

إيميلي ديكنسون كالمراة-الطفل: رؤية السريالي قبل السريالية

Emily Dickinson as the Femme-Enfant: Seeing the Surreal before Surrealism

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Abstract

Critic Gloria Femen lamented about the *lost women of surrealism* in one of her seminal research endeavours titled “Art History and the Case for Women in Surrealism”. She additionally lamented Surrealism’s founder, Andre Breton’s somewhat sexist take that for women to achieve anything in this convention, they must adopt the persona of the Woman-Child who is intact with her childhood innocence and is able to use the latter to transcend the rational world of the adult. While Femen rejected this idea claiming that it marginalized women artists whose art had noticeably entered its mature phase, this paper showcases how that may not be

the case with Dickinson. After subjecting Dickinson's poetry to close scrutiny, it was found that Dickinson might not only have inadvertently been using the Surrealistic convention at least a century before its official introduction in the world of art and literature but that the persona of the Woman-Child was, in fact, a major attribute of her poetry which imbued the latter with much of its surrealistic essence.

Keywords: Woman, Lamentation, Innocence, Adult, Child

المستخلص:

انتقدت الناقدة غلوريا فيمين في واحد من محاولاتها البحثية البارزة بعنوان "تاريخ الفن والقضية من أجل النساء في السريالية" عن النساء اللواتي فُقدن في الحركة السريالية. و قالت أيضًا أن مؤسس السريالية أندريه بریتون قد اتخذ موقفًا متحيزًا إلى حد ما بالنسبة للنساء للوصول إلى أي شيء في هذه المدرسة، فعليهن اعتماد شخصية "المرأة-الطفل" التي تستمر بارتباطها ببراءة طفولتها وقادرة على استخدامها لتتجاوز العالم العقلاني للبالغين. بينما رفضت الناقدة فيمين هذه الفكرة بادعائها أنها همشت الفنانة اللواتي أظهرن فنهن علامات النضج الواضح، إلا أن هذه البحث يظهر كيف قد لا يكون هذا هو الحال مع ديكنسون. بعد إخضاع شعر ديكنسون لدراسة متأنية و دقيقة، تبين أنه ليس فقط أن ديكنسون قد استخدمت عشوائيًا التقنية السريالية قبل قرن على الأقل من ظهورها الرسمي و الحقيقي في عالم الفن والأدب، ولكن أيضًا أن شخصية "المرأة-الطفل" كانت في الواقع سمة رئيسية من شعرها مما منح الأخير الكثير من جوهره السريالي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المرأة، العويل، البراءة، البالغ، الطفل

1.0 Introduction

Emily Dickinson's poetry has been scrutinized under various thematic lenses. Most critics, such as Ralph Marcellino, Anthony Hecht, and others have agreed that Dickinson's poetry transpires a struggling Christian's faltering faith in God and redemption and that the poet was obsessed with the ideas of death, immortality, and

the afterlife. Joyce Van Dyke speaks of how Emily's great creative merit, a rare quality among a poetess" could be the result of Emily's perpetual seclusion (Van Dyke, 1984, p. 277). But while solitude can definitely serve as a sanctuary where the poet rediscovers his or herself (Abdullah, 2023, p. 39). Emily was not necessarily a fan of social severance and accounts of her solitude have been perhaps exaggerated more than was necessary. Elsa Greene in her article Emily Dickinson was a Poetess speaks of how many believe that in order to have achieved the much sought after attribute of universality in her poetry, Emily must have subconsciously detached herself from her female psyche or how else could a woman, untrained in the formal conventions of poetry and inexperienced in the formal conventions of society, could construct such poetic marvel. Indeed she must been "mad" (Greene, 1972, p. 64) says the critic sarcastically.

However, when one begins to unravel the uncanny juxtapositions of unrelated or sometimes downright contradictory ideas in her poetry, the prevalence of scientifically inexplicable ventures, and a dreamlike sense of fleetingness, it is quite tempting to wonder whether Emily did craft her literary marvels under spells of poetic madness.

Out of respect for the great poetic genius of Emily Dickinson, the paper refrains from such a malicious judgment and argues for a possibility that not many have surmised. The paper takes a controversial take and adjudicates how many of Emily's poems were written not under some haunting spell of madness but in what could be described as the convention of surrealism.

