

## **'I died for Beauty': The importance of exploring the Frontier.**

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### ABSTRACT

The following essay offers a discussion of Emily Dickinson's poems *I never lost as much but twice* (49), *I cannot live with You* – (640), *I like a look of Agony* (241), *My life had stood – a Loaded Gun* (754), *Because I could not stop for death* — (712), *It was not Death, for I stood up* (510), *I died for Beauty — but was scarce* (449), *I felt a Funeral, in my Brain* (280), *I heard a Fly Buzz — when I died* — (465), *I've seen a Dying Eye* (547), *The Bustle in a House* (1078), *This Conciousness that is aware* (822). The discussion of these poems attempts to find out what death meant for E. Dickinson and why she was so much concerned about the process. The essay considers her Puritan background and focuses on the romantic concept of the frontier between reason and imagination, language and silence and finally, life and death.

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The Romantic movement, which originated in Germany, quickly spread and reached America around the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It coincided with the period of national expansion, with the new idea of state, and with a gradual separation from the ideas of the previous times.

E. Dickinson (1830-1886) was born in Amherst, a small isolated town resistant to the new ideas. For the Puritans, Death meant essentially the return to God's kingdom, but Emerson's ideas and the philosophy of Transcendentalism were threatening the legacy of the New England culture.

The following paper offers a discussion of some well-known poems to find out E. Dickinson's concern about Death. Some scholars regard her as a Christian poet and others as a post-Christian poet. E. Dickinson is also considered a romantic poet interested in what

lies beyond traditional beliefs, she goes deeply into the unknown as a source of romantic imagination.

Dickinson shows her roots of Puritanism in the choice of themes, she is traditionally concerned with the human occasions of birth and dying, however her approach to death lies beyond Puritan understanding. She can be considered as a link between the previous age and the new sensitivity of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when Romanticism and Transcendentalism entered the state and established art, rather than science, as the source of universal truths.

E. Dickinson thus, shows the roots of the New England culture and also adopts the new philosophy to release her romantic expression.

Emily Dickinson approaches death from several ways. In some poems she expresses the sorrow which is felt when someone beloved dies. In other poems she contemplates death from an objective viewpoint. She can imagine how is the frontier between life and death and what people feel when they are about to die. She also tries in some other poems to describe what is beyond the frontier.

One of her earlier poems, *I never lost as much but twice* (49) deals with the death of a person she loved, it is a very subjective approach to death. This poem does not describe death itself but the emotions of a person who has lost someone she loved, she shows sorrow and sadness (I never lost as much but twice / And that was in the sod ). In this poem she talks about religion too, she says that when we lose someone we love is when we need religion ( Twice have I stood a beggar / Before the door of God ). God appears as the Supreme Being which leads the deceased person towards salvation. However, there is a subtle criticism on religion, which can not relieve the absence of the beloved person. As Harold Bloom points out (1994:295) 'a poet who addresses God as father only after first calling him burglar and banker is up to something other than piety'.

The same theme appears in *I cannot live with You* – (640), she talks about the pain people feel when a dear person dies. She stresses that it is Death who chooses us causing separation. The poem presents two stages: life and death, the speaker talks from the stage of life about her lover, the deceased person. She seems to be in a church, there is a sexton's shelf and a porcelain like a cup, which imply a religious ritual. It finishes with the word "despair", in this case the word is not applied to death itself but to the fact of being separated from the person she loves. Judith Farr (1997:308) points out the importance of

the theme of separation in this poem: the poem's real power derives from its carefully reasoned dismissal or forfeiture of human life with all its actual visual forms, and from its election of a state of mind counter to happiness, even – theologically speaking-- to salvation: Despair'. I agree with Farr and I think the despair in which the speaker is sunk in life can not be comparable to the salvation of the deceased in death. As in 49, religion can not relieve the absence of the beloved. The separation is caused by Death but the problem is not Death itself but to be alive, it would be better to have died with the beloved person, (I could not die—with You— / For One must wait / To shut the Other's Gaze down— / You—could not—). Thus the problem is not Death itself but separation. Dickinson focuses on Death as a frontier between two stages and as a fact that we can not avoid.

