Forms of 'Anxiety' in the Anglo-American Poetic Tradition: Keats and Dickinson in Imaginary Conversation

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Abstract

Drawing on Heidegger's conception of 'dwelling' and 'being', my thesis introduces different forms of 'anxiety' with regards to existential philosophy present in poetic language. Focused on the work of two major poets in the Anglo-American tradition, my thesis offers a comparative reading of the treatment of anxiety in the poetry of John Keats and Emily Dickinson. My thesis approaches the term 'anxiety' not as a form of despair, but as a mood of uncertainty and a continuous state of being in relation to these poets' dialogue with existence, desire, and death, as well as spirituality, nature and imagination. The research sheds light on a new understating of anxiety as it manifests itself in both Keats and Dickinson's poetry, which is articulated through ideas about the role of anxiety drawn from Heidegger's philosophy. Consequently, Heidegger's ideas provide a critical lens, which helps to articulate the various forms of anxiety present in the poetics of Keats and Dickinson. My intention is to demonstrate how anxiety finds expression in poetic language, and in turn how poetry can both intensify and find possible resolutions to the problem of anxiety in the writings of Keats and Dickinson. My thesis hopes to demonstrate how Keats and Dickinson's modes of anxiety, ultimately, centre on questions of poetic identity and posthumous legacy.

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Declaration

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To My Dear Motherland

Chapter 1

Introduction

Forms of Anxiety in Anglo-American Poetic Tradition: Keats and Dickinson in Imaginary Conversation

This thesis reads the poetry of Emily Dickinson and John Keats in relation to one another by focusing on a number of key topics that manifest themselves as different forms of anxiety. My primary interest is in the way in which anxiety is manifested through poets' use of poetic language. I approach this topic with reference to Heidegger's later reflections on a series of existential concerns and drawing on these ideas offer readings of the treatment of varying forms of anxiety in the poetry of Keats and Dickinson. Heidegger's ideas provide a critical lens, which helps to articulate the various forms of anxiety present in the poetics of Keats and Dickinson. My broader intention is to demonstrate how anxiety finds expression in poetic language, and in turn how poetry can both intensify and find possible resolutions to the problem of anxiety. My emphasis here is not on a Bloomian 'anxiety of influence' and the fraught tensions between Keats and Dickinson.[1] Instead I focus on the significance and reach of the different forms that anxiety takes in the Anglo-American tradition represented by the works of Keats and Dickinson. This comparative study of the poetry of Keats and Dickinson does, however, recognize that Dickinson thought of herself as a self-declared inheritor of Keats' writings.

[1] See Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973).

1.1 Critical Receptions, Connections, and Conversations: Keats and Dickinson

Most representative of early Keats' legacy studies was George Ford's *Keats and the Victorians*[2] which, effectively, established Keats' association with Victorian writers, including Tennyson, Arnold, Hopkins, Morris and Rossetti. Some years afterwards, Jerome Bump began to further consider Keats' influence in Victorian poetry, specifically on the style of Hopkins' early poems,[3] which was shaped by Keats' preference for sensation and pictorial stasis. A similar sense of Keats' lasting influence has been maintained throughout Mark Sandy's chapter, in Michael O'Neill's edited book, *Keats in Context*, which demonstrates Keats' extensive influences on British and American writers.[4] Sandy particularly points out Dickinson's engagement with Keats, or rather, her acceptance and questioning of Keats' negative poetic intensity as well as the transient and contingent nature of existence.[5]

Identifying links between Keats and Dickinson, Michael Yetman's earlier study mapped a forest of intertextuality between Dickinson's works with those of the English Romantic tradition. Yetman concluded that Keats probably has, after Emerson, the strongest influence on Dickinson's works.[6] Yetman identified Keats' device of the uncertain 'waking dream' as an important influence on Dickinson's poetic treatment of states of awareness and consciousness. Dickinson simplified the technique by directly placing herself as speaker in the realm of imagination. Also, Yetman found out the consonant attitudes of the two poets towards the sacred function and position of poetry and, similarly to Keats, Dickinson viewed poetry as the highest perfection of mankind.

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[2] George Harry Ford, *Keats and the Victorians: A Study of his Influence and Rise to Fame, 1821-1895* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1944).
[3] Jerome Bump, 'Hopkins and Keats', *Victorian Poetry* (1974), 33-43.
[4] George Ford also considered Keats' relation to some non-English poets including Rilke and Mallarme.
[5] Mark Sandy, 'American Writing', in *John Keats in Context* ed. by Michael O'Neill, (Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp.304-305.
[6] Michael Yetman, 'Emily Dickinson and the English Romantic Tradition', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language 15(1)* (1973), 129-147, pp.131, 139.

Subsequently, Laura Gribbin argued for a more antagonistic exchange between Dickinson and Keats in which Dickinson is influenced by Keats' transcendental imagination and resistant to it.[7] Gribbin argues that Dickinson uses a pared-down, laconic poetic means to establish some kind of autonomy and imaginative parameters, in a bid to create a space of her own free from the often all too masculine impulses of the Romantic imagination. An alternative way of configuring Dickinson's response to Keats has been made by Richard Brantley, whose reading emphasizes Dickinson's concern with the physicality of sound and the ear as organ of sound as a reaction against Keats' 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', where we find that the ditties are of no tone.[8]

A more sustained consideration of Keats and Dickinson is to be found in Richard Gravil's *Romantic Dialogues*, which more fully sees Dickinson and Keats in imaginary conversation with one another in the broader contexts of Romantic legacies and Anglo-American tradition.[9] A number of studies published both before and after Gravil's critical study signpost the importance of this Anglo-American context for the imaginative exchange between Keats and Dickinson. These include, but are not limited to, Paul Giles' book, which argues that British culture impacts on American literature in the period of 1730-1860, and in what ways American writers of that time can be understood as responding to their English forebears.[10] Richard Gravil not only shares similar perspectives of the inherent relationship between these Anglo-American writers, but also pays attention to the intertextuality that connects their works. Robert Weisbuch's monograph probes into the evolutionary and unique American national characteristics, which differ from British literary

[7] Laura Gribbin, 'Emily Dickinson's circumference: figuring a blind spot in the romantic tradition', *The Emily Dickinson Journal 2(1)* (1993), 1-21 (p.15).
[8] Richard E. Brantley, 'Dickinson the Romantic', *Christianity and Literature 46(3-4)*, (1997), 243-271 (p.251).
[9] Richard Gravil, *Romantic Dialogues: Anglo-American Continuities, 1776-1862* 2nd edition (New York, NY: Palgrave-St Martins, 2015).
[10] Paul Giles, *Transatlantic insurrections: British culture and the formation of American literature,1730-1860* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001)

customs.[11] More recently, an edited book by Eve Tavor Bannet and Susan Manning explores the influences of British writers on American writers to show how questions of politics, gender, race and war are never easily disentangled from the complexities of literary ideas and forms.[12]

The diversely imaginary dialogues between Keats and Dickinson mentioned above are all accredited to a wider context of transatlantic cross-cultural encounters beyond Romantic tradition, and such cultural and literary exchanges, in turn, provide the discussion of Keats and Dickinson with systematic and conceptual insistence. Besides the abundant discussions of Anglo-American tradition in Romantic literary discourse, the cultural encounter is also observed in Victorian and modern discourses across Britain and America. John Beer's focus is on post-Romantic consciousness derived from the Romantic period that concerns humanity and its affinity to divinity.[13] Beer takes account of Heidegger's consideration of 'Being' as an inspiration to rethink the dilemma of existence.

Alexandra Harris inherits Beer's concern about the problem of 'individuality' during the cultural encounters, and shares a common interest in Virginia Woolf with Beer; however, she sets her views of cultural exchange on modernism vertically in Britain and horizontally in America and tries to seek harmony with the past. The traditional continuity between individuality and sublimity is fundamentally interrupted by modernism when 'newness', 'cleanness' and 'purity' invades the era.[14] Harris endeavours to restore the strong network of cultural encounters for British Romanticism and Victorianism by recovering the past in modern artistic works, everything

[11] Robert Weisbuch, *Atlantic Double-Cross: American Literature and British Influence in the Age of Emerson* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1986).
[12] Eve Tavor Bannet & Susan Manning, *Transatlantic Literary Studies 1660-1830* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011).
[13] John Beer, *Post-Romantic Consciousness: Dickens to Plath* (London: Springer, 2003).
[14] Alexandra Harris, *Romantic Moderns: English Writers, Artists and the Imagination from Virginia Woolf to John Piper* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2010).

including culture, landscape, and even weather.

In the latest work of Mark Sandy, he returns to his view on Romantic tradition again and has shown a newly specific perspective to the influence of second-generation romantic writers on American literary writings with regards to the manifestations of aesthetics, subjectivity and the natural world in transatlantic imagination. The continuing transformation of the environment between the Old and New World offers an insight for the decreasing favour of romantic form in Europe, but part of American writings remains its fascination to British Romantic genre.[15] The exploration of the dialectic of emotion versus impersonality in terms of different shades of subjectivity during influence and inheritance implies a Romantic focus with the figures in landscapes of nature in Sandy's discussion. His monograph foregrounds the aesthetic potential of redefining the essence of different transatlantic exchanges and celebrates the possibilities found in the cultural encounters. Keats and Dickinson, in particular, are posited as a literary pairing and described as being similar in terms of affinity and also conscious influence. Keats' Romantic poems share many preoccupations with affections as Dickinson writes her own romantically inflected though profoundly independent poetry.

In fact, Dickinson's interest in the writings of Keats is nurtured in her whole lifetime. Gravil points to Dickinson's response – "You inquire my Books – For Poets – I have Keats"[16] – and shows her direct imaginative bond to Keats. Gravil also compares some selected poems by Dickinson (Poem 1540, 130, 465, 632 and 308) with Keats' Odes to tease out her direct allusions to Keats and her consonance with, as well as scepticism towards, a Romantic tradition.[17] From Keats, Dickinson

[15] Mark Sandy, *Transatlantic Transformations of Romanticism: Aesthetics, Subjectivity and the Environment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021)
[16] Richard Gravil, p.315.
[17] Richard Gravil, p.316.

inherited a reverence for the beauties of poetry and the natural world, but like other critics before, Gravil places considerable emphasis on Dickinson's needs to 'clear herself a space'[18] as a female poet within the echo chamber of the Romantic poets. A number of eruptions by Dickinson's literary rebellion pave the way for the 19th century American emergence of slight revision to British Romanticism. Yet, noteworthy of Gravil's account are the melancholy themes that appeared in both the poetry of Keats and Dickinson, including death, nightmare and struggles with mortal love.[19] 'Melancholy' is precisely considered as a Romantic legacy by Simon Swift as the term defines the sense of lost and retained, identification and disavowal.[20] The term itself is a manifestation of romantic aesthetics. Binod Mishra takes the sense further and concretizes it via comparing the death wish of Keats and Dickinson through evaluating the complicated attitudes of both poets towards death in relation to disease, deprivation and desolation.[21]

Others have read Dickinson as an advocate of a late-Romantic imagination more positively. Richard Brantley states that Keats, together with other Romantic poets, inspires Dickinson to achieve the natural and spiritual synthesis, which opens up to her in the imaginative possibilities of dwelling. Brantley regards Keats' influence as shaping Dickinson's ideas on poetic tone and identity. Dickinson's faith in experience, in turn, is an extension of Keats' concern about the holiness of the heart's affections and the truth of imagination.[22]

Subsequently, Elizabeth Petrino has confirmed Dickinson's acknowledgement of Keats' presence within her work in the broader context of Dickinson's allusions to Shakespeare, Milton,

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[18] Ibid
[19] Richard Gravil, pp.322, 335.
[20] Simon Swift, 'Romanticism and Unhappiness', in *Legacies of Romanticism, Literature, Culture, Aesthetics* ed. Carmen Casaliggi and Paul March Russel (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012), Chapter 15.
[21] Binod Mishra, 'A Comparative Study of Death Wish in the Poetry of Emily Dickinson and John Keats', in *Studies in Literature in English* Volume X ed. Mohit K. Ray (India: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2005), pp.59-70.
[22] Richard Brantley, *Experience and Faith: The Late Romantic Imagination of Emily Dickinson* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp.13, 16, 21, 25, 78, 82.

Wordsworth, and Frost.[23] More importantly, Petrino identifies a triangular connection between Keats, Emerson and Dickinson in terms of their ideas about, and treatment of truth and beauty, especially evident in Dickinson's reinterpretation of Emerson's understanding of Keats in *Nature* (1836). She also asserts a treble link among Keats, Browning and Dickinson with regards to the idea of 'Restlessness', and to the relationship between art and immortality. For Petrino, Keats' 'To Autumn' also emerges as a pivotal text for Dickinson's senses of the season as providing 'delusive promises'. Important for my own research, Petrino recognizes connections between Keats and Dickinson that centre on poetic landscapes and art, and on a variety of issues of death, immortality, truth and beauty.

Taking up many of these key topics, Michelle Kohler's article is among the most comprehensive critical study to consider the shared imagery and poetic concerns between Keats and Dickinson. Kohler's account not only stresses the poets' treatment of death and landscapes, but also focuses on the figure of 'autumn' through contrasting the structural and formal differences of Keats' odes and Dickinson's six 'autumn poems'.[24] Ryan Cull, similarly, studied the lyric as genre in Keats and Dickinson. Cull focuses on Keats' influence on Dickinson with regards to the relationship between poems and poetic personae. Cull argues that Keats saw a discard of egotism in the lyrics on the basis of defining human beings as being disinterested and other-focused; By contrast, Dickinson insisted on considering human beings as being selfish and possessive, although she shared, with different emphases, a similar critique of the 'egotistical sublime' with Keats.[25]

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[23] Elizabeth Petrino, 'Allusion, echo, and literary influence in Emily Dickinson', *The Emily Dickinson Journal 19(1)* (2010), 80-102 (pp.83, 85).
[24] Michelle Kohler, 'The ode unfamiliar: Dickinson, Keats, and the (battle) fields of autumn', *The Emily Dickinson Journal 22(1)* (2013), 30-54.
[25] Ryan Cull, 'Interrogating the 'egotistical sublime': Keats and Dickinson Near the Dawn of Lyricization?', *The Emily Dickinson Journal 22(1)* (2013), 55-73.

Many of these critical approaches to Keats and Dickinson are indebted to Joanne Feit Diehl's seminal study, *Dickinson and the Romantic Imagination*, which excavated an array of diverse, but shared, literary themes between Keats and Dickinson. Diehl puts the emphasis on the tension between the self and the other in the poems of Keats and Dickinson, comparing their perspectives on nature and truth, mortal love and erotic others, self-sufficiency, poetic dreams, nightmare, death and betrayal. Diehl detects in Dickinson's poetic intensity, a desire to both separate herself from romantic aspirations and to maintain a benign reciprocity between her poetic identity and Romanticism.[26]

Questions of poetic identity have been most recently explored in Tenney Nathanson's focus on the dynamic trajectory of poetic selfhood in the work of Keats and Dickinson. Nathanson is adept in capturing the kinetic relay of the image of bird, which permits the poetry of Keats and Dickinson to participate, imaginatively, in the existence of outer forces and, paradoxically, realize a sharp identification of individual identity. The uncertainty of identities caused by such an imaginative dynamic process reveals Dickinson's own interest in Keats' negatively capable poetics.[27] Having gone some way to comprehending how Keats' legacy has operated in the critical discussion of Romanticism and within Romantic aesthetics, the thesis is reassessing the value of Keats' legacies and in what way is Keats and Dickinson's imaginary dialogue outstanding among multifarious romantic legacies. Dickinson has embraced a quasi-romantic sublimity to revise the transcendental tradition in American literature, but is not entirely enchanted by Romantic illusions. The thesis will seek the importance of romanticism to an understanding of Dickinson's oeuvre in future debate to

[26] Joanne Feit Diehl, *Dickinson and the Romantic Imagination* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), pp.68-121.
[27] Tenney Nathanson, "The Birds Swim through the Air at Top Speed': Kinetic Identification in Keats, Whitman, Stevens, and Dickinson (Notes toward a Poetics)', *Critical Inquiry 42(2)* (2016), 395-410.

show how Dickinson plays with her British forebears.

1.2 Defining Anxiety: Keats and Dickinson

Current scholarship on Keats and Dickinson chiefly concentrates on thematic and linguistic allusions and echoes. Much of the criticism is interested in a parallel comparison between both poets, such as a parallel between their desire for death, between the structure of their season poems, and between the lyric changes in their poetry. An equal proportion of criticism is curious about Dickinson's struggle to position herself in relation to the Romantic tradition, especially as represented by Keats' poetry and his ideas about the imagination. Both Keats and Dickinson, as many critics agree, treat differently the relationship between the self and the other, the sublimity, nature, a synthesis with spirit and body, death and the imagination. Both Dickinson and Keats share, with varying degrees, a poetic sensibility of a negatively capable uncertainty, which stresses emotion, feeling, and the senses. My thesis suggests that these poetic encounters with the self, nature, the spiritual, the sublime, death, and the imagination are characterized by different forms of anxiety in the writings of Keats and Dickinson.

Psychologists give 'anxiety' a definition that is conceptualized as a response to an unidentifiable threat or an anticipated danger.[28] In Freud's interpretation, anxiety is considered as a point when various questions gather together, and like a riddle with a solution that requires human beings to shed light on their mental existence. Scholarship has considered the term 'anxiety' in literature from the following aspects: anxiety produced in the process of reception and inheritance,[29]

[28] Robin Kowalski, 'Anxiety', in *Encyclopedia of Psychology: Vol. 1*, ed. by Alan Kazdin, (Oxford/Washington: Oxford University Press and American Psychological Association, 2000), p.209.
[29] Kerry Robertson, 'Anxiety, influence, tradition and subversion in the poetry of Eavan Boland', *Colby quarterly 30(4)* (1994), 264-278.

tension between spirit and language through anxiety,[30] poetry as a psychotherapy for anxiety,[31] and anxiety as a socially and poetically constitutive force in literary works.[32] The discussion of anxiety in terms of revealing the tension between spirit and language, by Lisa Hinrichsen, shows a kind of transformation from general uncertainty to 'object-specific fear'. It is not to say that there exists a named object, however, it points to the fear that should be towards some potential objects, which can be nothingness as well. Anxiety is accompanied by consistent confusion and chaos, but in face of such conditions, poets try to form a self-protective relationship with the world by changing their visual and linguistic perspectives and releasing the pressure contained in the poems. Poetry, therefore, is endowed with a power that can both restrain and unbosom the tension after objects are visualized in its language. Hinrichsen understands anxiety in literature as 'nebulous',[33] uncertain in origins and ends, and hard to describe in mind and language yet truly exists to influence the shape of literature. Clearly, from Hinrichsen's analysis, literature, or poetry, also has the power to process, reshape and release this anxiety.

Expanding Freud's definition of anxiety that happens in each phase of mental development, covering from the trauma of birth, separation, fear of loss to fear of death, Melih Levi's reconstruction of this term is set both in poetic and social levels to reshape literary works. In the social realm, Levi discusses the sense of 'exclusion' which originates from the loss of the desire for autonomy. Such anxiety is produced socially when poets feel themselves falling outside of the mainstream discourse. In poetic language, however, Levi defines the anxiety of poets as a structural

[30] Lisa Hinrichsen, 'A Defensive Eye: Anxiety, fear and Form in the poetry of Robert Frost', *Journal of Modern Literature* (2008), 44-57.
[31] Youkhabeh Mohammadian, et al. 'Evaluating the use of poetry to reduce signs of depression, anxiety', *The arts in psychotherapy 38(1)* (2011), 59-63.
[32] Melih Levi, 'Anxiety and Imagery in Attila Ilhan's poetry', *Middle Eastern Studies 56(4)* (2020), 653-663.
[33] Lisa Hinrichsen, p.44.

one when poetry is at the stage of being 'not without object',[34] following Lacan's double negative. Anxiety manifests from poets' attempts to sustain their images. Compared with Hinrichsen's understanding, Levi's reinterpretation of anxiety gets closer to existential issues when he notices a new tendency of Turkish poets representing mundane topics rather than sublime ones in their poetry in an unorthodox way. Levi's framework inspires us to define anxiety not merely as affective displacement, but more broadly, as a condition that all lives will experience from birth to death.

In the British Romantic tradition and its receptions, anxiety has been placed mainly in the discussion of influence and inheritance. Lucy Newly demonstrates how readers of Romanticism are imagined and theorized in criticism under intertextual relationship and reader-response practice. [35] The sense of the reader on the authorship, posthumous reputation, and identification of the author is stressed. Keats, in particular, belongs to this discussion as a Romantic figure as well as a Romantic reader of Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey. The anxiety of Keats in the reception of Romanticism is implied when 'Keats did not wholly identify with high Romantic ideology but held to his own version of the Miltonic belief'.[36] In addition, there are two early attempts of categorizing Keats' anxiety into different kinds: anxiety of separation, engulfment, [37] and perception, [38] which establishes an important guiding light for my research.

Susan Wolfson detects Keats' anxiety about his own poetic creation and poetic identity through his letter writing in response to the uncertain pressure from others.[39] This is elaborated by

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[34] Melih Levi, p.654.
[35] Lucy Newlyn, *Reading, Writing, and Romanticism: The Anxiety of Reception* (Oxford: Oxford University Press on Demand, 2003).
[36] Lucy Newlyn, p.275.
[37] Craig Powell, 'Creativity and the boundaries of the Self: Separation and engulfment anxiety in Keats and Poe', *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry 19(4)* (1985), 355-361.
[38] Jr Deanna and Peter Paul, *Keats and the anxiety of perception: the influence of eighteenth-century psychological criticism* (College Park, MD: University of Maryland, 1983).
[39] Susan Wolfson, 'Keats the letter-writer: Epistolary poetics', *Nineteenth Century Contexts 6(2)* (1982), 43-61 (p.58).

Jon Mee in the introduction to Gitting's edition of Keats' *Selected Letters*, in which anxiety is categorized as a kind of 'social insecurity'.[40] Mee attributes Keats' anxiety to his choice of living in creative uncertainty. As we have seen, something similar can be imagined across Dickinson's poetry and its treatment of gender, spirituality, death and the afterlife.[41] At the same time, Dickinson's attempt to clear herself a space in romantic discussion undoubtedly reveals her anxiety of inheritance and identity. From existing scholarship, anxiety, which we can primarily observe in poetry, still serves as an affective term. Yet in all, the understanding of anxiety in poetry always connects to how anxiety binds its energy into poetic forms and also how poets respond to it through presenting emotional displacements in the ritual of poetry.

Often in literary criticism, the term 'anxiety' relies heavily on psychological tensions, with a clear tendency to associate 'anxiety' with a sense of 'disorder' and perceived as a 'problem' to be overcome. Specifically, in fiction, the emotional state of protagonists is quite frequently evaluated through anxiety. As poetry, however, existing works only partially represent the range of literary responses to 'anxiety' with a link to 'identity' in particular. In the current consideration of the relations between anxiety and literature, I narrow my focus to concentrate upon the poetry of Keats and Dickinson as examples of poets who respectively respond to 'anxiety'. My thesis explores an understanding of anxiety in Keats and Dickinson's poetry and one which is informed and shaped by not by Freud but by Heidegger's philosophy. Such an approach keeps its stresses on anxiety as a mood of uncertainty and sees this mood as central to the poetics of Keats and Dickinson and their

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[40] Jon Mee, 'Introduction', in *Selected Letters,* ed. Robert Gittings, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p.xxvi.

[41] Betsy Erkkila, 'Emily Dickinson and Class', *American Literary History 4(1)* (1992), 1-27; Mary Loeffelholz, 'Etruscan Invitations: Dickinson and the Anxiety of the Aesthetic in Feminist Criticism', *The Emily Dickinson Journal 5(1)* (1996), 1-26; Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, 'Infection in the Sentence: The Woman Writer and the Anxiety of Authorship', in *The Madwoman in the Attic after Thirty Years* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020), pp.45-92.

attitudes towards hope, difficulties, and limitations of existence or being. Heidegger is a philosopher who takes moods seriously and habitually associates problems of emotion with issues of existence. He stated that through changes of emotions (negative or positive), we are aware of our problematic and uncertain status at the level of existence. He is also a reader of those 'anxious' emotions. Heidegger's discussion of existential anxiety in ontology helps to articulate and understand the uncertainty and anxiety of Keats and Dickinson's poetry.

1.3 Anxiety, Dwelling, Being, Poetic Art, Heidegger and Hölderlin

'Anxiety', in Heidegger's understanding is, inextricably, bound up with his concepts of 'being' and 'dwelling'. Dwelling does not merely refer to a building that houses us, as for Heidegger, the term possesses both architectural and philosophical connotations. According to Heidegger's lecture, 'Building, Dwelling, Thinking', dwelling has a threefold meaning. First, it refers to a space that we take shelter in, but by no means does it imply that we must stay in such an enclosed space. The basic nature of dwelling is to be free, to open spaces, to preserve and to be set at peace. That is, to respect the nature of each thing and thereby realize self-freedom. Moreover, dwelling is also the goal of building: as Heidegger says 'to build is in itself already to dwell'.[42] In Heidegger's view, to dwell, man has 'to cherish and protect, to preserve and care for, to till the soil, to cultivate the vine',[43] whereas to build often merely means to construct, without preserving and nurturing.

Dwelling emphasizes the responsibilities of human beings. The human being in the face of dwelling becomes the host and the behaviourist. However, if a building is to become a place of

[42] Martin Heidegger, 'Building, Dwelling, Thinking', trans. by Albert Hofstadter, *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York, NY: Harper Colophon, 1971), p.144.
[43] Martin Heidegger, p.145.

dwelling, as Jonas Holst claims, it becomes the dweller's way of creating a space[44] in which he or she comes to live well. Furthermore, dwelling represents 'the manner in which we humans are on the earth, is *Buan*, dwelling'.[45] Heidegger considers the earth, the sky, the divinities and the mortals as an integral within each of the four parts of dwelling and each of them function differently. The mortals, namely, human beings, serve as dwellers who have initiative, and therefore the goal of their dwelling is to save the earth, receive the sky and await the divinities. Then here again, Heidegger gives dwelling another fourfold mission in which staying (and dwelling) with things becomes the core of preserving the fourfold unity of existence.

The exploration of man and the spatial brings us to the question of being. Associated with dwelling, being does not refer to dwelling in a building, but human beings' dwelling on earth. Heidegger uses the metaphor of a 'bridge' which brings stream, bank and land into each other's neighbourhood to interpret the state of being – a condition of gathering things together – a combination of earth, sky, divinities and mortals. This assembly of elements facilitates the formation of 'thing', just like the example of the bridge, which allows the existence of, and gives a site for, the fourfold nature of existence. As a result, the bridge becomes a symbol that can express something 'that strictly speaking does not belong to it'.[46] As Heidegger claims, only things that have the function of locating can own space to provide sites by being there for the presence of other things. The bridge itself is a thing that has a location and, therefore, in its traversing of space can create a site for another thing.

Heidegger evaluates space as a phenomenon, a domain and a distance, which includes height,

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[44] Jonas Holst, 'Rethinking Dwelling and Building. On Martin Heidegger's conception of Being as Dwelling and Jorn Utzon's Architecture of Well-being', *Journal of interdisciplinary studies in Architecture and Urbanism 2* (2014), 52-60 (p.56).
[45] Martin Heidegger, p.145.
[46] Martin Heidegger, p.151.

breadth and depth between men and things. Man refers to a 'being existing in a human manner […] being dwells by the name 'man''. On the one hand, space exists within the presence of man. That is, space is a nothingness and only makes sense when it is filled by the existence of a being. On the other hand, the proof of the existence or the being of man lies in their dwelling between things and locations as they move through space. Thus, the relationship between man and space is complementary even if the crux of being present is one of dwelling (or staying).[47] Heidegger states that dwelling is the 'basic character of being in keeping with which mortals exist'.[48] That is to say, men need to learn how to dwell so that they can gain space for themselves to prove their own existence as a being. This relationship between man and space, inevitably, leads us to the place where death occurs. Jeff Malpas' work on Heidegger understands the boundary of space as 'death', defining death as a limit that opens up the space for being,[49] which endows space with a sense of finitude.

In relation to questions of uncertainty and anxiety, Jonas Holst offers an intriguing reading of Heidegger's dwelling as the process of 'making a halt and lingering on a path in doubts about where to go'.[50] This explanation links dwelling back to the first connotation of Heidegger's definition of dwelling: a space that we take shelter in. We abide in that place not because we want to stay, but out of an anxiety and uncertainty about the road ahead. As men exist as beings, we are thrown to this world when we were born without any instructions about where to go. Then there is dwelling through which we can temporarily withdraw from the world and are less exposed to it.

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[47] Jeff Malpas in his book writes 'to be is to be in place' (p.46), expressing the same meaning. See Jeff Malpas, *Heidegger and the Thinking of Place: Explorations in the Typology of Being* (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2012), p.46.
[48] Martin Heidegger, p.158.
[49] Jeff Malpas, p. 178.
[50] Jonas Holst, p.53.

