

## STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF “SUCCESS IS COUNTED SWEETEST” BY EMILY DICKENSON

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### ABSTRACT

The present study is an attempt to dig deep into the meanings of the poem “Success is counted sweetest” by Emily Dickenson. The poem is judged stylistically and the stylistic analysis of the poem has been done on the basis of graphological, lexical, grammatical and phonological level, and the themes like failure as a success, isolation, need, death and indifference of man. This analysis is helpful in the deep understanding of the poem.

**Keywords:** Style, stylistics, graphological level, lexical level, phonological level.

### INTRODUCTION

Literature is reflection of human life and in it poets are considered supreme as they impart unique ideas in limited words that are sometimes not comprehensible for the average minds. The poets play with words in a language, and to judge the word play, stylistics is a good source. Stylistics is the scientific and systematic study of style. The word *style* which is so commonly used finds its origin in a Latin word “elocution”, in Greek, word “lexis” equates this term. Style is used in many ways so it is an umbrella term containing various meanings. It is a process which is required to do something, a manner or way of doing a work. External appearance of everything is also viewed as style. It also includes way of living, personality of a person, thought of a person and his way of speaking and writing. Galperin (1971) is of the view that style is socially determined and functionally conditioned totality of the ways of using, selecting and combining the means of logical intercourse” in a language whether it be a national or a foreign language. Style is not limited to literary text but “a property of all texts” according to Fowler (1966).

### Stylistics

Stylistics is a branch of applied linguistics which is the study of style as it is a tool to study the style of an individual writer, or poet whose craftsmanship has peculiarities of its own. Stylistics analyses a literary piece of writing on scientific basis and on concrete data through a systematic process. In stylistics, sentence is important to judge a literary piece of writing. Unlike critical analysis, it is not focussed on interpretation. Rather it is very apt to be agreed with Trask(2004) that stylistics is the “study of the aesthetic uses of language, particularly the use of language in literature.”

According to Wales (2011) the target of stylistics is to show interpretation of the text. It is also the study of literary discourse from a linguistic orientation (Widdowson, 1975). Crystal (1992) propounds that stylistics is a branch of linguistics which studies the features of situationally distinctive uses(varieties) of language. The features of language a poet or a writer uses include diction, phrases, sentences etc.

## Introduction to the poem

Emily Dickinson is one of the greatest poets of America. She led a life of seclusion, but intensity of her feelings urged her to express her feelings in a metrical composition. As a sensitive person, she was severely affected by the horrors of civil war which broke out in America in 1861 and the aftereffects which this war brought such as the tragedy of Lincoln assassination, and the process of Reconstruction.

She lived a quiet life in her father's house in Amherst Massachusetts where she was born and died (1830-1886). It is a popular myth that she led an isolated life but her poetry reveals that she was not forgetful of the world around her. She was deeply engrossed in the phenomenon of this world. During her life, no volume of her poetry was published. After her death, her sister discovered her diaries and published the content. Now she is considered one of the two finest poets of nineteenth century.

## Summary of the poem

The poem brings to us the pathetic condition of those soldiers who, in the hope of gaining success in the form of victory over their enemy, fought a battle but now are injured and about to die. At a short distance, there is a crowd of victorious soldiers, celebrating their victory but this crowd is not a company for them. Success has intoxicating effect on victorious ones. Trumpets are being played by their opponents as a sign of their victory but for these soldiers, these trumpets are the symbol of their defeat and this is piercing the dying soldiers' hearts. The poem presents an enthusiastic and heroic atmosphere. The tone expresses a kind of enlightenment.

## Themes of the poem

The poem addresses the following major questions in the form of themes of the poem.

### *Failure, a kind of success*

The very first line of the poem is giving us the theme of the poem. The poetess describes a complicated phenomenon of human life that those who succeed in achieving something are not able to relish their success to full extent. The word success is important for those who "never succeed".

### *Need*

Next is the description of need philosophy. "Sorest need" is required to "comprehend a nectar". We have regard for something or someone only when acute need is there. In fact water is sought by thirst so success is also sought by failure.

### *Indifference of man*

The poet has used parallelism in this poem to bring about a heightened effect. On one side there are half-dead soldiers who are unable to bear the pain due to wounds they have received in war. On the other, there are the trumpets of victory which are adding to the misery of the dying half-conscious soldiers. Thus the callousness of human nature reveals itself in the behaviour of the victorious soldiers.

*Isolation*

Isolation of man on this planet earth has been the theme of various poets. The loneliness of dying soldiers among so many opponents shows that a crowd is not company.

*Death*

Death is a theme which occupies an important part in her poetry. Glaring example is “I could not stop for death” and so many poems like this. The house where she lived was in the way which led to cemetery so death seems to be a part of her poetry.

