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The Theme of Death in the Poetry of Emily Dickinson

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Abstract: *Emily Dickinson has been regarded as the leading poetic voice of the nineteenth century America. Dickinson lived most of her life within the private world of her father's home in a small New England town. Her romantic vision and emotional intensity kept her from making all but a few friends. Because of this life of solitude, she was able to focus on her world more sharply than other authors of her time. The poems of Emily Dickinson reveal an unusual awareness of herself and her world, a shy but a determined mind. Every poem is like a tiny microcosm that testifies to Dickinson's life as a recluse. Her poetry is the precursor to the modern spirit with the influence of transcendentalism but not Puritanism. Her treatment of Death and profound metaphysical tendencies are part of the singular nature of her genius. She was obsessed with death and its consequences especially with the idea of eternity. Dickinson strongly believes that it is important to retain the power of consciousness after life. The question of mental cessation at death is an overtone of many of her poems. The imminent contingency of death, as the ultimate source of awe, wonder and endless questions, is life's most fascinating feature to Dickinson.*

Key Words: Romantic, Death, Metaphysical, Consciousness

Introduction : The history of nineteenth century American poetry is a record of a constant experiment in the art of versification. The nineteenth century American poets like Dickinson liberated the sensibility of the people by revolting against the atrocity of the nineteenth century neo-classicism which was based on infallibility or reason to which feelings and passions must be subjected. The nineteenth century American poets are automatically drawn towards the picturesque, the exotic, the sensuous, the supernatural as it is also seen in the poetry of Emily Dickinson. Imagination is the main driving force for them. They are keenly conscious of the gulf between the transient, commonsense world of appearance and the eternal, infinite realm of ideal truth which man could perceive by means of imagination. In the poetry of Emily Dickinson Imagination too plays an important role. Dickinson comes under the direct influence of transcendentalism of her time. She glorified the life of intuition and repudiation of all external religious authority, like Emerson, the leading exponent of transcendentalism in America. Dickinson challenges the mystery of death with evasion, despair, curiosity or hope in her poetry as means to clarify her curiosity. From examining her poems of natural transitions of life and death, changing states of consciousness, as a speaker from beyond the grave, confronting death in a journey or a dream and on the dividing line of life and death one can see that Dickinson points to death as the final inevitable change. The intensity of Dickinson's curiosity about dying and her enthusiasm to learn of the dying persons' experience at the point of morality is evident in her poetry. She studies the effects of the dead's disappearance, in the living world, in a hope to conjecture something about the new life they are experiencing after death.