

Analysis of Emily Dickinson's Poem "There's a Certain Slant of Light"

Emily Dickinson is a great English poet of the American Renaissance. She is the author of numerous poems; "There's a Certain Slant of Light" is among them. The poem conveys the feeling of depression, of people being unaware of the initial reasons and looking for the answer they want to know in connection with the plague. It tells about the "internal differences" that are not visible but present (Dickinson 7).

The mood of depression or rather "seal despair" that had come from heaven seizes while reading the poem (Dickinson 10). Such a vague mood provokes people to fight against themselves.

"There's a Certain Slant of Light" is written using the four stanzas with the cross rhyme. Currently, the poem is metered. The trochaic tetrameter and a single spondee are most common in the stanzas.

Religious theme is expressed in the poem by such word combinations as "Cathedral tunes", "heavenly hurt", "seal", "imperial" (Dickinson 4-5; 9-10). It illustrates the horror of plague, the hopeless position it brings people to. Church music is like an albatross around horrified humans. It seems like hearing of funeral tunes that can only put in a very bad mood and make depressed. The theme also pierces with its coldness and hopelessness, grave seriousness, obscurity: "We can find no scar, but internal difference" (Dickinson, 6-7). The Speaker almost blames God that sent such a horrific thing as plague upon people.

There one can find the examples of symbolism in this literary work, e.g. winter is symbolized by the light cycle, old age, and the "slant of light"

(Dickinson 1). The usage of personification in the poem is illustrative. It displays awfulness of the disease: "the landscapes listen", "shadows hold their breath" (Dickinson 13-14). Such unanimated elements like landscapes or shadows greatly influence the reader's state of mind. A vast area is covered by stable, immovable, solid landscape that shelters the vegetation, supplies plants and people with water. Nevertheless, even landscape got frightened of plague.

Shadows evoke the most terrific feelings. People are afraid of darkness, desolation, obscurity. They are afraid to be alone in the dark. Shadows personify people's fear of unawareness of things and alienation.

There is a simile "oppresses like the heft of Cathedral tunes" that conveys the meaning of a weighty burden that has been brought by winter season (Dickinson 3-4). No ray could relate the people while the abhorrent anguish is delivered to them through the air: "Tis the Seal Despair - An imperial affliction. Sent us of the Air" (Dickinson 10-12).

The main character has been introduced to readers in the first stanza of the poem, it is a "slant of light," and it symbolizes plague and calamity. Speaker's ray of light is not a jolly ray but it is ray of despair, affliction, and illness. Imagery makes readers look at it as a negative thing.

Many contradictory issues fill Dickinson's poems. For example, it was forbidden in the 1800's to write about such feminine topics as a menstrual cycle, carnality, servitude, and politics. In "There's a Certain Slant of Light," she has chosen the plague as the topic for poem. The poet bravely inquires God why he has sent such a devastating disease upon humanity. The theme is exposed with the aid of symbolism, imagery, personification, and word choice. Dickinson describes depression using the senses of hearing, sight, and feeling.