

An Analysis of Pictorial Art in Emily Dickinson's Select Poems

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Abstract:

This paper attempts to analyse the pictorial art in Emily Dickinson's poetry. Art is a means that expresses and records sincere emotions. Poetry and art are complementary to one another. Poetry is a state of mind and heart expressed through words, colours, lines, and shades. Poetry as a type of literature creates pictorial art on the canvas of the mind through imagination. It elicits the depth and breadth of observation, assimilation, appreciation, and recreation of a poet's experiences, who has a natural impulse to carve each subject and object with the colour of mood and approach. It is a well organised effort to redefine the need and significance of pictorial art in poetry and also their bonded and firm relationship with each other as it is very obviously unfolded and proved by Emily Dickinson in her poems.

Key Words: Pictorial Art, Colours, Beauty, Sun, Night, Seasons.

INTRODUCTION

On December 10, 1830, Emily Dickinson was born in Amherst, Massachusetts. She was Edward Dickenson's daughter. She enjoyed her solitude and avoided social interaction at all costs. She consequently had few acquaintances. Although she wrote 1800 poems, just 10 of them were published, during her life time.

Wordsworth and Keats set the standard for sensual visual poetry in English. Emily Dickinson is not too far away from them. The verse of Emily Dickinson belongs emphatically to what Emerson long since called "The poetry of the portfolio,....something produced absolutely without the thought of publication, and solely by way of expression of the writer's own mind,"(241). Without the exuberant imagination of the poet or artist, no pictorial description comes to life. This is why beauty is found in the eyes, not in the thing. This truth is much more gratifying when applied to Emily Dickinson's poems.

Sensuousness and pictorial art are closely tied to Keats' poetry. Keats was a poet who believed that "an artist must serve Mammon,"(322) that is, his own art. He was a mindful poet eager to stamp his poems with his unique brand of greatness. He goes to considerable lengths to make his work with beautiful image, loaded with vivid emotions and memory. It is more than just a photograph; which reflects the author's vision and conjures up a striking, attractive picture. Being a sensuous pictorial poet, Keats loved, "the principal of beauty in all things" and believe that "a thing of beauty is a joy for ever"(323).

Instead of using a brush, Emily Dickinson creates her art works with precise and suitable words. She possesses all the qualities of a picture skillfully painted on a canvas. She communicates with clarity and spontaneity. She creates poems in her own special way, out of an instinctual desire and emotional outpouring that does not require any conscious or aesthetic experimentation. All the techniques she employs imply an analytical and sentimental approach to poetry.

Theodora Van Wagenen Ward (granddaughter of Dr and Mrs. Tosiah Gilbert Holland) writes:

Emily Dickinson's imagination reached out to wide horizons and her intuition plumbed the depths far below the personal, bringing to her poetry a universal quality that includes reader of the most divergent views to claim her as their own, yet nineteenth century New England flavoured all she wrote. (21)

Nature does not compel her vision to philosophise for herself or humans. Instead, she saw nature as a visual feast that she recreates in her poetry. Emily was enthralled by the extraordinary nature because she is an artist. She was forced to consider the compressive implications of her observations of nature due to the multitude of colours, noises, and tints found in nature as well as her analytical intellect. She predicts the modern approach toward nature, which rejects any simple categorization of man in relation to the universe and sees nature as something devoid of all sentimentality. Her thought and emotion colour her conventional thinking. Allen Tate states that Emily Dickinson's poem is created by her own perception and her deep sensation and understanding nature helped her in creating sensation to her poems. He calls her poem as "the perfect literary situation" The poet's main focus in this artistic scenario was perception(153).

Pictorial Description

Emily anticipates the Pre – Raphaelites in the graphic aspect of her verse derived from her vivid scenic imagery. They are both painters and poets. One of them is Emily. She employs images that are visual in nature. Mortality and immortality are complimentary, just as sound and silence are, since one cannot imagine immortality without morality. Emily Dickinson is well aware of this reality. Only in nature could she find both at the same time, living together. Emily takes full advantage to convey her sentiments and present the divine majesty of nature in the following poem, “What mystery pervades a well!” in which she draws a picture of colours, forms, depth, shades, and movements.