**Stylistic analysis of the poem**

This is a short lyrical poem having twelve lines. The poetess is a highly gifted person. She has tried to explain a great phenomenon of world in few possible words. Indeed this poem is very close to our lives.

The poem can be taken as a parable of human life. In this battle of human life, some of us remain successful in achieving success in terms of health, wealth, honour etc. Some of us are not successful in acquiring our desired goals. In the hope of achieving our goals, only death comes to our rescue. The charm of our unfulfilled desires continues to exist. This is a short lyrical poem having twelve lines. The poetess is highly gifted person. She has tried to describe a great phenomenon of life in few possible words. This poem is very close to life as every one of us has the same feelings at one or another stage of life.

**Graphological Level**

The poem is divided in three stanzas. Every stanza contains four lines so it is a quatrain. Though we find usual capitalization, yet Host and Flag start with capital letters. This has been done by the poetess in order to highlight the worth of these words.

**Lexical Level**

<b>Nouns (common)</b>	<b>Pronouns</b>	<b>Verbs</b>	<b>Adjectives</b>
Success	Those	counted	Sweetest, sorest
Nectar	Who	succeed	Purple, defeated
Host	He	comprehend	dying, forbidden
Flag	One	took	distant, agonized
Victory	Whose	tell	Clear
Ear		burst	
Triumph			

**Grammatical Level***Use of full stop.*

The poetess uses full stop two times in the poem.

Firstly, the poetess describes that success is important for those people who never succeed and who have tasted the bitter fruit of failure.

Secondly, the poetess tells that nectar is enjoyed best when there is the strongest need.

*Use of hyphen.*

The use of this symbol after defeated and dying shows the intensity of the poetess' feelings. As he defeated\_dying\_

*Sign of exclamation.*

At the end of the last stanza, this sign shows the emotional outburst of the poet.

### **Phonological Level**

The poem has three stanzas, having four lines each. The quatrain has been used to express feelings and emotions on the part of the poetess. The rhyme scheme in first stanza is *abcb* and it is the same in third stanza. Second stanza does not follow this scheme. There are only two rhyming pairs in the poem such as

Succeed, need

Ear, clear

### **Alliteration**

Use of alliteration “s” is clear in the first line of the poem.

Success is counted sweetest

Alliteration of “d” is visible in the 9<sup>th</sup> line.

As he defeated---dying---

### **Affixes**

Affixes are visible in the use of words such as

count+ed,

sweet+est,

defeat+ed,

dye+ing,

forbid+den,

strain+s,

agon+ized

### **Symbolism**

The poetess has cleverly used symbolism in the poem which adds to it a specific charm and delight. *Nectar* is the symbol of triumph and victory. In her day wars were common so they found their expression in this poem. Word *purple* stands for the blood stains and *Host* for king who wins the victory in the battlefield. It seems that the king is habitual of fighting wars with his enemies and during this process the uniform, he is wearing, has received so many stains which have become purple with the passage of time. Success is now a facile victory for him.

*Trumpets* are symbol of victory are for the successful soldiers but a symbol of defeat for the unsuccessful dying soldiers.

*Flag* is another symbol of victory used in this poem.

### **Paradox**

We find a paradox, a kind of homily which appears quite simple but very complex in nature when it is closely examined i.e.

Success is counted sweetest

By those who ne’er succeed.

Skilful use of paradox reminds the readers of Donne’s style of poetry where two heterogeneous ideas are successfully combined.

**Phrase**

A beautiful, marvellous and uncommon phrase has been used which gives a touch of richness to the poem e.g. “on whose distant ear”.

**Tone**

A kind of serenity, untold calmness is there in the poem. The tone of the poetess is suggestive of her sensitivities. Her tone seems to be sympathetic. The unfulfilled desire of success has been glorified. She has given us a new mirror to look at things and phenomena around us. With the help of mere words, the poetess has given us the photographic representation of a battlefield.

**CONCLUSION**

“Success is counted sweetest” is a poem which describes that success is sweet but the desire of success is more charming. Words have been carefully used to give the readers the picture of a battlefield where on one side there are the victorious ones whose victory will lose its charm after some time. On the other hand, there are the losers, the dying soldiers who will be able to taste the fruit of success as this particular word has still a charm for them. They will continue to love it forever. This poem reminds us of Keats *Ode On Grecian Urn* where  
 Heard melodies are sweet  
 Those unheard are sweeter.

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**Appendix****Success is counted sweetest**

Emily Dickenson

Success is counted sweetest  
 By those who ne'er succeed.  
 To comprehend a nectar  
 Requires sorest need.

1

Not one of all the purple Host  
 Who took the Flag today  
 Can tell the definition  
 So clear of victory

5

As he defeated – dying –  
 On whose forbidden ear  
 The distant strains of triumph  
 Burst agonized and clear!

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