

THE IMAGES OF DEATH IN EMILY DICKINSON'S POETRY



Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Master of Arts Degree in English  
at Srinakharinwirot University  
October 2011

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Advisor Committee: Dr. Sutassi Smuthkochorn, Dr. Prapaipan Aimchoo.

This research aimed to study the images of death in Emily Dickinson's poetry. The study focused on the images of death that emerged from her poems. The poems were also analyzed to see the development of the images of death from the early years to the late years of her writing. The samples of this study were 26 of Dickinson's poems which had death as a central theme. Firstly, the poems were categorized according to the images of death that they presented by considering from Janaro and Altshuler's notions of death. Secondly, the development of the images of death arranged by chronological orders was studied.

The findings revealed four categories of the images of death emerged from the poems as follows; 1) death as personal enemy 2) death the leveler 3) death as reward or punishment: the afterlife 4) death as predetermined end: fatalism. The images of death presented by Dickinson develop from the untroubled matter to become more miserable and finally be calm as the fact of life.



บทคัดย่อ  
ของ  
ปิยกุล คะอังกู

เสนอต่อบัณฑิตวิทยาลัย มหาวิทยาลัยศรีนครินทรวิโรฒ เพื่อเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการศึกษา  
ตามหลักสูตรปริญญาศิลปศาสตรมหาบัณฑิต สาขาวิชาภาษาอังกฤษ

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งานวิจัยครั้งนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาภาพลักษณ์ของความตายในบทกวีของเอมิลี ดิกคินสัน และลักษณะการเปลี่ยนแปลงของภาพลักษณ์ความตายแบบต่างๆ ในผลงานช่วงแรกจนถึงผลงานในช่วงชีวิตสุดท้ายของผู้แต่ง โดยกวี 26 บท ที่เป็นกลุ่มตัวอย่างของงานวิจัยนี้ได้มาจากการจับกลุ่มเนื้อหาตามแนวคิดเกี่ยวกับความตายของจานา โรว์และอัลซูเลอร์ ซึ่งผลของการวิเคราะห์แสดงให้เห็นว่า บทกลอนเกี่ยวกับความตายที่เขียนโดยดิกคินสันนั้นแบ่งออกได้เป็นสี่กลุ่มคือ หนึ่ง ความตายที่เป็นศัตรู สอง ความตายที่เป็นตัวกำหนดความเท่าเทียมของมนุษย์ สาม ความตายที่เป็นเหมือนรางวัลหรือบทลงโทษ ในช่วงชีวิตหลังความตาย สี่ ความตายคือสิ่งที่ถูกกำหนดไว้แล้ว โดยภาพลักษณ์ของความตายในช่วงแรกถูกถ่ายทอดออกมาเป็นเพียงสิ่งที่ไร้ค่า ไร้ความหมาย แต่กลับกลายเป็นความทุกข์ ทรมานและความเจ็บปวดในช่วงกลาง และภาพลักษณ์ของความตายถูกนำเสนอออกมาในลักษณะที่สงบมากขึ้นในช่วงชีวิตสุดท้ายของกวี



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Piyakun Khaangku

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.....Dean of Graduate School  
(Assoc. Prof. Dr. Somchai Santiwatanakul)

October , 2011

Thesis Committee

Oral Defense Committee

.....Major-advisor .....Chair  
(Dr. Sutassi Smuthkochorn) (Asst. Prof. Dr. Nitaya Suksaeresup)

.....Co-advisor .....Committee  
(Dr. Prapaipan Aimchoo) (Dr. Sutassi Smuthkochorn)

.....Committee  
(Dr. Prapaipan Aimchoo)

.....Committee  
(Asst. Prof. Dr. Apisak Pupipat)



งานวิจัยนี้ได้รับทุนอุดหนุนการวิจัย  
จาก  
บัณฑิตวิทยาลัย มหาวิทยาลัยศรีนครินทรวิโรฒ



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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### Rationale

Death is a mysterious truth and also a deeply personal matter for people around the world. It is a naturally occurring phenomenon of the human life cycle. Although people know that death is the common end of all lives, it still seems cruel and unkind to most of them. People fear death because it is an ending, and it takes something away from us or our loved ones. Because death is unwanted yet inevitable, it has been continually questioned. People's curiosity about death mainly involves the possibility of death's arrival without expectation, and the way we will understand it. Frank and Judith McMahon stated that "We may have seen death, read about death, or even come close to death, but we have never died. Thus, we face the ultimate unknown, and the fact that our society refuses to admit that death is a natural process" (413). From this reason, people tend to express their own attitudes and experiences in order to sort out the ways to understand death. Some present negative points while others express positive aspects of death.

The topic of death has long been portrayed in literary works. Writers use novels, fiction or short stories as the main tools to present their ideas toward it. In one of the best known works of early literature, *Epic of Gilgamesh*, in which mortality and longing for immortality are the main themes. The topic of death has been discussed repeatedly in poetry. Poets only use a few words to convey a variety of images while readers use their varied personal experiences and knowledge to enhance their own interpretation of a poem's meaning. This is because poetry is mostly related to the facts of life and human nature. Consequently, it seems that readers are not only exposed to the poets' points of

view, but they also acquire new perspectives to add to their own experiences from reading the poetry.

Emily Dickinson, who, despite her relatively short life, is widely considered one of the best known poets in the western hemisphere. She was an American writer who contributed a great deal of valuable work to the literary field. George and Barbara Perkins write that Dickinson is “incomparable because her originality sets her apart from all others, but her poems shed the unmistakable light of greatness” (972). It can be said that Dickinson’s uniqueness stands remarkable in the history of American literature.

In her writings, Dickinson engages various themes including love, nature, God, language, friendship, frustration and immortality. Significantly, the theme on death is most notable. According to McMichael George, the major theme of Dickinson’s poetry is concerned with death. She tends to personify it differently such as a lord, a monarch or a lover. The tone of every poem is varied. Some reflect joy while others deal with grief (1124). Undoubtedly, this leads to consider how interesting Dickinson’s poems dealing with death truly are. Conrad Aiken asserts that “Death, and the problem of life after death, obsessed her” (1924). This mandates to consider that Dickinson’s poems on death are both varied and profound.

For the reasons stated above, this research was conducted to study Dickinson’s poems dealing with death to gain a better understanding of the Western concepts of death and the poems themselves. This research focused on the images that she presented in her poetry. The poems were scrutinized to visualize the different images she portrays concerning death and how Dickinson presents them in her writing. The result will be

useful for people who are interested in poetry and especially for those interested in poetry especially in Dickinson's works.

### **Research Questions**

This study addressed the following questions;

1. What are the images of death in Emily Dickinson's poetry?
2. How does Dickinson's poetry develop from the early years to the late years of her writing?

### **Significance of the Study**

This analysis provides useful information on the concept of death in Western cultures. It also enhances the readers' understanding of the death poems written by Dickinson. Particularly, Thai readers would gain more knowledge of how Dickinson portrays the images of death in her poetry.

### **Scope of the Study**

Twenty-six of Dickinson's poems on death were analyzed in this study. Each poem was investigated to find how each image of death was portrayed. Then, the emerging images were grouped according to Janaro and Altshuler's notion of death. The poems were also explored to examine the developmental thought process of the poet from the early years to the final years of her writing. The title of each poem was arranged by chronological and alphabetical order as follows;

1. A Clock stopped – (1861)
2. Tie the Strings to my Life, My Lord, (1861)
3. At leisure is the Soul (1862)
4. A Toad, can die of Light – (1862)
5. Death is like the insect (1862)

6. Death is potential to that Man (1862)
7. He fumbles at your Soul (1862)
8. I am alive – I guess – (1862)
9. I heard a Fly buzz – when I died – (1862)
10. I live with Him – I see His face – (1862)
11. I never felt at Home – Below – (1862)
12. The Color of the Grave is Green – (1862)
13. There is a Languor of the Life (1862)
14. 'Tis not that Dying hurts us so – (1862)
15. 'Twas a long Parting – but the time (1862)
16. They dropped like Flakes – (1862)
17. What care the Dead, for Chanticleer – (1862)
18. All but Death, can be Adjusted – (1863)
19. Because I could not stop for Death – (1863)
20. Color – Caste – Denomination – (1864)
21. Under the Light, yet under, (1864)
22. I heard, as if I had no Ear (1865)
23. I've dropped my Brain – My Soul is numb – (1865)
24. After a hundred years (1869)
25. It came at last but prompter Death (1872)
26. Those – dying then, (1882)

### **Design of the Study**

This study used a qualitative method to collect the data. Dickinson's poems were analyzed to investigate the characteristics of the images of death. After that, those images were categorized into groups according to Janaro and Altshuler's criteria. Finally, the study discussed the chronological changes in Dickinson's attitudes towards death based on her life experience.

## Data Collection

Dickinson's poems of death were selected from *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, written by Thomas H. Johnson which published in 1960. This book was accepted to be true to the originality of Dickinson's work. Of approximately 1,000 poems written by Dickinson, 100 of her poems refer to death. Of 100 poems, Dickinson's 26 poems employed the image of death as a central theme. As a result, this study focused on the 26 poems and applied the death categories of Janaro and Altshuler as the criteria for analyzing images of death portrayed in those poems.

## Data Analysis

First, Dickinson's 26 poems were categorized according to the images of death by Janaro and Altshuler. The poems that presented the exact or similar ideas about death were placed in the same category. Then, each category was analysed to describe each characteristic of the images of death emerge from the poems. Next, the development of Dickinson's poems on death was studied in order to determine whether the attitudes toward death of Dickinson changed or not.

## Definition of Terms

**"Images of Death"** refers to the picture of death in which readers have when they read Dickinson's poems on death. In this study, the images of death cover the image of death as personal enemy, as the leveller, as reward or punishment: The afterlife and as predetermined end: fatalism.

**"The Afterlife"** refers to the kingdom where dying people exist in their lives after death.



## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter presents a review of the literature related to the current research. First, the Western concepts of death are shown using different perspectives. Second, Dickinson's poems on death, various criticisms and previous studies are discussed. Dickinson's biography is shown at the end.

#### **Western Concepts of Death**

The topic of death is always a main interest for people in any period because it is the shared experience that people must encounter at the end of their lives. For this reason, death has become the dominant topic discussed widely a long time ago until the present. Anajiel Villanueva wrote "Death in Ancient Greece" that the Greeks shared strong beliefs about the afterlife, the disposition of their souls, and where they would reside after death. Their beliefs about death and their souls were often written about and reflected in their rituals and ceremonies.

The University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology posted the similar topic in: "The Greek View of Death" which described that when a person dies, his or her psyche is in a phantom image leaving the body to enter the palace of Hades, the king of death, God and the underworld. The Greeks thought that the world after death and the human world were fully separated from each other. Especially, the Greek heroes, according to the Columbia Encyclopedia, they would reside at the Elysian field which was believed to be a blissful place located in the underworld for Gods and Goddesses. The righteous and godly person would be sent to that place and made to be immortal.

When Christianity surfaced in Western countries, people gradually accepted Christian beliefs and practices into their culture; the concept of death begins to become more concrete. Dante Alighieri revealed crucial belief about the afterlife's punishment in his story the *Divine Comedy* (wikipedia). The story dealt with the torment or agony that sinners received in their afterlife. The main characters Dante and Virgil journeyed to the circles of Hell and they observed how each sinner was subjected to a punishment that resulted from his or her sin. Dante also drew on medieval Christian philosophy to present how the soul journeyed toward God. This allegory vision of the afterlife makes death become totally dreadful and unacceptable because every dying person must receive his or her punishment in the life after death.

Different from the previous view, Niti Sithijarinyaporn wrote about the concepts of death in Christianity stating that death means three things for Christians. It is first a "sleep." Death is considered as a short sleep and after that people would become reincarnated once again in the image of Jesus Christ. Second, death means "time to take a rest". Christians believe that they were assigned to work for God since birth. For this reason, death for them is the time to stop working and they all have to wait for their Judgment Day and their afterlife. Their actions during their lifetimes will ultimately determine the place that their souls will reside in the afterlife.

Third, death means "moving". Christians believe that to die is to move from their human world to another level of existence. They would be transferred from their current complicated world to another place that is more calm and peaceful. Dying people would hopefully stay together in God's kingdom in their afterlife. For this reason, the writer concludes finally that for Christians, who believe in God, there is no fear of death because they realize that there will be another wonderful experience for them in the afterlife, and that they will reside with God for eternity. It seems that Christianity considers death as

something usual and common. Death is not the end of life because in their belief system, they will enjoy another level of existence thereafter. This belief makes the image of death become more comfortable. It also signifies that there are both of positive and negative views toward death in Christianity which based on beliefs of each individual.