Both poems, 49 and 640, deal with the feelings an ordinary person may express when someone beloved dies, both poems are an expression of sadness; there are references to religion although death is not regarded as a path to salvation but as a fact which separates ones from others.

In other poems, Dickinson shows a much more outstanding view of death. For her, death and life are a cycle which belongs to nature, so that nature emerges as something superior and eternal. Dickinson does not say that life, and consequently, our nature perish but things perish in nature and nature continues. The cycle is completed and starts again as we are part of nature and we live in nature. It can be sensed in many of her poems.

In *I like a look of Agony* (241), Death is part of nature because it is true and sincere. She says she likes death because it is true, it is impossible to 'simulate convulsion', 'agony' or 'throe', (I like a look of Agony / Because I know it is true—). The poem is told from an objective viewpoint, it is not focused on any person, just in the universal moment of dying and in the border between life and death. As A. Robert Lee (223) states, 'the focus falls slightly more upon the physical process itself, but still from the viewpoint of the outside observer'. In the first stanza death is described as an act of authenticity, which implies a compensating benefit in a world lacking of unambiguous truths. The second stanza shows the specific process of dying (The eyes glaze once – and that is Death -- / Impossible to feign ) as an unfeignable fact. It is an amazing approach to death, it has been and it will be surprising to regard death from such a favourable viewpoint. It is seen positively because

of its authenticity, the idea is emphasized in both stanzas. As Robert Lee (224) points out, 'To the poem's "I", at least, Death so bestows a compensating benefit, that of a clear, though momentary measure (or marker) of human life's unfeigned true character'. I think the concept evokes the romantic statement 'beauty is truth, truth is beauty', a concept present in many poems; in this poem death is truth, and consequently, beauty. Thus, for Dickinson, death is a source of inspiration, it is not only a fact which pushes out feelings of sadness but a field to be discovered so that the unconscious and the irrational would become a source to her poetry. Definitely, the poem describes Death as something completely objective and true since we can not decide if we want to die and when we are about to die, it is beyond our power, death comes and that is all.

In the poem *My life had stood – a Loaded Gun* (754), the ideas of death and killing are highly positive. The poem presents a hunting scene, the speaker is with her master, her owner, sharing the fascinating fact of killing, which makes her feel empowered. However the speaker does not say who is the master/owner. Judith Farr (1997:243) points out that 'owner suggests sexual love', and therefore the poem may be about sexual love. In the last stanza it is stated that the 'owner' has both the power to kill and the power to die, while the speaker only has the power to kill. (For I have but the power to kill / without -- the power-- to die. According to J.Farr (1997:243) 'this poem is often read as a revelation of the limitations experienced by women under patriarchy, or even of the dependency of the female artist who needs male masters like Higginson to help her exercise her powers'. I do not agree with this viewpoint, I think Dickinson means that although people have the power of killing themselves they have not the power of dying, only death can transport people beyond the frontier. This ability reaffirms the truthness of the specific moment of dying, commented in 241, it is impossible to feign an unconscious and irrational state. Therefore I think that the owner who carries her away in the first stanza is a personification of death, which empowers her in several ways. As Farr (1997:243) states, 'she has been waiting a long time in many corners until the right lover lets her speak (...) For Dickinson, love is always the muse'. Farr also states that 'her variant for "the power to kill" in the penultimate line is art'. I completely agree with her, the poet has to obtain the power to kill in order to reach her poetic expression. The master, death, helps her to say what lies beyond rationality, therefore she has got the power to kill, the power to put into words the meaning

of death, and as the master is death he has the power to die, he is the source of irrationality.