For Heidegger, being, ontologically conceived of as *Dasein*, equates with existence. As such, there is inauthentic existence and authentic existence. Inauthentic existence, according to James Magrini, lies in everyday moods such as love, happiness and boredom,[51] which accounts for the most part of daily existence. To be a being and to reach the authentic existence of being-in-the-world, however, we must possess anxiety (*Angst*). This is termed by Heidegger as 'existential anxiety' and relates to an all-pervasive uncertainty. We may ask in the first place where such existential anxiety stems from. Marijo N. Lucas gives her answer in connection with Heidegger from a psychological aspect that such anxiety comes from our acceptance (or lack of acceptance) of our life's givens, which encompasses 'the finitude of making choices […] and of freedom in the past'.[52]

Anxiety occurs when human beings feel dissatisfaction with the current situation of their lives, which does not accord with their beliefs, values and knowledge. Then they need to ponder over the reason for the existence and the anxiety it gives raise to. Lucas believes that we experience existential anxiety because we make choices in a moment that lacks authentic presence and subjectivity.[53] Namely, we lose the ownership of our existing rights on the way to the orientation of our 'being-toward-death'. Put differently, we are trapped in the 'they-self' dichotomy so that we give up on authentic existing. Robert D. Stolorow, helps explain further that self-oriented authentic existing is disrupted by the presence of the 'they',[54] and the individual no longer feels safe in the shelter state of dwelling. Individuals are in a situation where they are unpreparedly exposed to the

[51] James Magrini, '"Anxiety" in Heidegger's Being and time: The Harbinger of Authenticity', *Philosophy Scholarship* (2006), 77-85 (p.78).
[52] Marijo N. Lucas, 'Existential Regret: A Crossroads of Existential Anxiety and Existential Guilt', *Journal of Humanistic Psychology 44(1)* (2014), 58-70 (pp.59, 62).
[53] Marijo Lucas, p.59.
[54] Robert D. Stolorow, 'Toward Greater Authenticity: From Shame to Existential Guilt, Anxiety, and Grief', *International Journal of Psychoanalytic Self Psychology 6* (2011), 285-287 (pp.285-286).

gaze of the other.[55] Such exposure brings about a sense of being shameful and anxious and leads to authentic existence. On Heidegger's account, anxiety is basis of authentic existence.

For Heidegger, death is a further threat arising from anxiety. Anxiety operates by unlocking the limitation of Dasein's existence and through – the state of being nothingness – helps Dasein accept and manifest death. Here death refers to an authentic one, which does not imply the physical cessation of the organism, but points to the inevitability and indefinite certainty of mortality – being certain of death.[56] Death is a part of realizing one's own self.

In other words, conscience facilitates Dasein to reach its ontological freedom in the feeling of guilt because the true voice of Dasein, shown in nothingness, is an alien voice to the everyday one. As a result, in the face of the conscience, we again get into the oppression of anxiety. Conscience makes our feeling of being guilty confined in the state of anxiety, in turn, anxiety may increase the sense of guilt. Finally, guilt and anxiety form a circle, and 'being' becomes a 'resolute'[57] *Dasein*. As Magrini proposes, Heidegger always treats anxiety as the 'harbinger'[58] of authentic being and the fundamental ontology of Dasein.

> Poetry first of all admits man's dwelling into its very nature, its presencing being. Poetry is the original admission of dwelling.[59]

Dwelling poetically is Heidegger's answer for how human beings can move beyond anxiety and achieve authentic *Dasein*. Both in 'Building, Dwelling Thinking' and 'Poetically Man Dwells', Heidegger stresses the importance of language, without which he believes 'being' cannot be understood. Heidegger emphasizes the power of language, which again cannot be comprehended

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[55] Robert Stolorow, p.286.
[56] James Magrini, p.80.
[57] James Magrini, p.82.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Martin Heidegger, 'Poetically Man Dwells' trans. by Albert Hofstadter, *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York, NY: Harper Colophon, 1971), p.225.

without dwelling poetically. The phrase appears in the later phase of Heidegger's *Being and Time* to answer the question put forward previously. 'Poetically man dwells' is a statement borrowed from Hölderlin by Heidegger,[60] and which foregrounds the function of the aesthetic and art. By regarding poetry as an artistic language, Heidegger believes that the origin of the work of art, like the purpose of anxiety, is to disclose the world in its authentic terms. Heidegger learns from Hölderlin that human beings' dwelling rests mainly on the poetic. In association with the nature of dwelling, the poetic character of dwelling may suggest being open to things (the fourfold nature of existence) on their own terms.[61] Ultimately, dwelling poetically is, for Heidegger, to be open and compatible with the openness of the world.

In 'Poetically Man Dwells', Heidegger puts forward two questions concerned with limitations: Is all dwelling poetic? Does it refer to 'every man' and is it poetic 'all the time'?[62] For the first question, Heidegger's understanding is that only when dwelling can be located in the realm of aesthetics and literature can it be estimated as poetic or not. That is to say, to dwell poetically we must give up historical and social context as well as technological functionality, namely, the customary notion, of dwelling. Also, for the second question, the response is that poets act as a medium of poetical dwelling for other beings in the world. Only when poets close their eyes to actuality and begin their dreaming and imagining can poetic dwelling be realized. Here again, Heidegger emphasizes the importance of weakening the role of the historical and social life of human beings. A subsequent third question is about the compatibility of the poetic with dwelling. Heidegger gives his answer that dwelling and the poetic do not merely co-exist with each other, but

[60] Martin Heidegger, p.213.
[61] Diana Aurenque, 'Heidegger on Thinking about Ethos and Man's Dwelling', *Architecture Philosophy 2(1)* (2016), 39-53 (p.42).
[62] Martin Heidegger, 'Poetically Man Dwells', p. 213.

dwelling is interdependent on the poetic. This aspect exposes the relation of co-dependency of the two.

To be beings in the world, Keats and Dickinson need to find themselves in the world and then to attune the relationship of self, things and other-selves with that world. Yet to be poets in the world, Keats and Dickinson have the responsibility to dwell poetically, as the poet is the founder of being.[63] Unavoidably it will arouse anxiety about their identity as poets as well as beings, but anxiety is a subjective concept that is defined not by circumstances but by the personal experiences and the poet's imaginative representation of them. In this respect, Heidegger's understanding of anxiety as not merely a negative mood but also a pathway to realize authentic experience of existence is instructive for a comparative reading of the poetry of Keats and Dickinson. I focus on the diverse manifestations of anxiety and its attendant uncertainties of being in Keats and Dickinson. The aim of this research is to expose Keats and Dickinson's modes of anxiety and to revise our sense of Keats and Dickinson's treatment of issues such as nature, spirituality, death and imagination under the rubric of Heidegger's existential anxiety.

1.4 Existential Anxiety in Keats and Dickinson: An Overview

My thesis traces these forms of anxiety in chapters, which are arranged thematically rather than chronologically. Chapter two looks at correspondence by Keats and Dickinson with their readers, family and friends as indicators of the cultural, social and artistic contexts that were the cause of anxieties for both Keats and Dickinson. The chapter then explores a number of key ideas and themes that are central to Keats and Dickinson and are causes of anxiety: dissolution of poetic identity, pursuit of truth, beauty, and death, and the high evaluation of imagination. These preoccupations

[63] Diana Aurenque, p.42.

form a foundation for the subsequent chapters that examine how anxiety occurs in relation to each of these issues for Keats and Dickinson. My next three chapters investigate a series of anxieties that attend to issues of existence, desire and death.

Chapter three examines anxiety in various modes of existence ('dwelling' and 'being') through Heideggerian reflections on 'measurement'. I focus on a comparison between Keats' and Dickinson's sense of architectural poetic space, spiritual time with divinity and seasonal time in nature. In doing so, I explore questions of how both poets envisage life as a lineal or circular and how dwelling in these measured spaces requires a relative sense of an imaginative existence that is both inward and outward. Measuring such poetic spaces and the house of our being is dependent upon, for Keats, Dickinson and later Heidegger, a degree of uncertainty and anxiety. The chapter also explores the aspiration of the poetry of Keats and Dickinson towards the realization of eternity as one that is couched in doubt.

Chapter four investigates the anxiety of Keats' treatment of masculine desire in the discourse of Romance, and Keats and Dickinson's divination of secular love (manifest in Dickinson's bee-flower love motif). Anxiety of desire serves critically as a transitional stage between existence and death and, in Heideggerian terms, aids appearance of authenticity. Chapter five considers the anxiety of death as the final terminus of earthly life. This chapter explores a progressive dialogue of both poets with death from the perspective of a posthumous life, the spiritual promise and release, as well as disappointment of death.

Chapter six to eight posit the 'possible solutions to the anxiety' of existence, desire and death in the discussion of spirituality, nature and imagination. Chapter six examines Keats' revisioning of Greek mythology and Dickinson's attitude towards Christianity with a focus on how both poets

approach spirituality with a poised ambivalence that oscillates between hoped for ideal and sceptical reality. Chapter seven reflects again on the power of nature which, as with spirituality, affords Keats and Dickinson a mixed blessing in terms of hope and despair. The chapter revisits Keats' 'To Autumn' through a quasi-eco-critical perspective by rethinking the relationship between humans and the natural world in terms of male-female relations. Then the chapter examines the fascination with a feminized (often maternal) nature advocated by both Keats and Dickinson. After discussing the harmonious scene nature brings to the poets, the chapter then looks into the shadows and dark side of nature that lie in the process of forgetting, dying and decay. At the heart of this chapter is Keats and Dickinson's anxieties over temporality and, their respective, posthumous legacies.

The concluding chapter, acting as a coda, considers the role of the imagination in relation to transcendent aspirations, nature, mortality, and poetic identity. The chapter recognizes that the poetic 'I' of Keats and Dickinson can be characterized by uncertainty and anxiety, as both poets often depict subjectivity as divided and in debate with itself. The final part of this chapter builds upon these doubts and uncertainties to consider how the imagination often fails to deal satisfactorily with the existential anxiety of Keats and Dickinson. Since anxiety is considered as a continual condition of the state of being throughout the thesis, spirituality, nature and imagination can only ever provide a potential settlement and never offer a final resolution to anxiety. Each new born imaginative, for Keats and Dickinson, offers the prospect of future anxieties about the hopeful aspirations as possible betrayal of poetic selfhood, the world of nature, spirituality and death.

Chapter 2

Shared Anxieties and Sensations:
The Anglo-American Dialogue of Keats and Dickinson

> Keats suggests that a life of sensations is necessary not only for earthly happiness but also for one's eternal well-being.[64]
>
> ---- Robert Ryan

John Keats' letters are pivotal documents often closely associated with the process of his poetic growth and mental maturity. The letters have aroused both negative as well as positive criticism and influenced his contemporary and posthumous reputation over time. The first public use of Keats' letters as a tool for critical assessment of his poetic achievement was probably in 1836, by Charles Armitage Brown, who gave a lecture to the Plymouth Institution.[65]

2.1 Reading Keats' Letters: A Life of Sensation

Subsequently, there emerged a number of scholars who researched Keats' letters as an approach to his poems. Richard Monckton Milnes' *Life, Letters and Literary Remains of John Keats* (1848) is the earliest collective publication of Keats' letters as well as the first work of criticism. Milnes affirms Keats' reputation as a poet with 'perseverance', 'bravery', and 'amazing imagination',[66] as well as acknowledging the biographical value of his letters as a proof and record of poetic ideas and Keats' authentic personality. Subsequently, Harry Buxton Forman's *Letters of John Keats to Fanny Brawne* (1878), then, gathers together nearly forty love letters from Keats to Fanny Brawne with a feature-length introduction intended to affirm and enhance Keats' reputation. However, the result

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[64] Robert Ryan, 'Keats and the Truth of Imagination', *The Wordsworth Circle 4(4)* (1973), 259-266 (p.264).
[65] Abolfazal Ramazani, 'The Entry of John Keats's Letters into Critical Discourse 1836-1895' (Doctoral dissertation, University of York, 2004), p.14.
[66] Richard Monckton Milnes, *Life, Letters and Literary Remains of John Keats* (New York, NY: GP Putnam, 1848), pp.13-15.

seems to be at cross purposes. It receives many negative comments from critics such as Matthew Arnold and Algernon Swinburne, complaining that the publication of these love letters had a negative impact on Keats' manly character,[67] and that such emotional statements, which make Keats appear 'effeminate', should not have been published.[68]

After Forman, in 1891, Sidney Colvin rearranged Keats' letters with reference to his friendship and literary circles, commenting that the literary value of Keats' letters should be acknowledged.[69] Andrew Cecil Bradley formally mentions Keatsian terminology such as 'negative capability' and 'soul-making' from Keats' letters in his lecture in Oxford, 1909; he states that the letters are necessary to understand Keats' epic poem *Endymion* and that Keats' letters 'throw light on all of his poems'.[70] In 1958, H. E. Rollins collected *The Letters of John Keats* in two volumes and edited the content chronologically, from which readers can grasp Keats' changing thoughts across his lifetime. The 'biographical sketches of Keats' correspondents' in the first volume of Rollins' edition also provides detailed information on his relationship with his literary and social circles. Susan Wolfson (1982) describes Keats' letters as 'epistolary poetics' in her essay, fully emphasizing their aesthetic value from a formalist view. Generally speaking, Keats' letters to his family and friends help him win a good reputation while letters to Fanny provoke less favourable estimations.

However, W. S. Di Piero qualifies Keats' literary contribution as a writer of letters. He complains that Keats' letters reveal a 'noisy, savage and rude genius' compared with Byron, whose

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[67] James Najarian, *Victorian Keats: Manliness, Sexuality and Desire* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p.22.
[68] Abolfazal Ramazani, 'The Entry of John Keats's Letters into Critical Discourse 1836-1895', p.vii.
[69] John Keats, *Letters of John Keats to His Family and Friends* ed. by Sidney Colvin, reissue edition (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p.6
[70] Andrew Cecil Bradley, *Oxford Lectures on English Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1911), pp.210, 222.

letters show the audience an aristocratic gentleman.[71] Andres Rodriguez (1993) opposes this opinion by specifically using a separate chapter in his book to analyse Keats' complex poetic and philosophical mind on the basis of his letters. He argues that Keats' letters just do what his poems do,[72] and praises highly the way in which 'the etymologies of words in Keats' letters can explode into a terrain vast enough to occupy one interminably'.[73] These edited and critical documents, positive or negative, with a meticulous scholarship, show that the literary value of Keats' letters, whether as an example of the epistolary genre with a unique linguistic style, or as a context to understand Keats the man and the poet, is undeniable.

Keats' correspondence can be generally divided into three categories according to his circle of correspondents. Letters to his family (to George and Fanny Keats) mainly record his care for his younger sister and brother on matters of health as well as education, showing that Keats, as the eldest brother of a family in which both parents had died, was a sensitive family member. Though compared with other letters, this category is probably barren in terms of literary aesthetics, it authentically records his personality, his emotional experience, his living conditions and his traveling experiences with friends, from which readers can know the most natural and real Keats. Letters to his friends (including B. R. Haydon, Benjamin Bailey, J. H. Reynolds, Richard Woodhouse)[74] are closely related to his poetic creation, in which Keats frequently expresses his emotions both negative and positive on writing poems, his creative dilemma when writing long

[71] W. S. Di Piero, 'Something of Self', in *Memory and Enthusiasm: Essays. 1975-1985* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), p.168.
[72] Andres Rodriguez, *Book of the Heart: The Poetics, Letters and Life of John Keats* (New York, NY: SteinerBooks, 1993), pp.12, 21-36.
[73] Rodriguez, *Book of the Heart*, p.24.
[74] In Rollins' note, Bailey was highly praised as the noblest man by Keats (63). Haydon met Keats in 1816 because of Leigh Hunt, and later became an artist and friend whom Keats worshiped (76). Reynolds is one of Keats' dearest friends, and also the common friend of Leigh Hunt and Bailey (84). Woodhouse is a Keats' reader, he read Keats' *Endymion* and also provided 200 pounds for Keats' Italy journey (92).

poems, what he sees and hears when traveling around Britain, and how he feels about the negative criticism of his poems. Most of his philosophical understanding and poetic theories can be traced in letters with Haydon, Bailey, Reynolds and Woodhouse,[75] and this type of letter can be considered as a proof of his mental and poetic development. His correspondence with Fanny Brawne, on the other hand, can be regarded separately due to its unique style of language. The nearly forty love letters explicitly express his fervent love for Fanny, as well as his fear of dying early and his strong desire to be with her. Those letters, though mainly about love-related topics, have provided strong evidence of Keats' most productive years in which his most fabulous epics and odes were created. The letters also have values in revealing Keats' contemplation on some profound topics such as morality, religion and nature. The three categories of Keats' letters emphasize different aspects of the poet's life, while all deliver not only biographical information which is helpful to understand the poet's life but also have literary value in illuminating the writing style as well as the thoughts of the poet.

Previous scholars such as Milnes, Forman and Colvin have contributed hugely to the presentation of Keats' letters from a political and literary perspective; however, there still exists a gap: how those letters convey and express Keats' emotional experience in different periods. As for this area, Andres Rodriguez can be considered as a pioneer. Although Rodriguez depicts Keats' letters as a self-conscious and self-educational tool by which Keats tries to transfigure the world, and also primarily discusses how his poetic emotions are formed,[76] the study lacks insights into the emotions behind Keats' poetic and philosophical theories, how different emotions are related and

[75] Though in Rollins' edition, only three letters between Keats and Woodhouse are listed; yet in these three letters, Keats puts forward one of his most important poetic theories: camelion poet, to Woodhouse.
[76] Rodriguez, *Book of the Heart*, p.16.

what theories they refer to. Susan Wolfson explores the connection between Keats' letters and his poetic emotion as well by proposing the view that Keats' letters enact the actual processes of his mind and character,[77] which show his readers an authentic personality. She is opposed to the idea implied by Bruce Redford that letter writers should play as an actor, using ironic intonation and making what they write dramatic,[78] thus challenging the images of poets portrayed in Redford's propositions. Wolfson's perspectives on Keats' letters mainly emphasize his linguistic genius which is able to express his biographical information in distinctively epistolary features, and also stress his artful application of rhetorical techniques. Yet to some extent, Wolfson probably weakens the interplay between the process of Keats' compositions and his character as well as emotions. That is, Wolfson pays less attention to the aspect that the poetry may play in reshaping the style of Keats' letters as well. Rodriguez and Wolfson's research permits us to consider Keats' letters as examples of an individual genre and read them in dialogue with poetry.

2.2 Reading Dickinson's Letters: Life Feels Immortal

> A letter always feels to me like immortality because it is the mind alone without corporeal friend.[79]

The earliest publication of Emily Dickinson's letters was by Thomas Wentworth Higginson in 1891 in the journal *Atlantic Monthly*.[80] Then Dickinson's letters were officially published and distributed more widely in 1894 by Mabel Todd and Higginson, just eight years after Dickinson passed away,

[77] Susan Wolfson, 'Keats and Letter-Writer: Epistolary Poetics', *Romanticism Past and Present 6 (2)* (1982), 43-61.
[78] Bruce Redford, *The Converse of the Pen: Acts of Intimacy in the Eighteen-Century Familiar Letter* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp.5-6.
[79] Emily Dickinson, *Letters of Emily Dickinson* Vol.1 ed. ed. by Mabel Loomis Todd (London: Victor Gollancz, 1951), p. 313.
[80] Gudrun Grabher, Roland Hagenbuchle and Cristanne Miller, *The Emily Dickinson Handbook* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005), p. 163.

according to Mark Van Doren.[81] Todd was the neighbour of Dickinson, who had access to the manuscripts of her poems and letters.[82] This is the first effort at introducing Dickinson as a great letter writer as well as a great poet to the public. Before the death of Todd, she enlarged the publication of Dickinson's letters so that Dickinson's readers could know more about her thoughts and life. This prompts the publication of the new editions of Dickinson's letters. Over the years, there are scholars and critics continually focusing on Dickinson's correspondence. For example, in 1931, Martha Bianchi published a monograph, *The Life and Letters of Emily Dickinson*, reprinting the old version of Dickinson's letters and adding a number of newly unpublished letters. Another work also by Bianchi, *Emily Dickinson Face to Face: Unpublished Letters with Notes and Reminiscences* did the same thing a year later. Currently, the most popular editions of Dickinson's letters in the market are those by Bianchi and Todd. Other significant editions include those by Theodora Van Wagenen Ward (1951), Millicent Todd Bingham (1954), Thomas Johnson and Theodora V. Ward (1955), Richard Sewall (1965) and R. W. Franklin (1986). These collections refer to a wide range of Dickinson's letters, most of which are arranged chronologically.

Apart from Todd and Bianchi, other scholars such as Ellen Hart (1990), Martha Smith (1993) and Werner Marta (1995) also concentrate on collecting Dickinson's letters. Unlike Todd and Bianchi, they choose to concentrate on a particular aspect of those letters in order to avoid misinterpretation of some of Dickinson's cryptic ideas. For instance, Hart and Smith collect Dickinson's letters to her sister in law, Susan Huntington Dickinson, with whom Dickinson often shared her confusions and inner feelings. Meanwhile, the collections also convey vague descriptions

[81] Emily Dickinson, *Letters of Emily Dickinson* Vol.1 ed. by Mabel Loomis Todd (London: Victor Gollancz, 1951), p. v.
[82] *Letters of Emily Dickinson*, ed.by Mabel Loomis Todd, p. vi.

about Dickinson's unusual affection for Susan (as a result of which some critics regard Dickinson as a lesbian).[83] Werner Marta, on the other hand, gathers together forty short writings of Dickinson known as 'Lord Letters' to Judge Otis Lord, the man Dickinson adores in her late life. The collection enables her readers to have a look at Dickinson's writing of the late stages. Thomas H. Johnson is also a vital editor of Dickinson's letters, who published a volume of *Selected Letters* in 1971 after the three completed volumes appeared in 1958, summarizing the emotional transformations over the course of Dickinson's life in his long preface. Those collections of particularly selected letters enable Dickinson's readers and scholars to have a look at and research on specific emotional topics.

In addition to these collections, other scholars have further explored the various values of Dickinson's letters. Salska Agnieszka's chapter 'Dickinson's Letters' in the book *The Emily Dickinson Handbook* is the initial exploration of the value of her letters, contributing to the presentation of Dickinson's poetic genius and philosophical ideas. Agnieszka concludes that Dickinson's letters are epistolary works[84] much as Susan Wolfson does in her reading of Keats' letters. Meanwhile, she affirms the value of Dickinson's letters in witnessing the psychological and literary growth of Dickinson as well as explaining cryptic messages hidden in some of her obscure poems.[85] This is the first time that the literary value of Dickinson's letters is put forward. Later, Richard Sewall (1994) draws on a large number of Dickinson's letters titled 'Master Letters' to complete her biography. Cynthia Griffin Wolff (1986) also employs the letters in writing Dickinson's biography, trying to find linguistic connections, as well as other relations, between her letters and verses. This approach is taken further by Judith Farr (1992) and Robert Lambert (1996

[83] Martha Smith, *Rowing in Eden: Rereading Emily Dickinson* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1993), pp. 27, 28, 221, 228.
[84] Salska Agnieszka, *The Emily Dickinson Handbook* (Cambridge, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998), p.163.
[85] Ibid.

and 1997) in the meanwhile. Lambert is particularly interested in finding poetic sources and elements from Dickinson's letters and investigating her unique experiments with the idea of absorbing unrhymed poems into her letters, as originally argued in Lambert's dissertation in 1996.[86] This illustrates that Dickinson's correspondence has already been regarded as a specific literary genre to study.

Apart from focusing on linguistic aspects of Dickinson's letters, Lillian Faderman (1977) pays attention to Dickinson's correspondence with Sue Gilbert, who is an important person in Dickinson's homosexual relations.[87] Suzanne Juhasz (1983) and Lori Lebow (1999) approach Dickinson from a feminist perspective, the latter especially concentrating on narrative episodes in her letters, which opens up a new angle of researching Dickinson by regarding her as a story teller. Ellen Hart (1996) also approaches the letters of Dickinson from a gender perspective by focusing on her homoerotic desire for Susan Dickinson. A more recent research by Patricia Thompson Rizzo (2002) tries to discuss the elegiac mode of Dickinson's compositions through her letters and expose the darkness and grief in Dickinson's life. Recent research shows a tendency to consider Dickinson's correspondence with modern and contemporary literary concerns to the fore, which goes beyond the texts and focuses on issues including gender, politics and psychoanalysis.

From the first research to more recent critical work by Jane Eberwein and Cindy MacKenizie (2009), which gathers together the most representative critical comments on Dickinson's letters,[88] interest in Dickinson's letters has existed over a century and it also proves that the power of her

[86] Robert Graham Lambert, *A Critical Study of Emily Dickinson's Letters: The Prose of a Poet* (New York, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1996).
[87] Lillian Lambert, 'Emily Dickinson's Letters to Sue Gillbert', *The Massachusetts Review 18 (2)* (1977), 197-225 (pp.201-202).
[88] Jane Eberwein and Cindy MacKenizie, *Reading Emily Dickinson's Letters: Critical Essays* (Amherst MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011).

letters resembles the power of her poetry, for critics as well as readers. As Wendy Martin comments, no works of Dickinson should be discussed without her letters, which are sometimes more fascinating than her poems.[89] The number of uncovered letters of Dickinson is huge, and those existing published letters are thought roughly to represent only about one-tenth of the total letters that she actually wrote.[90] Most of Dickinson's letters were probably destroyed by her correspondents in accordance with Dickinson's wishes. That is to say, the significance of the few existing letters of Dickinson should be fully appreciated as a way of understanding the poet and her works.

While Keats' life is closely linked with his family and friends, Dickinson's life is one of long-term isolation. Her life is invisible to most people and there is little record of her activities outside her poems and letters. Therefore, the only way to know about her spiritual world is through her written communication with her circles. When thinking about the categories of Dickinson's letters, some of her biographical information needs to be considered. Todd's edition of Dickinson's letters is arranged by different contacts rather than chronology. According to Richard Sewall's biography of Dickinson, her letters can be divided into three categories. The first category is letters with friends in Dickinson's schooling and social period, including her early schoolmates, teachers and editor friends. This appears in the first, fourth, fifth and seventh chapters of Todd's edition. This part records Dickinson's discussion of the mission and responsibilities of a poet. It is portable to see in these letters that Dickinson is confident in her poetic talent. She claimed in her letter to Mrs. Holland that she would never stop as a poet even the whole America laughed at her.[91]

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[89] Wendy Martin, *The Cambridge Introduction to Emily Dickinson* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 19.
[90] https://www.emilydickinsonmuseum.org/letters
[91] *Letters of Emily Dickinson*, ed. by Mabel Loomis Todd, p.146.

The second category is letters with her family, particularly female members such as Louisa, Fanny and Lavinia.[92] With her family, Dickinson is more likely to talk about domestic trivialities rather than poetry, and as with Keats, these letters perhaps reveal her most natural and real self. However, it seems that most of her correspondents also care less about her identity as a poet. Dickinson once complained to Higginson that her mother and father never cared for her thought.[93] The different linguistic styles of her letters in the first and second categories reveal to readers Dickinson's multiple personalities. When she communicates with her poetic friends, Dickinson tends to present herself as a mature, brilliant, reflective and modest person. Yet in letters with her female family members, Dickinson shows more of her youthful and playful ideas.

The third category is associated with Dickinson's intimate relationships, both homosexual and heterosexual, with Susan Huntington Dickinson, Sue Gilbert, Charles Wadsworth and Judge Otis Lord. This category is to some extent abbreviated in Todd's edition but listed as important one in other edited books and critical essays by Ellen Hart, Lillian Faderman and Werner Marta. These letters reveal Dickinson's spiritual dependence on, as well as erotic desire for her real and imaginary intimate companions in an extremely elaborate language. Dickinson chose to live in seclusion, because of which her physical and mental requirements for love cannot always be satisfied, compared with normal and social people. Therefore, the language in those letters may be more explicit. The three types of Dickinson's letters also reflect her change in style at different stages of her career, along with her growing awareness of being a poet. Her language became more and more cryptic, and more advanced rhetorical techniques were used as time went by.

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[92] Richard Swell, *The Life of Emily Dickinson* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp. 289, 323, 636.
[93] *Letters of Emily Dickinson*, ed. by Mabel Loomis Todd, p.254.

From the content of her letters, readers know the transformation of Dickinson's main concerns in different periods. During her fifty-six-year life, Dickinson concentrates on many different topics with the change of her surroundings and the development of her mental maturity. In the early period of her life, Dickinson shows us her great interest in nature. Her letters are a record of what she saw in her daily life at that time. Then along with the changes in her life such as the death of her father and her beloved friend, Dickinson begins to think about topics such as religion and immortality. It is probably a way for her to hide and adjust her passive emotions. Yet in her late period, Dickinson wants to show readers her strong adherence to literature and philosophy. Her letters become more philosophical and profound. All these changes can be clearly seen in her letters with her two most important correspondents: Elizabeth Holland and Thomas Higginson.