The reason this take is controversial is because Dickinson's era precedes that of Surrealism as a thematic school of thought in arts and literature at least by a century. It would be quite valid to wonder how Dickinson could be writing in a literary convention when the said convention did not even exist in her time. This I take to be the main challenge and concern of my research paper. As this paper will eventually

showcase, although Dickinson preceded Surrealism by almost a century, she was still, albeit inadvertently, using the conventions of Surrealism in her poetry. The reason this is important is because critics, such as Gloria Femen, have lamented the absence of any major female artists in the cabal of the most popular surrealist figures. And although Femen was mostly concerned with art as opposed to literature, the truth of the matter is that literature boasts even fewer names when it comes to surrealist writers than visual arts.

The study's second concern is almost an offshoot of the first one. According to Femen, the reason why critics are averse to acknowledging female artists' ability to use the surrealist convention for their art is because of the somewhat sexist ideas of its founder who believed that women artists could also be successful with this convention so long as they were able to channel their inner-child and transmogrify their innate innocence to transcend the everyday rationale imposed upon them socially (Femen, 1975, p. 31) According to Femen, this posed a problem for many women artists who had entered their mature phase and could not possibly be expected to project this persona of what is termed in Surrealism as the Woman-Child or the femme-enfant (Femen, 1975, p. 31) However, as this paper shall showcase Emily indeed had been using something akin to this Woman-Child persona and the latter did play a key role in imbuing Dickinson's writing with much of its surrealistic quality.

1.1 Research Problem

How does the persona of the femme-enfant contribute to the creative faculties and scope of women poets especially in the literary convention of surrealism? The question has been seldom studied but is one that merits some resolution. Is it, as Femen suggests in her article, a whimsical figment of Breton's overwrought and

somewhat sexist imagination, or does English literature actually boast examples of successful female writers that advertently or inadvertently employed this convention as a means to give vent to their creative flux? The following thesis is an endeavor to seek answers to each of these aforementioned questions.

1.2 Significance of the Study

The debate as to women's true place in literature has been around for quite some time. Where major literary movements are concerned, few women appear to have either contributed directly or assumed credit for being its main proponents. The charge against Surrealism has been two-fold: the first is that we do not find enough examples of women literary figures, at least not popularly renowned ones, who dabble in this convention and the second is that it does not lend itself easily to women who, on account of some innate biological incapacity, lack the faculty to truly understand or convey the literary aesthetic of Surrealism. This paper is an endeavor to make amends as far as these charges go. It depicts how despite Andre Breton being credited as the founder of Surrealism, writers have been using this convention, or at least some form of it, for decades if not centuries before its official realization. The second is to depict how, as opposed to what Femen presented in her study, Breton may not be completely incorrect in his theory about the femme-enfant since it appeared to be one of the main strategies that Emily worked with and gives interesting insight into women's creative process and model.

1.3 Framework of the Study

The study analyses several of Dickinson's poems using Andre Breton's theory of Surrealism. The literature review section performs a comprehensive study of what surrealism entails but more importantly, it examines Breton's somewhat controversial concept of the femme-enfant and examines the extent to which Dickinson's writings

fit the thematic conventions of Surrealism. The most important thematic aspect of Surrealism is its dream-like quality that largely stems from the juxtaposition of contrasting and paradoxical objects and ideas and the use of often shocking and unconventional similes and metaphors. The study hence explores Dickinson's poetic pieces under this thematic light as well as tries to uncover the prevalence of what Breton calls the femme-enfant or the Woman-Child convention.

2.0 Literature Review

As a movement that surfaced through the turbid waters of arts and then literature in the immediate aftermath of the First World War, Surrealism emerged much later than Emily Dickinson's morbidly fantastic era. Being a nineteenth-century writer, Dickinson cannot be thought to have, in any way, invented or inspired surrealism which seems to have borne out of the 20th-century phenomenon of searching "for a reality deeper than appearance." (Criel, 1952, p. 133) In his article titled "Surrealism", Gaston Criel reveals how the movement could trace its roots back to Dadaism which originated in Zurich in 1916 after the First World War. Dadaism was based on Tristan Tzara's "baptismal" formula according to which "thought takes place in the mouth" (Criel, 1952, p. 133) For anyone familiar with the tenets of Surrealism, it is easy to see how and why Dadaism became the predecessor of literature's most intrusive aesthetic movements.