In philosophy, different groups of people have also discussed death. The Platonists, who believe in Plato's philosophy and ideas, consider death as immortality and resurrection. Death for them was not the end of conscious life because there is the continuum of consciousness at another level of existence of one's life after death (Louis 67). The Epicureans, whose beliefs are based upon the teachings of Epicurus, looks at death in terms of mortality. Death is nothing to be feared or shunned since there is no proof of an afterlife or the punishment in a future existence. Then, death is considered as an untroubled matter that human beings should not be concerned about (Louis 68).

Third, the Stoics, who believe that destructive emotions result from errors in judgment, depict death with creative resignation. Death should be considered as human nature or a fact of life that would surely happen. Thus, people should accept this fate and do their best with their duties and obligations each day. The inevitability of death makes them focus more on living gracefully and thinking positively to overcome their fear of it (Louis 70). Fifth, the Existential, who focuses on the condition of human existence and an individual's emotions, views death as absurdity. Death is considered absurd and nothing. Human beings are willing to struggle during their lives, pursuing happiness; however, death is an absurdity that will ultimately take everything away from them. Consequently, life for them is meaningless because they do not enjoy immortality required to use their time forever (Louis 70).

In the modern world, one psychiatrist, Elisabeth Kubler-Ross conducted a study about the feelings of patients who were approaching death in order to sort out people's

emotions when death is approaching (qtd. in Charles Morris 400). The findings from that research were categorized into five stages to reveal the reactions of people who faced impending death. First, the denial stage is when a dying person refuses to believe that his death is approaching. He does not want to accept the truth, and maintains that there must be an error or mistake in the diagnosis. Second, the anger stage is when a dying person tends to accept the truth of his fate. He starts to feel envy for other people that can continue their lives to fulfill their goals. In this stage, a dying person needs patience and understanding from his loved ones. Third, the bargaining stage is when a dying person tries to help himself out of his or her desperate feelings. He wants to buy time and talks to people around him in order to find a way to heal. He is having a difficult time coping with the truth of his certain death. Fourth, the depression stage is when he realizes that the bargain is impossible; then, he becomes disappointed, lamented and depressed. Fifth, the acceptance stage is when a dying person feels greatly exhausted and weak. He becomes unemotional and quiet. In this stage, he gradually accepts his fate and death. Kubler Ross's theory has become the pioneer guide that first dealt with and openly discussed death scientifically.

Similarly, Janaro and Altshuler categorized the attitudes toward death in order to present different concepts of death and to find the ways for people to overcome the fear of death (385-6). They collected their data from different sources such as: philosopher's views, famous writer's ideas and religious beliefs. Their outcomes are arranged into six categories. The authors first stated that death is the enemy of all human beings. It is a source of great fear; therefore, nobody wants to mention it. The concept of death fosters fear in people because it is inevitable and beyond their control. Death will always remain an unwanted reality. Furthermore, death is cruel because it takes away people's opportunity to live their lives and fulfill their goals. As a result, it is the enemy that is

totally unkind and unfavorable. The second concept of death is that death without self-interest is when dying people assign an empty value to their lives, and then they may view death as an escape from this personal void. In this perspective, the view is from people's reaction toward death, it does not focus on the image of death itself (387-8).

Third, death is considered as a leveler that makes every human being equal. Every life finally ends and turns into dust and this makes life means nothing. No matter who they are, death is the final destination for all of them (388-91).

Fourth, death is as reward or punishment in the afterlife. People believe that they were born on earth in order to work for God. Their death means that they have already accomplished their mission. Some further believe that people will reunite with their relatives and loved ones after they die. Furthermore, people's actions during their lifetime will determine their disposition in their afterlife. Those who do good deeds will be rewarded with heaven, while those who do bad deeds will be remanded to hell as their punishment. Then, death can be either reward or punishment for dying people in their afterlife (392-3).

Fifth, death is seen as predetermined end or fatalism. In this perspective death is the inflexible destiny that is unavoidable because it is fixed for human beings by God at the time of their birth. It is the fate that human beings have no power to change or to escape from it. This concept is especially prominent in the Puritan religion. Human beings cannot determine their own fate, thus God alone has the power and authority to determine the death of everyone's life. People believe that it is because of God's affection that He predestines people to their death. He wants to bring his people to reside with Him, in life everlasting; as a result, death is a reward because it would bring the dying person to enjoy this new life, in heaven. For this reason, death is the predetermined end and the fatalistic idea for all human beings on earth (393-6).

Sixth, death is taken as self-punishment. For some people, to punish themselves with death is a better way than to confront the cruel truths of their reality. Parsons reveals that people commit suicide because of the four major reasons: “to show bereavement, to preserve honor, to avoid pain and shame, and for the benefit of the state.” (qtd. in Janaro and Altshuler 396). From these perspectives, it seems that death is as a doorway to avoid shame and as the shortcut to escape the painful reality (396-8). Since the categories of death cited above consist of ideas from different sources, therefore; it covers nearly every aspect of the western perspectives toward death. As a result, readers can perceive the images of death from this category comprehensively.

To study the western concepts of death in Dickinson’s poetry, it is beneficial to employ the death categories presented by Janaro and Altshuler to clarify the images of death in her poetry since it covers Western death concepts, religious beliefs and also Dickinson’s views. Nevertheless, some death concepts or beliefs presented by different authors that are similar to Janaro and Altshuler’ ideas are merged to make the meaning of death more comprehensive. However, the second and the sixth image of death presented by the two writers are excluded because they are irrelevant to the current study since they emphasize the dying person’s feeling toward death instead of discussing about the image of death itself. This helps readers understand ideas about the attitudes toward death in Dickinson’s poetry that are perceived from general Western concepts. Consequently, there are four main perspectives toward death using in this research as follows;

1. **Death as Personal Enemy:** Death is a source of great fear; therefore, nobody wants to mention it. It further brings cruel pain to dying people greatly. For this reason, the concept of death fosters fear in people because it is inevitable and beyond their control. Death further takes away people’s loved ones and the opportunity for them to live their happy lives and to fulfill their lives’

passion. As a result, death always remains as an unwanted reality for most of them.

2. **Death the Leveler:** Death is a determiner to make every human being equal. No matter who they are death is the final destination for all of them. The fear of death makes people realize more about their lives' duties and obligation. As a result, human beings have to do their best every minute of lives.
3. **Death as Reward or Punishment: The Afterlife:** It is believed that there is another level of conscious existence in the life after death. People believe that they would reside with God in his land waiting for the Judgment Day to come. They further believe that person's actions during their lifetime will determine their disposition in their afterlife. Those who do good deeds will be rewarded with heaven, while those who do bad deeds will be remanded to hell as their punishment.
4. **Death as Predetermined End: Fatalism:** God has played an important role in this part because it is believed that the matter of death is fixed for human beings by God at the time of their birth. He alone knows who would be destined to hell or heaven. God has the power and authority to destine death to everyone's life. Because death is fatalism, it is something cannot be changed or adapted by any powers or men.

### **The Theme on Death by Emily Dickinson**

A lot of critics have argued intensively concerning Dickinson's poems on death and their topics are various, such as exploring her different themes, observing and speculating on her religious beliefs. George and Barbara Perkins praised Dickinson that "she remains incomparable because her originality sets her apart from all others, but her

poems shed the unmistakable light of greatness” (972). Her poems on death stand remarkable in the American history.

Some critics paid attention to Dickinson’s use of language skills and writing styles. Robert DiYanni indicated how to read Dickinson’s poems stating that it requires repeated and careful reading because Dickinson uses indirect language and special patterns in her poems. She leaves a “gap”, or unfinished story in each of her poems, allowing the reader to interpret the conveyed message (203). This suggests that it is difficult to understand Dickinson’s poems thoroughly because she leaves unconcluded messages to readers. DiYanni further adds that Dickinson uses irregular rhythms, inexact rhyme, and free grammar. She uses punctuation and capitalization in order to emphasize emotional and psychological impact (203). She is careless about traditional writing patterns but focusing more on the messages that she wants to portray.

Carey Gary pointed out that Dickinson’s fame is totally from her genius styles of writing. To read and understand her poem, one may need to concentrate and re-read a verse because she employs unconventional grammar in her writing. She uses different diction and different figures of speech than other poets. Her themes are always about the questions of life and especially death for which she uses varied tones in her compositions (12). This implies that Dickinson not only employs a peculiar writing style but also uses distinctive ideas to present each image of death in her poems. This strategy makes her works both varied and profound.

Alice Fulton (141) revealed that there are only a small number of poems by Dickinson that can be read easily. She employs a great deal of metaphor in her poetry such as household stuff, plants or animals. To compare her poems with other popular poets, Dickinson alone is the one who can play with the language interestingly. It is like “...all other poems are trees and her poems are birds” This implies that Dickinson’s



poems are different. Because of the distinctive use of language and imagery, her poems are difficult to comprehend and interpret.

Damrosch David wrote that Dickinson used simple hymnbook meters. Her poetry was accomplished with good rhyming and was created to leave the gaps for flexibility. Her use of dashes and peculiar punctuation was also to create a feeling of uncertainty in her poems (811). This suggests that Dickinson's poetry allows her readers to interpret the meaning of each poem instead of assigning her own meaning to it. Her writing style is also designed to impact the readers' feelings and thus personalize the meaning of each poem.

Niti Somrak studied Dickinson's 13 poems on death in his research "A Critical Study of Emily Dickinson's Literary Works: Poetic Elements in Poems of Death." They normally contain both sense and sound devices which include: simile, metaphor, symbol, personification, inversion, ellipsis, repetition, rhyme, alliteration, and assonance. Most notably, imagery and alliteration are essential parts in Dickinson's poems and the theme of each poem portrays how kind and friendly death is. The use of capitalization and dashes in Dickinson's writing are to make the poems unique and to catch readers' attention.

Not only Dickinson's interesting writing techniques but also her creative ideas are included in her poems. Bradley Sculley cited that "Her ideas were witty, rebellious, and original, yet she confined her materials to the world of her small village, and a few good books" (150). George Perkins added that Dickinson constructs her own world when she writes. She uses her imagination to portray her ideas and thoughts (971). So then, it can be stated that Dickinson uses her wits and draws on her own experiences in writing her unique poetry. By drawing on those events from her personal world, she presents her thoughts to her readers.

Petrino Elizabeth claimed that “Dickinson employs social and linguistic strategies of limitation in order to test the boundaries of existence. Viewed against the shared culture and literary tradition of other nineteenth-century women writers, Dickinson creates a new, powerful means of expression within the prescribed limits” (4). This shows that Dickinson’s writing shows different views from the poets in her period. Plus, her use of words is economical but it conveys powerful meaning. This quote suggests that Dickinson writes differently than other female poets of her period. She refuses to use the same views that have been presented by others.

According to McMichael, Dickinson intends to personify death into various figures such as a lord, a monarch or a kind lover. Her use of the tone in each poem is also varied. Some poems reflect joy, while some present the grief of the dying person (1124). Aiken further proposed that “...it will be noted; ...deal with death; and it must be observed that the number of poems by Miss Dickinson on the subject of death is one of the most remarkable things about her. Death and the problem of life after death obsessed her” (1924). The former writer explored the tone that is used to reflect readers’ emotions in Dickinson’s poems while the latter one declared that the topic of death and the life after always occupies the poet’s mind.

David Lehman praised Dickinson that “From Dickinson’s poems, you might almost suppose that she has died and written them posthumously” (3). Dickinson can touch every aspect of death. For this reason, it is accepted that Dickinson is able to create profound images of death to readers as if she has experienced death herself. She writes from almost every aspect of the topic of death. Johnson stated that there have been many poets who had written poems about death, but Dickinson was different because she did so in her unusual manner (203). Plus, the contents of Dickinson’s poems on death are mainly about the suffering of the body, the moment when one is dying and also emotional

violence. Each idea is influenced by Dickinson's personal perception, past experiences and religious belief (347). This indicates that the majority of the images of death are presented in Dickinson's poems. She devotes much of her attention to the cruelty and the pain of death.

Some authors paid their attention directly to Dickinson's theme on death. Hay and Casey Russell in his dissertation "The Spiritual Seesaw: Emily Dickinson and the Paradox of Belief." pointed out that the central concern in Dickinson's poetry is the acceptance of God, nature, and death. It seems that deep personal thought is the motivation that affects her belief in a higher power because she continually presents this faith in her poetry. A great number of her poems covered both doubts and beliefs while leaving readers with no conclusion.

Hardy and Marilyn Claire explored how Dickinson shapes death to become an animate figure in "A Word Made Flesh: Emily Dickinson's Poetic Strategies" They reveal that Dickinson tends to use "concrete nouns" in order to make a great effect on the physical sensation. She creates the shape of death to emphasize the relationship between her and death significantly.