In *I died for Beauty — but was scarce* (449), there are two speakers. The first speaker says that she died for beauty, and finds a man who died for truth in a grave next to her, (I died for Beauty — but was scarce / Adjusted in the Tomb / When One who died for Truth, was lain / In an adjoining Room — ). The first two lines clearly recalls Keats' *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, the statement 'Beauty is Truth, Truth is Beauty' is reaffirmed in E. Dickinson's poem when the man in the other grave declares that they (both speakers) are 'brethren' since truth and beauty are the same, (Themselves are One / We Brethren are). From then on they met at night and talked between the rooms until the moss reached their lips and covered their names on the graves, (We talked between the Rooms -- / Until the Moss had reached our lips -- / And covered up — our names --). Then it can be understood that both speakers die again. It is puzzling that in many Dickinson's poems we do not know whether the poems are told before or after the death of the speaker. In this poem both speakers are buried in their graves and die again, I think the double process serves a purpose, the second step toward the final death is an attempt to reach the source of knowledge sought in many poems. As P.S. Derrick (2002:233) points out, 'we should think of it as an attempt to communicate the ultimate knowledge'. The poem thus begins with death and ends with silence, it presents silence as the irrational state the poet has to conquer in order to reach her poetic expression.

Her poem *This Consciousness that is aware* (822) does not describe death as a fact nor as the frontier, she clearly says that everybody is going to die, so the poem deals with the awareness of people about the end, (This Consciousness that is aware / Of Neighbors and the Sun / Will be the one aware of Death). According to P.S. Derrick (2002:230), 'Dickinson also makes it perfectly clear that death is the moment of incommunicable revelation — the paradoxical moment of truth'. The first stanza shows the sense of mortality that we feel when we realize that the time and the world is passing by us. As Farr (1997:88) states, 'the first three lines set out an incredible thought, that the same mind which meets ordinary experience must ultimately confront death'. In the second stanza it regards death as the most powerful experience that people undergo, it is the moment of truth. (And most profound experiment / Appointed unto men). According to J. Farr (1997:88) 'Dickinson

ends her poem with a subtle irony: the self is never alone. It is always attended – like royalty-- by its own identity, a persistent Hound that can comfort or afflict'. As a whole the poem highlightens Dickinson's interest in discovering the interval, it considers the 'experiment' as a source of knowledge, which leads her to show specifically the frontier in some other poems.

According to Robert Lee (226), 'I felt a funeral, in my Brain' and 'I heard a Fly Buzz – when I died -- ' in common with ' Because I could not stop for Death', depict, as dramatically as any of her poems, the imagined act of dying itself, the actual experience of the withdrawal of consciousness'.

In her poem *Because I could not stop for death*— (712) Death appears as a being which has the power of taking people away. It is not the speaker who stops and dies but it is death who can stop for her, she is busy and death has to stop for her. Death is personalised in "He" and the speaker shares many things with him. I think that the poem may be understood in various ways: they are in a journey towards death or they are in a journey through death since it can be understood that the person is already dead. According to Farr (1997:330), 'the poem begins almost immediately to compress time and space in order to dramatize life and death, time experienced and time conceptualized' and according to P.S. Derrick (2002:231), 'the complete experience is encompassed between those two capitalized words: Death and Eternity (...) N° 712 looks forward to the Theory of Relativity ... Reach the speed of light, we suppose, and time stops. Only here, the limitation is Death. I think the speaker tells her travel from the house to the grave. In the first stanza she is called by death and has to put 'labour' and 'leisure' aside. She recalls different stages of life, according to Farr ( 1997:330) 'as if in accord with the theory that one's life flashes in various sequences before the soul as it leaves the body, Dickinson describes childhood, maturity and old age'. Exactly half-way through the poem she realizes she is not passing through the world but the world is passing by her. It creates a strong sense of separation between the living and the dead. In the fifth stanza the body is deposited in the grave, she perceives that the roof of her grave is sunken and scarcely visible, Farr (1997:330) states that 'Dickinson realizes that she has been buried for many years'. The last stanza implies that she is still travelling with her special driver. It is centuries since she has gone to the grave, but that first day felt longer than the succeeding centuries (Since then—'tis

centuries—and yet / Feels shorter than the Day), so when she enters eternity time stops, it seems a kind of description of what immortality is. As Farr (1997:330) points out, at 'the end of the poem she has achieved eternity (...) The poem is thus her supreme assertion of the continuance of the soul or self'.

