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Dashes in Emily Dickinson's Selected Poems

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ABSTRACT

Punctuation has a vital role in having a true interpretation of any text. It is a linguistic form which is connected with stylistics. Stylistics probes the aesthetic spots which are created by linguistic methods to reveal the writer views. Dickinson uses dash as a tool to add extra meaning besides the word. Dash is in need to be read and understood by the readers. Though dash creates a certain problem in the poem, it achieves various benefits of reflecting the sighs, emotion and loss without writing words.

This research analyzes dash as a punctuation mark, which appears widely in Dickinson's poetry.

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الشارحة في قصائد منتخبه للشاعرة ايميلي ديكنسن

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الخلاصة

يعتبر التنقيط وسيلة فعالة تساهم في إعطاء النص المكتوب معناه ويتم استخدامه كجزء من النمط الذي يؤثر على النصوص الأدبية. وكشكل لغوي فإن علامات الترقيم لها علاقة بعلم الأسلوبية الذي من أهم أهدافه هو تحقيق القيم الجمالية والموضوعية المتولدة عن الأشكال اللغوية، والقيم التي تنقل رؤية الكاتب للتنقيط أهمية كبيرة في تفسير النص المكتوب. تناول البحث أهميه واحدة من علامات التنقيط وهي

الشارحة في شعر ديكنسن والتي استعملتها بكثرة في قصائدها لتقرا بطرق مختلفة. ورغم أن كثرة استعمال الشارحة يخلق إشكالات في القصيدة لكن الشاعرة استفادت من التنقيط وخاصة الشارحة في نقل أفكار تعجز أحيانا الكلمات على نقلها وفي أحيان أخرى تظهر الشارحة لتكمل القافية وتضيف موسيقى للقصيدة.

1- INTRODUCTION

To have a full and accurate meaning of any written text, it is significant to have a full understanding of its punctuation which participates in giving a new meaning to a sentence. Thus, punctuation has a great connection with stylistics, which mediates between linguistics and literary criticism. Through dash, readers can also reveal the writer's emotion and hear the sighs, hesitation and loss. Poets sometimes fail to select the suitable words, thus they resort to use dash. Sometimes, dash adds artistic touches and it is considered as "a musical device" (Johnson 1960: x).

Style is considered as the writer's "medium ... language: whatever does, ... he does it in and through language" (Lodge1966: 4). The research presents new reading of Dickenson`s poem through tracing the new addition that the dashes add to her poems. It shows the hidden meaning that the dashes add to the general meaning of the poems. Punctuation is responsible of organizing the written text, and directing toward correct meaning.

2- EMILY DICKINSON'S LIFE

Emily Dickinson is a nineteenth century poet. She enriches English poetry with unique touches to such an extent that she is considered "the greatest woman poet in the English language" (Juhasz 1983:1). She suffered from loneliness. However, her poems reflect her life. She lived all her life in her room. She acknowledged that she isolated herself from any stranger (Ann Chin 2003: 423). She did not see the actual world or even met any visitor. She made her own world and stricted belief in puritanism perhaps encouraged her isolation (Foester

1921:95). She saw life from an imaginative world. Few of her poems were published in her life whereas hundreds appeared after her death. In spite of being a poet of nineteenth century, she did not gain popularity until 1930s. She did not only select her unique world but also she selected a unique style in writing including new rhyme and meter, capitalization and punctuation. Though dash creates problem in getting the theme of the poem, it is turned to be her trademark in poetry. Her writing is a rich area of studying because readers find difficulties in getting the true meaning from her different ways of writing. Others need to translate her new way in writing. She used punctuation to show her feeling and mirror her spirit:

Her odd punctuation—heavy on dashes . . .to convey a complex states of mind and feeling. She employed these . . .not for their own seek, but for emotional and psychological impact.

(Diyanni 2004: 650).

3-DATA ANALYSIS

Dickinson added new meanings by using punctuation in general and dash in particular. She used dash to show that poetic conventions fail to express her deep thoughts. Thus, by her new technique, she was considered to be a new school in poetry who was followed by many. According to Jahan (2003: 30), Emily Dickinson "wrote poems that not only are excellent but establish a standard of excellence". By her over use of dashes, she allows her readers to be vital sharers in hearing her sighs, breath and discovering her doubt and hesitance. Sometimes she uses the dash to prepare her reader to receive her appalling thought, making a pause and failing to find expressive words.

In her poem *The Soul that hath a Guest* (Johnson 1960: 674) which shows her deep emotion for her dearest friend Susan, Dickinson uses short and long dashes:

The Soul that hath a Guest
Doth seldom go abroad—
Diviner Crowd at Home—
Obliterate the need-
And Courtesy forbid
A Hosts' departure
When
Upon Himself be visiting
the Emperor of Men— (Johnson 1960: 674)

She exploits the long dash to be located at the end of the poetic line as if she fails to find suitable words that can express her deep emotion for Susan. Thus, it is clear that the long dash in this poem shows the deep emotion and sadness. The placing of the long dash at the end of line gives "the sense of openness" (Leiter2007:29) also shows that Dickinson completes her idea and gives her readers a chance to imagine the extent of her love to Susan. This occurs in some lines like *Doth seldom go abroad--* which emphasizes her deep love for her friend and the sadness of losing her, thus the thought of the line is completed with the placing of the long dash.

Through analyzing the dash in the middle, it cannot be read clearly since it shows no emotion but it has a certain function of dividing thoughts. The middle dashes are like the line of the painter on a vague image(Leiter 2007:29). She does not follow rule in the use of dash, instead she uses them to fill an empty space.