Ren Xiao-chuan investigated in his article "Death and Immortality: the Everlasting Themes", and concluded that the topics of death and eternity occupies most of Dickinson's poems. The survival of the soul after death is another one crucial question that she deals with in her writing. Dickinson also usually shows her early doubt about the existence of God and her realization about the afterlife in her poetry (96-9).

Tom Hansen discussed about religious beliefs that appear in Dickinson's poems in "Dickinson's WHAT INN IS THIS" (185-7). Some writers not only studied about Dickinson's works alone, but also compared her works with different authors. Raymond Benoit (31-3), for example, revealed the similarity of the theme in Shakespeare's "The

Phoenix and the Turtle” and Dickinson’s “I Died for Beauty” The two poems are focused on the theme of death, which is sought to compare ‘beauty’ and ‘the truth in numerical conceit.

Pelaez, Monica Teresa in her dissertation “Sentiment and Experiment: Poe, Dickinson, and the Culture of Death in Nineteenth-Century America.” compared the theme of death written by Edgar Allen Poe and Dickinson in nineteenth-century America. Pelaez indicated that the works of Dickinson cultivate an acceptance of death instead of the refusal of it. ‘The experimental death’ by Dickinson is profound and understandable; therefore, this seemed to completely protest the fear of death in that period as well.

### **Emily Dickinson’s Biography**

Dickinson was born in Amherst, Massachusetts, on December 10, 1830. Her family was revered and even admired in the town, because her grandfather was one of the founders of Amherst College. Furthermore, her father, Edward Dickinson was a member of the United States Congress. Her mother’s name was, Emily Narcross Dickinson. Dickinson had one brother, Austin and one sister, Lavinia. Throughout her lifetime, her siblings were good companions for her and they were the link between Dickinson and the outside world (Bradley & Beatty 148).

Dickinson lived a reclusive and private life. She once stated that, “I dont go from home, unless emergency leads me by hand, and then I do it obstinately, and drew back if I can” (Vivian Pollak 23). For this reason, she had been in only a few places such as Boston, Washington, and Philadelphia. Though, Dickinson isolated herself from the community, she still corresponded with many friends and read widely at home. In 1862, Dickinson wrote to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, a famous scholar/writer, and enclosed four poems with her letter because she wanted to attain Higginson’s opinions about her

verse. Since then, they continually corresponded and Higginson became her close friend. Although Higginson accepted that Dickinson's poetry was witty and qualified, only seven of Dickinson's poems were published during her lifetime (Bradley & Beatty 149).

After Dickinson's death from Bright's decease in 1886, Lavinia her sister found a tremendous amount of Dickinson's writings and manuscripts in her room. Lavinia contacted some scholars including Higginson asking them to collect and edited her sister's work. After that, Dickinson's poems and letters were printed and her work became well-known widely in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Bradley & Beatty 149).

Dickinson's popularity stems from her difference in presenting ideas. Taggard (qtd. in Somrak 3) said that the attitude toward death of Dickinson might be different from other poets because she was one of the witnesses in the American Civil War. It was her exposure to the harsh realities of the Civil War in America, after her previously protected and aloof existence in her home with her loving family that shaped Dickinson's outlook on death. As the death tolled people that Dickinson knew from Amherst and the surrounding areas appeared in the local newspaper obituary column, this must have brought the matter of death ever closer to her.

Another important factor that obviously had an impact on Dickinson was the death of her 15 year old friend and neighbor, Sophia Holland. At that time Dickinson was very young, and outwardly, she seemed to be unaffected by this incident. Her diary however, tells a different story. In "Emily Dickinson: An interpretive Biography" revealed her feeling that she felt totally sorrow for her friend. On her friend's dying date, she looked at Holland's face as long as she could because she knew that her friend would not be able to come back again (Johnson 205). This can be one of the major influences on Dickinson's profoundly different ideas toward death. She experienced death herself and kept her terrible feelings private. Consequently, when she voiced them in her poems,

they were quite profound and deep. Johnson critiqued more on Dickinson's poems of death. He said that she views death from every possible angle (203). This suggests that it should be interesting to study Dickinson's poems on death. Readers will not only explore her marvelous writing styles but her profound ideas about the theme on this topic also.



## CHAPTER 3

### THE IMAGES OF DEATH IN EMILY DICKINSON'S POETRY

In this chapter, the images of death that are found in Dickinson's poems are shown considering by the notion of death presented by Janaro and Altshuler. It discusses the content of each poem and shows how those images of death are presented to readers.

#### 1. Death as Personal Enemy

According to Janaro and Altshuler, death is considered as a personal enemy. It is placed on the other side of human beings because it is dreadful and unpredictable; therefore, no one wants to encounter it or wants to be its companion. Death normally causes pain for dying people; thus, it is compared as the enemy that is totally cruel. Furthermore, death is something that takes away human beings' loved ones and the opportunity to live their lives and fulfill their goals. Then, the matter of death impacts the great fear in human's minds because it is both fearful and undesirable (385-6).

In Dickinson's poetry, some of the images of death are portrayed as an enemy who intends to torture and kill the victim. Death is the final guest that comes to life without invitation. In, "He fumbles at your Souls" and "I heard a Fly buzz – when I died –" Dickinson personifies death as a ruthless killer with superior power who attacks the dying person without mercy. She also portrays one's dying moment as being painfully cruel, distressing, and dreadful in "A Clock stopped –" and "There is a Languor of the Life." Those death images, for the most part, occur at the victim's deathbed, while surrounded by a crowd. The narrator is occasionally the one who witnesses the dying moment, while many times it is the dying person herself. The dying processes are explained step by step and the torment of a dying person is revealed with different scenes. Dickinson presents both the internal and

external aspects of the human fear of death by portraying the event using natural scenes or painful moment of death to readers.

In 'Death is like the insect', the poet uses a natural scene to imply that death comes to human beings naturally, as do insects that are interested in the trees. The death image is the enemy that intends to explore and destroy life. The insect is a metaphor for death while the tree stands for life.

Death is like the insect  
Menacing the tree,  
Competent to kill it,  
But decoyed may be.

Bait it with the balsam,  
Seek it with the saw,  
Baffle, if it cost you  
Everything you are.

Dickinson places life and death on different sides, thus, it is clear that the poet uses the tree to compare with life in order to show its inability to run away from death or fight against death. The insect represents something that always causes decay and damage to the tree. This shows the picture of what death does to life. It creates an image of death like a destroyer that ruins other living things on earth. This poem suggests how death can be the enemy of life that is destructive and unfavourable.

In 'A Clock stopped', the poet shows how her subject suffers in the dying moment. Death in this poem is a powerful enemy that attacks the debilitated victim and brings her severe pain.

A Clock stopped –  
Not the Mantel's –  
Geneva's farthest skill  
Can't put the puppet bowing –  
That just now dangled still –

An awe came on the Trinket!  
The Figures hunched, with pain –  
Then quivered out of Decimals –  
Into Degreeless Noon –



The dead clock is compared to a heart that has stopped beating. Dickinson uses the clock and its second hand to represent the heart. Each movement of the second hand imitates the beating of the heart. Then, to use the dead clock representing the heart enables the readers to perceive a clear picture of when the heart has stopped beating and death has occurred. This signifies when bodily functions of the human being slow or begin to subside. It represents the death process in the human body.

The degree of pain is increasing with the passage of time. This death image is repulsive because it gradually tortures the dying person from a low to higher degrees of pain. This conveys to the reader that death would not abandon its painful attack until the dying person loses her last breath. Then, this seems to be one of the reasons why death has become an unpleasant reality that frightens most people.

The puppet in this poem is used to represent a dying person who is incapable of moving or feeling. The puppet creates a negative death image because it destroys a person's abilities and senses. The puppet not only presents the weakness of a dying person but it also makes the image of death totally depressing because the puppet itself can be moved only with the help of other people. The reader now realizes that death alone has control over the dying person passing, whether it wants to make the event painful, or to allow her die peacefully.

In, 'There is a Languor of the Life' Dickinson once again portrays a physical pain of a dying person at the moment of death. The narrator states that a dying person must suffer with great torment. The death image is abominable because it has the power to torture the dying person until she gradually loses consciousness.

There is a Languor of the Life  
 More imminent than Pain –  
 'Tis Pain's Successor – When the Soul  
 Has suffered all it can –

A Drowsiness – diffuses –  
 A Dimness like a Fog

Envelops Consciousness –  
As Mists – obliterate a Crag.

The soul that “Has suffered all it can” indicates the severe pain that one has to endure at the moment of death. The poem pictures the dying person lying in a dark room that has fog laden blocking the dying person’s sensations. This room suggests the depression and frustration that the dying person feels at her moment of death. The “fog” and the “clouds” are used as the unfortunate symbols that show painful moment of dying. They seem to increase the degree of fright and frustration toward death enormously because they enable readers to picture a great storm, ruins and loss. The use of a cloud in this poem symbolizes impending death and this can heighten the reader’s tension enormously. When dying people see a cloud approaching they feel that they are gradually drawing closer to their death.

In, ‘He fumbles at your soul,’ the death is pictured fearfully. Dickinson shapes death as the omnipotent enemy that attacks the dying person without mercy. That the killer alone who takes control the dying moment signifies that death has the authority to manage the moment of death.

He fumbles at your Soul  
As Players at the Keys  
Before they drop full Music on –  
He stuns you by degrees –

“He” is personified as a killer who attacks the soul of a dying person. The man is referred as a “Players at the Keys” which shows his strength and readiness for the game. In other words, the man is ready and eager to kill the soul. In Christian religions the soul is considered to be the foundation of man. Furthermore, the verbs used in this stanza which are “fumble” and “stun”, characterize the aggressiveness of the assassin.

Prepares your brittle Nature  
For the Ethereal Blow  
By fainter Hammers – further heard –  
The nearer – Then so slow  
Your Breath has time to straighten –  
Your Brain – to bubble Cool –

Deals – One – imperial – Thunderbolt  
That scalps your naked Soul –

When Winds take Forests in their Paws –  
The Universe – is still –

The image of a dying person being attacked by death is frightening. The poet's word choices suggest terrifying images, such as: "fainter", "to bubble cool", "Thunderbolt", "scalps". The word "naked Soul" conjures up a picture of a tortured and dying person because he seems to be the victim that cannot defend himself against his impending unmerciful death. It is interesting that Dickinson uses the word "blow" which possibly means that death uses only minimal energy to extinguish life. Therefore, killing must be something at which he is the expert. This makes death become the horrible enemy that brings fright to the dying person or even the readers greatly.

In, "I heard a Fly buzz – when I died –", the poem conveys a similar message. The dying person is tortured with the processes of death on his deathbed.

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 fly symbolizes the impact of death on life. The bee effectively represents cruelty because the bee itself has a stinger to hurt people. That the dying person loses his senses while hearing the bee buzz signifies that the dying processes have overwhelmed him. The use of the bee conveys a death image that is unkind and distressing.

The "Storm" appears to symbolize the moment of a painful death. The dying person is suffering with the torment of death as she is surrounded by this great storm. This symbol casts a dark sinister shadow on the death image. Dickinson uses "the Heaves of Storm" seems to intensify this already dark sinister moment of death because it induces a feeling of frustration, into the moment, while encountering the next heave of the storm. It is impossible

to predict whether the coming storm heave would be more or less intense than the previous one. In the next stanza, the poet shows the moment of when death has entered the room of death.

The Eyes around – had wrung them dry –  
 And Breaths were gathering firm  
 For that last Onset – when the King  
 Be witnessed – in the Room –

Dickinson uses the “Eyes” to magnify the torment of death when the dying person encounters excruciating agony during the process of dying. While the dying person is facing the aggressive killer, the eyes of the subject are focused. This shows the frustration and pain directed toward death, by presenting all the fearful feelings through the eyes of the dying person. This has a great affect on readers’ perceptions because it serves make them feel a strong depression with this emphasis.

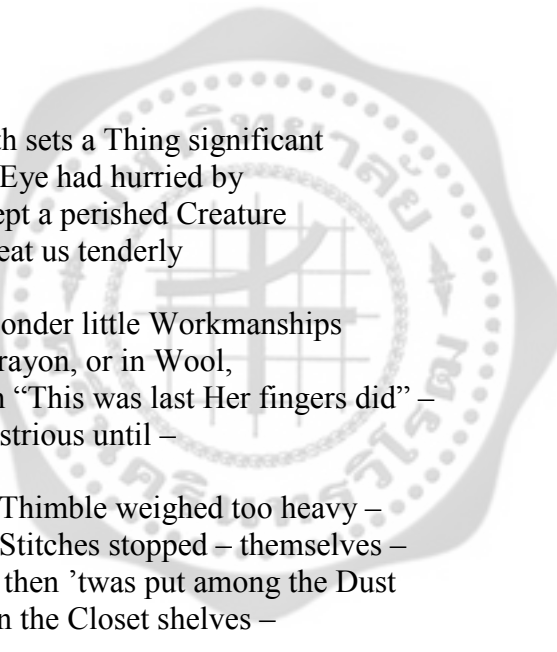
In the same poem, the “King” is used as a metaphor for God. When the king appears at the deathbed, the dying moment seems to worsen because the dying person gradually loses consciousness. The crowd that gathers around the deathbed can do nothing to help the dying victim. This signifies the overwhelming power of death process, and that God alone has control of the dying moment. God is in control and the dying victim can offer no resistance against him. Then, the king in this poem means power and superiority of both death and God.