Although Dickinson's correspondence became increasingly profound as she grew up and as her poetic career went further, the isolated life gave Dickinson the initiative of writing her letters in her own style. Dickinson perfectly employs such initiative and always tries to break the routine. In this respect, Dickinson is not regarded as a rigorous letter writer. For example, in her letters to Higginson, Dickinson named him 'Mr. Higginson' in their correspondence. The appellation became 'dear friend' when they got familiar. It became 'Higginson' in their later communications. Similarly, the signatures are also multiple. Sometimes it is 'your friend Emily', while in other occasions, it is 'your scholar' or 'your gnome'. This also happens in letters with Samuel Bowles who once shouted outside her house that 'Emily is rascal'[94] because Dickinson called herself a 'rascal' in an 1865 letter to him.[95] It is usual to communicate in such a casual form in modern times, yet in Dickinson's

[94] Paul W. Anderson, 'The Metaphysical Mirth of Emily Dickinson', *The Georgia Review 20 (1)* (1996), 72-83 (p.72).
[95] *Letters of Emily Dickinson*, ed. by Mabel Loomis Todd, p.185.

era when the distance between male and female was not that close, it is rare. The tradition of letter writing was relatively more serious, and the position of female letter writers was underestimated. Dickinson's strategy of using informal and amusing language is indeed a breakthrough of her time, especially when these correspondents are venerable editors.

However, little research which systematically explores the connection between her emotional change and the style of her poetic language has been found. For instance, critics may have noticed that Dickinson's letters often omit address and date, but they propose that this is due to her habit of using a free style of writing. Yet actually Dickinson did it on purpose. She explains this to Susan that a life without guessing makes her uneasy.[96] Even in her poetry she claims that 'to guess it, puzzles scholars'.[97] Dickinson's technique of abbreviating the address and date deliberately makes her letters enigmatic to her recipients as well as her possible future readers. It is worth investigating what is hidden in the riddles of the poet's language and what is the potential reason for the poet's emotional transformation.

2.3 A Shared Anxiety of Self: Establishing and Dissolving the Poetic Identity in Keats and Dickinson

> Somehow a stubble plain looks warm, in the same way that some pictures look warm--this struck me so much in my Sunday's walk that I composed upon it.[98]

The statement comes from a letter to Reynolds (19 September, 1819) after Keats experienced a beautiful autumn day. 'Somehow' sounds like an indescribable and instant feeling. It should be interpreted as 'the power or passion defining any object',[99] which follows what William Hazlitt

[96] Ellen Louise Hart and Martha Nell Smith, *Open Me Carefully: Emily Dickinson's Intimate Letters to Susan Huntington Dickinson* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 64.
[97] Jed Deppman, Marianne Noble and Gary Lee, *Emily Dickinson and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 64.
[98] John Keats, *The Letters of John Keats: 1814-1821 Vol.2*, ed. by Hyder Edward Rollins (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), p.167.
[99] *The Letters of John Keats: 1814-1821*, p.387. Keats wrote a review on Kean used Hazlitt's term 'gusto'.

calls ‘gusto’. Hazlitt defines ‘gusto’ as a kind of power inspired by imagination in which the natural appearance of the object is absolutely presented and the perceptive identity of the object is realized.[100] According to Hazlitt’s understanding, the natural appearance of the object should be obtained and gathered through a combination of our realistic and imaginative sensation, including visual, auditory, tactile and olfactory senses. Coleridge extends this empathic and synaesthetic concept from the field of pictorial art to the field of poetry to explain how a poet can abandon ‘the space and the isolation of his nervous system’ so that he can control his organic imagination and provisionally become the man he meditates upon.[101] This is practiced by Keats in his poems and his theories of ‘negative capability’ and ‘the camelion poet’. In the letter to Bailey (22 Nov 1817) and to George and Tom (21 Dec 1817), he writes:

> Men of genius are great as certain ethereal Chemicals operating on the Mass of neutral intellect – but they have not any individuality, any determined Character […] [102]
>
> […]
>
> I mean *Negative Capability*, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason.[103]

In the first sentence, Keats compares such ability to ethereal Chemicals which should have fairly strong plasticity so that they can become any components of the brain if needed. Because of such changeability, the chemicals enable the man to obtain full capacity in any unexpected scenes. For Keats, negative capability is like a chemical capsule by which he can absolutely open his mind to the external world and his brain becomes a thoroughfare to all thoughts. Through absorbing the

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[100] Robert Ready, ‘Hazlitt: In and Out of ‘‘Gusto’’’, *Studies of English Literature, 1500-1900 14(4)* (1974), 537-546 (p.538).
[101] Mike Abrams, ‘The Paradox of Shakespeare’ in the chapter of ‘Literature as a Revelation of Personality’, in *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953) p.172, 245.
[102] *The Letters of John Keats: 1814-1821*, p.184.
[103] *The Letters of John Keats: 1814-1821*, p.193.

natural characteristics of the perceived objects, the brain dissolves the original identity of the poet and finds the real one. In other words, as Douka Kabitoglou proves from a philosophical perspective, through abandoning the differentiation of the observer and the observed, the discriminating and thinking identity of the observer is removed, and the barrier between the subject and the object thus disappears.[104] This stresses the nature of Keats' negative capability. The following sentence is a definition of Keats' negative capability, which pays attention to the function and advantage of it. The negative capability endows the subject with versatile skills so that it enables the subject to keep a ream of calmness when surroundings transform without any advanced notice. In a word, Keats' negative capability needs the subject to weaken and dissolve the original identity, increasing the compatibility of the subject. No doubt, such ability of dissolution facilitates the assimilation of the identity: 'If a Sparrow come before my Window I take part in its existence and pick about the Gravel'.[105]

Similarly, apart from communing with a sparrow, Keats also sees himself as a 'billiard ball' or a 'wringing and rotten wheat' when his feelings of those scenes are genuine. Keatsian gusto is a kind of 'chameleon power'[106] or 'characterless adaptability',[107] that is, a poet is not impeded in his work by an identity of his own and will never impact on the freedom of the characters they create. Aileen Ward rephrases this power as 'tolerance for ambiguity'[108] with an attempt to stress the importance of the diversity and contradictions of self-experience. Clearly, Keats emphasizes the process of annulling the self and, as a result, entering into other identities, not necessarily human

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[104] Douka Kabitoglou, 'Adapting Philosophy to Literature: The Case of John Keats', *Studies in Philology* (1992), 115-136 (p.127).
[105] *The Letters of John Keats: 1814-1821*, p.186.
[106] Patricia M. Ball, *The Central Self: A Study in Romantic and Victorian Imagination* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 10, 212.
[107] Patrick Keane, 'Keats and Identity: The Chameleon Poet in the Crucible', *NC Magazine 5(1)* (2014).
[108] Aileen Ward, *John Keats: the Making of a Poet* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1963), p.161.

beings, but all types of human and non-human entities. In the end, the poet is capable of capturing the most genuine nature of the object from the extremely mysterious and doubtful situation. It resembles spirit possession, during which the poet becomes a ghost who seeks its host to settle itself. As Keats again exclaims to Woodhouse in his letter (27, Oct 1818), a poet should have 'no self, no character and no identity'.[109] This finds an accord with what Abrams argues in his Shakespeare book, that 'the poet could nowhere be seized',[110] which resembles God-like impersonality as well.

However, it is imprudent to define Keats as someone who does not care about the 'self' at all. Rodriguez states that 'In the context of soul-making, identity is not the thing Keats rejected in speculating on the 'gusto' that 'delights the camelion poet''.[111] The premise of annulling the self should be that there exists a self in the first instance. No doubt, Keats must have a firm sense of self in the beginning. In the letter to George (24 Sep 1819), he claims:

> […] a Man who cannot feel he has a personal identity unless he has made up his mind about everything. [112]

Here, Keats draws attention to the mind or the awareness of the self. Giving up the self, in Keats' interpretation, is giving up the mind of the self, transplanting the mind of the subject into the body of the observed object and finally realizing empathic echoes between subject now turned object. The body is still there while the mind has been, momentarily, supplanted. In the end, as Ward notes, Keats, in fact, intends to diversify the experience of a poet through giving up the identity of himself in an effort, paradoxically, to extend the limits of the personal mind.

The gusto of Dickinson, if we borrow this Keatsian term, resides in her imagined 'absence' from reality and her poetic artistry. One biography of Dickinson recorded that she chose to live in

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[109] *The Letters of John Keats: 1814-1821,* p.387.
[110] Mike Abrams, p.244.
[111] Andres Rodriguez, *Book of the Heart*, p.182.
[112] *The Letters of John Keats: 1814-1821*, Vol.2, p.213.

seclusion since the mid-1860s,[113] during which she read Ralph Waldo Emerson and Thoreau and was influenced by their transcendental philosophy. The letter to Otis Lord claimed, 'My Phildelphia [Charles Wadsworth] has passed from Earth, and the Ralph Waldo Emerson […]'.[114] Also, there exists a record that Dickinson once attended a lecture given by Emerson.[115] Though Dickinson is a recluse, critics of Dickinson tend to approve that Dickinson is a voracious and thoughtful reader of Emerson. Emerson advocates the integration of truth, goodness and beauty, which he regards as expressions of the universe and as different faces of the same all.[116] Truth, goodness and beauty are three ideal concepts from Greek philosophers, which, respectively, stand for the ontological true forms of natural things; the virtue of spiritual ethics and the perfect unity in forms of objects. Meanwhile, Emerson considers that the three are associated with knowledge, behaviour, perception, intelligence, morality and aesthetics, which is spiritual and sacred.[117] For Emerson, poets who shoulder the mission of exploring truth and goodness, are speakers, namers, and representatives of beauty, who will always stand in the centre.[118]

Emerson is important in this discussion with Dickinson as Emerson is also a reader of Keats. His proposition of truth and beauty is in essence a Keatsian percept. Emerson is an intermediate figure who is a responsive and receptive reader of Keats and other Romantics, including Coleridge and Wordsworth. Thus, Dickinson's own response to Keats is also refracted through her reading of Emerson. Dickinson practices Emerson's definition of the poet by adopting the method of 'absence'

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[113] Connie Ann Kirk, *Emily Dickinson: A Biography* (London: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004), p.34, 79, 94.
[114] *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, ed. by Thomas H. Johnson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), pp.727-729.
[115] David LaRocca, *Estimating Emerson: An Anthology of Criticism from Carlyle to Cavell* (Edinburgh: A&C Black, 2013), p.9.
[116] Stanley Brodwin, 'Emerson's Version of Plotinus: the Flight to Beauty', *Journal of the History ideas 35(3)* (1974), 465-483 (pp.472-473).
[117] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Essays of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. by Alfred Riggs Ferguson and Jean Ferguson Carr (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987).
[118] Ibid, p.223

and 'self-denial'[119] in order to realize what Emerson means when he describes the poet as a moody child who has a pair of eyes that 'rived the dark' through worlds, races, terms and times.[120] Michelle Kohler argues that, by writing this essay, Emerson teaches his readers to understand the role of a poet, as perceiving the likeness between things in the world,[121] through an initial withdrawal of self. An imaginative absence of this kind means the disappearance of the true self and a multiplicity of selves, as Dickinson wrote in her letter to Higginson (July 1862):

> When I state myself, as the Representative of the verse – it does not mean – me – but a supposed person. You are true, about the 'perfection.'[122]

In fact, her letters show her readership a thousand contradictory Dickinsons: an innocent girl, a sovereign queen, a struggling lover and a sublimate soul. In Dickinson's theory, the absence of the original self is beneficial for the subject to obtain truth and to reach perfection. Here truth is equal to what Hazlitt defines as the 'natural appearance of the object'. This closely resembles Keats' purpose in the proposition of negative capability and brings Dickinson's readers a sense of spirit possession. However, self-denial refers not only to the denial of her identity as a poet but also to the rejection of her true identity as a woman. This is frequently revealed in most of her poems in which she tries to keep 'absent'. For instance, in one of her famous poems, 'I Died for Beauty'[123], she notes:

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"? *5*

[119] *The Emily Dickinson Handbook*, p.230.
[120] *The Essays of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, p.219.
[121] Michelle Kohler, *Miles of Stare: Transcendentalism and the Problem of Literary Vision in Nineteenth-Century America* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2004), p.18.
[122] *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, ed. by Thomas H. Johnson, p.412.
[123] Emily Dickinson, *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Reading Edition*, ed. by R. W. Franklin, (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), p.207.

"For Beauty", I replied –
"And I-for Truth- Themself are One –
We Brethren, are", He said –

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

We first read that Dickinson frequently utilizes words such as 'brethren', 'kinsmen', 'our lips' and 'our names' which keeps emphasizing integrity. On the one hand, she borrows the tone of the man to show that the object accepts her identity because they have the same belief; on the other hand, she uses the form of dialogue to close the distance between the man and 'I'. Finally, in the last stanza, Dickinson extends their dialogue to a constant condition until both of them are buried and cannot talk anymore. The three steps make the distance between the man and 'I' closer and 'I' become that man in the end. In this poem, Dickinson makes herself a man so that gender difference can be excluded in the beginning and emotional echoes with the character can be generated. In Dickinson's interpretation, the comradeship is different from friendship, in which only the same gender can have the same affection and can be called as kinsmen. Therefore, at first step, she decides to give up her gender identity. Then, in the last line of this poem, Dickinson further says that the moss 'covered up – our names', which acts as another signal of covering up identity. This is similar to Keats' becoming a sparrow or a billiard ball as Dickinson imagines an elimination of the self and an absence of subjectivity. As in the first two lines of 'I'm Nobody! Who are you?' [124]:

I'm Nobody! Who are you?
Are you-Nobody- Too?
Then there's a pair of us?
Don't tell! they'd advertise-you know!

How dreary-to be-Somebody!
How public-like a Frog –

[124] *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. R. W. Franklin, p.116.

To tell one's name- the livelong June –
To an admiring Bog!

Dickinson uses a forthright mode of address with an exclamation mark to exclaim that she is 'nobody' at first. Then she writes two questions to stress that her fellow must be a 'nobody' as well. Due to the same identity, the two nobodies enjoy the company of each other and understand the benefit of their anonymity as well. However, 'don't tell' reveals that to be nobody is an unusual identity, so they need to keep silent to avoid being 'advertised' by others. The existence of nobodies at this stage should be with great care as the majority excludes and rejects them. Yet in the second stanza, Dickinson's tone becomes clearly more confident. The two exclamatory sentences show that Dickinson strongly feels that being somebody is not a good idea. The word 'dreary' conveys her boredom of being somebody. She compares the condition of being somebody to a frog because the frog likes croaking to arouse the attention from the surroundings, and such swanking characteristic which is self-important and self-promoting, early or late, will bring trouble to itself. In the end, Dickinson satirically uses 'admiring' to describe that the frog considers the 'bog' as a platform that can name itself and will never find itself in trouble. The bog represents a mainstream environment that approves the frog. The first two questions may sound tentative while naïve, yet the last sentence is not. Dickinson's combination of 'admiring' and 'bog' finally makes the poem ironic.

The 'nobody' Dickinson approves is actually a subject or a person that is skilled at eliminating its uniqueness and showing its likeness to others. Dickinson does not regard that being a focus in the public eye is a good thing as nobody only draws attention to nobodies. She wants to be a member of the group; thus, she has to explicitly show her readers that she is devoted to her ordinariness. The two opposing sides in this poem are striking. In those somebodies' eyes, the belief of the nobodies is incomprehensible, and for nobodies, the interest of circulating themselves also goes against their

devotion to spiritual privacy. Dickinson has chosen the side she is on when she begins the first word of this poem.

Compared to that of Keats, Dickinson's construction and deconstruction of her poetic identity are more complicated due to her gender identity. Thus, sometimes Dickinson acts not only to accomplish sympathy but also to eliminate the crisis of being a female poet, as a result of which Dickinson usually admits the male ownership of many roles which she thinks that women cannot control. Both Keats and Dickinson are imaginatively breathing with their characters when they create roles in poems, and at that time their identities are removed, and they become nothing. In Dickinson's poems, the profound influence of Emerson can be observed: in the process of pursuing truth and beauty, a poet is at any moment prepared for discarding his identity and becoming an innocent child who keeps receiving new information from the world.

This is a very Keatsian theme. In such a condition, poets display their intelligence to position themselves at a broad road where they speak not for themselves but for the characters they create. Although direct commentary from Dickinson on Emerson is never merely to show what evidence exists, Dickinson has imperceptibly and flexibly utilized key Emersonian ideas in her poetry. She once wrote in her letters to Jane Humphrey (January 1850) and Higginson (7 June 1862) that Emerson's poems from Newton were a treasured gift for her and pleased as well as encouraged her to continue her poetic career.[125]

The notion of Keats and Dickinson's dissolving the identity of the poet reveals Hazlitt's 'natural disinterestedness of the human mind',[126] which is primarily an aesthetic concept used to

[125] John S. Mann, 'Emily Dickinson, Emerson and the Poet as Namer', *The New England Quarterly 51(4)* (1978), 467-488 (pp.470-471).
[126] Jacques Khalip, ''Virtual Conduct: Disinterested Agency of Hazlitt and Keats, *ELH 73(4) (2006)*, 885-912 (p.885).

examine Kant's idea of receiving beauty from the passive spectator's point of view.[127] Disinterestedness, as mentioned by Nietzsche, means objectivity, which stresses 'self-sacrifice'[128] and pays attention to the aesthetic quality of the poetry. Giving up the identity of themselves as the quality of disinterestedness is undoubtedly a kind of self-sacrifice. Consequently, the poets are able to enter the objects they face or imagine by their genuine feelings and emotions rather than reasonable judgement, the result of which is that both poets actually complete a sense-journey with characters in their poems. They acquire easier access to the natural appearance of the object – its truth and beauty. The aesthetic value of the poem is thus realized.

2.4 In Pursuit of Truth and Beauty: Keats and Dickinson

The purpose of both poets' dissolution of their identity is to eliminate those barriers of subjectivity in the process of pursuing truth and beauty. In the letters of Keats and Dickinson, there are two questions they both address: should poetry give us an accurate and precise view of the world? or should poetry be beautiful and enhance the world we see? In other words, the poets hope to deal with the issue about in what way should poetry express truth and in what way does poetry understand beauty. The first time Keats mentions the concepts of truth and beauty is in his letter to Bailey (22 Nov 1817):

> I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of Imagination--What the imagination seizes as beauty must be truth – whether it existed before or not – for I have the same Idea of all our Passions as of Love: they are all, in their sublime, creative of essential beauty.[129]

In his letter to George and Tom (27 Dec, 1817), he again explores the relation between truth and beauty by arguing that:

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[127] Christopher Janaway, 'Disinterestedness and Objectivity', *Beyond Selflessness: Reading Nietzsche's Genealogy* (Oxford Scholarship Online, 2007), p.1.
[128] Janaway, p.3.
[129] *The Letters of John Keats: 1814-1821*, pp. 184-185.

> The excellence of every Art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate, from their being in close relationship with beauty and truth.[130]

The first statement claims that truth and beauty should be discussed in relation to the realm of imagination. In Keats' understanding, imagination, which is as essential as his affections, connects truth and beauty. Under this premise, the exploration of the relationship between truth and beauty makes sense. Keats' comprehension of the relationship between truth and beauty depends on the affections or the feelings of the subject. That is, to judge the truth and beauty of something, one should begin from subjective perception and imagination rather than reason and fact. In one of Keats' poem, 'On Sitting down to Read King Lear Once Again', for example, truth is found in tragedy. Through an imaginative historical dialogue with Shakespeare, Keats resonates with King Lear on his tragedy and believes that tragedy is beauty as well. When the truth and beauty which he pursues are associated with his passions and love, they reach a level of sublimity. After moments of pain and loss, there can still be beauty.

The second statement stresses the greatness of the art, which is linked with truth and beauty. This sentence means that due to its connection with truth and beauty, that kind of art is endowed with an ability to eliminate all inharmonious elements and realize sublime unity. For instance, in 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', truth is settled in landscape as well as in human society. There is a beauty in the Urn as well if beauty is truth and if what we take pleasure from is something true in the sense that it has to be right. The 'urn' passed from generation to generation of sorrowing humanity and becomes a quest for the self and beauty, in which permanence lies in psyche. 'All disagreeables', if we trace it back to the discussion of the self, can be understood as the contradictory and ambiguous relationship between the subject and the object, or between the original self and the transformed

[130] *The Letters of John Keats: 1814-1821*, p.192.

self. The hidden connotation of Keats' sentence is that not all arts are excellent arts, only those with this particular ability can be considered as high art. The frozen archetype of that urn epitomizes truth and beauty that resides in the self. In Abrams' interpretation, intensity here refers to the 'nature' or the 'truth' of the art, which is the first-order standard with which to judge the value of the poem.[131] Keats' pursuit of truth and beauty in poetry is further revealed in his letter to Taylor (27 Feb 1818) where he clearly states three axioms of what he thinks poetry should be:

> 1st I think Poetry should surprise by a fine excess and not by singularity – it should strike the Reader as a wording of his own highest thoughts, and appear almost a Remembrance – 2nd Its touches of Beauty should never be half way thereby making the reader breathless instead of content: the rise, the progress, the setting of imagery should like the Sun come natural natural too him – shine over him and set soberly although in magnificence leaving him in the Luxury of twilight – but it is easier to think what Poetry should be than to write it […] If poetry comes not as naturally as the Leaves to a tree it had better not come at all.[132]

The three axioms comprehensively reveal Keats' principles of writing poetry. First, the greatness of the poetry does not lie in its uniqueness but in its compatibility, which can express the readers' thoughts and create echoes with its readers. When reading these poems, readers will be surprised to have echoes with the poet's thoughts, and the recollections of the reader will be aroused at the same time. In other words, poetry gathers, summarizes, sublimates and delivers familiar ideas that readers once generated but not spoke out. The second proposition stresses the close connection with beauty. Excellent poems should be ones that strive for beauty all the time. In the end, when readers engage a poem, they will marvel at the beauty of the poetry as the concept of beauty has been internalized in their minds. This is the first occasion in which Keats states the significance of poetic beauty. We can understand the third axiom by borrowing Wordsworth's phrase of a 'spontaneous overflow of

[131] Mike Abrams, 'Longinus, Hazlitt, Keats, and the Criterion of Intensity', p.134.
[132] *The Letters of John Keats: 1814-1821*, p.238.

powerful feelings.'[133] The poems of qualities that matter, in Keats' understanding, are those which can deliver the poet's most sincere emotions in the most natural form. For readers, the process of reading these poems is just like experiencing the natural phenomenon such as the rising and setting of the sun. The act of writing poetry is organic and should occur naturally like the sun or leaves on a tree. Writing grows organically in patterns, and inspiration appears like the spider spinning its web. The poet is like the spider, and the web is the organically woven pattern of the poetry.

The discussion of truth and beauty can be traced in Dickinson's correspondence, too. Dickinson believes that truth and beauty are valuable things worth pursuing and sacrificing. In her letters to Higginson (Aug 1870, Nov 1871), she claims the way of discovering and expressing the truth (as well as the nature of truth itself) is a rarity. Dickinson notes:

> Truth is such a rare thing it is delightful to tell it.[134]
> Truth like Ancestor's Brocades can stand alone.[135]

Clearly, Dickinson takes the truth as a precious and pleasing topic to discuss. However, although Dickinson affirms the significance of truth, she also advocates that we should 'tell all the truth but tell it slant'.[136] For example, in her congratulation note to Helen Jackson (1869), Dickinson cryptically uses 'spring' and 'doom to balm' to describe Helen's second marriage, which arouses request for further interpretation from Jackson.[137] Though Dickinson did not respond to Jackson, her habit of using obscure imagery has caused misunderstandings of her works. Another example can be seen in a letter to Higginson (July 1862) where she uses 'butterfly', 'lizard' and 'orchis'[138]

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[133] William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads* (London: Routledge, 2013), preface.
[134] *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, p.474.
[135] Richard E. Brantley, 'The Empirical Imagination of Emily Dickinson', *The Wordsworth Circle 32(3)* (2000), 144-148 (p.144).
[136] *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. R. W. Franklin, p.494.
[137] Roger Lundin, *Emily Dickinson and the Art of Belief* (Grand Rapids, MI: WM.B Eerdmans Publishing, 2004), pp.231- 232.
[138] *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, ed. by Thomas Johnson, p.412.

to depict Higginson's knowledge of mapping, earning the reply 'beyond my knowledge' from Higginson. For Dickinson, the truth still refers to the original appearance of the world, but it is too bright for her to face directly. Thus, Dickinson's exploration of truth is an inward process where metaphor becomes a significant bridge to convey the connotation of truth. Metaphor becomes the means by which beauty is 'found'[139] for Dickinson.

Dickinson also believes that truth can stand alone free from the material world, but truth can be empirical, too. This relates to Dickinson's religious scepticism,[140] as Richard Brantley argues. Brantley considers that Dickinson's concept of empirical truth is sense-based and experiment-ended. That is to say, the first-hand experience of the poet plays a more significant role in acquiring the truth compared with logical justification. As for this aspect in poetic creation, Dickinson resonates with Keats' negative capability well. Both poets stress the principle of using abundant sensational experiences to seek out and explore truth. She measures and balances between writing in the way that truth in the world creates things that are beautiful.

Beauty for Dickinson is a form of sublimity as well. Previously, in her noted poem, 'I Died for Beauty' is mentioned as evidence of her dissolving the self. It is also a poem that perfectly presents her attitude towards beauty. For Dickinson, beauty is something that she can sacrifice her life to pursue. Besides, in the discussion of beauty, Dickinson also uses the image of 'kangaroo' in her letter to Higginson:

> […] An ignorance, not of Customs, but if caught with the Dawn – or the sunset see me – myself the only Kangaroo among the Beauty, Sir, if you please, it afflicts me, and I thought that instruction would take it away.[141]

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[139] Mike Abrams, 'Poetic Truth and Metaphor', p.286
[140] Richard E. Brantley, 'The Empirical Imagination of Emily Dickinson', p.145.
[141] *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Thomas Johnson, p. 412.

This is a reply from Dickinson to address those negative opinions on her irregular use of metres in her poems, which Higginson regards as 'not beautiful' in the traditional understanding of poetry. The image of the kangaroo is associated with jumping, representing diversity, variability and irregularity. Dickinson dares to break the routine of writing streamlined poems. Karl Keller once evaluated Dickinson's free style of writing as 'poetry fun and funny' to identify her as someone who ventures to bend conventions for her own need.[142] It proves that Dickinson's concept of beauty is a natural and unpredictable power that can deliver the most precise meanings of the poet. The kangaroo represents Dickinson's refusal to singularity where beauty should contain complexity and multiplicity.

Assessing both poets' statements, the concept of truth is more closely associated with art for Keats and more closely with 'religion'[143] for Dickinson. Keller further addresses this in his claim that Dickinson's pursuit of irregularity and uncertainty is influenced by her resistance to Puritan belief against which the truth of all objects is in 'fictitiousness'.[144] This is different from Keats' understanding. In Keats' interpretation, the truth, even though depending on one's imagination, exists there, which requires the actual sensation of the subject. Yet for both poets, beauty is an eternal concept during their poetic creation, and the surprise of poetry often hides in its expression of beauty. From the statements found in the letters of Keats and Dickinson, the aim of pursuing truth and beauty is to create a kind of pure poetry, the sense of the image of which is more important than the plot and design.[145] As Keats concludes in his poem 'Ode on a Grecian Urn': 'beauty is truth, truth

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[142] Karl Keller, 'The Only Kangaroo among the Beauty: Emily Dickinson and America', *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature 34(4)* (1980), 279-280 (p.279).
[143] Anhony Hecht, 'The Riddles of Emily Dickinson', *New England Review 1(1)* (1978), 1-24 (p.12).
[144] Karl Keller, *The Only Kangaroo among the Beauty* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), p.171.
[145] Mike Abrams, p.133.

beauty',[146] Dickinson gives a similar answer in her poem 'I Died for Beauty' in response to the line 'He questioned softly why I failed? ''For beauty,'' I replied, ''and I for truth – the two are one; …'''[147] Such a kind of highest poetry, or pure poetry, is intense and can shake the soul, which often gives a 'non-poetic'[148] sort of pleasure.

2.5 Living in the House of Imagination: Keats and Dickinson

Imagination is a critical tool and medium for both poets to realize the integrity of truth and beauty in the premise of giving up poetic identity. Poetry, as a product of imagination which, emphasizing the feeling and sensibility rather than judgement, seeks to situate its readers in a state of dream-like mind.[149] The 1817 letter of Keats to Bailey (22 Nov) assimilates imagination to Adam's dream:

> The Imagination may be compared to Adam's dream – he awoke and found it truth. […] However it may be, O for a Life of Sensations rather than of thoughts! […] And yet such a fate can only befall those who delight in sensation rather than hunger as you do after Truth – Adam's dream will do here and seems to be a conviction that Imagination and its empyreal reflection is the same as human Life and its spiritual repetition.[150]

This statement has a threefold meaning. First, it claims the authenticity of Keats' imagination: we can comprehend the object only after finding and feeling the charm of the beauty of it. Imagination is exactly the means of getting that beauty. Therefore, the content of the imagination must be the truth. Objects in our imagination, whether they appear in reality or not, should have that kind of authenticity. As a result, things in imagination have been beautified automatically and become more aesthetic than reality. Readers can become delighted from sensations of the depth of the beauty rather than 'desire'. The sentences also support the idea that Keats' imagination depends on

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[146] John Keats, *Complete Poems,* ed. Jack Stillinger, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), p.283.
[147] *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. by R. W. Franklin, p.207.
[148] Mike Abrams, p.138.
[149] Mike Abrams, p.134.
[150] *The Letters of John Keats*, p.185. See in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, lines 452-90; 478-83.

sensations. Behzad Pourgharib argues that Keatsian imagination has gone beyond the scope of reason and facts and has reached a paramount situation in which fancy happens without any design and with all-natural characters.[151] That is, the means of analysing and inferencing to grasp the object will lose the chance to reach beauty, and the result is therefore without authenticity.