Andre Breton who is usually credited as the founder of surrealism would have perhaps preferred the appellation of "discoverer". Instead of having founded the movement, Breton was able to spot the formation of something extraordinary in the weekly meetings of the rebel avant-garde artists who gathered to form the Dada movement. It was an international phenomenon and the movement gained pace with regular meetings at its headquarters in New York, Paris, and Cologne. According to

Robert Clancy, Dadaists, who were disgusted by the tragedies and atrocities of war had declared a sort of their own war against society, revolting the social conventions and shunning reason itself (Clancy, 1949, pp. 133–136).

Andre Breton, surmising something extraordinary brewing in this blatant rejection of reason and convention, created his First Manifesto of Surrealism in 1924. Breton could see a *crisis of consciousness* and saw the need to recreate human thought. Breton believed that this required tapping into the human resources and psyche that had been uncharted so far. However, it needed to be the “pure” human psyche since the latter was believed to be tainted and molded by the conventions and restrictions of society and reason (Breton.A, 1924, p. 5). Surrealism requires a releasing of energy that lies dormant buried under our rational psyche; the movement is literally defined by its name Surrealism which means to go beyond what’s thought to be “real” into the human spirit.

According to Criel, when the surrealists returned disillusioned from the First World War, their main concern grappled with the problem of getting to the heart of men through a communion that could bypass the physical and factual constraints of worldly reason and materialize in the realm of what could almost be characterized as a dream. Since the war proved the failure of human reasoning, surrealism emerged to offer poets, writers, and artists an alternative reality. It is an uncanny coincidence that as a movement surrealism was borne out of the morbid tragedy of mass-scale death while the latter is one of the most celebrated topics of Dickinson and around one-third of her poetic collection revels in this theme.

If, as Criel suggests, the poet is the “seer” to whom the barrier between the world and reality does not matter and whose task is to understand the super-reality transforming life and its wonders then perhaps Dickinson is one of the most

surrealistic prophetesses of the eighteenth century, which was, as stated earlier, a good whole century before surrealism was officially designated a literary movement.

Standing at the opposite end of the theory of arts for art's sake, Surrealism is a new way of living that makes use of the 'daily-wonderful,' the 'precious-wonderful in a mosaic which is sometimes scatological.' (Criel, 1952, p. 135) Another point of conflation between Dickinson's poetic art and that of surrealism is the logical fallacy. In his paper titled "An Amusing Lack of Logic", Keith L. Eggener defines surrealism's earliest roots as leftist in its political awareness. In fact, Eggener speaks of its ill-reception in America that was hostile towards the "importation of foreign decadence" (Eggener, 1993, p. 31). Quoting Julien Levy, the New York Gallery owner, Eggener reveals the orthodox cynicism of the Americans towards embracing and popularizing Surrealism as a literary or artistic phenomenon. From what Eggener has quoted in his article, it seems that Levy had a smug assurance in the vindication of the American innocence since surrealism boasted laughter of the "old and cynical" (Eggener, 1993, p. 34) and American laughter was "neither old nor cynical" (Eggener, 1993, p. 35) and the surrealistic tendency of cleansing by destroying would not reach the American. However, as this paper will demonstrate, it was exactly the kind of cleansing that Dickinson sought after in her poetry.

In his article titled "Surrealism and Freedom", Robert Clancy speaks of how Breton was able to spot something incredible amongst the meetings of the Dadaist rebels who appeared to have achieved the extraordinary feat of pointing to "a new adventure of the spirit" (Clancy, 1949, p. 272). In a way, the latter phrase summarizes much of Dickinson's poetry. Quite a few scholars find themselves reticent when it comes to outwardly describing Dickinson's poetry as surrealist. At most, they identify a few motifs in a surrealistic vein but most find other ways of making sense of Dickinson's art. This reticence could most logically be attributed to the unavailability of the