I willed my Keepsakes – Signed away  
 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 –

In this poem, Dickinson suggests that death is always the eventual winner in the human life cycle. Though many people are present in the room, no one seems to be able to help restore the dying person's life. Then, it can be said that death is the strongest enemy of life, and that can never be permanently defeated.

People are afraid of death not only because its fearfulness but also its quality that separates the dying people from their loved ones. In "Death sets a Thing significant" the poem shows the narrator's sorrow toward her friend who is dead. Death in this poem is unfavorable because it takes away the narrator's happy time that she used to have with her dying companion.



Death sets a Thing significant  
 The Eye had hurried by  
 Except a perished Creature  
 Entreat us tenderly

To ponder little Workmanships  
 In Crayon, or in Wool,  
 With "This was last Her fingers did" –  
 Industrious until –

The Thimble weighed too heavy –  
 The Stitches stopped – themselves –  
 And then 'twas put among the Dust  
 Upon the Closet shelves –

The above stanzas illustrate the speaker's inside vision about her friend. She recollects the old memory about her friend's favourite activities. That the "Thimble weighed too heavy-" and the "Stitches stopped – themselves –" imply the narrator's tiring heart when thinking about her friend that passes away. The use of "Dust" signifies long length of time that death occurs there, however, it seems that the speaker still be emerged in this sorrow.

A Book I have – a friend gave –  
 Whose Pencil – here and there  
 Had notched the place that pleased Him –  
 At Rest – His fingers are –

Now – when I read – I read not –  
 For interrupting Tears –  
 Obliterates the Etchings  
 Too Costly for Repairs.

The narrator feels depressed when taking a look at things or activity that her friend used to do. This makes realizing about how death takes away people's passion. Dickinson, in this poem uses the "fingers" to imply the ability of human beings to work because they are the main part of human body to move and to produce each activity. The last stanza reveals the difficulty that ones have to endure with the torment from leaving their beloveds. The narrator does not pay attention to what she reads because she actually misses her friend. It seems to be hard to pass through the anguish of the matter of death because the speaker concludes finally that it is "Too Costly for Repairs." Repairing here not only means the book that is wet by the tear but also the heart that is hurt by death. The image of death in this poem is something that brings sorrow to people who are left behind.

Similarly, the poem "I'm sorry for the Dead – Today –" portrays the picture of when a dying person leaves his beloved life and work. The narrator seems to understand that to die is the way life is. She, however, shows disappointment for the great opportunity that dying people must depart from their work and routine.

I'm sorry for the Dead – Today –  
 It's such congenial times  
 Old Neighbors have at fences –  
 It's time o' year for Hay.

In this stanza, the narrator shows her mercifulness toward dying people because they miss the happiest period of the year that is "It's time o' year for Hay". The word "congenial" declares positive feeling of the narrator toward death because it seems that everyone around there is happy with this moment. That the narrator uses the "hay" to imply that "death" is the final

state of life as well as “hay” is the final stage of planting. It on the other hand, expresses that life is nothing and worthless when human being dies.

And Broad – Sunburned Acquaintance  
Discourse between the Toil  
And laugh, a homely species  
That makes the Fences smile –

It seems so straight to lie away  
From all the noise of Fields –  
The Busy Carts – the fragrant Cocks –  
The Mower’s Metre – Steals

A Trouble lest they’re homesick –  
Those Farmers – and their wives –  
Set separates from the Farming –  
And all the Neighbor’s lives –

These three stanzas present the picture of laborious work in farming; nevertheless, it seems that the farmers are joyous with this task. The laugh and smile reveal a cheerful picture of all lives in the field. That the farmers feel homesick implies that the dying people have to go away from their world to somewhere else. They do not stay there forever.

A Wonder if the Sepulcher  
Don’t feel a lonesome way  
When Men – and Boys – and Carts – and June,  
Go down the Fields to “Hay” –

In this stanza, it seems that the poet satires the “Sepulcher” whether it would be lonely when everyone is gone. Everything will become hay and disappear into the ground leaving the “Sepulcher” alone. This also indicates the one unique place where people will remain in the afterlife. They will all live in the same place and this reflects that death makes everyone equal. In this poem, it seems that the “field” represents the age of childhood to adult that is fresh, enthusiastic and active to work. On the contrary, “hay” is a symbol of old age that is time to rest and pass away. It is clear that the poet uses nature to compare with life and death for inviting the imagery in this poem.

In the first death category, Dickinson generally personifies death as a strong deliberate assassin and portrays the dying person as a weak victim that cannot defeat this enemy. The image of death in this category is mostly portrayed as the brutal killer that brings terrifying feeling and severe pain to the dying person. This makes death become the unkind enemy that no one wants to be familiar with. Dickinson illustrates her subject's dying moment as both daunting and horrifying; therefore, the death images in those poems give pause to the reader, to consider both the poet's message and one's own life cycle. She not only presents dying processes but also describes the environment and the atmosphere of that moment. It is interesting that when Dickinson wants to reflect about the pain of dying processes, she normally writes using the first-person to tell the story. This allows the reader to become more involved and personalize the torment in the poems.

## **2. Death as the Leveler**

According to Janaro and Altshuler, death is the life event that makes every living thing equal. People are born on earth differently. Their lives, conditions and struggles are not the same. However, death is the final destination of all lives and no one can ever make an escape. Everyone finally will become the dust. Death further makes balance for nature otherwise there would be no space for the new born on earth (388-91). For Dickinson, her poems on this topic proclaim that death is the common end for all living things, and the right that they all have. It is interesting that a number of poems use animals to clarify equality of life.

The two poems, 'Color – Caste – Denomination' and 'What care the Dead, for Chanticleer-', present that there is no exception for death. The duration of the lives of all species are managed by death without exception in the end. These stanzas are from the former poem, As in sleep – All Hue forgotten –/ Tenets – put behind –/ Death's large – Democratic fingers/ Rub away the Brand –. In the latter poem, the poet also shows death's



carelessness of death to choose living thing specie as she repeats stating the following phrases in her poem. “What care the Dead, for Chanticleer –/ What care the Dead for Day? /What care the Dead for Summer? /What care the Dead for Winter? This implies that death can occur at any moment, day or night, today or tomorrow, summer or winter. The poet makes a confession about death in these two poems. It is like the determiner that sets every thing in the same level and position. However, the poet shows her understanding of this incident at the end of the latter poem. Though death takes away lives, nature maintains the balance on earth by supporting the production of new lives in the world.

In the following poem, ‘A Toad, can die of Light –’, death is presented as a right that everyone normally is born with.

A Toad, can die of Light –  
 Death is the Common Right  
 Of Toads and men  
 Of Earl and Midge  
 The privilege –  
 Why swagger, then?  
 The Gnat’s supremacy is large as Thin –

The toad symbolizes similar fates that are shared by human beings and animals. Michael Ferber claims that “toads are distinctively ugly, venomous, and evil” (82). He further observes that toads in the Middle Ages were normally used as “the symbols of evil or of several sins” (83). In this poem the toad is used to demonstrate the common final stage for all living things which is death. The use of the toad further symbolizes that both good and evil terminate at the same destination. Similarly, the midge is a small insect that is normally found near a river bank. The midge here symbolizes the hierarchy between animals and human beings. They are separated into different species; however, there is no difference between them because they all have to face death eventually. Death in this poem is not viewed negatively because the poet states that it is “The privilege”.

In ‘The Color of the Grave is Green –’, colors which are green and white are employed to indicate either pleasant or unpleasant moods that surround the death scene being described. The source of green is the grass or fields nearby, while the source of white is snow. The use of these colors serves to impact each reader’s perceptions differently toward the images of death. On one hand, green activates the picture of pleasant death. The poet’s intention is to use the green, from the grass to symbolize liveliness or refreshment of the life after death. Consequently, the picture of death hedged in green invites the reader to conceptualize a peaceful death. On the other hand, when using the snow white symbol the poet intends to invite the readers to perceive coldness together with loneliness. Therefore, her poems hedged in white, depict a gloomy and depressing emotion.

The Color of the Grave is Green –  
 The Outer Grave – I mean –  
 You would not know it from the Field –  
 Except it own stone –

To help the fond – to find it –  
 Too infinite asleep  
 To stop and tell them where it is –  
 But just a Daisy – deep –

The Color of the Grave is White –  
 The outer Grave – I mean –  
 You would not know it from the Drifts –  
 In Winter – till the Sun –

Has furrowed out the Aisles –  
 Then – higher than the Land  
 The little Dwelling House rise  
 Where each – has left a friend –

People can normally identify the grave by its sign and name of each owner, therefore; the outsiders may have various perspectives toward death because they have never experienced it themselves. The emphasis of the poet seems to be on the view of the “outsider” because the poet states, “The outer Grave – I mean –” twice. In the second stanza, the word “To” and “Too” are used to stimulate readers’ emotion to feel eager to know where the real grave

exists. Further in the third and the fourth stanza, the picture of the grave is still unclear to the readers because it is covered by snow. This once again emphasizes the uncertain appearance of the grave to the outsiders because their views vary subject changes of the weather or the season. Besides, the poet elaborates more about the color of the tomb in different seasons.

The color of the Grave within –  
 The Duplicate – I mean –  
 Not all the Snows could make it white –  
 Not all the Summers – Green –

You've seen the Color – maybe –  
 Upon a Bonnet bound –  
 When that you met it with before –  
 The Ferret – cannot find –

The poet concludes in the fifth stanza that the colors within each grave are similar. It implies that death is the leveler for dying people because they are all finally equal inside their tomb. The poem eventually presents that death is the only single matter that indicates no difference between people.

In 'After a hundred years,' death is presented as something many people have experienced several times in their lives. When the time passes by, death would finally become the memory for all people.

After a hundred years  
 Nobody knows the Place  
 Agony that enacted there  
 Motionless as Peace

Weeds triumphant ranged  
 Strangers strolled and spelled  
 At the lone Orthography  
 Of the Elder Dead

Winds of Summer Fields  
 Recollect the way –  
 Instincts picking up the Key  
 Dropped by memory –

The poem explains that "agony" disappears as time passes by while plants grow up. The word "Place" refers to the tomb because the narrator states that agony resides there. The poet

further employs the word “Peace” which alliterates with the word “Place”. It shows that “Place” that becomes “Peace” is the connotative sign that conveys a positive feeling upon death. Consequently, the portrayed death vision in this poem is not to be shunned because it is presented as an incident that would gradually disappear from people’s memories. The phrase ‘Strangers strolled and spelled’ shows the number of people that finally gather in that place. They come to visit the tombs in that graveyard. This signifies that people can be equal by considering death as the leveller that brings them to the same place beneath their tomb. Finally, people must die and lay gathering together in the same level and the same graveyard.

Most of the images of death in the second category are not dreadful or tough. It is presented as the determiner that brings equality to all living things without exceptions or conditions. The tone of each poem is calm and peaceful and this makes readers realize that death is only human nature or the fact of life that everyone must accept.

### **3. Death as Reward or Punishment: The afterlife**

Richard and Janaro consider death as a reward or punishment in the afterlife (393-6). Christianity believed that there would be the spiritual world in the life after death where dying people will reside together waiting for the Judgment Day. There, the action of people while they are still alive is the determiner for the place where dying people would stay in their afterlife. People who do good deed would go to heaven as a reward while people who commit bad deed would go to hell as a punishment.

Some of Dickinson’s poems present death as a reward for dying people because they exist in such a peaceful place in the afterlife while some poems show death as a punishment because dying people experience only boredom or damnation after death. In most poems, the dying person crosses over during the transitional moment between life and death without physical or emotional pain. After passing through that moment, they seem once again exist at

a new level of consciousness. In 'I heard, as if I had no Ear', the narrator shows the moment of her soul separates from her body. Dickinson uses the first-person narrator to explain the transition process and this helps the reader understand the subject's true feelings.

I heard, as if I had no Ear  
 Until a Vital Word  
 Came all the way from Life to me  
 And than I Knew I heard.

I saw, as if my Eye were on  
 Another, till a Thing  
 And now I know' twas Light, because  
 It fitted them, came in.