In her poem *A Tongue-to tell Him* (Johnson 1960: 400), she uses middle dashes more than end dashes. The use of middle dash here refers to the shifting of her idea:

And Answer What I do -
Beginning with the Day
That Night - begun —
Nay - Midnight - 'twas—
Since Midnight -- happened —say—
If once more - Pardon - Boy -
The Magnitude thou may

The middle dash in some line can be read as a sign of doubt. David's in his *Longman Anthology of World Literature* (2004:811) states that Dickinson shows uncertainty and doubt to let the readers explain the meaning that she explained:

I am true!
It's fee - to be of Gold -
Had Nature - in Her
monstrous House
A Single Ragged Child—
To Earn A Mine -would run
That Interdicted Way ,
And tell Him - Change
Thee speak it plain -
That so far - Truth is True?

Sometimes the dash shows her hesitance in telling something that maybe embarrassed. Also it shows her fear of losing her man. She resorts to dashes in

this poem to avoid unwelcomed idea. With this she wants to create vague poem to attract her readers:

Enlarge My Message - If too

vast

Another Lad - help Thee-

Thy Pay - in Diamonds - be -

And His - in solid Gold -

Say Rubies - if He hesitate -

My Message - must be told

Say - last I said - was This -

That when the Hills – come

down -

And hold no higher than

the Plain -

My Bond - have just begun-

In her *I Heard a Fly Buzz – When I Died* –(Johnson 1960: 223), she depicts the attendance of death which comes to extract the soul of the narrator. Because of the horror of the situation, the poet seems to employ the dash to make pauses reflect such horror. The dash shows the last breath of the dying narrator who cannot speak but pause:

I heard a Fly buzz – when I died –

The Stillness in the Room

Was like the Stillness in the Air –

Between the Heaves of Storm –

The Eyes around – had wrung them dry –

And Breaths were gathering firm

For that last Onset – when the King

Be witnessed – in the Room –
I willed my Keepsakes – Signed away

The closure of the poem with the death of the narrator does not end the poem; the real ending is fulfilled by the dash. In this poem, the dash substitutes the use of period. The poem is finalized with dash instead of a full stop to show her need not to put an end to the poem or as her habit to make the end suggestive by different readers:

What portion of me be
Assignable – and then it was
There interposed a Fly –
With Blue – uncertain stumbling Buzz –
Between the light – and me –
And then the Windows failed – and then
I could not see to see –

Sometimes she uses the dash for the purpose of forcing the readers to make a pause to feel and analyze the poetic line by "rending pauses, silences like wounds in the midst of speech" (Gilbert1984: 626). Her depiction of the dead child capture the attention and in spite of her simple vocabularies, she needs her readers to complete and imagine the painful image of death. In her poem *She Lay as if at Play* (Johnson 1960: 369)

She lay as if at play
Her life had leaped away -
Intending to return -
But not so soon -
Her merry Arms, half dropt -
As if for lull of sport -
An instant had forgot -

The trick to start -
Her dancing Eyes - ajar -
As if their Owner were
Still sparkling through
For fun - at you -
Her Morning at the door -
Devising, I am sure -
To force her sleep -
So light - so deep-

In her poem *A Wife - at Daybreak I Shall be-* (Johnson 1960: 222) Dickinson wants to widen the field of meaning by resorting to the dash that enable the words to be free from syntax. By the use of dash in this poem, she allows the readers to have wide meaning. The use of dash in this poem is to make a separation between the poet's personal thought and the familiar phrases:

A Wife - at Daybreak I shall be-
Sunrise - Hast thou a Flag for me?
At Midnight, I am but a Maid,
How short it takes to make a Bride Then
Midnight, I have passed from thee
Unto the East, and Victory-
Midnight - Good Night I hear them call,
The Angels bustle In the Hall-
Softly my Future climbs the Stair,
I fumble at my Childhood's prayer
So soon to be a Child no more-
Eternity, I'm coming-Sir,
Savior - I've seen the face - before!

Dickinson finds in dash the opportunity to tell what she hides inside her soul. Sighs , pain and excessive emotion are told in her poems via using dashes,

she forces her patient reader to read these dashes to complete the theme that she cuts by dash. Thus, using dash makes her poem having different ends depending on the readers minds, Sometimes her dashes are read from the context to have a single meaning, using this technique in writing does not distort her writing as some claim and blame her but it distinguishes her and makes her leave an everlasting stamp on poetry. Her dashes are read as words not marks which are exploited to support the theme, structure and musicality. Her insistence to keep on using dash reveals her faith in its importance as a veil to hide the conveyance many of her feelings.

CONCLUSION

Dickenson is known primarily for her mastery of the use of punctuation and in particular the dash in her poems. In some of her poems, she cannot find words to express her over emotionality; thus, she exploits dash in her poem *The Soul that hath a Guest* to express her deep emotion for her dearest friend to such an extent that she finds no words to express this rather than using dashes. She does not follow the rules of using the dash. In her poem *A Tongue-to tell Him*, middle dash can be read as a sign besides its function as a dividing of thought and in the same poem the dash can be read as a sigh that shows her deep emotion.

The middle dash is used in other poems like *A Tongue-to tell Him* to refer to the shifting of ideas. Sometimes, dash reflects her embarrassment of revealing emotion. Dash reflects pauses that shows her horror of the closing of death in *I Heard a Fly Buzz – When I Died*, at the same poem, end dash is used instead of full stop to show the endlessness of her poem which endears various suggestions. Dash is a good way that helps to understand the mood of the poet and it can be a tool to reveal additional meaning without using words.

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