surrealist movement during Dickinson's era but as this paper strives to depict, some of Dickinson's best pieces were strictly surrealist in the sense that far from absconding reason, her poetry tried to make sense of the spiritual world. This Dickinson achieved through a suspension of the objective realities by transfusing two quite distinct objects on a plane that is unconnected to either. Robert Clancy's work is important because he rightly sheds light on Edgar Allen Poe's prophesying surrealism's technical implementations. According to Poe, in surrealism, "the pure imagination chooses, from either Beauty or Deformity, only the most combinable things hitherto uncombined.... that the admixture of two elements results in a something that has nothing of the qualities of one of them, or even nothing of the qualities of either" (Clancy, 1949, p. 273) . According to Clancy, this is the perfect surrealist formula and the paper will vastly determine if Dickinson's writing fits this mold of an alien plane of reality disconnected from the very objects of its devising. The leading features of surrealism are the flow of pure thought unrestricted by reason, its insistence on non-conformity and lack of convention, and finally-disinterestedness (Clancy, 1949, p. 275).

In Dickinson, we find all three in strong contrast. Her poetry flows abjectly from the recesses of her deepest most intrusive thoughts; it is certainly unconventional and finally, there is an undeniable streak of disinterestedness with which she explores her themes of shocking and disturbing significance. All of this makes Dickinson a classic surrealist poet who inadvertently produced her writing using a literary convention that was to appear around a century later.

Upon the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the First Manifesto of Surrealism in 1975, Gloria Femen wrote her seminal article "Art History and the Case for the Women of Surrealism" in which she speaks of the need to highlight the craft of the women of surrealism, especially in art from whose celebration some of the most

predominant women were left marginalized (Femen, 1975, p. 31). Through her research of surrealist art in France and Mexico, Femen finds that the role of women in surrealism was “ridden with paradoxes and fraught with puzzling contradictions (Femen, 1975, p. 32). Quoting Breton, Femen speaks of the “femme-enfant” or the “Woman-Child”. This Woman-Child was characterized by her naivete, spontaneity, and childlike innocence that put her more readily in touch with the dreamlike world from one’s spiritual and unconscious realm of imagination. According to Femen, this created a paradox and a sense of crisis for women who found it difficult to relate to or put up the facade of the Woman-Child as they grew older and more mature in their artistic creations. These women, Femen believes, were systematically written out of the annals celebrating surrealist artists unless they conformed to the concept of the *femme-enfant*. Femen called women the “universal vessel of creation” (Femen, 1975, p. 35) not just of physical birth but also of spiritual rebirth. However, while Femen’s research focuses on depicting a departure of women’s artistic tendencies from the image of this *femme-enfant* or the Woman-Child, Dickinson’s poetic imageries do cast her in the mold of the innocent Woman-Child.

Emily Dickinson, being a canonical poetic figure in English literature, has amassed a sea of literary criticism. Her works have been heavily scrutinized and studied from various angles. However, few have tried to find or establish with any degree of certainty the *femme-enfant* of the surrealistic tradition in Dickinson. It is worth noting that Dickinson’s art was reminiscent of the women of the consciousness-raising groups of the 1970’s who, as noted by Aseel Hatif Jassem, did not like to openly flaunt their emotional and physical desires (Jassem, 2018, p. 4). Instead, her poetry was garbed under the persona of a curiosity-filled young girl with an exhaustive imagination. There have, however, been many conjectures regarding the kaleidoscopic conjoining of different and interrelated themes in unique analogies in Dickinson’s poetry. Perhaps the greatest reminder of the surrealistic vein in

Dickinson's writing came through in her obsessive attachment to the most fleeting objects in nature. Chief of these was her obsession with immortality. Many critics have deeply studied Emily's love for immortality and her conception of it. Lieutenant Ralf Marcellino, for example, had once dedicated a whole article to the interpretation of merely three lines in Emily's poetry:

The only News I know

Is Bulletins all day

From Immortality (Marcellino, 1945, p. 103)

According to Marcellino, the critics have famously attributed wrongful interpretation to these verses by Dickinson which were part of a letter written to a friend in the wake of his enlistment and eventual injury during the Civil War. Marcellino believed that for Emily death and mortality were one and the same. So while many known critics such as Genevieve Taggard and Sister James Power believed that the bulletins Emily was referring to meant some clandestine and spiritual messages from the Holy Power, Marcellino believed she was simply referring to the news of death that she so often received ever since the Civil War had started (Marcellino, 1945, p. 102). The fusion of death and immortality, two obviously contrasting ideas (when one considers death to be "the ceasing of existence" and immortality to "never stop existing") and their enmeshment on the plane of bulletins is actually a great example of surrealistic writing. The fact that the theme under consideration is one of a spiritual concern that cannot be discerned from merely observable facts lends it even more credibility. However, Marcellino, too, seems uninterested in pointing this out and instead simply focuses on the fallacy of the common interpretation.