What mystery pervades a well!
That water lives so far-
A neighbor from another world.
Residing in a jar
Whose limit none have ever seen,
But just his lid glass-
Like looking every time you please
In an abyss's face! (1-8).

Even without a brush, Emily Dickinson paints a picture of the sea with all its depth. With the use of words and her imagination she paints a bottomless picture of the sea before the eyes of the reader. Her pictorial work portrays the sea as a mysterious creation in the first stanza, which would be impossible in a colour painting. Her words transform the sea into a jar full of water, where God Himself resides in the midst of human beings. MC Naughton observes that “nature for Emily Dickinson was what she saw and heard what came to her through her senses; yet she went beyond this to a sort of implied pantheistic doctrine, often identifying nature with Heaven or God”(33). Emily Dickinson personifies water and refers to its surface as "abyss's face"(8) (bottomless face), her word picture reaches its limit.

Emily Dickinson is drawn to this simplicity with all its colourful diversity, and she immerses herself in the world of pictorial imagination solely for the aesthetic pleasure, she expresses in her poetry. She narrates the sunset in one of her earlier poems, as:

How the old mountains drip with sunset
How the Hemlocks burn –
How the Dun Brake is drank in Cinder
By the Wizard Sun –(1-4)

These are the visions flitted Guido –
Titian – never told –
Domenichino Dropped his pencil –
Paralyzed, with Gold – (21-24).

In this poem, Emily Dickinson fails to depict the sunset view in the same way as the three Italian painters, Rene Guido, Titian, and El Greco Domenico did because they were all perplexed by the illusory shifts, motions, and hues. The magnificent gold of the sunset is so stunning that Domenico gave up trying in vain to imitate it on canvas since colours can only

move in the sky. Emily Dickinson displays all the colours and nuances of sunset before imagination eyes in the first line of the poem “Old mountains drip with sunset” (1) which reflects the glory of the natural phenomenon called sunset. In the same way, she calls the sun “wizard” (4).

There is no feasible painting on canvas that can directly depict the sun as a wizard. A dynamic scene of ebbs is drawn in the third stanza. Emily skillfully makes a moving picture of ebbs in the sea that repeatedly touch the green colour grass on the soil using visual art. Emily is fascinated by natural hues and reflections. They move under her imagination's control. She uses sapphire (Neelam) colour to create her picture, which she drops on the sea waves and touches the green grass. A beautiful combination of golden and green colours is created and golden reflections can be seen all throughout. She is so taken with the golden bright colour and its gleaming reflection that she believes has the power to paralyse one's sensibility. The colour gold is associated with splendour, glamour, piety, and majesty. So, Emily Dickinson's canvas depicts not only a sunset but also an infinite painting full of colours, tints, brightness, and other elements.

Imaginative Description

Emily Dickinson breaks herself from the classic poetry about nature that William Wordsworth followed in his poems. She has written over 500 poems on nature, and there isn't a single one of nature's species beneath the sun and within her physical reach that slips her notice. Her principal themes are the seasons and the elemental forces that signal or bring about change, for obvious reasons. In her childhood, she went on picnics, parties, and celebrations. She confined herself to her garden cottage and then to her room, from where she studied the outside world more closely than she had ever done before. She was enthralled by the diversity of nature's species, and she included them all in her poetry. She paints a picture that appears in the garden in poem “A Bird Came Down the Walk”. Due to her choice of words and use of pictorial art, this little episode becomes an unforgettable image. She writes:

A Bird came down the walk –

He did not know I saw –

He bit an Angeworm in halves

And ate the fellow, raw,(1-4)

.....

.....