The "light" is used as a symbol of a life or a rebirth of the soul. "I" is as a voice of the dying person, that is now regains her consciousness and body functions after her death and she states that "And now I know' twas Light, because/It fitted them, came in." She mentions about the light as her sensation is reactivated indicates that the light is the signal of the separation of his soul from his now lifeless body, a rebirth into this new life plain after her death.

I dwelt, as if Myself were out,  
 My Body but within  
 Until a Might detected me  
 And set my kernel in.

And Spirit turned onto the Dust  
 "Old Friends, thou knowest me,  
 And Time went out to tell the News  
 And met Eternity

The narrator declares that her spirit turned to dust signifying that her physical life has finally ended. The "Might" symbolizes "God", because he ultimately has power over the dying person. Furthermore, in the forth stanza, the narrator states that God shows his familiarity with the dying person because God is his friend, "Old Friends" that "knowest me." This signifies that the narrator believes that she has lived a good life in God's image, and has long ago accepted the truth that God knows him and he that God is the one who controls life and

death. The poet finally uses “eternity” to show that the subject’s test on earth is over and life after death in paradise would be wonderful. The poet portrayed a peaceful image of death in this poem and in this poem; death is portrayed as a reward.

Another poem shows the moment when life is transferred to its new level of existence. The light symbolizes a new beginning because after passing through the transitional moment, the light is used in the poem as when the dying person shows her feelings about her life after death as in the previous poem. This poem presents death as a reward because the narrator states that she is now in “paradise”, the place that she would reside in her afterlife, and her feelings about it.

I’ve dropped my Brain – My Soul is numb –  
 The Veins that used to run  
 Stop palsied – ‘tis Paralysis  
 Done perfecter on stone.

Vitality is Carved and cool.  
 My nerve in Marble lies –  
 A Breathing Woman  
 Yesterday – Endowed with Paradise.

Though the subject’s soul is numb, still she knows what happens with her body. This indicates the malfunctioning of the human body when we pass on and it further shows the new stage of the life after death. In this poem, the afterlife is better because the narrator states that “Vitality is Carved and Cool”. This indicates the positive feelings of the dying person toward death.

Not dumb – I had a sort that moved –  
 A Sense that smote and stirred –  
 Instincts for Dance – a caper part –  
 And Aptitude for Bird –

Who wrought Carrara in me  
 And chiseled all my tune  
 Were it a Witchcraft – were it Death –  
 I’ve still a chance to strain

To Being, somewhere – Motion – Breath –  
 Though Centuries beyond,

And every limit a Decade –  
I'll shiver, satisfied.

The poet creates a picture in these stanzas that is totally peaceful and positive because she employs the words that shows no anxiety about death such as: “Dance”, “Tune”, “chance” and “satisfied”. At the end, the narrator concludes that she does not know the exact length of time of her remaining but she seems to be satisfied with this existence. This signifies that the subject is pleased and accepts idea of her death, feeling that her after life will be her reward. Thus, the image of death in this poem is positive, because it describes the speaker’s refreshed and satisfied with her reward. The life after death for her is not fearful but pleasant instead.

In, “I am alive – I guess –”, death is presented as a freedom from the complications of life. The narrator is free from the responsibilities, decisions, and chaos that complicate her daily lives. She mentions the “Morning Glory”, a beautiful flower that blooms each morning and closes each evening, to give the reader a positive feeling about death, as a new beginning and because “glory” normally means satisfaction for its recipient. Furthermore, the narrator does not show discouragement in the poem, this means that she seems to be pleased with the place she now resides.

I am alive – because  
I do not own a House –  
Entitled to myself – precise –  
And fitting no one else –

And marked my Girlhood's name –  
So Visitors may know  
Which Door is mine – and not

The above stanzas present the scene of a tomb that the speaker lives in. There is no discussion of “fear” or “terror” nor any evidence of displeasure. The subject once again proclaims her satisfaction by saying that “I am alive” which implies that death for her means perhaps another chapter of her life while it is different from her previous life cycle. Death in this poem is like a reward for the dying person.

In ‘Because I could not stop for Death –’, death is personified as a man who takes a lady and immortality with him on his carriage. The poet creates a situation of traveling to present her idea about a journey to the afterlife. She personifies death as a gentleman who generously takes a lady on his ride. The image of death here is presented as a kind, polite, and reliable man.

Because I could not stop for Death –  
 He kindly stopped for me –  
 The Carriage held but just Ourselves –  
 And Immortality.

We slowly drove – He knew no haste  
 And I had put away  
 My labor and my leisure too,  
 For His Civility –

The first stanza shows the busy life of a woman. She states that “Because I could not stop for Death –/He kindly stopped for me –” This indicates that people are busy with lives and that they do not know when death is approaching. Though people have no time to gaze at death, it; however, kindly stops to take them without invitation. In the following stanzas, the narrator pauses the poem by making a visit at different settings in order to activate readers’ perception of the conveyed message.

We passed the School, where Children strove  
 At Recess – in the Ring –  
 We passed the Fields of Gazing Grain –  
 We passed the Setting Sun –

Or rather – He passed Us –  
 The Dews drew quivering and chill –  
 For only Gossamer, my Gown –  
 My Tippet – only Tulle –

The man and the woman travel to many places. The “children”, “Gazing Grain” and “Setting Sun” symbolize the progression of life cycle of human beings from childhood, through adulthood and then death. The woman further states that her coldness is caused by the dew. This portrays the feelings and reflections of a dying person when she experiences the process



of death. The poet uses the word “passed” to emphasize the reflection on past situations that ones experience in their lifetime.

We paused before a House that seemed  
 A Swelling of the Ground –  
 The Roof was scarcely visible –  
 The Gornice – in the Ground –

Since then – ’tis Centuries – and yet  
 Feels shorter than the Day  
 I first surmised the Horses’ Heads  
 Were toward Eternity –

When death and the woman stop at the house, the journey is slower. This house is metaphorical for the woman’s tomb. Death brought her to rest in this house. This implies that they now reach to the end of the journey because the poet states no further area. That the woman reveals her heading to eternity signifies that her soul will reside eternally in the afterlife forever. In this poem, the poet shows the acquiescence of the lady to go with death makes the image of death positive. This implies that if human beings understand the truth of life and dare to encounter death without fear, they would not have to experience great depression or apprehension at the time of their death. Furthermore, that the poet reveals the tomb, wherein the physical body will eternally reside in quiet and peaceful surroundings, for the dying person, makes the image of death more comfortable. This means that the dying person only moves from her place on earth to the new existence in the afterlife, at peace. Then, this is the reward of the dying person in her afterlife because the dying person is satisfied with the new place that she discovers.

Dickinson not only writes about the afterlife but also questions about the kingdom of the life after death. In “Under the Light, yet under” the poet describes the distance or separation between life and death. Dickinson uses natural materials such as light, grass, dirt or beetle’s cellar, to present a long distance between the two of them.

Under the Light, yet under,  
 Under the Grass and the Dirt,

Under the Beetle's Cellar  
Under the Clover's Root,

Further than Arm could stretch  
Were it Giant long,  
Further than Sunshine could  
Were the Day Year long,

The first stanza deals with the distant location and existence of death plain from human world. Many of the places mentioned above in the poem, "Under the Light, yet under" are beyond human abilities to understand. In the next stanza, once again the places are far and secretive because one has frame of reference for them. Dickinson switches the location of the afterlife and this seems to invite the uncertainty about the disposition that death has in store.

Over the Light, yet over,  
Over the Arc of the Bird –  
Over the Comet's chimney –  
Over the Cubit's Head,

Further than Guess can gallop  
Further than Riddle ride –  
Oh for a Disc to the Distance  
Between Ourselves and the Dead!

The repetitive use of the words "over" and "further" stimulates the readers to picture a remote settlement of death. In the first stanza, the poet states that "Under the Light, yet under," and switches to "Over the Light, yet over," in the third stanza. This can be implied that the death plane is far away and unreachable. The words: "Beetle's Cellar", the "Clover's Root", the "Arc of the Bird", "The Comet's chimney, and "the Cubit's Head" are used as the 'meter' to indicate that death is distant to human world. This portrays death as unfamiliar to human beings, because nobody has ever reached it, and revealed its secrets to us. This poem reveals the kingdom of the afterlife but the poet does not imply any hints to readers whether it is such as peaceful place or fearful area. The next poem talks about the afterlife in a different way.

Those – dying then,  
 Knew where they went –  
 They went to God's Right Hand –  
 That Hand is amputated now  
 And God cannot be found –

The abdication of Belief  
 Makes the Behavior small –  
 Better an ignis fatuus  
 Than no illumine at all –

This poem talks about the place where the dying person resides after death. The poet shows the poet's belief in God that the dying person would stay with God. Dickinson further shows her belief about one's soul portrayed as transition to life in the afterlife. Most of the following poems, mainly talk about the Judgment Day that every soul awaits. The life after death frees those dying people from their obligations and worries.

At leisure is the Soul  
 That gets a Staggering Blow –  
 The Width of Life – before it spreads  
 Without a thing to do –  
 It begs you give it Work –  
 But just the placing Pins –  
 Or humblest Patchwork – Children do –  
 To Help its Vacant Hands –

The above poem indicates that the soul seems to have nothing to do, thus, it thirsts for work. This poem describes the separation between the physical being and the metaphysical being. Dying people move away from their physical form and progresses toward the transformation to metaphysical being. At this point according to Christianity teachings, people do not strive to strengthen the souls for Judgment Day. Men are transformed from the physical life to the spiritual life which is the "Soul". This confirms the poet's belief about the soul, and her soul has feelings and ideas as do human beings. The word "leisure" indicates the serene place that the dying person now resides. Therefore, the afterlife here seems to be the reward for the dying person because it brings her no duties or obligations.

However, it is unclear about how the soul appears because the poet does not reveal in her poem. The poem 'I live with Him- I see His face-' shows the solitary life of a dying person. "Him" in this poem refers to God. The narrator's Judgment has come to pass, as God brought death to her. Dickinson does not attempt to speculate on the location or environment of her confrontation with God. She only shows the impersonal relationship between God and the dying subject of this poem. However, there is a degree of punishment or repentance for the dead person because she is dissatisfied with her life in that place.

I live with Him – I see His face –  
 I go no more away  
 For Visitor – or Sundown –  
 Death's single privacy

The Only One – forestalling Mine –  
 And that – by Right that He  
 Presents a Claim invisible –  
 No wedlock – granted Me –

These two stanzas show that the dying person's physical life has ended, and transition has occurred. "He" is obviously a reference to God because the speaker refers to "Death's single privacy", and this obviously means that she has passed and God alone is the companion of consequence for the dead or dying in most of Dickinson's poetry.

I live with Him – I hear His Voice –  
 I stand alive – Today –  
 To witness to the Certainty  
 Of Immortality –

Taught Me – by Time – the lower Way –  
 Conviction – Every day –  
 That Life like This – is stopless –  
 Be Judgment – what it may –

These two stanzas show the poet's interest in Judgment Day, and its consequences. She hopes that she will successfully repent, ascend to Heaven, and escape from the boring life that she has transitioned to after death. Similarly in the next poem, the dying person complains of boredom that she has received in the afterlife. The poet once again presents an

idea of the life after death that though life is boring there, the Judgment Day is something all dying people are waiting for.

I never felt at Home – Below –  
 And in the Handsome Skies  
 I shall not feel at Home – I know –  
 I don't like Paradise –

Because it's Sunday – all the time –  
 And Recess – never comes –  
 And Eden'll be so lonesome  
 Bright Wednesday Afternoons –

If God could make a visit –  
 Or ever took a Nap –  
 So not to see us – but they say  
 Himself – a Telescope

Perennial beholds us –  
 Myself would run away  
 From Him – and Holy Ghost – and All –  
 But there's the "Judgment Day"!

This poem talks about the boring life when dying person remains in paradise. The narrator states that “Because it’s Sunday- all the time-” this indicates that there is no work for dying person in the afterlife. The subject hopes that she could run away from this boring land; however, she admits that God would be able to bring her back. Her approaching “Judgment Day” seems to be her last hope. Again, God is the one who controls paradise and the kingdom after death. Similarly, the following poem talks about the moment of when God comes for the Judgment Day.

'Twas a long Parting – but the time  
 For Interview – had Come –  
 Before the Judgment Seat of God –  
 The last – and second time

These Fleshless Lovers met –  
 A Heaven in a Gaze –  
 A Heaven of Heavens – the Privilege  
 Of one another's Eyes –

This shows the Christian beliefs that appear in Dickinson's poetry. The dying person waits for her "Interview" on "Judgment Day." The word "Fleshless" shows that the souls had been judged. However, they all still recognize one another because the narrator states that the "Lovers met" which means that those deceased people still maintain their recognition of each other. The lovers in the second stanza hope to remain in heaven because of their lasting feeling for each other.