Marcellino was not the only writer who focused on Emily's fascination with death. Critic Ruth Flanders, for example, has also written extensively about how death and

faith waged a constant battle in Emily Dickinson's mind. Keep in mind that surrealism emerged as an offshoot of Dadaism and the latter came about as a result of disillusionment, religious abandonment, and a desire for a different type of spiritual pacification in the wake of the chaos, destruction, and misery that followed the first world war. Emily's poetry struggles with similar religious abandonment while at the same time spuriously struggling with hopes of spiritual enlightenment. According to Ruth Flanders, in her article titled "Emily Dickinson on Death", death was always "the ever-present imperator, a force to be reckoned with and treated with respect" by Emily (Flanders, 1949, p. 203)

Another surrealistic aspect of Dickinson's poetry was its juxtaposition of familiar and unfamiliar themes. Some of the most common themes of surrealism are its dreamlike quality, uncanny metamorphosis, and juxtaposition of paradoxical or impossible actions. Dickinson often used similar conventions in her poetry. Not only that but she also maintains what could be described as a child-like way of approaching these. Eleanore Lewis Lambert, for example, in her essay titled Emily Dickinson's Joke about Death speaks of how Emily often shrouded the gravity of themes such as death and immortality in a cartoonish garb. She quotes the following lines in her article as an example.

The Bravest – grope a little –

And sometimes hit a Tree

Directly in the Forehead (13–15)

The cartoonish imagery of knocking one's head in the dark while talking about exploring the dark contours of a trance-like state of death exudes both the dreamlike state of surrealist thought as well as the innocence of the femme-enfant of which

Breton was such a fan. However, in order to arrive at any plausible conclusion about surrealism in Dickinson's poetry and her use of the persona of the Woman-Child, the paper would now proceed to explore it in greater detail.

3.0 Analysis

Emily quite ostensibly preferred the use of "innocent imagery" when addressing ideas of fleeting nature, such as death, love, and hope. In fact, the more fleeting the thematic subject, the more surrealistic her poetry would become but often keeping the persona of the Woman-Child. The following lines are from one of her most celebrated works that uses the extended metaphor of a bird to give some physical semblance to the idea of hope.

Hope" is the thing with feathers –

That perches in the soul –

And sings the tune without the words –

And never stops – at all – (1-4)

In a classic surrealistic manner, Emily never clearly articulates her metaphors. Instead, she uses the power of diction to paint a picture for the readers and help them visualize the morphing planes of meaning just as it does for her in her mind. In the lines above, one can almost see the child-like innocence of trying to describe an unfamiliar object in familiar terms. Just as a child, who, failing to name an object would describe the said object as "a thing with...", Emily too takes a similar stance and proceeds to describe hope as the "thing with feathers". It is at such a moment that one can clearly see the stance of the femme-enfant in Emily's poetry.

One must remember that the purpose of surrealism is not to simply create nonsensical visual imagery for the readers for the mere purpose of creating a shock value. In a literary context, surrealism offers a manner of introspective thinking and unnerves the reader by breaking down conventions. This breakdown of the social and literary conventions often allows writers to make important points about human conditions and the nature of the world around them. A great example of such breaking down of conventions can be mostly found in those of Emily's poems that deal with the topic of death. Much has been said, written, and speculated about Emily's obsession with death or whether she was an orthodox believer or a hopeless spiritual vagabond. Emily's keen and almost joyous obsession with love has left many critics troubled. It is my belief that reading these poems from a surrealist stance would give us a better insight into why Dickinson chose to convey her poetry in the manner she did.

