

“Hope is the Thing with Feathers”

Emily Dickinson’s poem “Hope is the Thing with Feathers” contains various characteristics that link the poem to transcendentalism. In the poem, Dickinson uses imagery and non-traditional meter to give the poem a touch of transcendentalism. Although the poem seems to be simple in terms of terminology and ideas, a closer look into the stylistic devices makes the poem unique. The poem describes hope as a bird that has feathers. It also attributes hope to happiness that “perches in the souls” (Dickinson 2). Clearly, Dickinson’s work portrays an extensive use of imagery. Imagery is one of the poem’s biggest characteristics that link it to transcendentalism. Imagery in Emily Dickinson’s work is represented through the use of metaphors and similes. The poem also makes use of punctuations to portray ideas and create flow in the poem. The flow is emphasized by the use of a rhyme scheme that weaver. It also uses capitalization to draw attention to words that bear the main ideas in the poem. This use of unique styles in poetry makes the poem a clear example of transcendentalist poetry (Dickinson 6).

As stated in the introduction, Dickinson’s use of imagery links the poem to transcendentalism. “Hope is the Thing with Feathers” talks about a bird or a thing that has feathers that “perches in people’s soul” to sing “wordless tunes”. Clearly, Emily Dickinson is trying to explain how hope is necessary in an individual’s life. The poem also shows how hope fulfils people’s lives by giving them happiness. For example, the metaphoric use of the bird represents freedom from anxiety. This means that people find peace when they find hope yet peace is a prerequisite for happiness. The hope guarantees people of life-long happiness as it “...sings the tunes without word...And never stops-at all”. However, she acknowledges that hope can be destabilized by “the storm” “That could Abash the bird”. The poem starts by acknowledging the simile between “hope” and a “bird”. The two most notable stylistic devices

that Dickinson uses in this poem are personification and metaphors. One of the examples of metaphors used to relate hope that abstract to something that is a thing or a bird is when she compares hope with a bird. Additionally, the use of personification is extensive in the poem. For example, the “bird” is given a human attribute to “sing”. The use of metaphor that associates hope to a bird reveals various ideas that link the poem to transcendentalism. For example, birds are considered as a symbol of spirituality, self-reliance, and freedom. As per the poem, the bird/hope is determined and courageous as it continues to sing even in challenging conditions such as “sore must be the storm.” (Dickinson 6). Dickinson paints a picture of the artistic value of human desire through a complex association of metaphors and personification (Dickinson 6).

Dickinson uses more than just imagery in the form of metaphors and similes to characterize the poem to transcendentalism. She uses capitalization as a means to draw attention to main ideas in the poem. The poet uses capitalization in words such as “Hope”. Capitalization is used to make the words noticeable. The positioning of capital letters in this poem is unique. Normally, in traditional poems, the uses of capital letters are either at the beginning of sentences and nouns. However, Dickinson capital letters in words regardless of its position in the sentence or whether or not its noun. She uses this non-traditional way of capitalization to draw attention to words. Words such as “Gale” and “Me” are considered important in communicating the main ideas in this poem. Dickinson uses capitalization as a way of creating emphasis on words. Clearly, she uses capital words on words that bear heavy meaning and those that have effects on the tone of the poem. For example, the word “Gale” is capitalized to show the strength of the hardships that hope sores through. The main objective of capitalization in this sense is to draw attention to the words (Dickinson).

The poem bears many characters that link it to transcendentalist poetry. Emily Dickinson uses unique positioning of punctuation marks to create a flow in the poem. For example, the hyphens at the end of all line in the poem show the ideal link between the lines. It shows that the poem talks about one thing called “hope”. This is intended to show continuity in the poem. The flow of the poem is further emphasized through the use of rhymes. With the exclusion of the first line, the poem is characterized by lines with four stresses following lines with three stresses. For example, the line: “That perches in the soul” is followed by “And sing the tune without words”. This gives the poem a wavering rhyme scheme (Dickinson 56).

‘Hope the Thing with Feathers’ is one of the poems that bear transcendentalist characteristics. This is reflected in Dickinson’s use of style and the general idea of the poem. In the poem, Dickinson uses imagery to show the similarity between hope and a “bird that perches on people’s soul” (Dickinson 2). The persona acknowledges that hope has the quality to persevere in “I have heard it in the chilliest land”. The same statement shows the need for people to shield hope from the strong “Gale”. Dickinson describes the bird as “sweetest” in times of gale and storm to show hope brings comfort in times of pain and hardship. The use of personification is also seen when Dickinson says the hope has never “...asked a crumb- of Me”. By this, Dickinson means that hope does not ask anything for the exchange of its good deeds. She implies that hope is selfless. Furthermore, she uses unique means to create flow through the poem. In her poem, Dickinson makes use of punctuation and rhymes to show the continuity of ideas in the poem. She involves the use of capitalization to show emphasis on the words that bear main ideas of the poem. All these characteristics are associated with transcendentalist poetry.

Work Cited

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