In addition, Keats' concept of the imagination emphasizes the process of sympathy, which is regarded as a sublime reflection of humanity and spirit. Walter Jackson Bate points out that Keats intends to pursue his imagination to the utmost in *Paradise Lost* in association with Milton.[152] This is proved in Keats' letter to John Taylor (31 Aug 1819), in which he quotes from *Paradise Lost* that 'men should be in imitation of Spirits ''responsive to each other's note''".[153] Keats uses the story of Eden to illustrate the importance of producing echoes with all God's creatures, in the process of which the authorship of God is given up.[154] A similar understanding of *Paradise Lost* can be seen in Keats' letter to Woodhouse (27 Oct 1818) as well, in which Keats advocates that the role of a poet, like the role of the God, is to fill some other body than his own.[155] By looking at these three characteristics, Keats stresses the aesthetic value of imagination and considers its function of 'revealing the truth as the mainstay of artistic beauty.'[156]

Keats' imagination relies on the emotion of the subject as well. Keatsian imagination is not always positive, and more than once he complains of the annoyance that imagination brings to him. In the latter part of the letter to Taylor, Keats notes that sometimes imagination displaces his passion and affection and leaves him in a state of self-suspension. He calls it 'Melancholist's Dream'[157] in

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[151] Behzad Pourgharib, 'Keats' View on Imagination in Comparison with Wordsworthian, Coleridgean and Shelleyan View', *Journal of Language Sciences and Linguistics 2* (2014), 45-54 (p.45).
[152] Nicholas Roe, *John Keats and the Culture of Dissent* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.231.
[153] *The Letters of John Keats, Vol.2*, p.153.
[154] Kent R. Lehnhof, 'Paradise Lose and the Concept of Creation', *South Central Review 21(2)* (2004), 15-41 (p.21).
[155] *The Letters of John Keats,* p.387.
[156] Ibid.
[157] *The Letters of John Keats, Vol.2*, p.113.

the letter to Sarah Jeffery (31 May 1819). His letter to Charles Brown (23 Sep 1819) further argues that the imaginary grievances give him more torment than real ones because the imaginary grievances are produced by his passionate feelings.[158] He even believes that the dull imagination is a barrier of the brightest realities in a letter to Fanny Brawne (16 Aug 1819).[159] This is Keats' paradox in which sometimes imagination is trapped in a dilemma that the subject is experiencing his own emotions and yet has sympathy with other identities. When the subjective emotion is too strong to control, imagination does not work. The poet might bring those pains and wounds back to himself, and the poet will suffer the loss of the self amid his creations.[160]

> Things real – such as existences of Sun Moon & Stars and passages of Shakespeare – Things semireal such as Love, the Clouds & which require a greeting of the Spirit to make them wholly exist – and Nothings which are made Great and dignified by an ardent pursuit.[161]

This clearly tells us that to judge the value of an object that has not appeared in reality, one should focus on the link between the object and the inner emotional world of the subject. It shows the high power and the firm foundation of subjective spirits and emotions for the poet's imagination. As the sentence goes, unlike things such as the sun and moon which have the evidence of their existence, those abstract things need 'a greeting of the spirit' to support their existence in individual minds. Keats' imagination, according to Thorpe, is 'the most authentic guide to ultimate truth and a generative force of creating the essential reality'.[162]

What is more, Keats' imagination also yearns to go beyond limitation and obtains freedom and liberty. As he notes in the letter to Woodhouse (27 Oct 1818):

A Poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence; because he has no Identity – he is

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158 *The Letters of John Keats, Vol.2,* p.181.
159 *The Letters of John Keats, Vol.2*, p.141
160 Jacques Khalip, p. 897.
161 *The Letters of John Keats*, p.243.
162 Clarence Thorpe, *The Mind of John Keats* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p.67.

> continually in for – and filling some other Body – The Sun, the Moon, the Sea and Men and Women, who are creatures of impulse are poetical and have about them an unchangeable attribute – the poet has none.[163]

This aspect closely relates to his idea of negative capability. The unpoetical essence of the poet allows him to transfer himself at any time so that he has absolute freedom. The spiritual essence of this statement is advocating the poet to enter a state of selflessness so that he can freely face, switch and experience the mind of the object by his imagination.

Dickinson does not discuss imagination too much as a theory in her correspondence. She is more concerned with practice of the imagination when writing poems. She once proposed:

> The possible's slow fuse is lit by the imagination.[164]

Elizabeth Phillips regards Dickinson's imagination as a naturally 'histrionic'[165] one in which Dickinson often shifts the situation, role and language in a flash. Compared to Keats' imagination, Dickinson's imagination is not in a state of dreaming but sobriety. Her method of imagination is that of an artist who is able to use organic senses to construct the kingdom of the imagination ingeniously. Writing to her cousins (July, 1862 and 1874), Dickinson utilizes 'purple morning'[166], 'green memory'[167] and 'scarlet fever'[168]; to Mrs. Holland (1856 and 1857), she writes 'my heart is red as February and purple as March'[169] and 'I feel the red in my mind'[170]. Also, in the poem 'Ample make this bed', she uses 'yellow noise'.[171] Readers may find it hard to connect colours directly with the object they describe. However, they are really there. It is because Dickinson's imagination

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[163] *The Letters of John Keats*, p.387.
[164] Emily Dickinson, *The Complete Poems*, ed. by Thomas H. Johnson, (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), p.1146.
[165] Wendy Martin, *The Cambridge Companion to Emily Dickinson* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.93.
[166] *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, p.411.
[167] *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, pp.89, 90, 142
[168] *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, pp.341, 342.
[169] *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, p.450.
[170] *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, p.142.
[171] *The Poems of Emily Dickinson,* ed. R. W. Franklin, p.357.

is connected with the technique of synaesthesia, which means that she might once physiologically experienced these colours in certain conditions so that the memory of the colours enables her to imagine other objects when the same feeling comes. Synaesthetic imagination further extends Dickinson's sensations; thus, in many of her poems that she frequently uses the word of colours to depict the sound.

Such synaesthesia is achieved through her poetic meditation, just as she claims in the letter to Higginson (Aug 1870), 'if I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that it is poetry.'[172] Synaesthetic imagination, which needs to stimulate different organs, has a high requirement for Dickinson to weaken her personal identity and consciousness in order to transfer the scenes rapidly. This resembles Keats' proposition in his practice of negative capability. Dickinson's interest in sensation is similar to Keats, and both poets tend to prefer sensation rather than thoughts.

In addition, Dickinson always tries to find a balance between her imagination and observation (perceiving). Her letters and poems usually offer a child-like perspective on the natural world. No matter her lucid descriptions on animals (butterflies, birds and so on) and natural scenes (seas, sky, garden and so on), or her use of metaphors on various objects (birds, garden…), the images presented in her letters and poems never break away from what she has observed in her real life. This combined with her synaesthetic technique, Dickinson's imagination touches the original appearance of the object more empirically. Brantley describes this as 'naturalized imagination' as empirical procedures of the poet's sense are especially stressed.[173] Compared with Keats' imagination which stresses imaginative sensation, Dickinson's naturalized imagination seems to be

[172] *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, p.474.
[173] Richard E. Brantley, 'The Empirical Imagination of Emily Dickinson', p.145.

more empirical.

Imagination is the soul of poetry in the understanding of Coleridge as it is unsustainable and ephemeral.[174] In Keats and Dickinson's letters, imagination is an indispensable element for both poets' poetic maturity and is the 'chief of poets' invention'.[175] Keats and Dickinson's imagination, like Hazlitt's proposition, is a kind of depersonalizing power,[176] which is a necessary step towards realizing their poetic ambition. The imagination of both Keats and Dickinson belongs with Shakespearean sympathetic imagination, the aim of which is to generate aesthetical sympathy[177] where truth and beauty can be integrated. Through emotional displacement, the poets fuse their emotions into another personality so that the whole process exists 'with the maximum sincerity and truth to their immediate sensations'.[178] Thus, they sincerely practice the virtue of disinterestedness and achieve universal sympathy. Keats mentions the influence of Shakespeare more than once in his letters to many correspondents. In Keats' letter to Reynolds (3 May 1818), he states that a poet should associate himself with the toiling masses, regarding the misfortune of the people as his own, never feeling at ease and always being concerned. This is a typical Shakespearean sympathy. Dickinson stresses Shakespeare in her letter to Higginson (1875) that 'while Shakespeare remains, literature is firm.'[179] But there is a problem with such imagination: the poets' willingness to enter the world of other beings[180] means that the poetic genius is unable to escape from the ghostly existence of others' shadows.

It is not difficult to ascertain from the above analysis that Keats and Dickinson's poetic

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[174] Mike Abrams, p.134.
[175] *The Letters of John Keats*, p.169.
[176] Jacques Khalip, p.885.
[177] Mike Abrams, 'The Paradox of Shakespeare', p.245.
[178] Clayborough Arthur, *'Negative capability' and 'the Camelion Poet' in Keats letters: the Case for Differentiation'* (Routledge: Taylor and Francis Group, 1973) p.153
[179] *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, p.491.
[180] Not necessarily human beings, it can be any other kind of living or non-living entity.

propositions have many points in common. Both poets make efforts to achieve a balance between their self and god-like impersonality in order to maintain disinterestedness in their pursuit of truth and beauty in poetry. As a method, imagination plays a pivotal role, for Keats and Dickinson, in the whole process of integrating truth and beauty. Although there exist differences in their opinions, such as the presentation of the 'truth' and the mode of relinquishing identity, we cannot deny that Keats and Dickinson share have trans-historical and transatlantic connections.

Chapter 3

The Anxiety of the Existential Imagination: Keats, Dickinson and Heideggerian Measuring

Heidegger believes that poetry brings us to the earth and makes us belong to it so that we can dwell.[181] Then how do we measure our dwelling or being? We need to use the notion of 'dimension' which encompasses both upward movement to the sky and downward movement to the earth. This space in between is what must be taken measure of. The 'between' space is a measurement of the world, yet it is also a measurement of man's mortality from birth to death. *Da-sein*, which means 'being-in-the-world', is being there – being in this 'between'. Heidegger argues that 'to write poetry is measure-taking',[182] or rather, poetry is a kind of measuring. The purpose of this measuring is to situate our being in relation to everything, and visualize our anxieties through language.

Then, what is the measure of poetry? Heidegger argues that the answer should be 'God',[183] but, as he states, the acceptance of god and the acceptance of man are different. What is alien to God is familiar to man because man represents mortality whereas God represents immortality. This suggests man's measurement against divinity. Those things alien to the divine include everything such as the sky, the scent, the sun, and other natural phenomena, which exist in close proximity to us as human beings. Poets make images to speak of those things alien to God and render God less alien to us by making God in the image of man.[184] It is called using the unfamiliar to measure the familiar. These images function to make everything seen by God. However, sometimes we fail to measure and we fail to dwell poetically. Then a paradox occurs. The authenticity of poetry depends

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[181] Martin Heidegger, 'Poetically Man Dwells' trans. by Albert Hofstadter, *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York, NY: Harper Colophon, 1971), p.218.
[182] Martin Heidegger, pp.219-220.
[183] Martin Heidegger, pp.224-25.
[184] Martin Heidegger, p.226.

on the appropriation of our being; the appropriate state of being depends upon our kindness and purity. Namely, we should attempt to dwell poetically, as this will brings us into the domain of spirit and morality.[185]

3.1 Measuring the Shape of Life

Concerned with how we exist, the anxiety of being is the fundamental problem of existence that Keats and Dickinson explore in their respective poetry. Anxiety is a way of responding to existential feelings and to uncertainties at the level of feeling. In this case, the understanding of Keats' and Dickinson's measuring can be that they are externalizing their anxiety by imaginatively reckoning everything in the world to confirm the shape or quantity of things. In fact, measuring is an important concept in the poetry of Keats and Dickinson. They measure the reincarnation of life, the movement of time, the inside and outside of space, the distance of imaginative transportation, and the durability of art. As Heidegger claims, the nature of measurement is the nature of number, belonging to the 'mathematical projection'.[186] Measurement, in the poetry of both poets, also takes the form of counting. Poetry is a kind of measurement for man, and the mission of poets is to make poetry accepted as a kind of measuring.[187] The poets borrow the concept of 'measuring' as a kind of manifestation of their anxiety as they attempt to give things a number or size as a means to reckon with the uncertainty and ambiguity of things. In Dickinson's 'Ample make this Bed', there seems to be a sense of measurement about shape and size, which provides the poem with its organizing principle.

Ample make this Bed –

[185] Diana Aurenque, 'Heidegger on Thinking about Ethos and Man's Dwelling', *Architecture Philosophy 2(1)* (2016), 39-53 (p.48).
[186] Joseph J. Kpckelmans, 'Idealization and Projection in the Empirical Sciences: Husserl VS. Heidegger', *History of Philosophy Quarterly 6(4)* (1989), 365-380 (p.377).
[187] Martin Heidegger, p.224.

Make this Bed with Awe –
In it wait till Judgment break
Excellent and Fair.

Be its Mattress straight –
Be its Pillow round –
Let no Sunrise' yellow noise
Interrupt this Ground –[188]

The poem lends itself to diverse interpretations. One interpretation is that the poem is about death.[189] The bed then becomes a metaphor of a coffin or a death bed. In this sense, Dickinson tries to measure the dimension of death by endowing it with spatiality. The first word of this poem, 'ample', gives readers a sense of spatial expansion, making the concept of 'bed' seemingly unmeasurable. 'Ample', as a positive word, refers to plenitude, which never merely means 'enough'. It implies a state of satiety and hunger, a condition of both fully enough and a vast infinity. 'Ample' makes the bed difficult to measure, while immeasurability itself is a kind of measuring as well, anticipating Heidegger's simile of 'sight' that your definition of someone's degree of blindness should be on the premise of the fact that someone else has sight. Moreover, ample is an adjective; the artful use of this word in the beginning makes the first line ambiguous. As readers may ask: what makes the bed ample? Why does 'ample' comes first? Anadiplosis is employed in the first two lines as the word order makes the meaning ambivalent. Dickinson first uses 'ample' and then utilizes 'awe'. The transfer of the diction reflects a change of emotion. In life, we make a bed in two ways. The first one is by tools, and we act as carpenters. The second one is by our preferences. We make the bed look the way we like; we decorate the bed. If it is not a grammatical mistake, then Dickinson's use of 'ample make' fits the second way of making – she makes the bed 'ample'. Therefore, ample here

[188] *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. R. W. Franklin, p.357.
[189] Barata do Amaral and Ana Luisa Ribiero, 'Dickinson's Ample Make This Bed', *The Explicator 51(3)* (1993), 163-165 (p.163).

might have a connotation of comfort as well. We 'make' a bed, customarily, by preparing it for sleep – pulling the sheets over it and laying out the pillows.

The bed itself also provides a kind of measure. It belongs to domestic economics in the domain of home. Therefore, to describe the bed as 'ample' becomes a part of good household management and ensures the word belongs to the discourse of domestic economy. Measuring the quantity or the shape of household contents highlights material preoccupation. Yet the bed also belongs with the sublime and the aesthetic. The bed is the dwelling in this poem. Is the bed referring to the one Dickinson temporarily reposes in? Not necessarily. The bed can mean everything. It can simply mean a bed; or, it can be the bed of mountains, the earth – the bed of nature, the bed of birth, and even the bed of death – eternal repose.[190] The measuring of this bed is multiple and uncertain. In this poem, the result of using 'ample' to make that bed is 'awe'. The way in which the reader moves from ample to awe is hidden between the opening word of the first line to the closing word of the second line, which is crucial to how we comprehend this poem. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'awe' as an overwhelming feeling of dread and reverence, which stands for sublimity and extremity, in concert with 'ample' before. The appearance of 'awe' promotes the picture to another level, as normally 'awe' is not the consequence that we expect. Thus, this helps readers to rethink the above question: what kind of outlook do bring to the bed and in what sense can it be made both ample and with awe? Besides the domestic sense of making a bed, the bed can be prepared for final rest. Our attitude towards the bed depends on how we look it. We have the right to judge and assess the bed.

Then in the third line, the 'judgment break' gives the answer. The phrase makes a compromise

[190] Barata do Amaral and Ana Luisa Ribiero, p.163.

which omits a 'day' between judgement and break. Dickinson informs this poem with a strong sense of religious connotation.[191] We can imagine laying in a bed, waiting for a break – daybreak. Judgment day, in Christianity, is that day in which God purposes to judge the 'inhabited earth'.[192] When Adam and Eve rebelled against God, they brought sin and death to human beings. On judgment day, along with Satan and demons influencing their activities and testing their loyalty, human beings will stand in front of God, waiting to be judged to continue living on earth or to be taken away. It is difficult to measure something without judgement. However, for Dickinson, the measuring of judgment appears excellent and fair. 'Fair' equals justice and accompanies judgement, which also appears in Shakespeare's sonnet 18 – 'And every fair from fair sometime declines', 'Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st'.[193] 'Fair' in sonnet 18 means justice as well as beauty. The 'beautiful' connotation of fair then accords with 'excellence'. Thus, there exists a pun – pleasant and just, in these two lines.

'Excellence' seems strange to connect with judgment as the day contains a meaning of trial and punishment. In addition, judgment day is no earthly companion. It is so sublime and so far away from us, there is no way of knowing what that judgement might be like. The two adjectives, 'fair' and 'excellence', again express an extreme degree. It is probably because the speaker is confident about the result of judgment. Also, it may be that she is looking forward to being taken away so that she can experience death and come to life again, accomplishing the reincarnation of life. As a consequence, Dickinson endows this poem with a picture: a person lying in a bed waiting for judgement and resurrection. As resurrection becomes the ultimate result, the speaker should treat

[191] Barata do Amaral and Ana Luisa Ribiero, p.163.
[192] W.R.F Browning, *A Dictionary of the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 36.
[193] William Shakespeare, *Sonnet* (New York, NY: Washington Square Press, 2004), p.39.

that bed with awe, with the sublimity of terror and worship. In this case, the judgment also becomes a measuring of man's dwelling on earth.

In the second stanza, Dickinson continues arranging her bed. The first two lines of the second stanza begin with a strong request. The poet uses 'be' rather than 'make', and puts 'be' at the beginning of each line, making the tone hortatory and encouraging, and meanwhile making the poem like a prayer rather than an order. The measuring of this ample bed becomes more clear: with mattress straight and pillow round. Straight and round are two opposite shapes. Our bodies rest on the mattress whereas our mind rests on the pillow. The body stands for human organic life, as Heidegger's explanation of inauthentic death: it goes through a 'straight' physical cessation so that it has an obvious end, death. However, the mind is different. Although the organic brain of human beings will cease to work, something in that brain (mind), which we call 'spirit', endures. It proceeds in a circular line that does not have an end in this poem. We can guess that the two metaphors of mattress and pillow express Dickinson's attitude towards the shape of life – she measures life as both a circle and a straight line. The organic life is a straight line while the spiritual life is a circular one. The destinations of human beings, paradoxically, can be a line and a circle. In fact, Dickinson does not resolve this tension in the poem, but leaves the matter open ended for the reader to contemplate. The last two lines of the second stanza are also impressive. The yellow sunrise gives readers a strong visual sense while the noise gives an auditory one. Yet by combining them, as is discussed in the former chapter, it achieves synaesthesia. Dickinson uses 'noise' to describe the sun, implying that the sun has a threatening presence for her. For other poets and novelists, the rise of the sun is a symbol of hope, of new life and liberation. However, it seems that Dickinson does not expect the rise of the sun; she even treats it as a noise. She is willing to stay in quiet and private

darkness with a mattress and pillow equipped.

As this poem includes a rich network of relationships among elements,[194] each element relates to each other, constructing a world of contiguity. For example, 'noise' and 'break', 'judgment' and 'sunrise', which occupy the same positions in the two stanzas, resonate with each other before and after. This makes readers appreciate that, for the poet, the noise of sunrise equals the break of judgment. They come to her with evident and great sound. Moreover, the last words 'this ground' also link with the first line 'this bed', both of which deliver a narrow sense, down to the specific meaning of birth and death,[195] as 'ground' sounds like returning to the earth, as in down to the ground. The last two sentences portray such a picture: the poet should have waited peacefully for the coming of judgment day. However, it does not mean waiting forever. The dash in the last and the word 'interrupt' disturbs this behaviour. 'Interrupt' is like a combination of the word 'inter' and 'erupt'. 'Inter' refers to burying somebody in the earth whereas 'erupt' is a suggestion of movement. Usually 'erupt' refers to burning as with a volcano, while here, it implies suddenly and violently moving upwards. Such verbal intensity reveals a supernatural power that is beyond our control and can determine the reincarnation of human life. There exists an inspiration behind strange images that comes from a measurement hitherto hidden from us.

On the subject of the reincarnation of life, Keats also has a similar poem, 'On Sitting Down to Read King Lear Once Again' that is concerned with reckoning, counting and measure:

> O golden-tongued Romance, with serene lute!
> Fair plumed syren, queen of faraway!
> Leave melodizing on this wintry day
> Shut up thine olden Pages, and be mute.
> Adieu! for, once again, the fierce dispute,
> Betwixt Damnation and impassion'd clay

[194] Barata do Amaral and Ana Luisa Ribiero, p.163.
[195] Ibid.

Must I burn through; once more humbly assay
The bitter-sweet of this Shakespearian fruit.
Chief Poet! and ye Clouds of Albion,
Begetters of our deep eternal theme!
When through the old oak forest I am gone,
Let me not wander in a barren dream:
But, when I am consumed in the fire,
Give me new Phoenix wings to fly at my desire.[196]

Compared with Dickinson's 'Ample Make This Bed', Keats' sonnet is endowed with a Shakespearean tragic sense of life, which is both grander and more epic in conception. This poem reveals Keats' way of looking upon the process of life, which he attempts to immortalize. The choice of re-reading *King Lear* is significant, as it is as one of the greatest tragedies of Shakespeare, which presents some of the most human-related questions: birth and death, family and individuals, duty and obligation, and the mixture of joy and misery. The work of Shakespeare conveys a deep sense of history and the tragic. To read and feel the play's emotional and historical charge, Keats settles himself into comfortable space, so that his self-consciousness can connect with Shakespeare and his characters. The title 'sitting down' is Keats' first manifestation of measuring reverence to Shakespeare. As Theodore Leinwand claims, Keats' re-reading of *King Lear* seems to require a quiet and comfortable reposing place to read Shakespeare so that readers can remember the places and the days.[197] 'Read' contains interpretation and understanding, defined by Mcleod as a 'psychological act',[198] which implies that Keats' sonnet is something more than merely an interpretation of *King Lear*. Besides the title, this sonnet, which conveys a four-fold idea, also enacts Keats' respect for Shakespeare.

The opening quatrain of this sonnet acknowledges the appeal of a chivalric romance –

[196] *Complete Poems* ed. by Jack Stillinger, p.165.
[197] Theodore B. Leinwand, 'On Sitting down to Read Shakespeare Once Again', *The Kenyon Review 24(2)* (2002), 106-123 (p.106).
[198] Theodore B. Leinwand, p.114.

beautiful and dangerous. The 'Syren' is beautiful in appearance with a charming voice, deeply attractive. However, she seduces navigators and murders them. Keats initiates a strong, regretful desire through his phrase 'golden tongued', which captures how seductive the Syren is. It is a kind of alluring language, which gives such romance a veil to hide the bloodiness below it. Traditional romance writes about love, passion and happiness. However, in *King Lear* and also in this sonnet, there is a strong sense of tragedy, which makes this poem powerful and elegiac. In fact, romance and tragedy are seen as opposites. Keats gives up romance and accepts the inevitability of tragedy. Beauty in romance should be kind, noble and pure. However, the Syren in this sonnet is associated with murder, death, the devil and hypocrisy.[199]

The charm of the Syren to a sailor is equal to the charm of a romance to a reader. Besides the contradiction between romance and death, the 'golden' and 'serene' also form a contrast with 'wintry' and 'mute'. These former two words are typically Romantic. 'Golden' reminds us of 'golden times', which is a symbol for hope and glory. 'Serene' conveys pastoral happiness, which implies tranquillity with satisfaction. However, 'wintry' presses upon us a sense of darkness, silence, fadeaway, solitude and desertion, which is a falsehood to romance but true to reality. 'Lute' stands for a beautiful sound whereas 'mute' suggests a hushing up and making no noise. The attraction of such romance is tempting to Keats, however, also risky. The sudden and opposite emotional shift in the four lines pictures a fluctuation from elation to frustration. These vocabularies, with strong contrasting connotations, are combined to create an intense visual impact: not living in fantasy, Keats is saying goodbye to romance and turning to tragedy as he knows that its onset is inevitable; he accepts and acknowledges tragedy.

[199] Thomas Dilworth, Betsy Keating, 'Keats' On Sitting Down to Read King Lear Once Again', *The Explicator 65(2)* (2007), 78-82 (p.78).

Clearly, Shakespeare does not stand for romance, or rather, he opposes romance with tragedy. For Keats, Shakespeare and romance are clearly divided when he said 'Adieu'. 'Once again' claims that Shakespeare gives Keats the same experience each time he reads it. 'Damnation' is a word in religion for human destination, which connects with hell. Clay in Christianity is a word for human beings as well. As Dilworth and Keating mention, the first human being, Adam, is made of clay.[200] However, clay is also a word for the earth – a place to put the human body. After the death of the body, where do human beings go? This is also a foreshadowing of the result of this poem. The word 'impassioned' endows clay with life. It seems to portray a scene that when the body of a man is judged to go to hell, his mind is still calling to stay in the clay. At the same time, the clay responds to the body as well. The line can be understood to suggest that human beings return to the original state of clay after they die. 'Clay' is a state of being everything on earth as it covers every point of the earth's surface. It is endowed with the nature of ubiquity.

Then the third quatrain explicitly expresses Keats' reverence for Shakespeare's poetic inspiration. 'Humbly' and 'chief" show Keats' respect for his literary predecessor. 'Assay' in the line means tasting and digesting, reserving enough time to understand. Following immediately Keats uses 'bitter-sweet fruit' to describe Shakespeare's *King Lear*, which connects with 'assay'. For the poet, the work of Shakespeare is double-edged. It brings him the misery of damnation; meanwhile, it opens up the eternal theme. Eternality is only accomplished after a tragedy happens, and suffering is a part of human destiny. Here the relationship between the reader and the author needs to be noticed. Proust and Roland Barthes argue that the death of the author announces the birth of the reader; or rather, the readers' wisdom can be revealed only after the author leaves.[201] In Barthes'

[200] Thomas Dilworth and Betsy Keating, p.79.
[201] Theodore B. Leinwand, p.108.

understanding, the author functions as a restrictive and redundant role, not only limiting the meaning of the text but also bringing the writing to an end. Once the text is completed, the author should be dead and discarded. However, Keats accomplished a double role – both the reader of Shakespeare and the author of 'reading Shakespeare'. As a reader of Shakespeare, Keats is alive. The tragedy is transmitted from *King Lear* to Keats. Randall McLeod believes that we feel the state of Keats when we read his sonnet of *King Lear*.[202] We can imagine and imitate the posture of Keats reading Shakespeare. It seems that readers of Keats are there in the same psychic and physically measured space of the reading scene.

The image of the poet wandering through the old oak wood can be regarded as a further reflection on dwelling and measuring. The old oak forest, like Arcadia in Shakespeare's comedies, promises a pastoral romance. The poet is lost in this fancy world. He wants to pass through the woods and be reborn like a phoenix, to fly, and to lift to a new image. This can be interpreted as a statement of life's journey, with the forest standing for death and destination, which comes nearly to an end, as in *King Lear*.[203]. As a reader, Keats admires Shakespeare's talent by writing to his friend Benjamin that Shakespeare is unable to 'annihilate self'.[204] In the letter, Keats explains that he feels the greatness of the tragedy, and he is so moved that he must write a sonnet to express his great respect for *King Lear*.