No Lifetime – on Them –  
 Appareled as the new  
 Unborn – except They had beheld –  
 Born infinter – now –

Was Bridal – e'er like This?  
 A Paradise – the Host –  
 And Cherubim – and Seraphim –  
 The unobtrusive Guest –

The lovers now get their new appearance and they would not have to reborn once again. They get married on the paradise with those angels and the guests. This poem shows the belief about the reuniting of lovers again in the afterlife. This makes the thought of death more comfortable, because it reassures people that after their passing they will be together.

It is interesting that most of the narrators of the poems in this category speak in the first-person: "I". This is clear that the poet's goal is to more fully understand describe the death process and life after death. Dickinson constructs her poem as if she is telling a story that she has already experienced herself. The idea of heaven is clear because she states it in some poems while the idea of hell is still unclear. Dickinson only describes some boring place in the afterlife, which cannot be completely identified as hell.

#### **4. Death as Predetermined End: Fatalism**

Richard and Janaro suggest that death is can be viewed as predetermined end or fatalism. Death is the inflexible destiny that is unavoidable. Human beings cannot determine their own fate because God alone can manage date and human beings can do nothing to

change this fate. God has powerful strength to control life and death. People comfort themselves that because of the love of God, they all die. In the afterlife, they will be able to reside with God in his kingdom. This makes the matter of death become predetermined and fatalistic for many people (393-6).

In Dickinson's poems, the poet shows her belief that God manages all death matters with His supreme power. According to Christian teachings, death is a fate that cannot be changed or adapted. Every life is assigned its destiny at birth and God is the one who manages this process for everyone. With the exception of death, the choices people make during their lives change their life paths and destiny. The following poem reveals that death is something fixed for all human beings.

All but Death, can be Adjusted –  
 Dynasties repaired –  
 Systems – settled in their Sockets –  
 Citadels – dissolved –  
 Wastes of Lives – resown with Colors  
 By Succeeding Springs –  
 Death – unto itself – Exception –  
 Is exempt from Change –

These two stanzas provide readers with a perception of picture of ruins that can be gradually restored. Season changes with natural's rules. However, death is different because it is beyond human beings' control. Spring is used as a symbol to show optimism after damages. It signals a return to the normal state of things in life's natural cycle. From this point, spring implies restoration, transition, and refreshment of nature in this poem.

Growth of Man – like Growth of Nature –  
 Gravitates within –  
 Atmosphere, and Sun endorse it –  
 But it stir – alone –

The above stanza illustrates similarity between nature and human lives. Plants and human beings grow and die in similar ways. According to the poet, death is acceptable. In this poem, Dickinson proclaims that there is a force to help restore decay or ruins for nature;

however, death is different because, in death, the clock cannot be rewound. Death is a predetermined end, and something that cannot be changed at all.

In ‘They dropped like Flakes –’, death is portrayed in a positive way. Death is viewed as ordinary matter but still it is under controlled by God. The word “they” indicates the number of dying people, so this implies that death is not only related to one person but it is to many or all.

They dropped like Flakes –  
 They dropped like Stars –  
 Like petals from a Rose –  
 When suddenly across the June  
 A wind with fingers – goes –

This poem explains a character of death that changes like the flakes, the stars, and the petals. All these natural materials are presented to signify the fragile and delicate lives of human beings. Dickinson uses these natural elements to invite a sense of imagery to readers and to emphasize that death is naturally common and acceptable matter. The grass and the daisy are used as similes death. The employment of these two plants can help to enable the readers to view death positively because their color invites a peaceful feeling while their appearances make the matter of death ordinary and beautiful. The grass and the daisy are used in Dickinson’s poetry in order to signify that they both can be normally found anywhere, and death occurs to everyone. For this reason, these plants are the two natural sources that make the images of death in this poem common and understandable. The arrival of the coming June which signifies a new wonderful growth period, would then replace the falling season. This shows the reader that the sorrow of death would be replaced once again with a new beginning. The stanza of the poem that follows further exhibits Dickinson’s belief in God.

They perished in the Seamless Grass –  
 No eye could find the place –  
 But God can summon every face  
 On his Repealless – List.



Nobody knows what becomes of death in the afterlife except God because He has the name list of every dying person. Dickinson again employs natural scenes to portray the death in a positive light. This enables readers to perceive death scenes absence of fear or horror.

Because death is framed in a context of the natural order of things, and a part of life, it is easier to accept for the reader.

In 'Death is potential to that Man' the poem reflects about death that is for everyone except God. The poet talks about friendship between two men who are parted by death.

Death is potential to that Man  
Who dies – and to his friend –  
Beyond that – inconspicuous  
To Anyone but God –

Of these Two – God remembers  
The longest – for the friend –  
Is integral – and therefore  
Itself dissolved – of God –

The familiarity between the two men and God implies God's power to know every man's fate. The following poem 'Tie the Strings to my Life, My Lord', pictures the willingness of a dying person to leave her life and take off to the Judgment Day with the Lord who comes to take her. The narrator realizes that death is not fearful, and, she shows no fear or hesitation to take the ride.

Tie the Strings to my Life, My Lord,  
Then, I am ready to go!  
Just a look at the Horses –  
Rapid! That will do!

Put me in on the firmest side –  
So I shall never fall –  
For we must ride to the Judgment –  
And it's partly, down Hill –

This is the moment when the "My Lord" takes the dying person to the afterlife, because the narrator declares that they both are heading to the "Judgment". The Lord here can be both death and God because the narrator believes that the Lord is able to take her to the Judgment

day. This confirms the “Lord” s power to bring the subject to her final destination. The word “tie” shows her willingness to take this journey with the Lord, and she again shows that willingness in the second stanza, when she wants to be placed “on the firmest side”. The “horse” is a symbol for the speed of this transitional moment between life and death, because it runs fast and the narrator believes that the Judgment Day is “partly, down Hill”.

But never I mind the steeper –  
 And never I mind the Sea –  
 Held fast in Everlasting Race –  
 By my own Choice, and Thee –

Goodbye to the Life I used to live –  
 And the World I used to know –  
 And kiss the Hills, for me, just once –  
 Then – I am ready to go!

Finally, the narrator accepts that she would be separated from her previous life, because she says “Goodbye” to it. This reveals that human beings would definitely be separated from all human ties and obligations at the time of their death. The poems in the last category present death as the fate that people have no right to deny. It is naturally combined in Humans’ destiny since their birth.

### **The Development of Dickinson’s Poems on Death**

During Dickinson’s lifetime, she devoted much of her attention on the theme of death and the afterlife. Since the death of her friends in a childhood years, her parents, a beloved nephew, and the people in the Civil War, Dickinson seemed to engage herself in a quest to understand death and what it brings. The question of immortality, eternity and the power of God seemed to obsess her. Dickinson intended to reflect her feelings, experiences and beliefs in her writing and this made her images of death multifaceted. In this section, Dickinson’s poems on death are analyzed in chronological order to follow the development of her poems.

In the first period between 1860 and 1861, Dickinson started to scratch the surface of the topic of death. She begins with the curiosity about what death is and this signifies that

death is still not something that has impacted her much. This seems to be because her life during these years did not encounter death often. In ‘Dust is the only secret’, 1860, for example, death is compared to a dust which signifies that it means nothing or even meaningless. It is rarely if ever discussed in her presence and it seems to cause no harm and invoked no fear in the townspeople.

Dust is the only secret –  
 Death, the only One  
 You cannot find out all about  
 In his “native town”

Nobody knew “his father”  
 Never was a Boy –  
 Hadn’t any playmates,  
 Or “Early history –”

Industrious! Laconic!  
 Punctual! Sedate  
 Bold as a Brigand!  
 Stillier than a fleet!

It is obvious that the poet shows her enigma about death. No one knows who it is, where it is from or its history. For this reason, death, from Dickinson’s early writings, is considered as unimportant and worthless.

Dickinson pens her ideas about death in many poems and the images of death in those poems are not horrible or fearful. Most of those images are portrayed through discussion of the dying moment at the deathbed and the processes of death are not very painful, such as in ‘To die – takes just a little while’ in 1861. It takes only a short moment for dying process. The poet also shows her optimism at the end of the poem, proposing that time would help the mourners forget their grief. In another poem which is written in the same year, ‘Looking at Death, is Dying’, to die is only involves letting go of life and breath and to rest for eternity. Similarly, with ‘Tie the string to my Life, my Lord, 1861, the subject is willing to leave her

belongings behind and takes a journey to eternity with the Lord. All these poems show death as a pleasant occurrence because it is presented as only sleep, a rest, or a journey.

In these early years, Dickinson used simple language. She intends to choose one or two figures of speech in her poems such as a metaphor or a simile to show her images of death. The frequent use of the dash is very clever, as seen such in the following poem;

To die – takes just a little while –  
They say it doesn't hurt –  
It's only fainter – by degrees –  
And then – it's out of sight –

Her use of dash seems to signal readers when one idea is completed and when the new idea begins. Furthermore, Dickinson frequently select words that convey positive meanings in her poems, such as: “gay”, “pretty sunshine” or “holiday.” With the use of uncomplicated figures of speech and simple sentence structures, it is comfortable for readers to interpret and understand Dickinson’s poems on death in the early years of her writing easily.

Later, in 1862, death has become more important to Dickinson because the poems on this topic are especially intense. There were incidents that caused Dickinson to write a lot of death poems in this year, among these are: her teacher’s death, her suffering from palsy, and the Civil War casualties that took place during that time. According to those incidents, Dickinson not only has to endure her own physical pain, but also faces a degree of mental illness during those times. Then, it can be assumed that she is preoccupied by the fear of pain and the grief relating to it. For this reason, all these feelings activate her writing creativity to produce numerous death poems during this year. Some poems show acceptance that death is true to life, and that it is a part of human nature such as in “They dropped like Flakes” that to die is the expiration of life, as some plants that have short life cycles. Death is presented as the right that all living things contain since their birth in ‘A Toad can die of Light.’ Further in ‘Doom is the House without the Door’ the poet shows her positive idea toward the tomb

that it is like another house for the remains of a dying person in the life after death. All these poems communicate with readers that death is normal because it naturally occurs in the human lifecycle, and life after death is not difficult because a dying person knows the disposition of his remains to a peaceful and respectable place. His own residence is similar to when he is still alive.

On the other hand, some poems show the cruel pain of dying processes that the subject must endure in his or her dying moments. For example in 'He fumbles at your soul', 'I've seen a Dying eye' or 'I heard a Fly buzz- when I died -', a dying person in these poems is pictured as a victim that is cruelly tortured by the pain of death processes. These moments invite a dreadful feeling because death attacks the dying person with brutal strength and aggressive methods. The word choices used in these poems are very powerful such as: "stun", "thunderbolt", "scalp" "cloudier", and "obscure." Therefore, the images of death in this category are as something unkind and unpleasant.

In 1862, Dickinson reveals another fresh idea concerning death, that it takes away the opportunity for life from a dying person. This signifies that she not only accepts the fate of death but also understands about the negative side of it. In 'For death – or rather' death takes the dying to eternity in 'I'm sorry for the Dead- Today -' Dickinson shares the sorrow of the dying person and sympathizes that he has to live his beloved life and grasp the opportunity to fulfil his passion. In the former poem, and the latter one says that . These poems remind readers to realize the fact about life and motivate them to care more about their duties and responsibilities.

Moreover, it is interesting that Dickinson starts to mourn the loss of her beloveds which relates to the loss of her teacher and people who lost their lives or limbs participating in the Civil War at that time. In 'I knew that He exists', the narrator tries to think positively that her parting beloved does not disappear but still exist somewhere unreachable only in this

lifetime. Likewise, in ‘Death sets a Thing significant’, the narrator thinks about her old memories with her friend, and of the time and interests that they share together. The tone of these poems is totally sad and depressing. Dickinson moreover accepts in ‘Death is potential to that man’ that death is destined for everyone except God. This is the first year that the poet declares her belief in God in her poem, and she seems to believe that his power places him in a position of superiority. For her, it is God alone who controls the cycle of life and the processes of death.

Dickinson’s poems on death in 1862 have become more difficult because her writing techniques are more various and complicated. The messages of death are also more complex because the poet does not present only the surface of her idea of death. She intentionally tells something deeper and that the readers have to use their critical thinking to analyze her poetry. The following poem is the most outstanding one that well characterizes the majority of Dickinson’s poems in this year.

I’m sorry for the Dead – Today –  
It’s such congenial times  
Old Neighbors have at fences –  
It’s time o’ year for Hay.

