flies in light, trying to figure out what the afterlife is and when it might come.

Dickinson may write a lot about our human fears, but she also writes a lot about our warm emotions as well, like love. In "If you were coming in the fall", Dickinson talks about the longing you can feel for a lover when they are gone. "If I could see you in a year, / I'd wind the months in balls," (Dickinson, "If you were coming in the fall") shows our emotions of wanting time to go by so quickly that we tend to try to make it seem smaller than it really is, regardless of how long. The last stanza does touch on fear we have that comes with love, and that is: if we are to be away from our lover and don't know how long, that could potentially hurt in a way we don't yet understand. And so for humans, Dickinson is saying that we never know what love may be, and if we have to be away from the one we love, we must find a way to get through it, despite how it may hurt.

"That I did always love" is another good example of an enjoyable feeling humans have that comes with a small downfall. In this poem, Dickinson is stating that she always loved the receiver and because love is life and life has no meaning without love, she will never stop loving him because life has no meaning without love. We can see this confirmed in the lines, "That till I loved / I never lived – Enough –" and "That love is life— / And life hath Immortality—". Then in the last two lines of the poem, Dickinson is stating that if the receiver doubts her love then she will only feel sorrow. This is a definite fear of humans, that their lover will not believe how they truly feel and will not reciprocate, and then they will be alone with nothing but sadness.

Emily Dickinson is one of the world's best poets and we can clearly see why. She uses human nature and normal, everyday human emotions and fears to write a story. Each poem teaches the reader a little more about themselves and how they feel about being honest, about fame and success and is known for that success. Some of her poems make us think about what it would be like to die and what might be in the afterlife if anything at all. Some make us think about what it may be like to lose our minds and descent into madness. And yet, a lot of Dickinson's poems are also about the beauty we all can find in life and how amazing love feels, despite some of the disagreeable situations love may bring. Dickinson allows us to feel so many emotions all at once, and yet each emotion is slightly different for each person. For this, she must be recognized.

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