Yet, as a writer, he has confidence that his writings will be read by others in the future. 'Barren dream' contrasts with reality, which is close to romance in the statement of Dilworth and Keating.[205] Keats does not want to stay in the realm of unreality. He acknowledges and accepts tragedy, as

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[202] Theodore B. Leinwand, p.111.
[203] Thomas Dilworth and Betsy Keating, p.79.
[204] Benjamin Taylor, 'Refusing to Refuse Perplexity: Keats and the Tragic', *New England Review 2(3)* (1980), 431-446 (p.433).
[205] Thomas Dilworth, Betsy Keating, p.79.

tragedy defines a true poet. In all, there are three measurements in this quatrain. The first is the form of sonnet – strictly fourteen lines in total with ten syllables in each line. The second measurement is the difference between the barren dream of romance and tragedy. The third one is King Lear's image of the circle – 'the wheel of fire' – in which we are born, suffer and die, which may have influenced Dickinson's use of circular imagery for life. This is a punishment in Greek mythology. The fire circle is a symbol of tragedy.

In the final two lines of the poem, Keats traces the footprint of the Phoenix in a bid to attain rebirth. Echoing with the line 7 'must I burn through', there exists a bridge between Keats' reading of Shakespeare and thinking about rebirth. Why and how does Keats measure life in this sonnet? Should life be romantic or painful? In his understanding, the tragic resurrection process of human beings is painful like a Phoenix burning through fire. The entirety of life is painfully rendered as a renewable, but 'bitter-sweet […] Shakespearian fruit'. That is, the Phoenix chooses the way of dwelling by itself. Therefore, the 'Phoenix' becomes an existential image of why we suffer.

The wing of the Phoenix allows Keats to fly towards his desire as he wishes. Keats, as the author, gives readers desires. 'Consumed' suggests that the fire is swallowing the poet. This represents Shakespeare's Phoenix and the Turtle. Keats imagines himself to be a Phoenix and hopes to get the powerful wings of a Phoenix. The whole tone of this sonnet is elegiac while hopeful. The wing of the Phoenix is a symbol of the power to rebirth. The new life is given romance. In the eyes of Keats, an authentic existence can only be realized after misery and tragedy have been endured. Metaphors of damnation, begetters and a phoenix's wing all reveal his attitudes towards the reincarnation of life – a circle that will return to the beginning. Keats' negatively capable sense of Lear is part of beauty, but always tragedy. He can feel the heartbreak of Lear, which is partly self-

destruction. Imaginatively, for Keats, the destruction of oneself is the implication of discovering another, and as a result, the consequence is to embrace the possibility of new life, new identity and new creation. Poetic identity, for Keats and Dickinson, depends upon an imaginative reckoning of the world that is at once self-destructive and self-creating.

Metrical choices Keats and Dickinson made in these two poems highlight their sense of measurement as well. In 'Ample make this Bed', for instance, this short poem seems to imply the scribbles of Dickinson with no evident rhyming scheme to follow in the lines, but the poet still weakly rhymes in the first line of the first and second stanzas after 'bed' and 'straight', and the second line of the first and second stanzas after 'awe' and 'round'. The words rhyme rarely as assistant stresses on the shape of that bed which symbolizes Dickinson's desire of knowing where life will be led to, but the absent sense of rhyme indicates the quick finality in the second stanza. 'Round' and 'Ground' function most efficiently as a cadence rhyme so that readers can progress the life circle with an obvious ending – death. Besides, the punctuation channelizes the flow of this poem as well when Dickinson stops at dashes where she wants to capture the frame of expression. The dashes replace commas so that the focus shifts to the words before the dash: bed, awe, straight, round and Ground, forming a circle of emphasis on the measurement of that bed. The tiny frame of this poem implies that the whole life is powerfully compressed within the highly condensed language and purified image of that judgment day. The limited words enable Dickinson to throw a rich ambiguity into this poem but also make her measurement outstanding through the burning conflict between compressed form and infinite meaning of 'awe'.

Compared with Dickinson's newly random style in 'Ample make this Bed', the form of the sonnet 'On Sitting Down to Read King Lear Once Again', however, is traditional with three

connected quatrains and an ending couplet. The rhyme scheme is evident with a pattern of 'abba' in the first two quatrains, 'abab' in the third quatrain and 'aa' in the couplet. The rhyme pattern constructs musical stress on Keats' encounter with Romance and Shakespeare as well as his meditation of alternation on his vision of life. The sound echo forms a circle in which Keats is asked repeatedly on the choice of Romance or tragedy. Besides, Keats demonstrates the philosophy of life measuring through a 'masculine ending' like what Dickinson also did in 'Ample make this Bed'. For example, the 'fire' and the 'desire' provide a strong resonation on the connotation of rebirth through the extra stressed syllable. The masculine ending carries the sense of authority for Keats as the author of reading Shakespeare, as the emotion of rebirth always appears with the next line's stress. In this way, both Keats and Dickinson succeed in demonstrating how life begets death and how death begets immortality. Different from Dickinson, however, Keats' choice of the image to meditate the possibility of life measuring is abstract and divinely remote, but both of them share the common technique of highlighting contrasts and providing a symbiotic relationship between antagonistic poles. Back to 'Ample make this Bed', the last line with Dickinson's poetic affect presents a perfect rhyme in the end to reconsider the eternal judgment with much noise. This might be an allusion of Dickinson on Keats' inversion in 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' that 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty'.

3.2 Measuring Inner and Outer Spaces: Dickinson and Keats

Besides measuring the shape of life, Keats and Dickinson share a strong sense of inside and outside spaces. The definition of 'in' could be applied to various imaginative situations. It can evaluate something to be enclosed or surrounded by something. It can depict something invisible of a whole, compared with the surface, or appearance of a thing. As a coexisting concept, 'out' stands in

opposition to 'in'. Space is generated through the related co-existent tension that exists between in and out. As Brian McHale notes, 'poetry spaces language'.[206] The measuring of space reveals how the poets' define their poetic identity. Both Keats and Dickinson are imaginative space fillers. They fill their respective poetic spaces by exploring the productive tensions of 'in' and 'out'. The discussion on the interaction of the outer and the inner is revealed explicitly in one of Dickinson's poems, 'The Outer – from the Inner'. She writes:

> The Outer – from the Inner
> Derives its Magnitude –
> 'Tis Duke, or Dwarf, according
> As is the Central Mood –
>
> The fine – unvarying Axis
> That regulates the Wheel –
> Though Spokes – spin – more conspicuous
> And fling a dust – the while.
>
> The Inner – paints the Outer –
> The Brush without the Hand –
> Its Picture publishes – precise –
> As in the inner Brand –
>
> On fine – Arterial Canvas –
> A Cheek – perchance a Brow –
> The Star's whole Secret – in the Lake –
> Eyes were not meant to know.[207]

The poem is divided into four stanzas with four metaphors, clearly showing how the inner can shape the outer. In this poem, the inner refers to a range of concerns to do with feelings, thoughts, mind and even spirit. The first stanza shows the relation of attachment between the outer and the inner space. Although Dickinson herself does not employ the word 'space', the concept of 'in' and 'out' has constructed boundaries and further produces a sense of space. The poet believes that the outer

[206] Brain McHale, Alber Jan Nielsen Henrik and Richardson Brian, 'The Unnaturalness of Narrative Poetry', *A Poetics of Unnatural Narrative* (2013), 199-222.
[207] *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. R. W. Franklin, p.208.

comes from the inner, determined by the inner, and the inner acts as the core. This accords with the criteria of western metaphysical tradition which categorizes the outer as signifier and the inner as signified.[208] Without the existence of the inner, the outer makes no sense. The word 'Magnitude' becomes a term of measuring a connection in and through these outer and inner spaces. It is the inner that determines the magnitude of the outer, which is the centre of existence. In the poem Dickinson may refuse to give an exact measure, but she does imaginatively establish a counter relation between outside and inside as a means to measure its scale and ensure that the outer has formed its attachment with the inner.

If 'Magnitude' delivers only a relative concept, then the 'Duke' and 'Dwarf' in the third line give two opposite extremes. The inner determines you a Duke or a Dwarf. These two words reflect the poet's thinking on self-identification, which aims to speak for itself in the face of nature and society.[209] 'Duke' is a title beyond Dickinson's hierarchy and gender, which implies power. Her employment of this title shows her desire for nobility and social affirmation. 'Dwarf' is a word that has been in use since the Renaissance. Early artists draw dwarfs as groups in their paintings to serve as foils to the prince or duke to present their dignity.[210] The dwarf is short and small and posited besides the duke, controlled by the Duke's hand as if a crutch. The Duke is set in the middle of the painting while the dwarf is marginal. The contrast implies Dickinson's insecurity of her identity as if she would be on the fringe of the society as a female poet. It alludes to Keats' 'social insecurity' when Jon Mee finds out Keats' uncertainty of living due to his social class. Dickinson manifests her

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[208] Cyrus R. K. Patell, 'Emily Dickinson: The Violence of the Imagination', in *The Cambridge History of American Literature: Volume 4 Nineteenth-Century Poetry 1900-1910* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.469.
[209] Eleanor Elson Heginbotham, *Reading the Fascicles of Emily Dickinson: Dwelling in Possibilities* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2003), p.32; Sharon Leiter, *Critical Companion to Emily Dickinson: A Literary Reference to Her Life and Work* (New York, NY: InfoBase Publishing, 2007), p.154.
[210] Robin O'Bryan, 'A Duke, A Dwarf and a Game of Chess', *Notes in the History of Art 34(2)* (2015), 27-33 (p.27).

anxiety of identity when the space for her is visualized to be compressed into a limited and marginal dimension. She desires to break the confinement and obtains the power to reinforce the foundation of the inner and hind her anxiety.

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The image of the dwarf not only evolves in the painting and literature; the duke (king) and the dwarf (pawn) also stand in antithesis in a chessboard, forming a space of antagonism. Usually the Duke and the Dwarf appear together as two antitheses. To be someone like a duke or a dwarf depends on how we consider ourselves. We imagine ourselves grand or small. The use of 'Duke' and 'Dwarf" provides evidence of how the poet places mood in her interaction with the world as well.[213] The outer is established through our relation to others – we make room for others. In this inner realm, our mood decides the magnitude of the space. Mood belongs to the realm of the inner, which has its identity and occupies the central position. Along with the poems 'At last – to be identified' and 'Love – thou art high', Dickinson leaves space for her representation of artistic identity, which stresses the spatial imagery within her poems to facilitate her poems from a closed space to a wider and higher distance.[214] The space, in Dickinson's poem, is not confined to that

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211 Charles Emmanuel with dwarf, Portrait of Carlo Emanuele 1562-1630.
212 The Prince Philip of Spain with the court dwarf Soplillo
213 Christopher E. G. Benfey, 'Dickinson and Skepticism', in *Emily Dickinson and the Problem of Others* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), p.23.
214 Eleanor Heginbotham, p.35.

occupied by entities. It is a collective concept, which refers to outer and inner material and imaginary spaces.

The second stanza of Dickinson's poem introduces the images of 'axis' and 'wheel', which strengthens the dual sense of inner and outer, material and imaginary space. The poet vividly depicts the scene of spinning with the dust raised, arousing the visual imagination of the reader. This is another metaphor. The axis, equalling 'mood', is the soul that produces power. The power does not come from a narrow sense, but instead, from a combination of feeling, thought, mood and spirit. The raised dust can be expansive, depending on how powerful the axis is. However, the dust cannot be raised if there is only an axis. The wheel and the axis constitute a whole. The wheel is the metaphor and the externalization for the strength of the axis, which connects Dickinson's mind with ultimate selfhood;[215] and the coordination of the axis and the wheel makes a powerful revolution. 'Unvarying' and 'conspicuous' give readers two opposite feelings. When the spokes rapidly revolve and fling the dust, we cannot even see how many spokes there are. The spokes gradually become ambiguous. This action is 'conspicuous'. However, if the spokes do not move around the axis, the dust, randomly raised, will fly everywhere. Dickinson emphasizes that the axis confines the boundary of the dust, giving the outer space a limit and a 'magnitude'. That is to say, the 'unvarying' axis is like a criterion that can define the range of things, which again stresses the centre of existence. A paradox exists here that the axis cannot always stand for the soul of human beings because the axis can be eternally unvarying under a stable power (like an established routine or habit), whereas the soul is more varied in its responses to changes of time, place and space as it journeys towards its final resting point.

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[215] Michael Yetman, 'Emily Dickinson and the English Romantic Tradition' *Texas Studies in Literature and Language 15(1)* (1973), 129-147 (p.133).

The wheel's revolving can also be considered as the circling of time. In this case, humans are the dust. In Christian prayer 'Ashes to ashes, dust to dust', human beings will finally become the dust to which we will return. This reminds us of our bodily decay, which resembles Keats' 'impassion'd clay'. Then the 'axis' become the eternal life of the inner – our spirit. Our mind and spirit are different. Connected to body, our mind will cease. However, our spirit will not. Spirit belongs to supernatural being, the nature of which is eternality. It can be everything and also can be nothing.

Dickinson depicts the spirit as determining the body. The third and the last stanzas continue her thinking on the spirit. Dickinson's third stanza employs the images of painting and brush, and the last stanza develops the metaphor of the artist and canvas. These sentences portray a picture of an invisible artist, who draws himself or herself on the canvas by using a brush without hands. However, how can a painting be achieved without hands? Here the poet may refer to those people that stand in front of an art and only see the complete art without any impression of labour involved in its creation. Only the artist himself takes part in the process of creation. Thus, only the artist is alert to the invisible hand directing the brush for painting. The inner is associated with the artistic inspiration and imagination of the artist. The artist is trying to show the inner self through the outer work of art. He or she is mirroring the self. As we know ourselves best, the outer representation should be rendered as 'precisely' as the inner, which Dickinson describes as 'brand'. 'Brand' is a word for identity to name and situate something. It is a kind of measuring as well. Our physical body reflects our inner spirit. Equally, the outer space of something reveals the inner essence of this thing. All things are internally branded. Thus, the brand is a word also for ownership and implicitly or explicitly a means to mark proof of ownership.

'Arterial' draws on medical terminology. Dickinson's collocation of 'arterial' and 'canvas' is ingenious as arterial implies both art and heart, which endows the canvas with life. Everything painted in the canvas, together with it, constitutes an entire body. The canvas becomes our trunk, or our portrait. In Dickinson's conceit, even a small part of our outer body, like the cheek or the brow, can 'brand' our most unique characteristics as people vary in mood and in appearance as well. The power of the skin is great.[216] Then she further adds the metaphor of the star and lake to illustrate that the reflection of the star in the lake is a mirror of our inner spirit in the outer body. Imagining the last sentence, we can propose that the lake probably denotes our eyes, as they are a measure of our soul. This disagrees with Adam Frank's statement, which considers the star as our eyes.[217] It is the same with the lake: it mirrors the star but cannot include everything of the star. This is why Dickinson writes that the whole secret of the stars is 'In' the lake, equalling 'under'. The surface of the lake can only, then, mirror the appearance of the star. Metaphorically, the star then becomes an implication of our spirit. Frank's other interpretations about Dickinson's imagery of the 'eye' is intriguing. 'Eye' here might be 'I' as well.[218] We, the selves, cannot see all things equally.

Dickinson's poem endorses the inner and accepts the outer, however, with no clear priorities.[219] Still in 'The Outer from the Inner', there exist interpretations of the relationship between these two developed dimensions of inner and outer from the measuring of its own poetic space. Compared with some other poems of Dickinson, which are emotional and intense, 'The Outer from the Inner' is more rational due to its imaginative attempt to measure space. Although Dickinson respects the position of the inner, she is afraid elsewhere of being confined in a limited and defined

[216] Adam Frank, p.11.
[217] Adam Frank, p.12.
[218] Adam Frank, p.13.
[219] Cyrus R. K. Patell, p.470.

space. In the poem 'I Dwell in Possibility' (as well as in 'Water Makes Many Beds'), she avows her imaginative trust to the outer,

I dwell in Possibility –
A fairer House than Prose –
More numerous of Windows –
Superior – for Doors –

Of Chambers as the Cedars –
Impregnable of eye –
And for an everlasting Roof
The Gambrels of the Sky –

Of Visitors – the fairest –
For Occupation –This –
The spreading wide my narrow Hands
To gather Paradise –[220]

James Wohlpart defines this poem as a kind of redemption for Dickinson.[221] The poem, corresponding with Heidegger's philosophy that in the end, 'poetically we dwell', is a perfect combination of Dickinson's reflection on the status of her poetry and the possibilities of her spiritual life. As is stated in the analysis of 'Outer from Inner', the inner is unvarying whereas the outer is multiple. Her material life is in reclusion, which can be viewed as the unvarying inner. However, this kind of life mode cannot debar the expansion of her ideological map. The reclusive physical body cannot change, but her mind, equalling the 'axis', can revolve. Different possibilities of dwelling, like the dust flung by the wheel, stand for the outer. Dickinson is trying to stress the power of poetry here, where metaphors are abundant. In the first instance, she portrays a 'house' with enough windows and doors. Then, she uses 'Chambers' and 'Roof' to enrich this metaphorical house. Such a house is further reinforced by Dickinson's use of 'stanzas' here, as the word derives from

[220] *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. R. W. Franklin, p.215.
[221] A. James Wohlpart, 'A New Redemption: Emily Dickinson's Poetic in Fascicle 22 and 'I Dwell in Possibility'', *South Atlantic Review 66(1)* (2001), 50-83 (p.55).

the Italian meaning room in a house. So as Dickinson develops the image from stanza to stanza, the poem also moves from room to room reinforcing its own structure and the architectural structure of its core imagery.

Dickinson believes that poetry, as a means of imaginative dwelling, opens thousands of windows – possibilities, for her. The appearance of 'windows' and 'doors' is vital here because they are the mere access from the inner to the outer, a means to open up all possibilities. Dickinson endows poetry with infinitude and as a result, poetry becomes immeasurable. It is worth noting the paradoxes in the two stanzas. On the one hand, the poet depicts the poetry as a house with enough windows and doors, and with both sky and a roof, boundless and infinite. On the other hand, some chambers are hidden from our eyes, continuing to draw our vision to what is concealed from us. The pictures are contradictory: is the house of poetry finite or infinite, measurable or immeasurable? Are windows and doors used as entrance or exit? The poet does not answer. Besides, 'cedars' and 'sky' are elements from nature, which connects with the house of poetry, suggesting that poetry grows organically from nature. This is why poetry is better than prose because the inspirations of poetry symbolizes openness and multiplicity in contrast to those clear-cut distinctions and moderations from which prose originates.[222]

In the end, readers, referred to as 'visitors', who witness the power and the process of expressing the poet's thoughts, will not see the artwork completely. Once again, another paradox appears. The narrow hands belong to the finitude, but paradise is a symbol of infinitude. How to gather infinitude through finitude? Dickinson answers in these terms: 'Gambrels' in the last stanza is an architectural word, linked with a beautifully shaped roof. The shape of 'Gambrel' is like our

[222] A. James Wohlpart, p.64.

'narrow Hands' holding together, making a triangle. The 'Hands' in capital brings to mind the image of God, the creator to her readers.[223] The protective shape of hands gives Dickinson power of sustaining the suffering from the secular world and transferring the abyss of sorrow into renewed life. Paradise is a new one full of possibilities. Finally, Dickinson endows such possibilities, in 'Water Makes many Beds', with a sacred religiosity.

> Water makes many Beds
> For those averse to sleep –
> Its awful chamber open stands –
> Its Curtains blandly sweep –
> Abhorrent is the Rest
> In undulating Rooms
> Whose Amplitude no end invades –
> Whose Axis never comes.[224]

This short poem reminds her readers of the poem 'Ample make this bed'. Different from 'Ample make this bed', which wants a peaceable rest, this poem shows rest in despair. At first, it introduces a visible image – water, and again, the metaphor of 'chamber' and 'axis' appear, along with the new image – 'curtains' – connecting with the 'window' in the former poem. 'Water' is frequently used in Dickinson's poems and regarded as a literal baptism for Dickinson (J726), which may also symbolize immortality (J726), the loss of identity or the dissolution of personalization (J1210) and eternity (J1380).[225] Similarly, both the bed in 'Ample Makes This Bed', and the bed in this poem, refer to broader concepts – a bed for repose, a bed of life or a bed of nature. Understanding the connotation of water and bed, we can propose that the second line 'those averse to sleep' means people who do not want to die. Then the whole poem should be read as her thinking about the immortality of life. Therefore, the following 'chamber' is deserved to be comprehended as the grave.

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[223] A. James Wohlpart, p.64.
[224] *The Complete Poems*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson, p.609.
[225] James S. Mullican, 'Dickinson's Water Makes Many Beds', *The Explicator 27(3)* (2015), 44-47 (p.45).

The picture then goes like this: those who are approaching death lay on a bed in the chambers, which have windows and curtains, struggling to be at rest. The chamber is surrounded by the water, so it keeps undulating. Dickinson is contemplating death by water. The normal grave is under the earth, surrounded by the soil. It is fixed and unmoved. The contradictory imagery stretches our imagination into two opposite directions: one towards the infinity of the water and the other towards the prospect of a finite (yet unattained) rest.

The subject of 'Whose' in the last two lines is given two answers by James Mullican. The first answer is those with no hope of salvation. The second answer refers to all human beings. Both propositions depend on whether the clause is restrictive or non-restrictive.[226] To understand 'whose' as all human beings sounds more reasonable as Dickinson thinks about the theme of death from a non-personal view. 'Amplitude' resonates with 'Ample', and 'Axis' corresponds with another 'Axis'. We should notice that 'end' is a concept that connotes both time and space. This line respects the meaning of 'amplitude', stating that there is no end to constrain the amplitude of human beings. Human beings have the potential to realize numerous possibilities and immortality. If the 'Axis' refers to God,[227] then the last line should imply the last day – judgment day. The poet believes that as infinity exists, we will not encounter the judgment day. This poem measures life both from a spatial and a chronological dimension, concluding that life is actually immeasurable.

All three poems discuss the measuring of space with regards to the inner and the outer, revealing that living in the culture of Puritanical values, Dickinson is trying to reconcile her sense of a trapped life with an escape from the cage.[228] The poems deliver a power that closely connects

[226] James S. Mullican, p.47.
[227] Ibid.
[228] A. James Wohlpart, p.56. Especially refers to the cultural system.

to outer nature and inner seclusion. The diverse outer with its possible dwellings bring its readers to the boundless and infinite universe. If the house is poetry itself, then, the 'possibilities' not only refers to ways of understanding the poetry but ways of understanding the world through poetry. The imaginative measuring of these inner and outer spaces and the immeasurability of them express Dickinson's determination to deal with her existential anxiety.

Back to 'The Outer – from the Inner', there is an allusion of Dickinson to Keats in treating art with beauty, eternity, infinitude and sublimity through spatial dimensions. The 'in' and 'out' sense of space is elaborated in Keats' 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' when the ashes of the dead inside the urn dialectically exist with the ongoing civilization outside the urn. The inner, which symbolizes the past civilization, makes room for the outer, which refers to the current one. The inner, as the spirit, witnessed the changing of the outer, enabling the urn to be true art as it transcends the temporal and is measured in the realm of eternity. In fact, the measuring of space and time is simultaneous in the ode when Keats notes, 'foster-child of silence and slow time'. A picture of frozen time is presented in front of readers, but as the existence that divides the inner and the outer, the urn also stands for the frozen space. The container, urn, as well as the ashes inside, cease to move and change both in the dimension of time and space. The stillness of the urn establishes a formal perfection and a kind of ideal beauty. The urn, like a 'historian', observes the vicissitudes of civilization and keeps unchanged across generations as if the subjects on the pictures of urn also escape from the impermanence of mortality.

'Ode to a Nightingale' portrays the speaker's engagement with the flowing melody of the bird's music, while 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' stresses Keats' engagement with the static immobility of sculpture. The urn has the sense of nature's indifference when considering its meaning to human

beings. In other words, as with nature, man is recorded and experienced by the urn. Yet Keats tries to put the 'urn' outside of time and the separation from time causes the urn to exist eternally but inhumanly as a 'friend to man'. The process of being 'outside of time', in turn, establishes a new dimension of space. If Keats regards that the urn is a symbol of beauty, then, such beauty coexists with coldness and loneliness. This accords with Keats' bright star and Madeline's story that shares, in terms of 'Ode to Melancholy', an awareness of a beauty that must die and an experience of the fading of joy.[229] Keats may enrich the concept of eternity through a recognition of the need for transience to humanize the message of the urn, but he does so at the expense of realizing the imaginative limitations of the sterile museum space into which he places his imagined Grecian artefact.

3.3 Measuring and Architectural Poetic Spaces: Keats

Keats and Dickinson share a concern with poetic spaces rendered as architectural structures. Earl Wasserman found that 'Doors, chambers and mansions seem to have possessed especially important symbolic values in Keats' mind'.[230] Theodore Leinwand concurs that one of Keats' letters to Reynolds announces that the poet is domesticating space for reading and writing to make a dormitory room.[231] Moreover, in Keats' poems, 'The Eve of St Agnes', 'To Autumn' and 'Ode to a Nightingale' convey a strong sense of being within in a room. 'The Eve of St Agnes' eulogizes the old, medieval love story between the noble lady Madeline and the knight Porphyro. However, the hallmarks of anxiety, death, measuring and imagination are all stamped all over it. The concept of

[229] Jack Stillinger. 'The Hoodwinking of Madeline', p.551.
[230] Lasse Gammelgarrd, 'Interior Space and Description in Keats' Narrative Poetry', *Style 48(4)* (2014), 577-592 (p.582).
[231] Theodore B Leinwand, 'On Sitting down to Read Shakespeare Once Again', *The Kenyon Review 24(2)* (2002), 106-123, (p.107).

space appears in many lines of Keats' poem, following a progressive order.

Opposite spatial images in Keats' poem correspond with each other. Through this sense of space Keats shapes a 'thematic space of the narrative'.[232] From the first stanza to the fifth stanza, the castle of Madeline's family is the first and only interior space presented to the readers' eyes. With the backdrop of the ritual of St. Agnes eve, which happens in January, Keats begins and ends his narrative with a number of contrasts: the cold outside versus the warm inside, the Beadsman stoic praying for the Baron versus the indulgent revellers addicted to pleasure, and the luxurious revelry inside versus the bleak, despairing evening outside.

The building of Madeline's home separates the outside and the inside and is a symbol of the difference between richness and poverty, domestication and wildness, coldness and warmth, life and death. From the description we can suppose that Madeline's family belongs to noble rank, as they dwell in the castle. Within the castle, the hierarchical differences continue to exist. The Beadsman stays in the chilly chapel, whereas the revellers occupy the castle's higher more luxurious levels. The geography of Madeline's home and the placing of Madeline's chamber is vital to the success of Porphyro's quest to discover the space of Madeline's chamber.[233]

From the fifth stanza onwards, the bedchamber of Madeline arises as a contradictory interior space, which brings the narrative focus to Madeline. It is a magic and symbolic space for the scene of seduction.[234] It is also a place for Porphyro's spiritual pilgrimage.[235] In Madeline's chamber, the image of the window, shown as 'casement' (in the 24th stanza), mediates between the inside and

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[232] Martin Aske, 'Magical Spaces in The Eve of St. Agnes', *Essays in Criticism31(3)* (1981), 196-209 (p.196).

[233] Jack Stillinger, *Reading The Eve of St. Agnes: The Multiples of Complex Literary Transaction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.55.

[234] Lasse Gammelgarrd, p.578.

[235] Jack Stillinger, 'The Hoodwinking of Madeline: Scepticism in "The Eve of St. Agnes"', *Studies in Philosophy 58(3)*, (1961), 533-555 (p.540).

outside. Gaston Bachelard refers to this as 'the dialectics of inside and outside'.[236] Porphyro's attempt of removing Madeline from her 'chamber' to another new inside space hides a narrative of desire, the process of which must experience a threshold inside-outside-inside pattern. Implied here is an estimation about whether taking Madeline out of her room is right or wrong. The inside and the outside involve the mastery of space, crossings and transcendence. Windows and doors act as access to the outer world and retreat to the inside world, having played an effective role of conciliation between the inside and the outside.

Keats evaluates the 'casement' as 'diamonded with panes of quaint device', 'innumerable of stains and splendid dyes', through which Madeline metaphorically becomes a 'saint', a 'pure' and 'splendid angel', with plenty of beautiful things such as rose-bloom, amethyst and glory hair around her. These lines of praise affirm Madeline as a noble woman and attempt to translate her into an image of immortality – a heavenly angel. The 'casement' glorifies her and places her at the centre of Porphyro's story. However, the chamber seen through eyes of Porphyro is opposite to this. It is 'pale, lattic'd, chill, tomb-like silent' (in the 14th stanza). It makes his brow 'flushed' and his heart pained (in the 16th stanza). For Porphyro, entering Madeline's room is a 'purple riot' (in the 16th stanza), which implies a dangerous desire and encroachment of the real on the idealized images of Madeline's chamber as a place of spiritual realization and transformation.