And Broad – Sunburned Acquaintance  
Discourse between the Toil  
And laugh, a homely species  
That makes the Fences smile –

It seems so straight to lie away  
From all the noise of Fields –  
The Busy Carts – the fragrant Cocks –  
The Mower’s Metre – Steals

A Trouble lest they’re homesick –  
Those Farmers – and their wives –  
Set separates from the Farming –  
And all the Neighbor’s lives –

A Wonder if the Sepulchre  
Don’t feel a lonesome way  
When Men – and Boys – and Carts – and June,  
Go down the Fields to “Hay” –

It is obvious that Dickinson uses a variety of figures of speech such as personification, symbolism and metaphors which each makes her portrayal of death become more complex while imaginable. With the sophisticated use of a grammatical structure, such as the use of a capital letter in between the sentences, the unusual use of punctuation and the uncommon treatment of subject- verb agreement, it would be harder for readers to fully understand the poems. Dickinson further employs some words that can be interpreted with different meanings such as “the field” which signifies refreshment and teenagers, or “hay” that means death or old age. From this point, the interpretation would be depended a great deal on the life experiences and background knowledge of the reader.

From between 1863 to 1864, Dickinson pays her attention on the transitional moment between life and death. This means that the poet presents the picture of when a dying person is in between life and death. The picture presented is that of a dying person slowly losing consciousness and once again sensing reactive body functions in the life after death. Some poems portray the transitional moment as a journey such as in ‘Because I could not stop for Death’ 1863, death is personified as a gentleman who takes the narrator on a journey destined for immortality and eternity. This trip is as a journey that brings a dying person across the transitional moment between life and death. The journey is presented as gentle and soothing trip. This signifies that the concept of death has become more comfortable and soothing for the poet.

During 1863-1864, Dickinson mentions less about the pain of death during the dying processes but she becomes interested in the territory and characteristics of the afterlife instead. She shows her belief that there is another kingdom in the afterlife for the souls of those dying people to reside in and she presents it using different scenes. Some places are pleasant because the dying person has nothing to do except wait for the Judgment Day while

others are not cheerful because the dying person is being controlled by God, and he has no right to run away. Dickinson writes a lot of poems on this topic and this confirms her belief about another level of existence in the afterlife.

Follow by 1865 and 1866; Dickinson's poems are not much different from the previous years. Dickinson composes some poems to repeat her beliefs about the continuity of the life after death such as in 'I've dropped my Brain – My soul is numb –' or 'I heard, as if I had no Ear.' It seems that a dying person lives again after her death. Dickinson does not mention much about pain and the suffering of dying. In some poems, death is presented as a part of human's destiny because it is true and unavoidable while some display death as a resting time for human beings. Instead of complaining about the pain of death, the poet tends to explore more about the territory of the afterlife. Some poems state that the land of death is far away and unreachable while some make believe that it is near and just underground. No matter how far or near death is, it is still something that is not completely understood, and certainly unpredictable. Therefore, it is clear that during these periods, a large percentage of Dickinson's concentration was on the mechanics of death and the territory of the afterlife. The fear of death has become less to annoy her.

In almost the last phase of Dickinson writing which covers the years 1867-1872, the images of death have become less fearful. The poet declares that the sorrow that the mourners feel about their parted loved ones could be healed over time. This means that the passage of time can gradually help mourners forget their grief about death. This invites a positive feeling because if sorrow could be healed, then, they could possibly recover their own lives and happiness. In 'The last night that she lived', the moment of death described by the narrator of the poem is not dreadful because the dying person is compared with a reed that only *Consented, and was dead* –. Likewise 'After a hundred years' in 1869, Dickinson shows her idea that time could surely heal the sick hearts of the mourners after death takes



their beloved away. This poem is like the optimistic signal of the poet's attitude toward death because she states no more pain about dying processes in this year or the years that follows.

The years after 1873, Dickinson still writes much about the afterlife. At this point, God seems to be directly connected with the matter of death because it is he alone who can determine death to life. Then, God and religious beliefs are intentionally combined in many poems, during these years, to show God's power and what influence he can have over life. The territory of the afterlife is also depicted in various ways as in the previous years. The poem 'Those not live yet', in 1879 shows the poet's acceptance of death and her belief that it is not completely horrible. Sometimes, the death might be a new beginning for some, for whom, while still alive and presently grieving, they will heal. In these final periods, Dickinson does not talk about the pain of the dying processes or the grief of death anymore. The tone of most of her poems is soft, calm and it invites understanding and acceptance toward death. Dickinson writes about the topic of death and the afterlife until death finally comes to take her life in 1886.

Then, it can be concluded that Dickinson's images of death are not consistent, because they are portrayed differently from the early years to the final years of her writing. However, readers can see slight changes, such as the theme and the tone of the poems in the different periods of her writing. First, death seems to be nothing to Dickinson because death is viewed in the first place as the untroubled matter that is rarely discussed and has no negative impact on life. Furthermore, the words using in the poems during the early years seems to bring comfortable feeling toward death such as "morning", "free", "holiday" or "sleep". All these words make the images of death totally mundane.

Later in the poet's middle life, the images of death are especially productive and varied. The subject of death during these years is treated quite differently, because some of her poems present positive attitudes toward death, while some show negative side of death.

Therefore, the pictures of death sometimes deal with the merits of death which brings vitality for life, while sometimes they show the severe pain that death delivers to the dying person.

However, it can be assumed that the poet is in the middle between knowing the cruel pain of the dying processes, and accepting that death and its torment are a part of human nature.

During this phase, Dickinson writing becomes more sophisticated. She employs several literary tools and unusual grammar to present her attitudes toward death. This makes her poems a bit harder to understand and interpret.

In the final years of Dickinson's writing, she deals less with the moment of death or its associated pain. Instead, she concentrates on the afterlife and God who has control over death. The tone of each poem tends to be slow and calm and this makes the matter of death less horrible or fearful. It seems that Dickinson views death as normal as something that would surely occur to every life. This certainly indicates that with maturity, she gains more thorough understanding and acceptance of death at the end of her life.

## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research was conducted to study the images of death in Dickinson's poetry. The images of death were studied initially to determine the number of the images of death in from Dickinson's poems. Those images were categorized in order to study each characteristic of the concept of death in each category. Dickinson's poems on death were analyzed in order to investigate how they developed from the early years to the late years of her writing.

In this study, Janaro and Altshuler's notions of death were used to analyse the images of death that emerged from each death category. Different attitudes toward death collected by them ranged from religious beliefs to mythology, philosophy and medical evidence. First, Janaro and Altshuler's image of death as personal enemy was found in Dickinson's poetry. In her poems, death was portrayed as a cruel killer who attacked the victim without mercy. The poems under investigation in this category were "Death is like the insect", "A Clock stopped –", "There is a Languor of the Life", "He fumbles at your Soul", "I heard a Fly buzz – when I died –", "Death sets a Thing significant", "I'm sorry for the Dead – Today –"

The second definition of death presented as a leveler was found in Dickinson's poetry. It was like a determiner which made every living thing equal. The poet used death as God's vehicle to bring all human lives to the heaven. The poems that were consisted with this idea were "Color – Caste – Denomination –", "What care the Dead, for Chanticleer—", "A Toad, can die of Light –", "The Color of the Grave is Green –" and "After a hundred years."

Furthermore, Janaro and Altshuler view of death as a predetermined end or fatalism was reflected in several of Dickinson's poems. It was the fate that no man could ever change. Dickinson revealed her belief about the supreme power of God that He can determine everyone's life. Death was the final end of everyone except God that He himself managed all birth and death matters. The poems in this category were "All but Death, can be Adjusted –", "They dropped like Flakes –", "Death is potential to that Man" and "Tie the Strings to my Life, My Lord."

The forth category explained death as a reward or punishment described that there was another level of existence after death where dying people resided together to wait for the Judgment Day. This belief was presented in following poems, "I heard, as if I had no Ear", "I've dropped my Brain – My Soul is numb –", "I am alive – I guess –", "Because I could not stop for Death –", "Under the Light, yet under", "Those – dying then", "At leisure is the Soul", "I live with Him – I see His face –", "I never felt at Home – Below –" and "Twas a long Parting – but the time."

There was somewhat significant change in Dickinson's perception and portrayal of death in terms of chronological order, the development of poems could be seen. In the first period of her writing, Dickinson showed her curiosity toward death as what it looked like or where it came from. However, in the second phase, her concentration on the topic on death was obvious and her views about death obviously began to change based upon her exposure to the death and destruction of the civil war, and impacted on her friends, families, and neighbors in the surrounding communities. For this reason, her poems in this phase mainly revealed the circumstances when a dying person was tortured by the dying processes. Dickinson, in the same years, not only depicted the negative side of death but also the positive aspects of it. She presented her full position on death by

writing some of her poems that considered death as a natural occurrence. Consequently, her images of death during this phase varied because they were presented as both unpleasant in some poems, and as accepted facts of life in others.

Near the end of her life, Dickinson gave less attention to the subject's dying moment or the pain of death. She became more interested in the transitional moment between life and death and moreover concentrated on the soul and its existence in the afterlife. In addition, she touched on the topics of heaven and hell which is the fate that she believed awaited all dying people after their passing. Therefore, the images of death in the last phase were calm and peaceful.

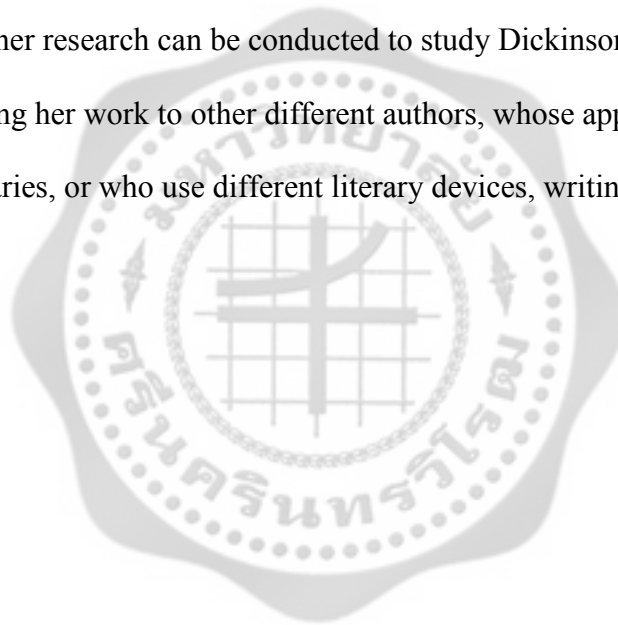
This study presented similar ideas with different writers about the literary devices used in Dickinson's writing. According to Diyanni (*Modern American Poet: Their Voices and Visions*), Carey (*Emily Dickinson: Selected Poems*), Damrosch (*The Longman Anthology of World Literature*), Somrak (*A Critical Study of Emily Dickinson's Literary Works: Poetic Elements in Poems of Death*), Dickinson's writing was complex because she uses unusual grammar, peculiar rhythm, distinctive punctuation and various figures of speech. All these devices made her poems difficult to read but meaningful and profound. The results from this study also supported previous research. It is found that Dickinson's writing consisted of figurative language such as metaphor, simile, personification or hyperbole and mixed with various devices such as assonance, alliteration or euphemism. This writing procedure influenced Dickinson's poems on death to become vivid, influential and meaningful.

Some results were corresponding with the discussion of McMichael in his book, the *Anthology of American Literature*, which revealed Dickinson's shapes of death. He stated that Dickinson normally personified death as a Lord, a monarch and a lover. Hardy and Marilyn also asserted in their study "*A Word Made Flesh: Emily Dickinson's Poetic*

*Strategies*” that Dickinson usually shaped death in order to emphasize the relationship between her and death. In the same way, it was obvious in this study that Dickinson liked to create the animate figures of death to have different characteristics such as the gentleman, the furious killer, the Lord or the strong player to show her perception towards death in different moments and diverse perspectives.

### **Recommendations for Further Studies**

1. The further research can be conducted to study Dickinson’s poetry on the other topics such as love, friendship, nature, language, God or immortality.
2. The further research can be conducted to study Dickinson’s poetry comparing her work to other different authors, whose approach to writing poetry varies, or who use different literary devices, writing styles, imagery or themes.





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**APPENDICES**

## Coding Poems

### Group 1: Death as personal enemy

1)

Death is like the insect  
Menacing the tree,  
Competent to kill it,  
But decoyed may be.

Bait it with the balsam,  
Seek it with the saw,  
Baffle, if it cost you  
Everything you are.