He glanced with rapid eyes

That hurried all around –

They looked like frightened Beads, I thought –

He stirred his Velvet Head. (9-12)

Through her description, a simple form of a little bird is made worth looking. Moving, “Velvet” (12) – like the head of a bird presents an automatically moving picture in the garden with a line of green grass effect. “A Route of Evanescence,”(1) a poem about the hummingbird, has her most renowned description. Emily Dickinson wrote the description in a single stanza in 1880, with eight lines of unpredictability. The structural integrity of the poem

heightens it's evocative power and the tension of the metaphors releases the refined surprise of her wit. She composes:

A Route of Evanescence
With a revolving wheel –
A Resonance of Emerald –
A Rush of Cochineal –
And every Blossom on the Bush
Adjusts its tumbled Head –
The mail from Tunis, Probably,
An east Morning's Ride- (1-8).

The beauty of this poem is an adequate description with the most appropriate terms. The bird's rapid, almost elusive movement is suggested in the first line, as it circles around the buds and petals. It has the appearance of a spinning wheel. The third line combines the touch of green colours in its wings with the buzzing sound it makes as it flies. Like the bird rushes and disappears, the scarlet patch on its throat appears as a splash of "Cochineal" (4), leaving behind the tumbled blooms to attest to its existence. The image is fluid, adaptable, and colourful. The poet imagines the bird as a postman delivering letters from faraway Tunis on its daily route the "Route of evanescence" (1).

Emily's eyes are opened to the magnitude of nature's splendour. The sunrise and sunset are Emily Dickinson's favourite natural events. Higgins thinks that nature "was more a point of departure than a goal in Emily's reference to it, and so "she used it for scene-setting, for humour, or for commentary on human actions and thoughts"(235).

Emily narrates her experience, during night in another poem, catching the opportunity to be the first witness of the daybreak. She paints a picture of the dawn, full of wonderful splendour. The description is minute and descriptive. She writes:

I'll tell you how the sun rose –
A Ribbon at a time –
The steeples swam in Amethyst –
The news, like Squirrels, ran –
The Hills United their Bonnets-
The Bobolinks – begun –
Then I said softly to myself –
"That must have been the Sun"!
But how he set – I know not –
There seemed a purple stile
That little yellow boys and girls were climbing all the while –
Till when they reached the other side,
A Dominic in Gray –
Put gently up the evening Bars –
And led the flock away – (1-15).

The image begins with a row of ribbon-like rays. As the day breaks, a thin, gleaming ribbon appears to prepare the sky for the arrival of the sun. Emily does a drawing, depicting

the preparations for the arrival of the sun. She paints a thrilling vision of the rising light in “The steeples swam in Amethyst” (3). The sun's purple rays shine through the church's steeples. The purple dazzling rays of the sun are allegorically represented by amethyst. The poet paints a wonderful vision of the young sun before the reader. The church's tower is entirely engulfed in vivid purple beams. It shines like amethyst, a valuable blue jewel. The image of plum dazzles, with several lights and hues of colour adds to its vibrancy. Small squirrels leap and sprint at breakneck speed. Emily's utilisation of shapes and forms is truly lovely and remarkable. The poem makes the elusiveness of nature clearly. Every image complements and enhances the other. The picture's grandeur is shown in the scene's depth. The poetess, whose hats are removed to embrace the light, sees the hills as a feminine figure. Emily starts with comparisons and outperforms the audience. The blackness of the night that passes thanks to the sun is represented by bonnets. Emily paints a scene of bright hills that allow everyone to begin their new day. She depicts the enchantment of shade by describing the rising sun and purple rays that cover the shining church tower, as well as removing the hats of hills, all of which emphasise the certainty of the sun's presence. The picturesque description has a lovely harmony that gratifies any heart.