The dream of Madeline constructs a space between the real and the ideal, within which transformations and displacements of self and object frequently happen,[237] bringing the story to the climax. In this dream-space, Porphyro appears. It is the first time Porphyro appears in Madeline's dream. It is the man in the dream that first satisfies Madeline's desire. The image of Porphyro in her

[236] Martin Aske, p.198
[237] Jack Stillinger, p.55.

dream is immortal (in the 35th stanza), 'beyond a mortal man impassion'd far' (in the 36th stanza) and out of which it transfers into mortality and approaches the point of death. Thus, Madeline tries to stay in the dream-space to guarantee the existence of Porphyro and the fact that Porphyro will not abandon her. The boundary of this space depends on the point of Madeline's awakening. This enables the appearance of Porphyro to be the process and fulfilment of 'spiritual pilgrimage'.[238] Madeline rejects her immediate reality and intends to stay in the space of her dream – 'a midnight charm' (in the 33rd stanza), 'pure and deep' (in the 34th stanza). However, Porphyro wishes the opposite. Porphyro wishes Madeline to wake up – 'Awake! Arise! My love' (in the 39th stanza) so that she become his bride and leaves the castle with him. He even tries to plays her lute to make her awake. This is the space in which the desire of Madeline is to be realized. It is at once, paradoxically, a space of the spiritual and the erotic.[239]

How does the poet regard this space? Keats calls Madeline's dream a 'whim' (in the 7th stanza), that 'Hoodwink'd with faery fancy' (in the 8th stanza). It shows that Keats is sceptical about the tale and idealized promises of the world of romance. He regards the dream as unreliable and easily-delusional. Although Madeline is well prepared for this dream, she feels panic when Porphyro appears. She cannot tell whether it is in the dream or the reality that she encounters Porphyro. Madeline wishes Porphyro to leave 'like a ghost' (in the 12th stanza) in her dream, which corresponds with 'like phantoms' (in the 41st stanza) when they escape at the end. It proves that Madeline does not fully trust the dream as well: she admits that it is a 'deceived' (in the 14th stanza) thing from angels. Keats also makes Madeline's dream resonate with Adam's dream as he writes in the 28th stanza that 'Stol'n to this paradise', reminding his readers of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, in

[238] Jack Stillinger, p.537.
[239] Jack Stillinger, p.55.

which Satan sneaks into Eden to seduce Eve. Then, the 'elfin storm', 'sleep dragons', 'be-nightmar'd' (in the 42nd stanza) appear to both help Madeline break from her delusional dreamland and affirm her as heroine in a romance aided in her escape by the world of faery. This is why when Porphyro stares on Madeline's dream, the cold and silver image combines with the warm and coloured image again – a signal of illusion and delusion. The truth in this poem seems to be both immeasurable and undesirable.[240]

Elsewhere, Keats measures imagination in terms of space in 'Ode to a Nightingale', where he notes, 'Darkling I listen'. There is a strong sense of inner and outer space, as well as literal and metaphorical darkness surrounding him within this constructed and enclosed space. 'Darkling' is an interesting choice of adjective by Keats, which conveys several senses of being existing in and out of darkness, a thing born of the darkness, or rather, something becoming increasingly darker. Milton once describes the singing of a wakeful bird as darkling, too, to express the mood from despair to hope. Keats probably shows his respect to Milton here; however, Keats stresses the quality of his own listening. Keats heard not simply the outwards sound but the voice of a soul that points to ecstasy. Through imagination, Keats utilizes his spatial imagery and visualizes the transition from emptiness to fullness, and finally realizes the dissolution of the nightingale's existence into his own being within the constructed space of the ode.

Keats' fascination with constructing these kinds of imaginative interior spaces can be found in some of his correspondence as well. In one of his letters to his friend Reynolds, he adopts the simile of the house as human life, comparing life as a large 'mansion of many apartments'.[241] The apartments are divided into kinds: a thoughtless chamber for our infant, non-thinking period and

[240] Jack Stillinger, p.537.
[241] John Keats, *Selected Letters,* ed. Robert Gittings, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p.89.

maiden-thought chamber for us facing misery and pain. Also, another letter refers to 'those hours of the day that were peaceful enough and inviolable enough to be able to give them refuge.'[242] The word 'chamber' is suitable for this sealed and small space. We read that Keats is protective of his interior spaces as the symbolic values of these spaces exceed their realistic functions. He measures the inside to be a safe and peaceful one so that everything in that room will become the language of lives and his imagination can be facilitated by sensation, as a result of which ego and non-go can be separated.[243] As Leinwand proposes, it is dismaying to interrupt a space once it is initiated.[244] Both in Keats' correspondences and his poetry, the poet is willing to endow the interior space with his full romantic emotions. The chamber of Madeline in 'The Eve of St. Agnes' and the room in Keats' correspondence with his friend, are given a sense of magic and tranquillity. This is the ideal place for Keats to repose and compose. Yet Keats is equally aware that these idealized, romanticized spaces are at risk from an outer darkness and encroaching awareness of reality.

For both Keats and Dickinson, inner and outer spaces are inextricably inter-related.[245] 'The Outer – from the Inner' expresses Dickinson's ideas on identity as a poet and 'I dwell in Possibility' consolidates the status of her poetry. Similarly, Keats' fascination with spatial contrasts reveals the poet's imaginative emphasis on sealed and bounded spaces. Keats' negative capability is the imaginative, empathetic ability to experience both the inside and outside of any given entity. Keats' concept of negative capability anticipates later existential thought. Heidegger connects space with the way that human beings dwell. The dweller's way of creating a space to come to live is to make a building a place of dwelling.[246] This not only decreases the anxiety of uncertainty, but also offers

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[242] Theodore Leinwand, p.108.
[243] Ibid.
[244] Ibid.
[245] Cyrus R. K. Patell, p.472.
[246] Jonas Holst, 'Rethinking Dwelling and Building. On Martin Heidegger's conception of Being as Dwelling and

an extension for spirit. The mutual resistance between the inside and the outside clarifies the concept of 'here' and 'there', further generating 'being here' and 'being there', which helps readers better understand the wisdom of ontology. That is to say, a sense of space is the key to realizing the construction and dissolution of (poetic) identity.

3.4 Measuring Spiritual Time: Dickinson

Compared with spatial measurement, temporal measurement seems to be clearer in Keats and Dickinson's poetry. Keats and Dickinson explore the distance, the movement and the scale of time in their poems. Life, death and eternity are all criteria with which to measure time. In search of the movement of time, both poets are trying to identify themselves in history. In 'How firm Eternity Must Look', Dickinson writes,

> How Firm Eternity Must Look
> To crumbling men like me
> The only Adamant Estate
> In all Identity –
>
> How Mighty to the Insecure
> Thy Physiognomy
> To whom not any Face cohere –
> Unless concealed in thee[247]

Something that is so sublimely overwhelming here is called Eternity.[248] Eternity is a criterion of a temporal measurement in opposition to a moment of finitude. It shows the capacity and scale of time in relation to a going towards infiniteness. Clearly, Dickinson considers 'eternity' as a significant aspect of time. The existence of eternity determines and proves the identity of something and someone. The power of 'eternity' strengthens the stability of identity. On the other hand, the

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Jorn Utzon's Architecture of Well-being', *Journal of interdisciplinary studies in Architecture and Urbanism 2* (2014), 52-60 (p.56).

[247] *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Franklin, p.533.

[248] Eleanor Elson Heginbotham, pp.36-37.

‘only adamant estate’, stresses again the stability of such eternity. ‘Crumbling’ is to do with decay and deterioration over time. For the poet, transience implies constantly changing, which brings identity up and down, as she describes the speaker as ‘crumbling men’. Only from an eternal view can identity be confirmed and defined, and can the ‘crumbling’ state be restored to wholeness. Dickinson particularly stresses her identity as a poet. She believes that time itself proves the value of her poems and herself. Eternity transfers the value into a kind of firm identity, like a possession she owns. This is why she calls eternity an ‘estate’.

In the second stanza, Dickinson re-emphasizes the power of eternity from the point of view of those who feel insecure due to appearance. Dickinson argues that humans are not coherent in appearance. It can be interpreted from an expanded understanding that everything in this world is isolated and does not even have a chance to know the appearance of ‘the others’. We become dust after we die and return to nature. The world is still revolving and no one can bear our appearance in mind unless we have lived in their hearts. That is to say, too much dependence on appearance to request a memory from others is unreliable and insecure. Different from the poem ‘Because I could not stop for Death’, which puts ‘eternity’ at the end, this poem opens with and through ‘eternity’. The tone of ‘Because I could not stop for Death’ does not suggest an intimidating mood whereas a power of pulling her towards or leading her to eternity emerges. In other words, the poet enacts this eternity in that poem and finally goes into the state of being infinite. Due to the position of ‘eternity’, Dickinson’s poem, however, delivers a deep sense of anxiety from the poet about her identity. She proposes, at the beginning, that ‘eternity’ firmly overwhelms our life. She considers ‘eternity’ as a physical experience when pointing out the feelings of the body.

The word ‘Physiognomy’ is intriguing. This word refers not only to the general appearance

of someone but also to providing a possibility to estimate people's personalities from their faces. The judgment from outside, which is received ego-identity, often betrays the certain emotions and experiences of the subject, which is the higher self. The conflict between outside assessment and personal belief will easily make self-doubt intervene. Therefore, the poet says 'not any face coheres'. The poet requires people to conceal their original and genuine face under the mask and to portray different faces in different circumstances so that their insecure expressions can be covered. For instance, in this poem, Dickinson uses 'men like me' rather than 'people like me' or 'women like me', inadvertently masculinizing herself. It belongs to ego-illusion, which attempts to transfer self into nobody.[249] In addition, there exists uncertainty about 'How mighty to the insecure'. Does it refer to 'eternity', or 'thy physiognomy'? If it points to the latter, then physiognomy becomes deceiving. Superficially it gives people power, but actually, it crumbles people, who, like Dickinson's speaker, drop into the abyss along with endless insecurity. In search of eternity, do we act as a whole under our original face or as fragments that are to be completed? Do people like Dickinson really have an identity? Only 'eternity' can tell. This poem employs an opposite order compared with 'Because I could not stop for death' to evaluate the movement of time, by claiming that we are controlled by 'eternity'.

If the poem 'How Firm Eternity Must Look' deals with the question of the scale of time, then, in 'Our journey had Advanced', Dickinson tries to explore the distance of time in the process of its movement,

> Our journey had advanced –
> Our feet were almost come
> To that odd Fork in Being's road –
> Eternity – by Term –

[249] RC Allen, Rupert C Allen, *Emily Dickinson, Accidental Buddhist* (Bloomington, IN: Trafford Publishing, 2007), p.65.

Our pace took sudden awe –
Our feet –reluctant – led –
Before – were Cities – but between –
The Forest of the Dead –

Retreat – was out of hope –
Behind – a Sealed Route –
Eternity's White Flag – Before –
And God – at every Gate –[250]

This is a poem with mystery and riddles also about 'eternity'. The whole poem portrays a coherent image: human beings experience a life journey throughout time.[251] This is a journey of consciousness from finitude to infinitude.[252] 'Our' claims that there is not only the poet herself but other companions. Where does their journey end? The 'odd fork' appears. As the poem says, this is a being's road with a fork that confronts them with choice. Under the appearance of 'Being' and 'Eternity', 'Fork' represents a metaphor of a split between death and immortality. The poet and her companions must determine a direction in which to go to. This is why their feet are just 'almost' come, which implies that they have not yet arrived. 'Being's road' means existence and life. It states that the poet and her companion are at the final point of their journey. Ahead is eternity. The poet chooses the following journey after the fork – eternity, which she holds as a holy and awful thing. Meanwhile, it means that the poet gives up another choice – death and a final end. As a result, like the bed which she makes with awe, the poet makes her pace with a sublime admixture of respect and terror in this journey as well. As such, the whole poem becomes a meditation on Dickinson's existentialism.[253]

[250] *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Franklin, p.209.
[251] Robert Gillespie, 'A Circumference of Emily Dickinson', *The New England Quarterly 46(2)* (1973), 250-271 (p.250).
[252] Douglas Novich Leonard, 'Dickinson's Our Journey Had Advanced', *The Explicator 41(4)* (2015), 29-31 (p.30).
[253] Douglas Novich Leonard, p.30.

Dickinson's use of the word 'Reluctant' shows that they are forced to make that choice.[254] 'Before' and 'between' respectively stand for the destination and the process, and 'behind' in the third stanza is a symbol of the past time. The poet approves that people cannot retreat to the past life as time has already lapsed. Life is behind people, not before. Different from a negative view of the past life, the last two lines deliver an invisible joyful emotion[255] as if those who are lost find their way out. 'White flag' is usually used for surrender. One interpretation can be that as God stands in every Gate, and those people need to surrender to God. At that point, God decides which gate they can enter and what is the result – torments or bliss, behind the gates. This accords with the sense of 'Retreat' from battle mentioned before. A further r interpretation is that Dickinson considers 'white' colour as an image of purity and eternity.[256] Her biography has recorded her habit of always dressing in white as a ritual of life and career. In the poem, the white flag stresses eternity and acts as a leading signal. Travelers pass through the wilderness of death and arrive in the cities of eternity. Towards eternity, we gradually become white –nothingness and anonymity. God, in front of every gate, becomes a guardian for those travellers to go to the right gate as there is no God at the gate of hell. Finally, death becomes a conquest rather than a conclusion.[257] The dash after 'before' and 'gate' suggests something is yet to come. Therefore, is God the enemy or the leader? What is the real implication of the eternal white flag? Are those travellers finally involved in triumph or surrender? Is the journey a joyful reward or a tragic end, or half of them? The poem is ambiguous.[258]

In addition to thinking about time as eternity, Dickinson considers beauty as 'infinity' 'Infinity'

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[254] Robert Gillespie, 'A Circumference of Emily Dickinson', *The New England Quarterly 46(2)* (1973), 250-271 (p.268).
[255] Douglas Novich Leonard, p.30.
[256] Wesley King, 'The White Symbolic of Emily Dickinson', *The Emily Dickinson Journal 18(1)* (2009) 44-68 (p.44).
[257] Robert Gillespie, p.270.
[258] Robert Gillespie, pp.268-270.

not only contains the aspect of 'eternity' of time, but also further shows the quality of time.

> Estranged from Beauty – none can be –
> For Beauty is Infinity –
> And power to be finite ceased
> Before Identity was leased[259]

Beauty coexists with truth in Dickinson's theory. The poet believes that no one is capable of being estranged from beauty as beauty exists everywhere spatially and temporally. 'Infinity' applies to the dimension both of space and time. This means that beauty can be extended to eternity. Under such circumstances, identity can be announced and confirmed. Paul Crumbley estimates such identity as confinement within a unified self that needs to be exceeded and understood.[260] This further extends the concept of identity and resonates with the power of beauty. Crumbley believes that identity is a temporary state when we are on loan to us. 'Lease' is a process of giving out or offering of a loan. Giving out our identity, we become nothingness. This is the same with 'Our journey had Advanced'. We get purity and eternity only after we give up our identity. Thus, identity is trying to deny infinite – beauty. Robert Audi reads this poem as Dickinson's theistic perception.[261] Sensing beauty arouses her consciousness of infinity, a word that is beyond reality. God satisfies all conditions of infinity because he has no identity and exists eternally, thus, we consider that God also as a symbol of beauty as well.

3.5 Measuring Seasonal Time: Keats

Like Dickinson after him, one of Keats' poetic concerns is with the reckoning of infinity and beauty and the measuring of time. Keats is interested in measuring the scale, the movement and the

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[259] *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Franklin, p.568.
[260] Paul Crumbely, *Inflections of the Pen: Dash and Voice in Emily Dickinson* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1997), p.30.
[261] Robert Audi, *Rationality and Religious Commitment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp.112-113.

quality of time. In his 'To Autumn', Keats announces,

> Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
> Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;
> …
> And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;
> […]
> Until they think warm days will never cease,
> For Summer has o'er-brimm'd their clammy cells.[262]

The first stanza of 'To Autumn' describes the fruitful scene of harvest, which reflects the positivity of the season. Similar words such as 'mellow', 'maturing' and 'ripeness' express the nature of autumn. Meanwhile, maturity becomes a standard of temporal measurement, too. In this poetic picture, everything is in the process of becoming mature. The fruit is still maturing, the bees are gathering nectar, and the flowers are growing. Maturation is almost completed at this time, but never fulfilled. The word 'mature' refers not only to a point of time, but also to the quality of time. In other words, the word pays attention to the temporal process that advances the maturation of all living things. Keats measures the time of Autumn as good and fruitful. The last line of this stanza shows clear measurement between seasons: what happens between summer and autumn. As summer has come to an end now, the poet alludes to a change that is due to come. 'Warm days will never cease' expresses a desire of nature for eternity because 'warm days' create a friendly environment for crops in nature growing and ripening. 'Conspiring' in the stanza conveys a sense of working together and even breathing together. Elements such as the sun, the crops and the season, are connected by the power of nature, and in turn they fulfil the fecundity of nature.

It is the first time when eternity and transience conflict in the ode. Keats wants to keep autumn there meanwhile transferring from summer to autumn. However, the fulfilment of autumn can only

[262] *Complete Poems*, ed. Jack Stillinger, p.360.

be realized after summer leaves and winter arrives. Therefore, it is better to consider autumn as just one facet of seasonal and temporal change. Actually, autumn has special connotations for Keats. In a letter to Reynolds, Keats notes, 'How beautiful the season is now […] this struck me so much […]'.[263] The impression of autumn is deeply engraved in Keats' mind. At the time of this ode's creation, Keats has suffered from tuberculosis. We can understand Keats' conception of autumn as a season of natural demise and acceptance of that eventual finality. Autumn itself is unconscious, but man can realize and understand this profusion. Human consciousness grasps the passing of the time and gives embrace to future rebirth in the season. Within the ode, the quieting of self-consciousness symbolizes the maturing process of Keats' own mind, a state in which he can feel fulfilment of time and accept his own destiny.

> […]
> Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;
> Or on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep,
> […]
> And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep
> Steady thy laden head across a brook;
> […]
> Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours.

The second stanza personalizes Autumn as a female labourer. The process of maturity that characterizes the moment between being born and dying, as symbolized by the hushed watching of the cider press's 'last oozings hours by hours'. Clearly, the narrator is still immersed in the sensual joy of the season, but is also alert to autumn as a harbinger of winter and death. Keats has sympathy for autumn as his description of the labour is gentle, harmonious and slow, without any emphasis on the completion of the tasks undertaken. Through appreciating the peaceful and luscious autumnal, Keats both keeps time and holds time in abeyance. The poet slows down the rhythm of the harvest

[263] John Keats, *Selected Letters*, ed. Robert Gettings, p.271.

in an attempt to retain the season. And stave-off the onset of winter and death.

The enjoyment of the present moment and Keats' effort in making the beauty of the present moment an eternal possession testifies to his anxiety that this moment, like all others, is transitory:

> Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?
> Think not of them, thou hast thy music too, –
> While barred clouds bloom, the soft-dying day,
> […]
> Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;
> And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;
> […]
> And gathering swallows twitter in the skies. [264]

An encroaching sense of loss is suggested by the brief moment of doubt expressed by the speaker. Although the question about the music of spring is quickly dismissed, the doubtful note in the ode heightens an awareness of the possibility of seasonal transitions from ripeness and plenitude to coldness and destitutions. Autumn is a transitional season caught between living and dying like the movement of the 'light wind'. In this sense, autumn subtly transfers, with its own closing funeral music, into a feeling of sadness, loss and grief.

Nevertheless, Keats portrays the sense of loss as a beautiful and peaceful end of life by describing it as 'soft-dying'. The soft-dying is realized through the seasons and through the passage of the single day. However, within that, Keats still captures the sense of eternity and timelessness. Death becomes more bearable as we are a part of natural process. He endows the reaped plain with 'rosy hue', the harvested grain with gnats' mourning, the sky with swallows' hovering. The swallows push up and outwards towards the sky. But even at the close of the ode they have not yet departed. They are actually in the process of departing in. In Keats' understanding, beauty of nature will never die although all mortal beings will. It is a universal understanding of eternity. The passing

[264] *Complete Poems*, ed. by Jack Stillinger, p.362.

of human life becomes part of the natural cycles and process. By these means, 'To Autumn' conveys the idea that we have natural and temporal seasons; we have the sense of the day, and we have the sense of a measuring of the autumn through these activities. Keats' 'soft dying day' makes it clear that all of the activities of autumn and all the cycle of the seasons are compressed into a single day. Through these remarkable and single moments, Keats captured the seasons, as well as all the activities of harvest and a sense of timelessness and eternity.

Both Dickinson and Keats privilege this unrealized sublimity to champion imagination over concrete reality in ways that challenge the dualism of Western metaphysics.[265] Dickinson's measurement of time is neutral, even like a scientific meditation, which, unlike Keats' measurement of spatial and the temporal, contains a plenitude of negative and positive emotions and connotations. Different from Dickinson, Keats' imagination never fails to return to reality. Keats admits the complexity of happiness and sorrow and attempts to set a rule for future behaviour in the world.[266] In all, numerous kinds of measuring in Keats and Dickinson reveal both poets' efforts in connecting questions of selfhood with an angst about spatial and temporal awareness as a manifestation of more deep-seated existential anxieties. Keats and Dickinson's imaginative measuring of the poetic spaces in which they immerse themselves anticipates Heidegger's measure of being as state of anxiety born of an immersive involvement with world-hood.

[265] Shira Wolosky, 'Emily Dickinson: The Violence of the Imagination', *Nineteenth-Century Poetry: 1800-1910* (1994), 427-480 (p.466).
[266] Jack Stillinger. 'The Hoodwinking of Madeline', p.555.

Chapter 4

The Anxiety of Desire:
The Poetic Search for Beauty and Truth in Keats and Dickinson

The transition from existential anxiety to death is usually thought of by Heideggerian scholars as fullness, without any other intermediary process in between. However, there should be a state between anxious living and eventual death in which Keats and Dickinson try to overcome existential anxiety. This process must be experienced to encourage truth to make an appearance. The sense of measuring things is one means to confront anxiety by transferring uncertainty to a kind of certainty, but it is no guarantee of the fulfilment of ultimate desire (possibly only fully realizable in death). The pre-authentic state shown in desire, in which the subject is still exposed to 'they-self', cannot be defined as a safe dwelling. Beings feel 'uncanny'[267] at the gaze of others, and the sense of shame and guilt appears as manifestations of anxiety at this stage. Consequently, desire and its imaginative search for truth emerges as an interregnum between anxiety and death.

Heidegger philosophically explores desire as well. The Heideggerian desire, which is named 'oreksis', happens in the space between full possibility and the vacancy of actuality.[268] In company with existential anxiety to death, it is still a state of transiting from absence to abundance. Such desire also shows a movement of thriving when *Dasein* (being) is subjected to the limits. Authentic desire, in Heideggerian philosophy, contains the relationship between possibility and love, which closely relates to the expectation of 'being'. In fact, this vocabulary of an anxiety of desire can be considered at the heart of a Heideggerian inflected reading of treatment of desire in Keats and Dickinson's poems.

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[267] Robert D. Stolorow, 285-287.
[268] Ben Vedder, 'Heidegger on desire', *Continental Philosophy Review 31(4)* (1998), 353-368 (p.354-355).

4.1 The Explicit Desire in Bee-Flower Love: Keats and Dickinson

In Keats and Dickinson's oeuvre, there are poems trying to establish the sense of desire through language of nature, the bee-flower images in particular. For instance, in 'Calidore', a bee 'buzzes round to swelling peaches'.[269] In a letter to Reynolds, Keats rethinks the link between insect and flower to accord with botanical writing and implies human sexual pleasure in poetic inspiration, '[…] the Bee hive – however […] rather be the flower than the Bee […] The flower I doubt not receives a fair guerdon from the Bee […] but let us open our leaves like a flower and be passive and receptive'.[270] Keats has maintained male-female distinctions, through his account of a negatively capable imaginative act by considering man as bee and woman as flower, and keeping the female aligned with passion in the poems. 'Ode to Psyche' links love with the power of the fancy in garden, where there are 'zephyrs, streams and birds, […] bees', and a 'rosy sanctuary'.[271] Again, in *Lamia*, the 'morning song of bees' is the floral tool Lycius uses to ingratiate Lamia. Keats has intended to think seriously about the relationship between the flower and the bee. Keats considers the notion that flowers are experiencing the passive assimilation, whereas bees are receiving active assimilation.[272] As for sexual pleasure, Keats considers women attaining more delight than man when he describes himself as a humble bee.[273]

In fact, the bee-flower metaphor belongs to botanical realm of discussion on desire. There is no direct evidence that Dickinson was a reader of Keats on the subject of bee-flower love and the imagination. However, Dickinson's interest in this bee-flower relationship is as manifest in her

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[269] Alan Bewell, 'Keats' Realm of Flora', *New Romanticisms* (2016) 71-100 (p.80)
[270] Alan Bewell, p.84.
[271] Alan Bewell, p.74.
[272] D. S. Neff, 'The Flower and the Bee: Keats, Imitatio, and the 'Orlando Furioso'', *South Atlantic Review 67(1)* (2002), 38-62 (p.45).
[273] Margaret Homans, 'Keats Reading Women, Women Reading Keats', *Studies in Romanticism 29(3)* (1990), 341-370 (p.345).

poetry as it is in Keats' own writing. Dickinson is adept at using natural images to euphemistically express desire in her poems, among which the most frequent images are flowers and bees. Dickinson endows the relationship between flowers and bees with a sexual connotation to hint her at own complex sexual desire. One of her poems reads,

> The Flower must not blame the Bee –
> That seeketh his felicity
> Too often at her door –
>
> But teach the Footman from Vevay –
> Mistress is 'not at home' – to say –
> To people – any more![274]

The poet refers the bee to male and the flower to female, endowing their behaviours with sexual purposes. Dickinson considers the process of the bee's gathering honey as natural and deserved so that the flower should not blame the bee for its behaviour. However, 'too often' still shows that the bee is a pesky intruder to some extent as he disrupts the life of the flower. 'Felicity', a subtle hint at the subject of desire here, equals bliss or ecstasy, which makes the process of gathering nectars an enjoyment rather than a chore for the bee. Keats puts forward a similar kind of 'felicity' in his poem 'In drear nighted December', where 'green felicity' indicates the exuberance of spring. Dickinson confirms that the bee lives in the moment of gathering nectars from flowers every day, as she portrays bees as merry and dissolute scamps in her poem. It seems as if being out for pleasure is the nature of the bee and its activity. 'Door' suggests that the flower can choose whether to accept or refuse the bee. The door can be either closed or open, totally depending on the willingness of the flower. Thus, the poem has completed its first step: releasing desire. 'Door' is the only barrier between the bee and the flower, and constructs a possible space for the flower to judge its

[274] *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Franklin, p.106.

relationship with bee.

In the following stanza, the poet explains that the flower is figuratively associated with 'Vevay' through the image of the Footman. The US has a town called Vevay in Indiana. However, Judith Farr tends to believe that Vevay refers to the faraway city in Switzerland which is guided by the imagination and readings of Dickinson.[275] There are many cities across Europe, Asia, Latin America only in the dreams of Dickinson to visit,[276] but Dickinson perhaps attempts to succeed Romantic legacies here as 'Vevay' is also a place in the broader context of Romanticism when it appears in Rousseau's *Julie: or la Nouvelle Heloise* (the story is set Vevay), Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* ('Allez a Vevay') and his Swiss tour in 1816,[277] Henry James' *Daisy Miller*,[278] Ruskin's 1846's painting – Vevey Sunrise,[279] L.M. Alcott's *Little Women*[280] and Wells' *The Shape of Things to Come* (human will for peace as it found expression at Vevey),[281] etc.

The place Vevay is associated with another poem 'Our lives are Swiss', in which the place is portrayed as a 'still' and 'cool' one. The reference to the place in Switzerland suggests 'coldness' in contrast to the implied passion and desire symbolized by the bee. As the place emerged in Dickinson's imagination, the place must be tempting like 'Siren'. The image suggests a cool aloofness on the part of the flower in her attitude towards the bee. However, the white snow of the Alps symbolizes the 'solemn' of the coldness, like a guard in its responsibilities. Thus, the appearance of that footman in the poem is a gatekeeper, who denies entry and refuses the passions.

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[275] Jane Donahue Eberwein, *All Things Dickinson: An Encyclopedia of Emily Dickinson's World* ed. by Wendy Martin (Greenwood: ABC-CLIO, 2014), pp.665-666.
[276] Judith Farr and Louise Carter, *The Gardens of Emily Dickinson* (MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), p.152.
[277] George Byron, *The Poetical Works of Lord Byron, Complete: Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1839), p.264.
[278] Henry James, *Daisy Miller* (London: Peguin Book Limited, 1947), pp.5, 6, 10.
[279] In Birmingham Museums, Accession Number: 1958P16.
[280] L.M. Alcott, *Little Women* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1994), pp.396-400.
[281] Herbert George Wells, *The Shape of Things to Come* (London: Orion, 2017)

Helen Vendler estimates in the Swiss poem that the Alps resemble the Decalogue to depart human beings from their desire,[282] which echoes the function of the 'door' in this poem. As 'siren' in Homer's reference is to do with sexual seduction, it might be proposed that Dickinson implies the flower to keep primly 'still' and 'cool' like the white snow of the Alps and learn to refuse avid pollinator if it desires to keep its high position.[283] The Alps has the nature of both 'siren' (sexual appetite) and 'solemn' (moral duty) in 'Our lives are Swiss' poem, and these two personalities are endowed to the flower as well.