One of her most celebrated yet macabre poems on death is one where this surrealist compulsion is the most noticeable.

I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,

And Mourners to and fro

Kept treading – treading – till it seemed

That Sense was breaking through – (1-4)

An enemy to reason, surrealist poetry tries its best to make sense of the senseless in the most paradoxical fashion. In the simplest terms, Dickinson could be referring to an episode of severe migraine or a similar misfortune, but Dickinson takes two objects, a funeral, and a headache, and fuses them into one by using the “plane” of the brain. Once again, Dickinson carries a childlike compulsion to describe

phenomenon in extremely objective terms. Is she losing sense, is it a headache, or is she simply depressed? Just as a child would find difficulty in identifying her malady and instead resort to using other objective comparisons to make sense of it, Emily too never calls out her predicament for what it is directly. Instead, she resorts to describing, to the best of her ability, exactly how she feels. In doing so, she ends up fusing unconventional and slightly macabre imagery. There is a funeral but only in her brain. Since this funeral is physically non-existent, it may not necessarily be commiserating an actual death but then who are the visitors mourning? According to Emily, the mourners' enthusiasm leads to sense almost "breaking through". From hence, the poem only gets more and more surrealistic and dream-like in nature.

And then I heard them lift a Box

And creak across my Soul

With those same Boots of Lead, again,

Then Space – began to toll,

As all the Heavens were a Bell,

And Being, but an Ear,

And I, and Silence, some strange Race

Wrecked, solitary, here –

And then a Plank in Reason, broke,

And I dropped down, and down –

And hit a World, at every plunge,

And Finished knowing – then – (9–20)

There's a conjoining of various unrelated imageries to create a strange nexus of events that once again can only make sense in a dream. The mourners carry a "box" whose occupant is a mystery. Amid the commotion that follows, that puzzle of the box becomes insignificant. Space tolls, heaven rings, being becomes an ear, and Emily becomes one with space and silence. It is only until the plank of reason breaks that the poet finally finds her deliverance from the ghoulis mourning ritual.

Emily's plummet through the plank of reason and her hitting the world at every fall, calls to mind Alice's fall through Wonderland. While Dickinson's poem came out four years before the novel, what is interesting is that in both cases the "fall" allows the protagonist to break into a world devoid of reasons but despite the absence of reason, these protagonists are able to reach some sort of a greater truth. While Alex plummets into a world of inversion and paradox, the protagonist of Emily's poem hits a new world at every plunge and only finds solace once she "finishes knowing".

When it comes to poems written by Emily Dickinson that read like a fever dream, there is "T was the old — road — through pain —". The poem starts with what seems like the metaphor of being lost in the forest. It is a common trope used by many a poet and usually deals with themes of life's struggles or departure from it or, as in the case of Frost's *The Road Not Taken*, the uncanny possibilities of life. With Emily however, the panoramic view soon morphs into various contrasting imageries that strongly clash with one another. The poem is highly reminiscent of a dream where various images merge into one with a single common motif barely connecting the sporadic imageries. In "T was the old — road — through pain —", the dream begins by following the footsteps of a female. Whether the female is a fully grown adult, a

lost teenager, or a prepubescent child is unknown. Emily is never the one to bother with minute details.

The readers see this female protagonist straddling a difficult path through pain leading up to heaven itself, but somewhere along the path the vision shifts. There is a little book, possibly the book belonging to the female protagonist, there is a hat which the poet is certain also belongs to her but “she” herself has disappeared. The vision then shifts to the chambers bright. The maids of these heavenly chambers are preparing a bed, quite probably for the departed maiden.

'Twas the old — road — through pain —

...That stops — at Heaven —

This — was the Town — she passed —

There — where she — rested — last —

...Wait! Look! Her little Book —

The leaf — at love — turned back —

Her very Hat —

...Another bed — a short one —

Women make — tonight —

In Chambers bright —

Too out of sight — though —

For our hoarse Good Night —

To touch her Head! (1-22)