Then, if it have burrowed  
Out of reach of skill –  
Wring the tree and leave it,  
'Tis the vermin's will.  
1862

2)

A Clock stopped –  
Not the Mantel's –  
Geneva's farthest skill  
Can't put the puppet bowing –  
That just now dangled still –

An awe came on the Trinket!  
The Figures hunched, with pain –  
Then quivered out of Decimals –  
Into Degreeless Noon –  
1861

3)

There is a Languor of the Life  
More imminent than Pain –  
'Tis Pain's Successor – When the Soul  
Has suffered all it can –

A Drowsiness – diffuses –  
A Dimness like a Fog  
Envelops Consciousness –  
As Mists – obliterate a Crag.  
1862

4)

He fumbles at your Soul  
As Players at the Keys

Before they drop full Music on –  
 He stuns you by degrees –  
 Prepares your brittle Nature  
 For the Ethereal Blow  
 By fainter Hammers – further heard –  
 Then nearer – Then so slow  
 Your Breath has time to straighten –  
 Your Brain – to bubble Cool –  
 Deals – One – imperial – Thunderbolt –  
 That scalps your naked Soul –

When Winds take Forests in the Paws –  
 The Universe – is still –  
 1862

5)  
 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  
 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 –  
 1862

6)  
 Death sets a Thing significant  
 The Eye had hurried by  
 Except a perished Creature  
 Entreat us tenderly

To ponder little Workmanships  
 In Crayon, or in Wool,  
 With "This was last Her fingers did" –  
 Industrious until –

The Thimble weighed too heavy –

The stitches stopped – by themselves –  
 And then 'twas put among the Dust  
 Upon the Closet shelves –

A Book I have – a friend gave –  
 Whose Pencil – here and there –  
 Had notched the place that pleased Him –  
 At Rest – His fingers are –

Now – when I read – I read not –  
 For interrupting Tears –  
 Obliterate the Etchings  
 Too Costly for Repairs.  
 1862

7)

I'm sorry for the Dead – Today –  
 It's such congenial times  
 Old Neighbors have at fences –  
 It's time o' year for Hay.

And Broad – Sunburned Acquaintance  
 Discourse between the Toil –  
 And laugh, a homely species  
 That makes the Fences smile –

It seems so straight to lie away  
 From all of the noise of Fields –  
 The Busy Carts – the fragrant Cocks –  
 The Mower's Metre – Steals –

A Trouble lest they're homesick –  
 Those Farmers – and their Wives –  
 Set separate from the Farming –  
 And all the Neighbors' lives –

A Wonder if the Sepulchre  
 Don't feel a lonesome way –  
 When Men – and Boys – and Carts – and June,  
 Go down the Fields to "Hay" –  
 1862

### **Group 2: Death the leveler**

1)  
 Color – Caste – Denomination –  
 These – are Time's Affair –  
 Death's diviner Classifying  
 Does not know they are –

As in sleep – All Hue forgotten –  
 Tenets – put behind –  
 Death's large – Democratic fingers  
 Rub away the Brand –

If Circassian – He is careless –  
 If He put away  
 Chrysalis of Blonde – or Umber –  
 Equal Butterfly –

They emerge form His Obscuring –  
 What Death – knows so well –  
 Our minuter intuitions –  
 Deem unplausible –  
 1864

2)  
 What care the Dead, for Chanticleer –  
 What care the Dead for Day?  
 'Tis late your Sunrise vex their face –  
 And Purple Ribaldry – of Morning

Pour as blank on them  
 As on the Tier of Wall  
 The Mason builded, yesterday,  
 And equally as cool –

What care the Dead for Summer?  
 The Solstice had no Sun  
 Could waste the Snow before their Gate –  
 And knew One Bird a Tune –

Could thrill their Mortised Ear  
 Of all the Birds that be –  
 This One—beloved of Mankind  
 Henceforward cherished be –

What care the Dead for Winter?  
 Themselves as easy freeze –  
 June Noon – as January Night –  
 As soon the South – her Breeze

Of Sycamore – or Cinnamon –  
 Deposit in a Stone  
 And put a Stone to keep it Warm –  
 Give Spices – unto Men –  
 1862

3)

A Toad, can die of Light –  
 Death is the Common Right  
 Of Toads and men  
 Of Earl and Midge  
 The privilege –  
 Why swagger, then?  
 The Gnat's supremacy is large as Thin –  
 1862

4)  
 The Color of the Grave is Green –  
 The Outer Grave – I mean –  
 You would not know it from the Field –  
 Except it own stone –

To help the fond – to find it –  
 Too infinite asleep  
 To stop and tell them where it is –  
 But just a Daisy – deep –

The Color of the Grave is White –  
 The outer Grave – I mean –  
 You would not know it from the Drifts –  
 In Winter – till the Sun –

Has furrowed out the Aisles –  
 Then – higher than the Land  
 The little Dwelling House rise  
 Where each – has left a friend –

The color of the Grave within –  
 The Duplicate – I mean –  
 Not all the Snows could make it white –  
 Not all the Summers – Green –

You've seen the Color – maybe –  
 Upon a Bonnet bound –  
 When that you met it with before –  
 The Ferret – cannot find –  
 1862

5)  
 After a hundred years  
 Nobody knows the Place  
 Agony that enacted there  
 Motionless as Peace

Weeds triumphant ranged  
 Strangers strolled and spelled  
 At the lone Orthography



Of the Elder Dead  
 Winds of Summer Fields  
 Recollect the way –  
 Instincts picking up the Key  
 Dropped by memory –  
 1869

### Group 3: Death as Predetermined End: Fatalism

1)  
 All but Death, can be Adjusted –  
 Dynasties repaired –  
 Systems – settled in their Sockets –  
 Citadels – dissolved –

Wastes of Lives – resown with Colors  
 By Succeeding Springs –  
 Death – unto itself – Exception –  
 Is exempt from Change –

Growth of Man – like Growth of Nature –  
 Gravitates within –  
 Atmosphere, and Sun endorse it –  
 But it stir – alone –  
 1863

2)  
 They dropped like Flakes –  
 They dropped like Stars –  
 Like petals from a Rose –  
 When suddenly across the June  
 A wind with fingers – goes –

They perished in the Seamless Grass –  
 No eye could find the place –  
 But God can summon every face  
 On his Repealless – List.  
 1862

3)  
 Death is potential to that Man  
 Who dies – and to his friend –  
 Beyond that - inconspicuous  
 To Anyone but God –

Of these Two – God remembers  
 The longest – for the friend –  
 Is integral – and therefore  
 Itself dissolved – of God –

1862

4)

Tie the Strings to my Life, My Lord,  
Then, I am ready to go!  
Just a look at the Horses –  
Rapid! That will do!

Put me in on the firmest side –  
So I shall never fall –  
For we must ride to the Judgment –  
And it's partly, down Hill –

But never I mind the steepest –  
And never I mind the Sea –  
Held fast in Everlasting Race –  
By my own Choice, and Thee –

Goodbye to the Life I used to live –  
And the world I used to know –  
And kiss the hills, for me, just once –  
Then – I am ready to go!

1861

#### **Group 4: Death as Reward or Punishment: The afterlife**

1)

I heard, as if I had no Ear  
Until a Vital Word  
Came all the way from Life to me  
And than I Knew I heard.

I saw, as if my Eye were on  
Another, till a Thing  
And now I know' twas Light, because  
It fitted them, came in.

I dwelt, as if Myself were out,  
My Body but within  
Until a Might detected me  
And set my kernel in.

And Spirit turned onto the Dust  
“Old Friends, thou knowest me,  
And Time went out to tell the News  
And met Eternity.

1865

2)

I've dropped my Brain – My Soul is numb –  
 The Veins that used to run  
 Stop palsied – 'tis Paralysis  
 Done perfecter on stone.

Vitality is Carved and cool.  
 My nerve in Marble lies –  
 A Breathing Woman  
 Yesterday – Endowed with Paradise.

Not dumb – I had a sort that moved –  
 A Sense that smote and stirred –  
 Instincts for Dance – a caper part –  
 And Aptitude for Bird –

Who wrought Carrara in me  
 And chiseled all my tune  
 Were it a Witchcraft – were it Death –  
 I've still a chance to strain

To Being, somewhere – Motion – Breath –  
 Though Centuries beyond,  
 And every limit a Decade –  
 I'll shiver, satisfied.  
 1865

3)

I am alive – I guess –  
 The Branches on my Hand  
 Are full of Morning Glory –  
 And at my finger's end –

The Carmine – tingles warm –  
 And if I hold a Glass  
 Across my Mouth – it blurs it –  
 Physician's – proof of Breath –

I am alive – because  
 I am not in a Room –  
 The Parlor – Commonly – it is –  
 So Visitors may come –

And lean – and view it sidewise –  
 And add "How cold – it grew" –  
 And "Was it conscious – when it stepped  
 In Immortality?"

I am alive – because

I do not own a House –  
 Entitled to myself – precise –  
 And fitting no one else –

And marked my Girlhood's name –  
 So Visitors may know  
 Which Door is mine – and not  
 1862

4)  
 Because I could not stop for Death –  
 He kindly stopped for me –  
 The Carriage held but just Ourselves –  
 And Immortality.

We slowly drove – He knew no haste  
 And I had put away  
 My labor and my leisure too,  
 For His Civility –

We passed the School, where Children strove  
 At Recess – in the Ring –  
 We passed the Fields of Gazing Grain –  
 We passed the Setting Sun –

Or rather – He passed Us –  
 The Dews drew quivering and chill –  
 For only Gossamer, my Gown –  
 My Tippet – only Tulle –

We paused before a House that seemed  
 A Swelling of the Ground –  
 The Roof was scarcely visible –  
 The Gornice – in the Ground –

Since then – 'tis Centuries – and yet  
 Feels shorter than the Day  
 I first surmised the Horses' Heads  
 Were toward Eternity –

The Word – feels Dusty  
 When We stop to Die –  
 We want the Dew – than –  
 Hornors – taste dry –

Flags – vex a Dying face –  
 But the lest Fan  
 Stirred by a friend's Hand –  
 Cools – like the Rain –

Mine be the Ministry  
 When thy thirst comes –  
 Dews of Thessaly, to fetch –  
 And Hybla Balms –  
 1863

5)  
 Under the Light, yet under,  
 Under the Grass and the Dirt,  
 Under the Beetle's Cellar  
 Under the Clover's Root,

Further than Arm could stretch  
 Were it Giant long,  
 Further than Sunshine could  
 Were the Day Year long,

Over the Light, yet over,  
 Over the Arc of the Bird –  
 Over the Comet's chimney –  
 Over the Cubit's Head,

Further than Guess can gallop  
 Further than Riddle ride –  
 Oh for a Disc to the Distance  
 Between Ourselves and the Dead!  
 1864

6)  
 Those – dying then,  
 Knew where they went –  
 They went to God's Right Hand –  
 That Hand is amputated now

And God cannot be found –  
 The abdication of Belief  
 Makes the Behavior small –  
 Better an ignis fatuus  
 Than no illumine at all –  
 1882

7)  
 At leisure is the Soul  
 That gets a Staggering Blow –  
 The Width of Life – before it spreads  
 Without a thing to do –

It begs you give it Work –  
 But just the placing Pins –  
 Or humblest Patchwork – Children do –

To Help its Vacant Hands –  
1862

8)  
I live with Him – I see His face –  
I go no more away  
For Visitor – or Sundown –  
Death's single privacy

The Only One – forestalling Mine –  
And that – by Right that He  
Presents a Claim invisible –  
No wedlock – granted Me –

I live with Him – I hear His Voice –  
I stand alive – Today –  
To witness to the Certainty  
Of Immortality –

Taught Me – by Time – the lower Way –  
Conviction – Every day –  
That Life like This – is stopless –  
Be Judgment – what it may –  
1862

9)  
I never felt at Home – Below –  
And in the Handsome Skies  
I shall not feel at Home – I know –  
I don't like Paradise –

Because it's Sunday – all the time –  
And Recess – never comes –  
And Eden'll be so lonesome  
Bright Wednesday Afternoons –

If God could make a visit –  
Or ever took a Nap –  
So not to see us – but they say  
Himself – a Telescope

Perennial beholds us –  
Myself would run away  
From Him – and Holy Ghost – and All –  
But there's the "Judgment Day"!  
1862

10)  
'Twas a long Parting – but the time  
For Interview – had Come –

Before the Judgment Seat of God –  
The last – and second time

These Fleshless Lovers met –  
A Heaven in a Gaze –  
A Heaven of Heavens – the Privilege  
Of one another's Eyes –

No Lifetime – on Them –  
Appareled as the new  
Unborn – except They had beheld –  
Born infinites – now –

Was Bridal – e'er like This?  
A Paradise – the Host –  
And Cherubim – and Seraphim –  
The unobtrusive Guest –  
1862







## VITAE

**Name:** Ms. Piyakun Khaangku  
**Date of Birth:** October 23, 1983  
**Place of Birth:** Sakon Nakhon  
**Address:** 206/2 M.1 Sukhabhiban Road. Kutbak District,  
Sakon Nakhon 47180

### **Educational Background:**

2002 Certificate (Mathematics and Science)  
Thatnaraiwittaya School, Sakon Nakhon  
2006 Bachelor of Arts (English and Communication)  
Ubonratchathani University, Ubonratchathani  
2011 Master of Arts (English)  
Srinakharinwirot University, Bangkok