The splendour of the sunset is explored in the third stanza. Emily keeps a close eye on every attitude, temper, and change as the sun rises slowly. She observes a purple colour line once more as the sun starts to set. The route appears to be a tiny subway for passengers. It is like a purple door closing for the day. The poet metaphorically presents yellow colour rays as young boys and girls, yellow is considered as naughty, mischievous children who try to climb over the purple colour woody wall, in the third and fourth lines of the third stanza, “that little yellow boys and girls were climbing all the while –” (11). Emily startles the readers with this line. The surrounding scenery is incredibly colourful. Purple rays are swamped by yellow rays, unlike the morning. Emily draws an amazing picture of the sunset for which metaphor is used in vivid ways. The poem's theme is the sun, which has the ability to turn from light to dark. Boys and girls are personified as a purple wooden wall. When the sun sets and young boys and girls climb over the purple colour wall until they reach the other side, it appears as if the sun closes the day's shop. The black darkness arrives with grey colour to rule over the planet as soon as the sun sets. The notion is that dark colours obscure all natural objects. It appears as 'bars,' which depict the world and nature behind it. A lock stands for the villagers, birds, animals, and all other insects of Nature who return home to rest in the dark night which has power to create every moment according to it's will in the fourth verse, “And led the flock away” (15). The aesthetics of pictorial painting are highly appealing. The juxtaposition in this poem is found in the diverse combination of dawn and evening, sunrise and sunset. Two very different functions of the same sun have been discovered. Here, representation of nature's mystery and elusiveness is more important than description. Nature's delight is evident in these two disparate notions and moods. Nature is abundant and magnificent in its diversity.

Symbolic Description

In many a poems Emily presents the variety of seasons. She finds beauty in different seasons. Spring, like other poets, draws her attention in particular. She paints an image of the spring season, when the sky is clear and the sun shines brightly over the Earth. The area is

filled with light and brightness. The sky in the picture is clear enough to be seen plainly. The weather is pleasant, and everything is in blossom and shining. All of nature's splendour is shown. One of her poems about the beauty of nature in the springtime is as follows:

The Morns Are Meeker Than They were –

The nuts are getting brown –

The berry's cheek is plumper –

The Rose is out of town.

The Maple wears a gray scarf –

The field is scarlet gown –

Lest I should be old fashioned

I'll put a trinklet on (1-8).

In the first line, a vision of spring is brought before eyes, when the morning brings soothing sunlight to calm each nerve, in contrast to the cold, frigid winter. It pleases everyone and generates a happy atmosphere. In one line, two different positions of the morning are shown. Rather than a physical painting, she paints a vision of ripening nuts in a flashing brown colour to template the sense of taste. Flaring brown nuts are mouth-watering and enhances the picture of the spring with brown colour, while berries are happy and giggling during the season. Spring sucks the juice from their cheeks. They're all ready to eat. At the first sight of all the fruits in the picture, there is a tempting lust to swallow them. Emily's wit is a game of words. In the line "The rose is out of town" (4) the word "town" indicates the location of rose plantations, and the word "spring" reflects the cause that resides in their buds as futurity springs from the buds, their native habitat.

The poem "The Morns Are Meeker Than They Were -" demonstrates Emily's artistic ability. The line begins with summer's relaxing brightness and continues with colourful motifs. Emily paints her word - picture with milky white sunlight, brown nuts, red berries, and red roses. Without blinking, the description is incredibly eye-catching. The appeal of scenic vistas continues in the second stanza. Now that spring has arrived, the Mapal tree rapidly develops and sprouts new leaves. All of this creates the appearance of a scarf. More shade is being cast by the tree. The scarf is grey in colour because the tree is covered with numerous leaves.

Emily's use of colour is interesting and her comparisons and personifications are consistently excellent. She personifies a field in the spring season by depicting it as a red gown, eager to welcome the glorious weather. All the blooms open from their buds, and the roses appear to wear a scarlet robe. In the painting, the fields gleam and flame. Summer spreads light, beauty, brightness, and fleshes across the fields, orchards, plains, mountains, trees, and all other natural objects.

This poem has a strong pictorial quality combined with wit and inventiveness. The beauty of a dense maple tree is breath taking. The picture's beauty is enhanced by the green colour of the leaves and the red colour of the fields. The poem is highly appreciative and colourful in terms of pictorial quality. Each image amplifies the previous one. The description is just as crucial as evocation of nature's mystery and elusiveness. Johnson opines that "for her, the world of nature is a dwelling place, hauntingly mysterious, peopled with God's creatures who live amid the phenomena God ordains and regulates"(183).