Dickinson also talks about her own death, the poem *I felt a Funeral, in my Brain*, (280) deals with her own death, the fact is contrasted with the activities of the people in the house. The poem begins with the idea of the funeral that feels the dying person and with the image of a mourner witnessing the death of the relative. The person who is about to die is conscious of her own death and conscious of the death of her consciousness, as the first line indicates. Dickinson is contrasting the viewpoint and actions of the mourners with that of the speaker, the dying person. Mourners are treading, after are seated, and the service comes. She is describing the rite of a funeral, which is contrasted with the real and specific moment of dying (A service, like a Drum— / Kept beating—beating—till I thought / My mind was going numb—). In the next stanzas she places the mourners and the dying person in two spaces in order to stress the fact of crossing the border between life and death, and according to Farr (1997:90) it is in the tenth line when 'does the poem make clear that this funeral records the steady failure of the various sentinels of perception'. I agree with Farr in that the poem depicts a travel from feeling to not knowing. Death eventually comes in the last stanza with a final "then" which symbolises the end of the journey through the border between life and death. (And then a Plank in reason, broke, / And I dropped down, and down— / And hit a World, at every plunge, / And Finished knowing—then--). However Farr (1997:90) states that 'the last "then" followed by its dash, suggest the continuity of the intellect (...) the speaker is still alive, think and record it'. I do not agree with Farr, I read the last 'then' as the last step toward death, as the moment of loss of consciousness.

The poem is similar to her poem *I heard a Fly Buzz—when I died—* (465) in the sense that both of them deal with the very moment of dying and both are told by a first person speaker, but in 465 she does not compare her death with what is going on in the house, she only talks about the moment of dying. In the first stanza she is conscious of her own death and she describes the atmosphere of the room. According to Farr (1997: 310) the speaker is

already dead, 'Dickinson audacious opening line demands that her reader listen to the remembrance of a dead person whose consciousness has so survived the transitus that it can describe for us the first step of the journey', (I heard a Fly Buzz—when I died— / The stillness in the Room / Was like the Stillness in the Air—). In this stanza I can already perceive the border between life and death, the stillness in the air and in the room are a kind of contrasting border together with the Fly buzz that she hears when dying. In the second stanza people do not cry, there is a moment of silence when 'the king' (death personalised) enters the room. This moment represents the end of life, which usually ends with a last will and with a testament, (I willed my Keepsakes—Signed away /What portion of me be / Assignable—and then it was / There interposed a Fly—) . The fly that appears in the room is the last thing that the dying person sees; a fly is something so insignificant for us that it creates an intense contrast with the fact of witnessing the death of a person. According to Farr (1997:310), it represents 'a suggestion of the puzzlement that is life as well as its homely sweetness', and according to R. Lee (229) 'the Fly's buzz, the aimless, intrusive noise which plays into and against the “stillness” of the death-chamber, yields nothing less than a drama of the grotesque, the formality of leave-taking from life and one's home and family subverted by this frenetic winged intruder, an unwitting insect messenger of the very last moment of consciousness'. The last stanza describes the end of the journey, the moment of dying, (And then the Windows failed—and then / I could not see to see—). The last line is the last step, she crosses the frontier. Robert Lee (229) points out that the last line 'takes us right to the very edge of life, the penultimate moment of sensation, an astonishing imaginative feat'. I think this line offers several possibilities to think about: we know that when we die there is nothing we can see because we are actually dead, however it can be thought that another cycle begins in the silence of that first step towards Eternity. Perhaps it has to do with Dickinson's thoughts on religion and agnosticism, it is not clear in this poem whether she still keeps the faith on religion or not.

These three poems, 280, 465 and 712, describe strongly the frontier, it is difficult to say whether the poems are told after the supposed death of the speaker or not, Judith Farr (1997: 6) states that E. Dickinson represents the medieval belief known as *Transitus*, a process describing the progressive distancing of the soul from the body, 'in nineteenth-

century parlance it was sometimes called the “crossover”, souls borne aloft by angels to meet Christ in the air'. I do not completely agree with Farr, I think E. Dickinson probably thought about the Transitus although I do not believe her concerns were about this concept. She aims at going deeper into the abyss of death and reporting back on what she finds there, on what she is interested in, on the new discovered place as a source of poetic knowledge, and she does it from the frontier. I believe these poems are told from the frontier.