The bee is still the repelling bee. As Dickinson endows the flower with a highhanded manner, the flower, like a woman of status, may ask her footman to tell the bee that she is not at home. This nobility is also revealed in the line 'Velvet people from Vevay' of the poem 'Pigmy seraphs – gone astray –'. Velvet people represents a high and noble group. Dickinson connects the flower with Vevay to make it a noble and distant one. 'Mistress' is not the woman who has regular sexual relationship with a man without marriage in the poem; however, it refers to female head of a house with employed servants implying social standing as an owner or property and household staff. 'Any more' implies that this refusal will last forever, which is a terrible thought because it cancels feelings of sexual attraction and reproductivity vital to sustaining humanity. Dickinson presents the problematic nature of desire in this poem from the female perspective of a single woman who owns property and is autonomous about whether she is open (or not) to desire.

The whole poem is playful in tone, as the speaker persuades the flower that there is no need to blame the bee for his activity because this is his nature. The first part of Dickinson's poetry starts

[282] Helen Vendler, *Dickinson: Selected Poems & Commentaries* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), p.43.
[283] Judith Farr and Louise Carter, p.185.

with a carefree 'open yourself to desire as is it natural' in contrast to the second part of the poem, which curtails, controls and suppresses desire. Feit Diehl explores an idea that Dickinson is actually wavering between the feeling of 'waiting for her master and radical rejection of his presence',[284] which is much like the hesitating attitude of the flower to the bee. Echoing Dickinson's own life, the uncertain attitude towards desire reveals the conflict of Dickinson's reclusive life and her longing for a marriage. Alternatively, it may also reflect that she desires a heavenly fulfilment in a bid to realize divine eroticism through postponed earthly bliss. A tension between physical and spiritual eroticism is fully expressed.

There is a flower that Bees prefer –
And Butterflies – desire –
To gain the Purple Democrat
The Humming Bird – aspire –

And Whatsoever Insect pass –
A Honey bear away
Proportioned to his several dearth
And her – capacity –

Dickinson employs another kind of flower to make an intimate connection with the bee – the 'purple clover', as noted by Judith Farr.[285] What is the role of the purple clover in its relation to bees? The lines, at first, claim that it is not only bees that want the flower, but also butterflies and hummingbirds admire it. The speaker uses 'prefer', 'desire' and 'aspire' to convey the same idea that the flower is vitally necessary. Then the speaker points out that it is a 'Purple Democrat'. Purple was a colour long associated with nobility, including political rulers as well as priests, which had both secular and spiritual significance. Christian culture further connects purple with royalty,

[284] Joanne Feit Diehl, 'Come Slowly: Eden: An Exploration of Women Poet and Their Muse', *Signs 3(3)* (1978), 572-587 (p. 578).
[285] Judith Farr and Louise Carter, p.130.

particularly restricted to emperors[286] to 'signify biblical royalty under Jesus Christ'.[287] The poet chooses the purple clover in her first attempt to locate this flower at a high position, proving that bees, butterflies and hummingbirds own good judgment. It reflects the poet's good judgment. Purple, as an introspective colour, which includes complicated connotations, appears frequently in many of Dickinson's poems as a metaphor of her imagination and relief in spiritual realms. As purple symbolizes power, the colour is a good choice to be considered to compensate for Dickinson's emotional vacancy that comes from purity and loftiness. Also, the purple flower figuratively helps her accomplish some 'forbidden' emotional experiences.[288] Steven Herrmann even considers the purple colour as a kind of 'marriage symbolism imbedded in Nature', which offers a prospect of fulfilment for Dickinson's desire even when she is in reclusion.[289]

The poet associates the clover with the Democratic as the clover is a common plant, the equivalent of the common people, and welcomes all visitors. The poet makes a good reconciliation between nobility and approachability by combining purple with Democratic, realizing the special in the ordinary. Dickinson believes that clover is the favourite plant of the bee for pollination because the clover is referred as 'luxurious living'. As the clover can provide abundant nectar, bees, butterflies and hummingbirds should take it according to their 'capacity'. The amount of nectar they can obtain should be subjected to their identity. On the side of the clover, it is justice to all insects. They do not scramble for nectar, which also implies the clover's 'democracy' even though the relations of bees, butterflies and hummingbirds construct a competitive battlefield for the nectar.

Her face be rounder than the Moon

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[286] Michael Ferber, *A Dictionary of Literary Symbols 2nd Edition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.163.
[287] Joan Voight, 'The Power of the Palette', *Adweek 44* (2003), p.32.
[288] James R. Guthrie, 'Darwinian Dickinson: The Scandalous Rise and Noble Fall of the Common Clover', *The Emily Dickinson Journal 16 (1)* (2007), 73-91 (p.78).
[289] Steven Herrmann, *Emily Dickinson: A Medicine Women for Out Times* (Wyoming: Fisher King Press, 2018), p.100.

And ruddier than the Gown
Or Orchis in the Pasture –
Or Rhododendron – worn –

She doth not wait for June –
Before the World be Green –
Her sturdy little Countenance
Against the Wind – be seen –

The speaker naturally endows the clover with womanhood by using 'her face'. We may notice that 'ruddier' is a synonym of 'red' when the speaker previously says it a 'purple' one. 'Ruddy' is to depict the complexion of someone. Here the word is used partly because the clover has been personified. It is an adorable and shy maiden. In the eyes of the speaker, the flower is more beautiful than the moon, the gown of the orchis and the rhododendron. Yet, the colour of orchis and rhododendron is purple in different degrees as well. It sounds a little strange here when the speaker compares the complexion of the clover to the 'gown' of orchis and rhododendron. In this context, 'ruddier' is a word that depicts the extent of the purple purity among the three flowers. The clover has her typically 'sturdy' personality that she wants to be a minority as she does not wait for June when all flowers blossom and the grass turns green. She does not participate with those flowers that pursue their colours and beauty. Here the flower experiences both masculine and feminine powers. 'Sturdy' and 'litigants' are connected with power and strength –masculine quality while 'fashions' and 'jealousy' are terms of femininity.[290] 'Fashion' belongs to the social and cultural realm, concerned with what people wear and how they behave. Dickinson depicts this female flower with male personalities: being independent, having high self-esteem and is not easily made 'jealous'.

Contending with the Grass –
Neat Kinsman to Herself –
For Privilege of Sod and Sun –
Sweet Litigants for Life –

[290] http://blogs.commons.georgetown.edu/engl-369-project-af817/f-642/

And when the Hills be full –
And newer fashions blow –
Doth not retract a single spice
For pang of jealousy –

Her Public – be the Noon –
Her Providence – the Sun –
Her Progress – be the Bee – proclaimed –
In sovereign –Swerveless Tune –

The Bravest – of the Host –
Surrendering – the last –
Nor even of Defeat – aware –
When cancelled by the Frost –[291]

To obtain the privilege of getting enough sod and sun in order to ensure her sweetness, the clover fights against the wind, the grass, and even her kinsman. This reveals a determined self-sufficiency. She has to struggle to obtain nutrition before those hills that are full of other flowers competing with her. This is the same as the competition among bees, butterflies and hummingbirds. It sounds betrayal to a 'democrat'. However, the aggressiveness of the clover is to serve for those insects to get enough nectars from her, thus retaining her own democracy. Dickinson first realizes the flower's independence by accomplishing flower as her own company. The last two stanzas seem to be judgment day for the clover. The noon becomes the public, and the sun becomes providence. The flower looks as if she is waiting to be awarded, and she wishes that the bee announces her success. She hopes that her effort can be seen and confirmed by wider nature. Unfortunately, the result is not the one she wishes. An unexpected turn occurs when the poem announces that the flower is surrendered, defeated and cancelled. Although the clover is the last to surrender and seen as 'brave', the last three words still establish an intensely tragic emotion compared with the poem's earlier confidence and ambition in the first stanza. 'Cancel', is an excessive verb for the flower. It goes

[291] *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Franklin, p. 287.

beyond the range of natural laws and looks as if the flower is deliberately weeded out. ‘Frost’ refers to death in nature. It hides the connotation of women feeling ignored and left alone in the relationship. It is a kind of anxiety, and this is why Dickinson praises the spiritual endurance of the clover because she believes that the clover will return. ‘Host’, which refers to a host of angels, has religious connotations. The religious implication of the poem sees Dickinson to elevate desire to a higher spiritual realm.

Although Dickinson’s bee-flower poems gender the flowers as females, each depiction of these flowers reveal different personalities and positions. Compared with the rose, jasmine and harebell poems, this clover seems to be an outbreak of the woman’s rebellion and owns both roles as man and woman. Dickinson tries to redefine beauty and break the conventional stereotype of male and female qualities, which always define female merely as sweetness, warmth, sensitivity, nurturance and tenderness. This emphasis on these qualities ignores other attributes such as the power, courage, strength, independence and leadership of a woman. The pollinators in those poems are portrayed as males with different purposes. The bees in the rose, jasmine and harebell poems act as philanderers who flirt with the flowers.

However, in this poem, the bee directly shows his attempt to approach the honey and take it away. The rationality of the bee’s action in this poem gradually goes towards fainting, whereas the flowers feel more disenchanted. Dickinson puts both characteristics of beauty and strength in a single flower, as she challenges more traditional stereotypes of defining gender. From the rose trying to say ‘no’, to the clover which appears as sturdiest and the bravest of the flowers, the speaker is promoting the image of flower. She longs for a powerful and determined woman who has courage to bear solitude. The clover does not think it a ‘Defeat’ and she must be the last one to ‘Surrender’.

Clearly, Dickinson shows her admiration in the clover's persistence. This is Dickinson's attempt to overcome her anxiety in the discussion of desire when these flowers try to identify themselves with their autonomy rather than be identified by bees.

In those erotic bee-flower poems, the relationships between the aggressor and the victim, domination and subservience are revealed. They are no longer simply in a relationship between honey suppliers and takers. The sexual consciousness with simultaneous pain and pleasure express the poet's great longing for love and temporary loss of rationality. We feel her sincere pursuit of spiritual democracy as a single and unmarried nineteenth-century lady who would not have the same rights as a male in marriage. This further reflects Dickinson's struggling in face of anxiety of desire when she needs to deal with the invasion of 'they-self'. Clearly, at this stage, the balance has not reached, and Dickinson's being is under the condition of exposure and 'thrownness'. It is an ambiguous manner of Dasein as it has not received enlightenment from anxiety. Through a special set of metaphors by assigning human qualities to non-human bees and flowers, Dickinson rethinks human desires in a more open and natural context, endowing bees and flowers with struggling quality in the process of transformation.

Bees are traditionally associated with productivity and community, the cultural associations of which accords with what Puritan doctrine expects for a male in human society.[292] However, bees in Dickinson's poems also represent sexual desire. Thus, their productivity becomes a kind of reproduction. Closely following poem 208 'Rose did caper on her cheek', Dickinson compares the rose to the rosy colour which appears on the cheek of a young lady as a blush. 'Caper' equals playful

[292] Victoria Morgan, 'Repairing Everywhere without Design? Industry, Revery and Relation in Emily Dickinson's Bee Imagery', in *Shaping Belief: Culture, Politics and Religion in Nineteenth-Century Writing* ed. by Clare Williams and Victoria Morgan (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008).

leaping, which shows the spreading of this colour across the lady's cheek, bridging an association between the excitement of the young girl and the rose language – love. Then the speaker puts forward another rose – a young man, which is opposite to the rose on that lady's cheek. At this moment, the rose becomes a bridge that introduces the birth of young love. With the maturity of images of bees and flowers, they become increasingly personified.

In the poem 663 'Again – his voice is at the door', Dickinson adopts an anthropopathic tool to involve flowers into an erotic relationship with the bee. The flower becomes more powerful as a symbol of love, which bears the lovers up to the eternal fable such as the story of Dante and Beatrice, Romeo and Juliet. Of course, in the process of increasing the power of the flower, Dickinson's speaker suffers. It is undoubtedly a bittersweet time to deal with the anxiety. The line 'The purple – in my Vein'[293] reveals Dickinson's preference to endow herself with divinity and royalty in order to control the relationship, and to make 'self' dominant 'they-self'.

Further, in the poem 'If You Were Coming in the Fall', the bee appears again along with a clear story of waiting. The poet is in dialogue with her imaginary lover, as she promises that she will wait for him if he will come to her in autumn. Absence in this poem offers space for Dickinson to meditate on the essence of love. She considers eroticism at a more sublime level, combining carnality with the reunion of souls in the afterlife. As a result, physical eroticism is actually reduced and spiritual attachment is enhanced. The 'Goblin Bee' is menacing, which adds a degree of uncertainty and doubt about whether lovers can reunite after death even they are redeemed. This increases the religious colour in this poem. We should admit that Dickinson is skilled at redefining eroticism through natural images. For example, the picture of the bee physically landing the flower

[293] *The Poems of Emily Dickinson,* by Franklin, p.123.

shows the bee's dominance over the flower. It resembles traditional erotic position. In fact, bees and flowers provide Dickinson a space to reveal how eroticism can be presented in nature. Jordan Landry believes that Dickinson is trying to decode the body of the female by introducing a symbolic system in which bees become that decoder, as a result, the imagination of sexual desire becomes positive and acceptable for Dickinson.[294] In Dickinson's symbolic system, human conventions and non-human figures are mixed, the code of a woman's body is translated into other models of being so that new imaginary bodies of women are established in the context of wider nature.

Keats' masculine gaze differs from Dickinson's preference in using flower metaphors. In his poem 'To Mary Frogley' (1816). For example, 'dark hair […] as the leaves of hellebore […] peeps the richness of a pearl' (line 13-15), 'sweetness of thy honied voice' (23-24), 'sweet privacy' (27) […] these statements are closely associated with flowers. We see a woman at nature or flowers through Keats' eyes, or we see a flower at a woman. The flower is a critical symbol of erotic passion in the botanical realm but has been anatomized. The metaphorical link among flowers, eroticism and the female body is common in Keats' poetry,[295] as it is in Dickinson's. For example, the rose stands for women's breast, 'nipple gland […] exhibiting rose-like folds'.[296] Keats also stresses 'especially roses'[297] that have abundant dew that the speaker wants to taste. In *Endymion*, the rose stands for a wild woman that Endymion falls in love with (line 55-59). All of these imply a connection between eroticism and flower. Apart from this, the female figure has contained a garden of flowers in the poem 'To Mary Frogley': hellebore (14), waterlily (33), lily (54) […]. Dickinson

[294] Jordan Landry, 'Animal/Insectual/Lesbian Sex: Dickinson's Queer Version of the Birds and Bees', *The Emily Dickinson Journal 9(2)* (2000), 42-54 (pp.47-48).
[295] Donald Goellnicht, *The Poet-Physician: Keats and Medical Science* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1984), p.104.
[296] Donald Goellnicht, p.89. Astley Cooper, *On the Anatomy of the Breast* (London: Harrison and Co Printers, 1840), pp.52, 210.
[297] Donald Goellnicht, p.102, 103.

locates the discussion of desire in a natural world and focuses on bee-flower love to symbolize her own desire, which is much more tactful than Keats. Keats' employment of anatomy, separating bees from the botanical realm, remains a patriarchal view to decode the female body, whereas Dickinson's purely botanical metaphor respects the democracy of sex and eroticism.

4.2 The Treatment of Masculine Desire: Keatsian Romance

Dickinson is drawn to Keats' poetry in part because she is also interested in developing this kind of Romance language which gives a voice to sort of suppressed or implicit desire, which Keats' poems express. Keats' early poetic experiences of eroticism is clearly dominated by his knowledge of gender and sexuality. Keats trained as a surgical apprentice at Guy's hospital in his early times. It is believed that some of his imagination of the female body in his poetry is based on his early knowledge of learning anatomy at the hospital.[298] Much of Keats' love poetry focuses on human figures rather than animals as Keats uses anatomical knowledge he learnt from the hospital to apply to poetic creation. In fact, his deconstruction of the female body in the medical realm allows him to establish a new representation of women in literature. Under Keats' anatomy in his poetry, the impression of the female body becomes erotic, passive and beautiful.[299] In addition, images of nature are often wholly personified (rather than a single element) as a female in Keats' erotic poems from an anatomical perspective.

Some critics exploring female images in Keats' poem investigate how the female was unveiled and penetrated by a masculine science.[300] However, Keats' use of anatomical metaphors

[298] Hrileena Ghosh, 'Guy's Hospital' Poetry', in *John Keats and the Medical Imagination* ed. by Nicholas Roe (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p.22.
[299] Niamh Davies-Branch, 'The female body dissected: Anatomy and John Keats', in *Hektoen International A Journal of Medical Humanities* (2019), https://hekint.org/2019/04/26/the-female-body-dissected-anatomy-and-john-keats/
[300] Niamh Davies-Branch.

in his love poem is criticized variously. It has been regarded as 'weak poetry of sensual excess'.[301] Therefore, poems at this time show a 'coy eroticism'.[302] Walter Jackson Bate defines it as discouraging lines of eroticism[303] as those poems not indirectly and decently express desire. However, other critics have valued those poems as a powerful literary device.[304] Keats employs botanical images such as flowers to express his erotic desire under masculine authority,[305] and the images of flowers reflect the beauty of the female in Keats' poem. Such beauty conforms to male's desire and to some extent, reveals a relationship of subordination.

It is evitable that the masculine habit is brought to his thinking on desire in the realm of medieval romance as the anatomic metaphor emphasizes such kind of subordination. For example, parts of the flower have sexual analogies – woman's papillae as a petal, lover's bed as flowerbeds. Such a fragmented arrangement is considered to be purposefully gathered for pleasure,[306] and for exploring a link between plant growth and human passion.[307] Dickinson may use anatomic knowledge but she does not share Keats' professional interest in anatomy. Sexuality and eroticism have mechanical difference, the former stresses the physical process whilst the latter arouses emotion. Eroticism concerns feeling excitement, which belongs to intense arousal, like the wild poems and luxurious feeling in Dickinson and Keats' statements. Therefore, we usually evaluate human being's experience as 'erotic', whereas the behaviours of plants and animals are 'sexual'.

The name of 'Calidore' comes from Spenser's *Faerie Queene*.[308] Young Calidore is a knight

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[301] Alison Bashford, *Purity and Pollution: Gender, Embodiment and Victorian Medicine* (New York, NY: Macmillan Press, 1998), p.71.
[302] Andrew Motion, 'Chapter Seventeen', in *Keats* (London: Faber and Faber, 2011), the third page of this chapter.
[303] Walter Jackson Bate, *John Keats* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1963), p.63.
[304] Alan Bewell, 'Keats' Realm of Flora', *Studies in Romanticism 31(1)* (1992), 71-98 (p.74).
[305] Alison Bashford, p.80.
[306] Alan Bewell, p.74.
[307] Donald Goellnicht, p.104.
[308] Walter Jackson Bate, p.62.

who is taking an adventure paddling over the lake. The scenery along Calidore's way was clearly recorded. Then Calidore arrives at a castle and hears horses coming. The beauty of the scene soon gives way to the appearance of the beauty of women.

> Which the glad setting sun, in gold doth dress
> […]
> Just as two noble steeds, and palfreys twain,
> […]
> They brought their happy burthens. What a kiss,
> What gentle squeeze he gave each lady's hand!
> How tremblingly their delicate ancles spann'd!
> Into how sweet a trance his soul was gone,
> While whisperings of affection
> Made him delay to let their tender feet
> Come to the earth; with an incline so sweet.
> From their low palfreys o'er his neck they bent:
> And whether there were tears of languishment,
> Or that the evening dew had pearl'd their tresses,
> He feels a moisture on his cheek, and blesses
> With lips that tremble, and with glistening eye
> All the soft luxury
> That nestled in his arms. A dimpled hand,
> […]
> His present being: so he gently drew
> His warm arms, thrilling now with pulses new,
> From their sweet thrall, and forward gently bending,
> Thank'd heaven that his joy was never ending;
> […]

The personification of the sun opens the window for Keats' imagination. The sun is modified as a classical god that brings light for this journey. Besides, the sun has emotion and has a shape to dress in gold, which revitalizes the picture and establishes an affectional association with the poem. We should admit that Keats endows the scene of Calidore encountering two ladies with great passion when their first greeting is arranged to have physical intimacy – kiss and hand touch. Calidore treats ladies gently as he is 'a man of elegance and stature'. Naturally, the two ladies, in the eyes of Calidore, are noble girls. The frequent appearance of the following body sections implies Keats'

anatomical view for women: ladies' 'hand', 'delicate ancles'. 'tender feet' and 'pearl'd tresses'; Calidore's 'neck', 'moisture cheek', 'trembling lips', 'glistening eye', 'arms' and 'dimpled hand'. Starting from Calidore's perspective, the body of those two ladies are so beautiful that words of the feminine: 'delicate', 'tender', 'pearl'd' are piled up to eulogize them. Calidore observes the ladies from small parts rather than in entirety, finding different beauty codes in different parts of their bodies. For example, 'delicate' shows the slimness of the ancles; 'tender' portrays how light-footed they are, which shows a soft and well-rounded figure; 'pearl'd', on the other hand, reveals the brightness of their hair. Partial description of the female body allows Keats' readers to feel on the pulses a variegated female beauty.

As for the emotional activities of Calidore, we can find evidence from words such as 'moisture', 'trembling', and 'glistening'. They all reflect the gentle and sentimental nature of Calidore's interactions with the female sex. It is a sexualized male gaze on the external beauties of genuine women. Calidore feels nervous and such nervousness may be unconscious as well. 'Moisture' on Calidore's cheek refers to Calidore's sweating, and 'trembling' reveals both nervousness and excitement. This shows that Calidore keeps respect for the ladies. Together with trembling, 'glistening' further exposes the pleasant emotions of Calidore. Such emotions come from both the objective beauties Calidore sees from the ladies and the embellished beauties Calidore completes through his kiss and hand touch with the ladies. From his inner heart, Calidore feels satisfied with the encountering with the ladies.

A 'Soft luxury' is reimagined by Dickinson's 'luxury' in 'Wild Nights', which also stresses sensual luxury. Dickinson's luxury is 'wild', with fired passion and explicit desire. On the contrary, Keats' luxury is 'soft' with a series of gentle terms. In Keats' other poems, we can find a 'leafy

luxury' (*Poems*, 1817), which is to depict glory and loveliness.[309] 'Leafy' is vividly utilized to ensure the feeling of abundance. However, both Keatsian uses of luxuries stress a rare moment in which erotic desire is released and intimacy, in actuality or fantasy, is satisfied. Calidore has processed his distance with the ladies. 'Nestled in his arms' implies Calidores's masculinity – an image of a heroic and powerful gentleman. Echoing 'soft', the word 'sweet' appears three times in this short paragraph. The first 'sweet' refers to the 'trance'. The soul of Calidore is totally lost when his eyes were caught by the beauty of the ladies. The atmosphere between Calidore and the lady becomes seductive.

The second sweet is to depict the 'incline'. Calidore is so obsessed in the whispering with the ladies that his body seems to be out of control – he 'delayed' his steps. This reflects an increased siren power. Then the last sweet is to depict the 'thrall'. 'Thrall' is a keyword, which appears again in 'La Belle Dame sans Merci'. Karla Alwes points out that 'thrall' in Keats' career, simultaneously, refers to attraction and repulsion with regard to the female.[310] Keats describes the thrall as 'sweet' here, which refers to the attraction. Alwes mentions that 'thrall' in this poem also symbolizes 'mortality',[311] as all of the elements in Calidore are mortal. The scenes of nature, though green and lush, are temporary. The encountering with the ladies is temporary. Therefore, the whole earth becomes luxurious as Calidore holds coy muse of sexuality, and Calidore himself, as well, will go towards death. Thus, the earth will forgive the ladies and will not announce denunciation to their thrall. Siren is deceptive due to her voice, whereas the ladies is deceptive to Calidore due to their shapes. Both 'trance' and 'thrall' reflect that Calidore has lost his mind. 'Soul' designates the spirit

[309] E. F. Guy, 'Keats' Use of 'Luxury': A Note on Meaning', *Keats-Shelley Journal 13* (1964), 87-95 (p.87).
[310] Karla Alwes, *Imagination Transformed: The Evolution of the Female Character in Keats' Poetry* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993), p.19.
[311] Karla Alwes, p.20.

and the non-physical dimensions of existence, including thought and emotion. The poet states that the 'soul' has gone in such 'sweet trance', implying that Calidore gives up his spirit at his will. He voluntarily accepts the thrall from the eroticism. We read a deep desire for the sexual passion of Keats here. Erotic pleasure brings Calidore new pulses. This is an unprecedented experience. We can imagine how impossible it is for Calidore, a medieval knight, to inspect the body of the woman and be tempted. At this moment, Calidore believes that joy is everlasting. He is still staying in a condition of losing his soul.

> The sweet-lipp'd ladies have already greeted
> All the green leaves that round the window clamber,
> To show their purple stars, and bells of amber.
> …
> From lovely woman: while brimful of this,
> He gave each damsel's hand so warm a kiss,
> And had such manly ardour in his eye,
> That each at other look'd half staringly;
> And then their features started into smiles
> Sweet as blue heavens o'er enchanted isles.[312]

'Sweet lipp'd' resonates with the three 'sweets' before. It also accords with the 'sweet spot' of earth (line 26). Of course, nature is supporting their greeting as the green leaves become even more active than those ladies. Sweet lip, as if ready to kiss, implies seductiveness, which stands for sexual happiness. The women are greeting what is natural and so might well be open to greeting Calidore in the same way. Vegetation of nature was metaphorically intermingled with women so that Calidore 'eye prepared to scan Nature's clear beauty' (line 29-30). In other words, the women Calidore meets conform to the natural scene Calidore saw along the journey. Green leaves seem to anticipate the arrival of possible lover and Calidore arrives almost natural. We might say as well that these ladies

[312] John Keats, *Complete Poems and Selected Letters of John Keats*, ed. Edward Hirsch (New York, NY: Modern Library Classics, 2001), p.28-30.

are a continuation of the natural landscape in Calidore's imagination, which is full of expectation. Women and their surrounding nature are both cultivated and controlled in Keats' early poems in order to act as a mere symbol of adornment.[313]

As 'Calidore' belongs to Keats' early love poems, it relates less to direct physical eroticism; on the contrary, erotic activity is sublimated into harmless and innocent imagination.[314] Ladies are treated as fairies, which proves Keats' early imitation of Edmund Spenser, under whose writing Sir Calidore wanders in fairyland.[315] In the final lines, Calidore politely gives warm kisses to each lady with his masculine passion, or rather, the pure erotic desire of Calidore has been controlled. Physical impulsion has transferred into simple interactions, and the last 'sweet' has been separated from previous sensuality to innocence and becomes a connotation with pleasure. On the other hand, however, Keats' medical thinking about the female body is revealed in the description of how the knight touches and feels the separated body parts such as lips, cheeks, ancles, and feet through contact. The feeling is sensuous through Calidore's dissecting the ladies' body in his mind. Keats is drawing upon a traditional way of writing when body of women could be regarded as constitute part and his medical training reinforces this sense.

Although 'Calidore' emphasizes on chivalry and heroism, it opens a door for Keats to explore the code of the female body. In his later poem 'Woman! When I behold thee flippant, vain' (1816), Keats announces that 'I hotly burn – to be a Calidore'. Calidore stands not only for a knight, but an identity that has an awakening sense of eroticism. Ladies of Calidore accord with Keats' early taste for romance. His youthful fantasy attends to the surface beauties of women, which are shunned in

[313] Karla Alwes, p.21.
[314] Karla Alwes, pp.17-18.
[315] Christine Gallant, *Keats and Romantic Celticism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp.41-42.

his later poems. Women at this stage own gifted attractions that fire Keats masculine desire. Through 'Calidore', the quality of erotic language in Keats' early poems show that it is not just an imitation of Spenser.[316] In turn, Keats has established his own awareness of sublimated eroticism.

4.3 The Divine Desire in Mythology: Keats

Keats' treatment of medieval romance sublimates the desire. In fact, both Keats and Dickinson try to elevate, imaginatively, desire to the heavenly realm. The poet is different from the speaker with regards to experiencing the desire, and the self-world and the speaker-world are two independent thresholds when desire is considered as fantasy in the poetry of Keats and Dickinson. Different from the treatment of medieval romance, Keats introduces the images in mythology to translate secular desire into a divine desire. In Keats' poems, women often appear either as Goddesses or temptresses. Christopher Ricks said in *Keats and Embarrassment* that Keats' supernatural women are erotic and even demonic in their figuration of sexual desire. One of Keats' narrative poem, 'La Belle Dame sans Merci', portrays a vivid female image that is half-human, half-faery and half-demon.

> O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
> Alone and palely loitering?
> The sedge has wither'd from the lake,
> And no birds sing.
>
> O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
> So haggard and so woe-begone?
> The squirrel's granary is full,
> And the harvest's gone.
>
> I see a lily on thy brow,
> With anguish moist and fever-dew,
> And on thy cheeks a fading rose
> Fast withereth too.

[316] Spenser is not from medieval period, but from late romance, he just wrote in medieval style.