This poem of Emily's is not surrealistic because of its uncanny gel of imageries, which, as we can see are more or less related. A traveler is missing. We see the town she has passed and her belongings and the fact that a bed in the chamber of heaven is being prepared for her in the afterlife. What makes this poem truly surreal is its dream-like quality. Only in a dream, it may be possible to follow a person on their journey to heaven, have a faint notion of the towns they passed, identify their belongings sprawled on the pathway, and see their chambers in heaven being prepared. But just as how in most dreams we are both present with and without the object we most desire, the poet too is present both with and without the female passenger. Emily does an apt job of capturing the fleetingness of a dream where you are perpetually accompanied by a consternating and paradoxical sense of being without the object of desire despite being with them at the same time. It is indeed a difficult feeling to capture and Emily is perhaps not given enough credit for transmuting this dream into a physical and verbose form as successfully as she did. The poet sees the chambers of heaven that are lit bright as well as the women who are making the bed, however, the chambers are, at the same time, too "out of sight". It is this feeling of being both with and without that lends this poem a most notable surrealistic quality.

Another thing worth noticing is once again the apparent child-like innocence and wonder along with the diction itself. In fact, the very form of the poem, with its long dashes and pauses followed by short interjectory statements, most of which convey either wonder or curiosity, is reminiscent of a child's repertoire. The sentiments of curiosity and wonder are those associated most often with children, however, the tone grows more adult-like with its final understanding and acknowledgment of the fact that the female's final place of rest is beyond her access and reach. Emily had a

distorted or at the very least, an unconventional understanding of death. In many ways, one could call her perspective of death also naïve and childlike. For most children death does not symbolize exactly the end for someone as much as it symbolizes the inability to access the departed. Most children understand death as the phenomenon where the departed person has been taken away from them to a place from which immediate return is not possible. It is only when we get older that we begin understanding death as the “end of life”. When writing in her surrealistic vein, and especially when courting themes of death, Emily often courted her Woman–Child persona that allowed her to take a similar standpoint as that of a child who refuses to see death as marking the end of it all but more as an interlude that has physically separated the dead from the living.

Her other most celebrated poem, *Because I could Not stop for Death*, uses a similar dreamlike convention. Many critics have taken the personification of death and her carriage ride as a metaphor for the time of passing away and while this does not seem incorrect what I would like to add is that Emily might not have meant any of it in the figurative sense and actually encountered the feeling of traveling with “death” as part of a dream. Once again, the action of the poem seems disturbingly macabre and conventionally irrational. However, surrealist writing does not care for either convention or reason. Disturbing themes wound together with the lace of dream convention is right up the alley of most surrealist writers and so long as it could allow the poet to grapple with some extraordinary truth that sound reason, social convention, and proper judgement are unable to unravel, they are contended. This could be one reason for Emily’s undisturbed comportment throughout the strange action of the poem. Although accompanied by death, Emily is unamused. She treats the uncanny as the norm which is often the case with surrealism. The fleeting essence of a dream is prevalent throughout the poem. With just death as her company, Emily passes through the School, “where Children strove/ At Recess – in

the Ring” (9) and then “Fields of Gazing Grain” (10), and “the Setting Sun” (11). When they finally arrive at a house whose Cornice was buried “in the Ground”, Emily makes the following observation.

Since then – 'tis Centuries – and yet

Feels shorter than the Day

I first surmised the Horses' Heads

Were toward Eternity – (20–14)

Time in a dream is a very liquid entity. It spills through any system of measurement and all days are convoluted in one. In a dream, one can live for eternity and yet experience it as though in a single day. It is an extremely imperceptible and variable phenomenon. Similarly, the centuries spent in the “house” are shrunk to less than a day and what is most tangible is the realization that her journey was one towards eternity. Once again, her resignation to being carried away by death in a chariot and a passive acceptance of her fate as well as her surroundings shows her childlike demeanor. Like a little girl, she appears to trust the discernment of the adult death accompanying her and resorts to her fate while inadvertently acknowledging her inability to take matters into her own hands. This is another instance of the femme-enfant caught in a surrealistic world of her own that apparently does not make sense but accidentally unravels a deeper layer of meaning.

In addition, the contrasting images fused together in a paradoxical fashion lend the poem its classic surrealistic essence: centuries contrasted with a single day, the cornice of a house contrasted with the underground, and the journey with death contrasted with the young school children symbolizing life.