Nature has the capacity to captivate every sight in Emily's depiction. Emily's eyes are wide open to nature's wonders. She gives a mountain its own identity and makes it sit on the throne of eternity in the following poem:

The Mountain sat upon the plain
In this tremendous chair –
His observation omnifold,
His inquest, everywhere –

The seasons played around his knees
Like children round a fire –
Grandfather of the Day is He
Of Dawn, the Ancestor – (1-8)

Emily imagines painters who capture all facets of beauty. She possesses the ability to envisage the personalities of abstract natural objects as well as nature itself. They have the ability to communicate directly with nature. Her paintings are as obvious in words as a skilled painter's brush on a canvas. The mountain is personified as a distinct personality of a powerful athletic man who sits on the Earth as a senior supervisor in the poem, "The Mountain Sat Upon the Plain". The poet imagines the Earth as an endless chair on which the mountain sits. The scene changes in the second stanza. While the world moves on without pausing for a second, the mountain remains stable and still in its place. The mountain in the photo calmly watches each and every moment. The poet depicts a lively landscape in the mountains. She enjoys paying attention to even the most overlooked features of nature. As a result, even a mountain has meaning and beauty for her. She admires the mountain's stability and continual stillness. She paints a stunning word-picture of Stable Mountain, as well as the sound of the changing landscape and seasons. A mountain stands silently but the world doesn't. She draws a canvas with a moving scene or picture.

Flowers, like mountains and other commonplace natural objects, draw her intense attention. She captures the beauty of flowers in the following poem, imbuing them with a distinct personality and behaving like children. Nature is naturally enlivened by this quick personification of flowers. She explains:

As children bid the Guest "Good Night"
And then reluctant turn –
My flowers raise their pretty lips –
Then put their nightgowns on.

As children caper when the wake
Merry that it is Morn –
My flowers from a hundred cribs
Will peep, and prance again (1-8).

The poetess is inspired by the blossoming flowers to converse with them and connect with nature. She personifies flowers symbolically. She explains that, as children say farewell to their elders at night, flowers say goodbye to the moon, which is the night's guest.

Tenderness, softness, and delicacy abound in this painting. She personifies flowers and herself symbolically. She understands the love of a mother as she too is a woman. So she refers to flowers as "My flowers" (7). She sees herself as the mother of all things, including flowers. She notices that flowers shrink at night and imagines that youngsters, like flowers, rise their lovely mouths upward, possibly to kiss and bid night farewell. Emily Dickinson's pen masterfully employs metaphor as the key to the poem. The flower-filled portrait evokes the purity of children, unaffected by the ways of the world.

Morning arrives, the sun rises, and flowers wake up stretching out their bodies, as in the second stanza. The flowers' faces are light up with delight at the sight of the gorgeous, colourful dawn. They remove their nightgowns (buds) and emerge from their folds to peer out and observe the world preparing itself for a new day.

Emily Dickinson accurately describes the tiniest movements of flowers at night and in the morning. One can discover a vivid image of flower buds in full bloom. Flowers are as sweet and innocent as children. Her love for nature's items is so strong that she longs to be in their presence and watch the changes in their forms with delight.

Conclusion

Emily Dickinson brings forth the hidden beauty of whatever subject she visualises with her colourful words and multi-dimensional insights. She makes a friendly and honest approach to her subject matter with her deft and pleasant touches. Her nature poems are rich in visual elements. They are a type of painting on canvas that she does without using a brush or colour. Her poetry has all the elements of pictorial art, such as colour, shade, shape, depth, and light. All the accessories she employs for them are simply words that gain status. This article sheds light on Emily Dickinson's use of picture art in her poems and explicates that she is no less than any other pictorial art poet. She frequently and deftly incorporates pictorial art into her nature poems. Her word-pictures depict fascinating subjects that appeal to all the senses. Her poetry engages the most important resource in poetry, the intellect and spirit.

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