In *I've seen a Dying Eye* (547) she contemplates death from outside and focuses on the moment of dying. There is a dying person and the frontier between life and death appears again. In the first three lines the fact of dying appears focused on the eyes of the person, (I've seen a Dying eye / Run round and round a room), it is a powerful scene, it is as if the eyes were disembodied in order to concentrate specifically on the transition from life to death. The fact of dying itself happens when the eyes become cloudier, (Then Cloudier become—/And then—obscure with Fog— / And then—be soldered down), that is the beginning of the journey across the frontier. The process seems to be completed with the last "then" followed by the dash. As in other poems it is difficult to say whether the word 'then--' represents the last step of life or the first step toward eternity. The last two lines correspond with the last thoughts about life, (Without disclosing what it be / 'Twere blessed to have seen), and it can also be understood that it is impossible to see what is beyond the frontier. I think the poem gives a strong sense of agnosticism created by the powerful image of the dying eye and its transition from life to death.

In *It was not Death, for I stood up* (510), she does not describe the moment of dying, she contemplates death from outside. In the first two stanzas the speaker talks about the impression that death creates on her, death appears as the inevitable moment awaiting for men and as the process nobody is prepared for. Death is depicted by means of a succession of ordered figures which in the third stanza remind her of her own death, (And yet, it tasted, like them all, / The figures I have seen / Set orderly, for Burial, / Reminded me, of mine—) Then, in the fourth stanza she begins to talk about her own death, about the moment in which everything stops and 'despair' can be felt. In this poem I do not think 'despair' might be an equivalent to salvation or eternity. The poem shows the suffering we may feel on the brink of death, there is not a conciliatory thought of immortality. Death is not what she

needs to reach the romantic imagination, it is a travel of suffering without salvation.

The poem *The Bustle in a House* (1078) begins with a description of the day after the death of a dear person. It is only the morning after, but there is a 'bustle' of everyday activity, a return to normality to subdue grief, (*The Bustle in a House / The Morning after Death / Is solemnest of industries / Enacted upon Earth—*). In the second stanza she describes the feelings people have when a relative dies, the sorrow that Death represents for us. (*The Sweeping up the Heart / And putting Love away / We shall not want to use again / Until Eternity*). It is different from other poems in the last line, where she makes a more definite affirmation of immortality.

In regard to religion and faith, there is an oscillation in her mind, in some poems she mentions eternity as a new life, in others she shows a strong sense of existentialism. Dorothy Huff Oberhaus, however, regards Dickinson as a Christian poet. She has studied Franklin's *Manuscript Books* considering Dickinson's fascicular arrangement of the poems. According to Oberhaus death means a path toward salvation in Dickinson's poetry, 'her concerns, like those of other devotional poets, are often eschatological – death for her, a Christian experience, a transit from what she calls in F-40's first poem the “Street of Existence” to what she calls in F-40's final poem the “New Horizons” of eternity' (Oberhaus, 7). She also states that Dickinson has not always been regarded as a Christian poet since her poems have been read outside their context, 'one of the most important reasons many twentieth-century readers have missed the Christian nature of E. Dickinson's mind and art is that until Franklin reconstructed the fascicles and made them available to readers in his 1981 *Manuscript Books*, we have been reading the poems outside their fascicle context. And it is their fascicle context which creates their meaning'. Therefore according to Oberhaus each poem should be read taking into account its context so that the sense of existentialism showed in many of the poems might be understood in a 'Christian way'. I do not completely disagree with Oberhaus, I think the context of the poems is really important although I find difficult thinking of E. Dickinson as a 'faithful christian'. Harold Bloom has a different viewpoint as well, he does not consider E. Dickinson as a christian poet but as a post-christian poet, I agree with Bloom (1994:295) when he states that 'Dickinson's seems essentially cognitive (...) Her anguish is intellectual but not religious, and all attempts to read her as a devotional poet have crashed badly. The entity named God

has a very rough career in her poetry and is treated with considerably less respect and understanding than the rival entity she names Death'. Similarly, Margarita Ardanaz's (1992: 31) comments on death point out E. Dickinson as an agnostic poet,

vemos que la idea de la muerte en sus poemas va siempre asociada a la de la vida y a la del amor. No mantiene la idea puritana de la muerte como principio de una nueva vida sin fin. La muerte nunca es para ella paso hacia la otra vida o hacia la eternidad. No es via hacia, sino camino en sí mismo (...) su postura ante la muerte es, ante todo un absurdo inexplicable.