This paradoxical affinity is also quite keenly embellished in her poem, *I Dwell in Possibility*. As an artistic and literary movement, Surrealism is almost synonymous with possibility and paradox. The entire scale of surrealism is balanced on a fragile handlebar of paradox...of what is almost impossible. The impossibility in this instance is that of a cozy infinity. Emily yearns for a never-ending spiritual experience and likens it to the frigid boundaries borrowed from architectural lexicons.

I dwell in Possibility—

A fairer House than Prose—

More numerous of Windows—

Superior— for Doors— (1-4)

The poem contains fusion of several images and ideas that are not directly related. There's a great case to be made about Emily's use of the word "possibility". In this instance, she perhaps means poetry that she prefers to "prose" on account of the various possible combinations and fusion of ideas that most of the prose is typically averse to. She calls her poetry a "fairer House than Prose" since it offers more "Windows" and "Doors". The house is an extended metaphor for creativity and the windows and doors could be seen as symbols for exchanging and transcending ideas from one plane of meaning to another. Most surrealist works, in addition to using irrational juxtaposition rely on symbolism and metaphors. These metaphors go a long way in uncovering the psychological state and ideas of the writers. Dickinson was a renowned homebody. Her poem "I'm Nobody—Who Are You?" is a widely known testimony to her aversion to creating a public persona for herself but this poem shows that while she disdained fame, she did not mind social exchanges of some sort. The fact that she coveted a metaphorical house with plenty of windows and doors is symbolic of the fact that Emily enjoyed a transcendence (also metaphorical) of some

sort. She wanted to leave the possibilities of meaning and interpretation open and once again chose the persona of a femme–enfant in a surreal dream–like world.

A naïve curiosity and resistance to reason were two evident facets of Dickinson’s poetic genius, especially in the mature phase of her poetry. However, the apparent façade of the femme–enfant was most probably Dickinson’s method to conceal the harsher realities and truths of life in a more palatable way. It is not so much that Dickinson was averse to a linear sense of reason but that she was intuitively aware of its rather unpleasant effects. Her poem, *Tell all the truth but tell it slant*, perhaps lends the most significant insight into why Dickinson was apt to shift into the persona of a femme–enfant caught in dream convention.

Tell all the truth but tell it slant —

Success in Circuit lies

Too bright for our infirm Delight

The Truth's superb surprise

As Lightning to the Children eased

With explanation kind

The Truth must dazzle gradually

Or every man be blind — (1–8)

In a way, the above poem encapsulates Dickinson’s major dilemma. She was not one to shy from facing the truth but worried that it might be “Too bright for our infirm Delight”. The Woman–Child persona was important since she believed that “The

Truth's superb surprise" must be eased to mankind in the same way as "Lightening to the Children" is "eased". It appears that Dickinson did not have any qualms in acknowledging man's insignificance and inaptitude against a world as mighty and unpredictable as ours. However, this must be a difficult epiphany for many. Hence, instead of professing her epiphany as a philosopher, she would often assume the humble guise of a Woman-Child who is occasionally struck by the divine and equally occasionally is found reposing in the quiet acceptance of things beyond her control.

Conclusion

In the words of Frederick J. Pohl, Emily Dickinson was one of the most "interesting women" to have lived in America (Pohl, 1933, p. 467). One reason for this epithet could be the paradoxical contrasts that existed both in her personal life and transferred to her poetic art. In the words of Douglas Anderson, Dickinson's poetic power "derives in large measure from the unfamiliar range she gives to this familiar duality, a range achieved by providing the two contrasting poles—transcendent life and circumstantial, daily existence new names and new locations in human experience" (Anderson, 1984, p. 206). This paper explores how this range of duality and the coexistence of the circumstantial and transcendental when translated into Emily's writings imbued the latter with quite opaque qualities of Surrealism. Many of Emily's poems are in search of a fleeting transcendence that can only be achieved through complete subjugation to one's spirituality. To do this Emily inadvertently applied a dreamy, and paradoxical writing convention that a century later came to be called Surrealism. In addition, Emily used this dreamy convention in conjunction with the persona that is extremely reminiscent of Andre's concept of the Woman-Child. In a way, the conjunction of the femme-enfant with the mature and transcendental realizations represents the climax of Dickinson's surreal poetic paradox.

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