Ardanaz points up the positive aspects of death found in many Dickinson's poems. I think the positive aspects are always associated to the romantic concept of death as the mother of beauty. Thus, as Ardanaz states, death is a path in itself, a path to be discovered. Ardanaz also points out the agnosticism and existentialism of E. Dickinson. It is a controversial point if we consider there are poems suggesting death as a path toward salvation. In (712) *Because I could not stop for Death*, the last stanza seems a description of what immortality is. Similarly, in (1078) *The Bustle in a House* the end of the poem constitutes a stable affirmation of immortality. Both poems make difficult to regard E. Dickinson as an agnostic person. However in (547) *I've seen a Dying Eye* I think there is a strong sense of agnosticism showed in the description of the transition from life to death. In (49) *I never lost as much but twice* and in (640) *I cannot live with you*, God appears as the supposed Supreme Being incapable of consoling her for the loss suffered.

There are other poems in which E. Dickinson does not show feelings of salvation or scepticism toward religion. In (241) *I like a look of agony* and in (822) *This consciousness that is aware*, death appears as a positive act of authenticity, which leads E. Dickinson to depict the specific moment of dying in such poems as (28) *I felt a Funeral, in my Brain* and (465) *I heard a Fly buzz – when I died*. Dickinson describes thoroughly the moment of dying exactly from the frontier in order to reach the expression of irrationality, and as in (449) *I died for Beauty – but was scarce*, to reach the romantic source sought by the poet,

the mother of beauty.

To sum up, it can be said that E. Dickinson talks about death from an objective viewpoint, as the imperceptible fact which happens everyday, death is associated to life and nature. In some of her poems appears the religious idea of death as a new endless life, eternity. Then she talks about death as a desire for salvation. In other poems, however, she regards death as a path itself, showing some aspects of existentialism and agnosticism. There are many other poems where death is seen positively, as a part of the cycle of nature where we are the continuum between life and death. There is an interest in death as much as in the fact of dying and witnessing it, in the border between the rational vs the irrational, the conscious vs the unconscious, language vs silence. In these poems she is like a frontier explorer. Dickinson does not simply go into the abyss in the hope of discerning what lies beyond religious beliefs, she crosses the frontier to tell what she finds there. It can be understood as a way of exploring the unknown and the hidden part of the mind, dramatizing death. It is a way of exceeding the limits of the human consciousness trapped in time. It is in these poems she turns out to be a Romantic poet interested in the unknown. She attempts to describe death, and consequently silence, through language, thus she fulfills the romantic role of filling the gap represented in the frontier, she puts into words what death and silence mean. A meaning which lies beyond rationality, so that for her, death is the source of the romantic imagination, the moment of unconscious revelation.

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(49)

I never lost as much but twice,  
And that was in the sod.  
Twice have I stood a beggar  
Before the door of God!

Angels -- twice descending  
Reimbursed my store --  
Burglar! Banker -- Father!  
I am poor once more!

(640)

I cannot live with You --  
It would be Life --  
And Life is over there --  
Behind the Shelf

The Sexton keeps the Key to --  
Putting up  
Our Life -- His Porcelain --  
Like a Cup --

Discarded of the Housewife --  
Quaint -- or Broke --  
A newer Sevres pleases --  
Old Ones crack --

I could not die -- with You --  
For One must wait  
To shut the Other's Gaze down --  
You -- could not --

And I -- Could I stand by  
And see You -- freeze --  
Without my Right of Frost --  
Death's privilege?

Nor could I rise -- with You --  
Because Your Face  
Would put out Jesus' --  
That New Grace

Glow plain -- and foreign  
On my homesick Eye --  
Except that You than He  
Shone closer by --

They'd judge Us -- How --  
For You -- served Heaven -- You know,  
Or sought to --  
I could not --

Because You saturated Sight --  
And I had no more Eyes  
For sordid excellence  
As Paradise

And were You lost, I would be --  
Though My Name  
Rang loudest  
On the Heavenly fame --

And were You -- saved --  
And I -- condemned to be  
Where You were not --  
That self -- were Hell to Me --

So We must meet apart --  
You there -- I -- here --  
With just the Door ajar  
That Oceans are -- and Prayer --  
And that White Sustenance --  
Despair --

(241)

I like a look of Agony,  
Because I know it's true --  
Men do not sham Convulsion,  
Nor simulate, a Throe --

The Eyes glaze once -- and that is Death --  
Impossible to feign  
The Beads upon the Forehead  
By homely Anguish strung

(449)

I died for Beauty -- but was scarce  
Adjusted in the Tomb  
When One who died for Truth, was lain  
In an adjoining room --

He questioned softly "Why I failed"?  
"For Beauty", I replied --  
"And I -- for Truth -- Themself are One --  
We Brethren, are", He said --

And so, as Kinsmen, met at Night --  
We talked between the Rooms --  
Until the Moss had reached our lips --  
And covered up -- our names --

(712)

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 Cornice -- in the Ground --

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

(754)

My Life had stood -- a Loaded Gun --  
In Corners -- till a Day  
The Owner passed -- identified --  
And carried Me away --

And now We roam in Sovereign Woods --  
And now We hunt the Doe --  
And every time I speak for Him --  
The Mountains straight reply --

And do I smile, such cordial light  
Upon the Valley glow --  
It is as a Vesuvian face  
Had let its pleasure through --

And when at Night -- Our good Day done --  
I guard My Master's Head --  
'Tis better than the Eider-Duck's  
Deep Pillow -- to have shared --

To foe of His -- I'm deadly foe --  
None stir the second time --  
On whom I lay a Yellow Eye --  
Or an emphatic Thumb --

Though I than He -- may longer live  
He longer must -- than I --  
For I have but the power to kill,  
Without -- the power to die --

(510)

It was not Death, for I stood up,  
And all the Dead, lie down --  
It was not Night, for all the Bells  
Put out their Tongues, for Noon.

It was not Frost, for on my Flesh  
I felt Siroccos -- crawl --  
Nor Fire -- for just my Marble feet  
Could keep a Chancel, cool --

And yet, it tasted, like them all,  
The Figures I have seen  
Set orderly, for Burial,  
Reminded me, of mine --

As if my life were shaven,  
And fitted to a frame,  
And could not breathe without a key,  
And 'twas like Midnight, some -

When everything that ticked -- has stopped --  
And Space stares all around --  
Or Grisly frosts -- first Autumn morns,  
Repeal the Beating Ground --

But, most, like Chaos - Stopless -- cool --  
Without a Change, or Spar --  
Or even a Report of Land --  
To justify -- Despair.

(822)

This Consciousness that is aware  
Of Neighbors and the Sun  
Will be the one aware of Death  
And that itself alone

Is traversing the interval  
Experience between  
And most profound experiment  
Appointed unto Men --

How adequate unto itself  
Its properties shall be  
Itself unto itself and none  
Shall make discovery.

Adventure most unto itself  
The Soul condemned to be --  
Attended by a single Hound  
Its own identity.

(1078)

The Bustle in a House  
The Morning after Death  
Is solemnest of industries  
Enacted upon Earth --

The Sweeping up the Heart  
And putting Love away  
We shall not want to use again  
Until Eternity.

(547)

I've seen a Dying Eye  
Run round and round a Room --  
In search of Something -- as it seemed --  
Then Cloudier become --  
And then -- obscure with Fog --  
And then -- be soldered down  
Without disclosing what it be  
'Twere blessed to have seen --

(280)

I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,  
And Mourners to and fro  
Kept treading -- treading -- till it seemed  
That Sense was breaking through --

And when they all were seated,  
A Service, like a Drum --  
Kept beating -- beating -- till I thought  
My Mind was going numb --

And then I heard them lift a Box  
And creak across my Soul  
With those same Boots of Lead, again,  
Then Space -- began to toll,

As all the Heavens were a Bell,  
And Being, but an Ear,  
And I, and Silence, some strange Race  
Wrecked, solitary, here --

And then a Plank in Reason, broke,  
And I dropped down, and down --  
And hit a World, at every plunge,  
And Finished knowing -- then --

(465)

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 --