Set in medieval times, this ballad also processes from the eyes of a knight but the speaker is endowed with God's perspective. The first three stanzas are questioned by an unidentified person and responded by the knight. He (she) introduces the environment and then he (she) found the knight. Different from Calidore, this knight seems to experience a barren place and sense of despair, with the first and second stanza, simultaneously, questioning what might 'ail' the knight. 'O' conveys an empathetic tone. 'Loitering' shows his purposelessness, unlike Calidore who knows his destination. It seems as if the knight has been abandoned there. 'Alone', 'palely', 'haggard' and 'woe-begone' accurately convey the negative emotion and the isolation from the context of the knight. The body is there but his mind is in a very different place. 'Withered', 'no birds sing', 'harvest's gone', on the other hand, borrow the atmosphere from surroundings to imply that the darkness is approaching and everything is prepared. 'Pale' is against with full-blooded, which further implies the spiritual death and withered hope of the knight.

All these elements suggest a grey colour to the picture as if the knight is an uninvited guest of this isolation. The contrast of emotion in this poem and 'Calidore' is extreme: a difference between death and vigour. Keats uses lily and rose in the third stanza to depict the morbidity of the knight, which is ironic. The dewdrop on the flower is originally a symbol of freshness and vitality, but here it is used to evaluate the sweat left on the forehead. Similarly, healthy people keep rosy red on their cheek, while the rose colour on the knight's cheek is fading, which indicates illness. Moreover, lilies also represent the restored innocence of the soul, bringing the spirit to a state of innocence and peace after people die. The symbol of lily implies the knight in a state of half alive. Elements that stand for vitality seem to wither and die, which is the opposite extreme compared with the scenery in Calidore. The beginning of this poem has established the predicament of a dying

medieval knight.

I met a Lady in the meads,
Full beautiful – a fairy's child,
Her hair was long, her foot was light,
And her eyes were wild.

I made a garland for her head,
And bracelets too, and fragrant zone;
She look'd at me as she did love,
And made sweet moan

I set her on my pacing steed,
And nothing else saw all day long,
For sidelong would she bend, and sing
A fairy's song.

She found me roots of relish sweet,
And honey wild, and manna-dew,
And sure in language strange she said –
'I love thee true'.

She took me to her Elfin grot,
And there she wept and sigh'd full sore,
And there I shut her wild wild eyes
With kisses four.

From these stanzas, there are responses from the knight to the questions before. The 'I' becomes the knight rather than the questioner but the transformation is invisible. In such a desperate situation, the knight meets a lady, immediately creating a dramatic turn. Unlike Calidore's ladies, the knight's lady might be a potential spiritual salvation or damnation of this knight's life. She is a light for the knight in darkness and at the edge of death. The first impression of this lady is the same as ladies in 'Calidore': beautiful, fairy, and child-like innocent. Then the knight acts as Calidore, looking at her body parts up and down, from eyes, hair to foot. It looks like a doctor measuring his patient. The beauty of this lady again constructs a contrast with the surroundings. Keats says that this woman is 'full' beautiful, which lights his hope but also just a state of illusion. Yet, it is closely followed by

her ‘wild’ eyes. Her ‘wild’ eyes hide a sense of desire under her appearance. ‘Wild’ suggests wickedness or sweetness, madness or inspiration,[317] which is mysterious and unfathomable. It also has the indication of passion, which appears in Dickinson’s ‘Wild Nights’.

Naturally, the knight is obsessed with the woman from then on so that he makes a garland and bracelet to please her. The woman with ‘faery’s song’ becomes the single focus and even the single source of life for the knight. This is too much like the song of the Siren which makes his soul lost. Soon they should have an erotic relationship. ‘Fragrant zone’, ‘sweet moan’, ‘my pacing steed’ and ‘full sore’, which is filled with suggestions of sexual liaison, can be deliberately read as the process of their intercourse. ‘Zone’ not only indicates the geography, but also refers to erogenous point of the body, which arouses sexual desire. Later she brings food and sweets to the knight, promising that she really loves him. Before this, the line says ‘as she did love’. The tone of uncertainty reflects the fact that the knight actually does not know the essence of their relationship. Is the scenario imagined by the knight, or is it in the dream realm on the extremes of happiness and pain?

‘She took me to her Elfin grot’ reveals the woman showing initiative. ‘She took me’ resembles ‘she had me’, conveying a sexual sense. On the surface, the woman repeatedly said that she loved the knight, but in reality, the more loving one should be the knight. In the eyes of the woman, she is vulnerable and he is protective of her. The gesture of the knight in that woman’s arms seems to be a baby rather than a lover. On the other hand, he is protective of her as well as he saw her weeping. he stopped her sighing by closing her eyes and kissing her to sleep. How can this happen between two persons that meet each other for the first time? Then in the following, we may notice that ‘wild’ appear again with twice. It seems as if there exists a huge secret in her eyes. At this moment, the

[317] Jane Rabb Cohen, ‘Keats’ Humor in ‘La belle dame sans merci”, *Keats-Shelley Journal 17* (1968), 10-13 (p.12).

woman is setting up a whole set of seductions to the knight, first with beautiful appearance, then through intimate contact and flirting, and finally via sweet words as well as tears.

It is hard to confirm whether she indeed takes the knight lovingly, or 'as' she did love, and whether in language 'I love thee true'.[318] The deceptive and seductive nature is hidden under her beautiful and vulnerable appearance and delicate emotions. The 'honey' and the 'sweet' of the woman remove her malicious intent.[319] The knight's defences crumbled and fell into her gentle trap. In traditional chivalry literature, this result should be impossible as knights always have strong restraint and noble morality to treat women in an educated and protective way – a positive masculine trait. Yet, in this story, the woman is even smarter than the knight and tricks him, entirely disrupting the idea of chivalry. The story makes the woman's temptation irresistible and creates a sense of fearing women,[320] or woman's power over man. The foreboding scene seems to stop here and temporary pleasure soon becomes a horrific memory. The language of these sections is strongly suggestive of sexual encounter.

> And there she lulled me asleep,
> And there I dream'd – Ah! woe betide! –
> The latest dream I ever dream'd
> On the cold hill's side.
>
> I saw pale kings, and princes too,
> Pale warriors, death-pale were they all;
> They cried – 'La Belle Dame sans Merci
> Hath thee in thrall!'
>
> I saw their starv'd lips in the gloam,
> With horrid warning gaped wide,
> And I awoke and found me here
> On the cold hill's side.

[318] Jane Rabb Cohen, p.12.
[319] Jane Rabb Cohen, p.11.
[320] Edwin Moise, 'Keats' La Belle Dame sans Merci', *The Explicator 50(2)* (1992), 72-74 (p.72).

And this is why I sojourn here,
Alone and palely loitering,
Though the sedge is wither'd from the lake,
And no birds sing.[321]

The sleep builds up a turn of the story and establishes another setting of the story. In the sleep, the knight seems to be dragged back to his original world where he is familiar with. However, everything changes. The king, princes and warriors all become 'death-pale' as if they are defeated or threatened by a secret power. These men could be the lady's previous victims. This is foreshadowed by 'cold hill'. 'Cold hill side' indicates isolation and despair, creating a painful waking up. The knight cannot tell whether it is because he slept on that cold hill that the world he enters is cold and pale, or the world has totally changed. In the dream, he does not know whether it is a sensual experience or not. To him, it is 'woe'. Then someone reminds him of that woman, saying she is merciless and she enslaves the knight.

Or it may be a doubt from the knight's heart that he does not confirm whether the woman does love him or whether he wakes or sleeps.[322] There might exist another possibility. Before 'I' met the lady, 'I' have almost fallen into a coma. No one can tell whether the knight really saw that woman, or both woman and the king existed in the same dream of the knight. The latter brings the two sides into one world so that the warning seems to be more reasonable. Besides, if the knight has entered a dream realm before he 'meets'[323] the woman, then all becomes his fantasy, which resonates more closely with unspoken erotic desire without betraying the tradition of chivalry.

In addition, there are three persons in this poem. There exists an unidentified questioner (anonymous and genderless) at the beginning, and the knight starts his monologue later. That

[321] *Complete Poems,* ed. Jack Stillinger, pp.270-271.
[322] Jane Rabb Cohen, p.11.
[323] The word 'met' is the medieval word for dream as well as the past of meeting.

unidentified person introduces the surroundings of the knight, listens to the story of the knight but never introduces himself (herself). He (she) seems to be a stranger but he (she) behaves as if a close friend of the knight, accompanying him and recording the knight's last words. The omission of introducing this stranger enables Keats to make a romance-dream convention in this poem.[324] Probably this unidentified person is that lady. She first seduced the knight through her wild eyes, faery's song and sweet language, and then abandons him. So great is the pain that the knight has blurred his memory of the women and unable to make clear the dream and reality. 'Thrall' appears again. Unlike 'sweet' thrall for Calidore, this one is 'horrid'. The thrall is for the knight but also for the woman. She might be forced to be a tempter because the knight disrupts her calm life.

To some extent, the woman is a victim of love as well. The knight does not know who tells him about this. He can only see their lips in the dark. At this point, he fears and wakes up in shock. Love and death simultaneously accompany the knight, along with dream and waking, temptation and restraint. No doubt, the function of the woman is to entrap. He does not know whether he is enslaved in the dream or before he sleeps. He wakes on the cold hill but his 'loitering' continues again as the beginning of the poem. When he is awake, the woman has left him. It is not clear whether the woman leaves from his dream or his awakening hours, but his second loitering might be understood as a sort of negative form of Heidegger's notion of dwelling. He 'loiters' and 'sojourns'; in other words, he dwells, but to no avail. One thing we can make sure is that the disappearance of the woman causes the spiritual death of the knight, or rather, the failure of dwelling in the knight's ambiguous being. This must be a 'death-pale' loitering as the knight cannot find the 'self' in that 'between' space. 'Self' is in a deniable way of existence as there is no parameter shown

[324] Jane Rabb Cohen, p.11.

as its proof. That is to say, his awakening time and his dream hours alternate in a continuous cycle but provide no landing space for the knight's being, and the real and imaginative worlds are closely bound together to make dwelling 'loitering'. Although at the last moment he returns to the real world where the poem starts, he never escapes from the memory of the woman. It does not matter whether the lady was ever really there as the knight is finally trapped in the borderlands between ideal fantasy and demonic nightmare.

Keats' knight experiences two kinds of landscapes, one representing tournaments and honour (in Calidore) and another representing unhappiness, suffering and wrongs (La Belle Dame sans Merci).[325] Calidore and the knight in 'La Belle Dame sans Merci' occupy these two kinds. Ignoring the honour of Calidore, what does the abandonment mean to the knight of La Belle Dame and Keats the poet? It shows anxiety and fear of men to female empowerment. This can be proven in his description of patriarchal order he saw in the dream: king, prince, and warriors – they are all subjected to the woman. The woman is beautiful, erotically attractive but meanwhile deadly. She may even be a spirit or an illusion rather than a human being. Her merciless behaviour consists of her love and joy she provides. It is such a strange power that consumes him completely. We can regard it as a warning that anything one falls in love or obsesses over can disappear in an instant and is not worth the agony. Also, it is a reminder of the dangers of obsession. Therefore, Keats tries to portray his transformed sexual attitudes in 'The Eve of St. Agnes', where the female suffered pain, tears and sorrow – the loss of virginity. Keats announces that readership of 'The Eve of St. Agnes' is not suitable for women.[326]

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[325] Porscha Fermanis, *John Keats and the Ideas of the Enlightenment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p.41.
[326] Argha Banerjee, *Female Voices in Keats' Poetry* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Dist., 2002), p.42.

St. Agnes is the patron saint of virgins, but Madeline retreats from that world where sex is forbidden before marriage[327] to imply a fulfilment of romantic love over social restrictions both in religious and non-religious contexts. 'Isabella', equally importantly, sheds her cultivated virginity with the discovery of Lorenzo's body, a moment when a wild passion is generated.[328] There exists a certain irony of Keats' divinizing eroticism. Isabella ends in madness and death whereas Madeline and her lover are lost in a storm, which is sentimental. Keats approves of sexual romanticism, but both the story of St Agnes and Isabella are set in medieval times when public sexual love is published by death. No divine love will be found in pagan doctrine. Keats is opposing sexual violence in Greek theogony tradition with the coexistence of Christian erotic divinization. The poet is trying to establish his paganism on the erotic theology of Christian Platonism so that his readers can feel a sense of scandal. Erotic focuses on these two poems reflect Keats' quest for ideal love.[329] The erotic desire should exist in the realm of individual existence, but it must not coarsen into the pornographic.[330] As Keats writes in the poem 'Woman! When I behold thee flippant, vain', even though the woman is devoid of all virtues – meek, kind, and tender – the desire of the speaker is still fired. The external beauties of the woman overwhelm the virtues inside with regards to stimulating sexual impulses. This seems to go against the idealized male-female relationship shaped by chivalry and mythology,[331] which, with varying degrees of success, La Belle Dame sans Merci tried to preserve.

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[327] John Keats, *The Letters of John Keats, 1814-1821 vols.2* ed. by Hyder Edward Rollins (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), p.163.
[328] Rachel Schulkins, *Keats, Modesty and Masturbation* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2014), p.83.
[329] Andrew Motion, the third page of Chapter Seventeen.
[330] Thomas McFarland, *The Masks of Keats: The Endeavour of a Poet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) p.44.
[331] Ayumi Mizukoshi,'The Cockney Politics of Gender –the Cases of Hunt and Keats', in *Romanticism on the Net 14* (1999), https://www.erudit.org/en/journals/ron/1900-v1-n1-ron426/005851ar/

Elsewhere, in Keats' letters, he evaluates attractive women as 'the Beauty of a Leopardess'.[332] This shows how the beauty of women's power attracts his eyes. The process of exploring the body code of women is also a process of finding the essence of beauty in poetry.[333] In 'Lamia', *Endymion*, 'The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream', Keats pursuit of erotic love not only satisfies his body, and there exists some 'higher love' that is directed to God.[334] God and goddesses in Christianity as well as in art and poetry are semi-naked and embracing, which accords with sensual scene. It is a combination of erotic release and physical anxiety. As a result, love is strengthened from personal pleasure to a healing and liberating force. This is clearly shown in a short paragraph in *Endymion*, 'The breezes were ethereal, and pure, […] And on their placid foreheads part the hair'.[335]

Erotic charge changes when Keats' commitment to medicine loosened. This is probably a result of the distinction between what he imagined and what is actual.[336] 'Lamia' rejects the possibility of romantic love and turns to the functional relationship. Women become aggressive and invert the roles of sexual dominance. Then the femme fatale appears. They are provocative to patriarchy, full of sensuality and mystery, and able to control their sexuality. Although in the early stage Lamia is trapped in the form of a serpent, the serpent gradually becomes her nature. The 'self' of Lamia has gained enlightenment from a confined form that helps remove the impact of the potential 'they-self'. It is not Lamia, but Lamia in serpent form that restrains her anxiety and kills Lycius. From Calidore to Lamia, there is a progressive fading of romantic love directed to a male audience.[337] There are doubts, anti-violence, pain and rebellion generated from desire.

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[332] Walter Jackson Bate, p.379.
[333] Gerald Enscoe, *Eros and the Romantics: Sexual love as a theme in Coleridge, Shelley and Keats* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG, 2015), p.106.
[334] It does not mean that Keats believes in an orthodox notion of God.
[335] *Complete Poems*, ed. Jack Stillinger, p.53.
[336] Andrew Motion, the third page of Chapter Seventeen.
[337] John Whale and John Blades, 'Narrating Romance: 'Isabella', 'La Belle Dame sans Merci', 'The Eve of St Agnes', and 'Lamia'', in *John Keats* (New York, NY: Macmillan International Higher Education, 2004), p.54.

4.4 The Sublimation of Secular Desire: Dickinson

Different from Keats, it is still the image of bees that is used euphemistically to explain 'reproduction' to children in Dickinson's poetry. Dickinson's readers can understand the dimension of the sexual meaning in her poems. If bees and flowers are images Dickinson borrows to subtly imply secular desire, the poem 'Wild nights' (269) is the one that directly exposes her eroticism in terms that express a kind of religious ecstasy. Landry's essay explores the association between religion and eroticism. However, Puritan discourse gives men more chances to speak about their desire.[338] To give a space for women, Dickinson tries to create a female subject who have rights to own, express, and extend sexual passion to rebel the male-oriented tradition. It is a mistake to assess that Dickinson's reclusion equals renunciation of life. On the contrary, a reclusive life helps, to some extent, stimulate her sexual desires and drives. This poem, 'Wild nights', proves that Dickinson is aware of the essence of love and the joy of carnality.

Wild nights –Wild nights!
Were I with thee
Wild nights should be
Our luxury!

Futile – the winds –
To a Heart in port –
Done with the Compass –
Done with the Chart![339]

The double 'Wild nights' in the first line conveys a longing for indulgence. With the exclamation and a dash, it looks like a call for the nights. Moreover, the speaker uses plurality here, indicating that she (we assume that the speaker is a female) desire more than one night to be wild. A repetition, an exclamation and a dash briefly but powerfully portray the erotic emotion of the poet. 'Wild' can

[338] Jordan Landry, p.43.
[339] *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Franklin p.120.

refer to being stormy in totally natural conditions without human intervention. However, it also refers to being passionately eager and enthusiastic,[340] an uncontrolled behaviour released from inhabitation. It can be proposed that Dickinson contains two kinds of connotations of 'wild' here. On the one hand, it points to the outer space she may temporarily yearn for in the timeless reclusion; on the other hand, it also vividly indicates her strong emotion and desire for erotic love. When she 'wildly' falls in love with someone, the sense of order is disturbed due to this intensity of passion.

'With thee' is the critical moment in the poem. It is proposed that 'thee' is an imagined lover of the speaker. Being with this person makes the nights meaningful – 'luxury'. 'Luxury' originally refers to expensive, enjoyable but not essential things. For Dickinson, 'luxury' means both a rare moment of longing for the spatially outer world and a moment of desiring a chronological space in which eroticism can be released and intimacy can be obtained. It conveys an emotion of excitement, comfort and indulgence along with 'wild'. For the poet, 'luxury' points more to physical pleasures than the spiritual in this line. 'Nights' exactly accord with this chronological concept. Thus, the latter is called 'our luxury' as it belongs to 'our' time. 'Luxury' also reveals how precious the nights are – now that the nights are not necessities in the life of the poet, the price of it becomes higher. Yet the poem remains regretful because it is only a hypothetical wish, the realization of which is never guaranteed. This is proved by the word 'tonight' in the last stanza as well. The only night – 'tonight' makes the moment particularly 'luxury'. That is to say, an unsettled and unsettling sexual desire which goes beyond the rational and gravitates towards sensation, which is repeatedly desired at that moment. 'Tonight' itself becomes an implicit reference to such desire.

[340] Paul Faris, 'Eroticism in Emily Dickinson's 'Wild Nights'', *The New England Quarterly 40(2)* (1967), 269-274 (p.271).

'Compass' and 'Chart' imply some kind of amatory doctrine, or rule (restraint)[341] between the speaker and her imagined lover. If a boat is 'in port', it does not need a compass and a chart, which are associated with journeying. The metaphor suggests that the speaker has found security and does not need to venture any further. The winds, however, indicate a kind of outer power that attempts to weaken this relationship and blow them apart. The winds accord with 'wild', which implies a stormy night. It is proposed that the speaker wants to prove that the relationship between her lover and her will not be influenced by anything so that it is 'futile' even the winds try to separate them.

When the speaker locates that heart in a 'port', it has defined an outcome. 'Port', to some extent, is already a destination and a shelter. The 'port' can be the metaphor of God and a symbol of the place of safety and shelter, which can be found in Christian hymns when God is depicted as 'our Rock' and 'a shelter in the time of storm'.[342] The speaker is trying to seek shelter when she feels that it will be a too windy and stormy (wild) night to settle. There is double sense in which 'wild' is used. On a 'wild' night, the speaker would ideally like the intimacy of a close relationship whether with God or a lover. At the same time, the expression of 'wild nights' also seems strongly suggestive of uninhibited passion. Clearly, she is not prepared to take an adventure at this night. On the contrary, she would like to stay in the port as a result of giving in to the storm. We suspect that 'thee' in the first stanza transfers to refer to 'God' who offers shelter. A sort of invisible spiritual anxiety arises here, and a tendency of separation enlarges desire.[343]

Rowing in Eden –
Ah – the Sea!
Might I but moor – tonight –

[341] Paul Faris, pp.270-271.
[342] Charlesworth Vernon and Sankey I.D., 'A Shelter in the Time of Storm', *The Hymnal for Worship and Celebration* (1839).
[343] James L. Dean, 'Dickinson's 'Wild Nights'', *Explicator* (1993), 91-93 (p.93).

In thee![344]

The last stanza of 'Wild Nights' looks intriguing when the first line goes 'rowing in Eden'. Originally 'Eden' should refer to a garden of pleasure and shameless sexuality – an image of perfection. Now 'Eden' has become a sea. The appearance of 'Eden' is parallel to the implication of the paradise, which puts the love in the mind of the speaker at a sacred and heavenly level. Thus, it becomes a religious fulfilment as she believes that no earthly night and 'Eden' can conquer this unquenched passion. The line indistinctly points to the analogically forbidden love, if we take Dickinson's lesbian sexuality into account.[345] Adam and Eve have a sense of shame after they obtain the awareness of gender and sexuality. Similarly, the sense of shame comes to Dickinson as well when a homosexual issue is regarded as something scandalous. This happens between women at Dickinson's time when she is an unmarried lady. In fact, it is not only female poets who use Eden to hint at forbidden relationships. Similarly, Ernest Hemingway later uses the image of 'Eden' as well when he tries to work out a suppressed homosexuality.[346] The love between a man and a woman is not a thing that equals 'Eden'. This connects with the forbidden concept in the poem 'The Flower must not blame the Bee', which gives readers the sense of 'love affair'.

'Moor in thee' has more than one possible understanding. The first understanding of 'In thee' lies in religious level, when the speaker wants to realize spiritual fulfilment. 'Thee' points to God. Another interpretation of 'in thee' refers to the scene when the woman says to express her physical fulfilment in sexual experience. At this moment, the lover really becomes that port. The poet wants to sleep in the embrace of the lover and stop at the harbour which she considers both as safe and enthusiastic. She becomes a sailor. The reason for employing 'sea' as a target image, on the one

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[344] *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Franklin, p.120-121.
[345] Martha Nell Smith, p.55.
[346] Daniel Train, "'Reading Slowly to Make it Last': Reading Readers in Hemingway's *The Garden of Eden*', *The Hemingway Review 36(1)* (2016), 31-48 (pp.31-32).

hand, might be that the unlimited extension of the sea gives a sense of safety as its shoulders are wide enough to embrace its lover. The speaker can lay down securely in God with intimacy, and a moment of release is achieved. The waves of the sea contain a form of passion as well, which associates with the passion of the speaker.

On the other hand, it is because 'Eden' is where the fall happens when Adam and Eve give way to temptation. The biblical term tells us that we should labour for salvation and spiritual satisfaction does not come easily. 'Siren', as a symbol of temptation, also connects to the sea. 'Rowing' becomes a description of hard work struggling for salvation through huge efforts in a life journey of course. The modal particle 'Ah' sounds like a sigh for the endless struggling in the infinite sea – a cry of fear and pain. It also sounds like a surprising tone of pleasure – a cry of relief. It we read the poem following the first understanding, it is a religious poem. However, if we follow the second interpretation, it should be an erotic poem in which the woman takes initiative. Dickinson leaves a riddle for her readers here by providing two possible suppositions of the poem and 'Eden' is both a blissful one and a struggling one.

Dickinson prefers a Keatsian tender of the night. The sexual fulfilment of the mistress fails in the selfless sea in Dickinson's poem. Readers may doubt this poem that if the poem is a yearning for carnal love, or if the poem is a spiritual love experience with God. Hence, the wild nights are given connotational doubleness – uncontrolled passion or spiritual comforts; welcoming the storm or giving in to the storm; addressing 'thee' as an actual person or the God; and emotion of simultaneously stormy and calm. Some paradoxes exist. For example, the heart should long for wildness; however, it chooses to stop in the port finally. Storm and harmony simultaneously coexist. As a result, there is oppression in the shelter. The heart is in fact prisoned for the sake of safety.

James Dean has announced 'eight or nine minds about'[347] this poem, where he believes that Dickinson connects personal desire with human nature, further with the larger natural world. Nonetheless, at least we can confirm that the object in this poem is great importance for the poet.

The religious sexual trap in 'Eden' can be observed in poem 211 as well, in which bee-flower love has been elevated to biblical love and temptation. As a result, a state of bliss has been established.

Come slowly – Eden!
Lips unused to Thee –
Bashful – sip thy Jessamies
As the fainting Bee –

Reaching late his flower,
Round her chamber hums –
Counts his nectars –
Enters – and is lost in Balms.[348]

Poem 206 tastes like a tentative of eroticism whilst this poem seems to be the first test. The first stanza, a monologue from the flower, seems also like a perspective from a virgin girl when she first experiences sex, due to which she feels uneasy on her lip, and asks to be slow. Eden is originally the place of happiness and innocence before betrayal happens. However, the word 'thee' encourages readers to understand 'Eden' as the name of a young man. Then it becomes a requirement from the flower (the young maiden), asking Eden to come slowly. 'Sip' belongs to physical language. 'Bashful' and 'sip' conveys an air of being very much careful. The behaviour of the object is quite gentle in a fear to make the flower uncomfortable. In which condition will we sip? When we want to taste, or when we feel the water is too hot, we will 'sip'. 'Jessamies' symbolizes fragrance, a word to praise the beauty of the flower – the jasmine flower, which is also an image of first and young

[347] James L. Dean, p.91.
[348] *The Poems of Emily Dickinson,* ed. Franklin, p.95.

love. Unlike the love of the old age, jasmine delivers a sweet and clear impression.

However, even in such light scent, the bee is still fainting. The second stanza is the perspective of the bee, or from a virgin male who hesitates to come to his lover. The way of the bee reaching that flower is not direct, but by 'humming' around its chamber. This is a tentative and seclusive behaviour as well. The image of the bee entering the flower is flirty, as a result, he is overwhelmed in the Balms and by the gentleness of the flower. Dashes after 'hums', 'nectars' and 'enters' further portray the stop and hesitation of the bee, from which we can see that both the flower and the bee are inexperienced so that the bee will get lost even he faces only pure and simple jasmine. 'Lost' accords with 'fainting' in the first stanza. We thought it is the nourishing nectars that make the bee 'fainting'. Yet, it is the bee itself that is obsessed with such a relationship. Flowers and bees are not merely in the association of provider and the absorber. They are, on the other hand, in the relationship of sex. Under the impression of the extreme feminine of the flower, Dickinson successfully leads the reader to the conception of Eden.

'Eden', in the reading of Marta McDowell, is the backdrop of Dickinson's garden in her Amherst home where she evaluates as 'seems indeed to be a bit of Eden'.[349] However, it also keeps the meaning in the *Bible* – an erotic garden and a sexual paradise. By mentioning 'Eden', Dickinson is imagining the state of bliss. Vendler considers that Dickinson is containing her despair into the hope of Eden.[350] Dickinson desires a consummation of erotic love in this poem rather than stop at a secular and ordinary level. This resembles the tone of poem 206. Eden is in the realm of the Bible, the God and the paradise. Only the fulfilment of love can both the flower and the bee reach paradise.

[349] Marta McDowell, *Emily Dickinson's Gardening Life: The Plants and Places That Inspired the Poet* (Portland, OR: Timber Press, 2019), p.18.
[350] Helen Vendler, p. 44.

Dickinson compares this relationship with the love the God, by paralleling a young man marrying a virgin to the God marrying his bride. Thus, the bee becomes the metaphor of the prayers and the flower symbolizes God. The poet directly shows a longing for sensuality. Thus, she is willing to suffer the postponement of pleasure. In the poem, the bee keeps trying to enter the flower to get its nectars. Dickinson removes the sound of the bee when it ends humming and only keeps its silent movement into the chamber of the flower. Naturally, the poet tries to endow the bee with some kind of politeness. Therefore, when the intercourse between the flower and the bee develops to this stage, the purpose of the bee becomes more direct and evident because he 'counts the nectars' – a behaviour of judging the value of the flower.

Poem 213 is a third flower-and-bee poem which implies erotic relationship also in divine tone.

> Did the Harebell loose her girdle
> To the lover Bee
> Would the Bee the Harebell hallow
> Much as formerly?
>
> Did the 'Paradise' – Persuaded –
> Yield her moat of pearl –
> Would the Eden be an Eden,
> Or the Earl – an Earl?[351]

Compared with poem 206, the bee in this poem has become a lover (or a secret 'mistress') of the harebell so that the harebell tries to help it get rid of the dilemma. The previous poem has clarified the identity of the flower. It is proposed that the poet prefers certain kinds of flowers, from which the importance of identity is felt. For example, a 'rose', in the eyes of Dickinson, is a symbol of a nobleman, whereas a 'Jasmine' stands for a maiden, and a 'harebell' plays the role of a seductive mistress. However, the confusion still exists as the flower should worry that the bee disrespects it

[351] *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Reading Edition*, ed. Franklin, p.68.

in the morning. Dickinson arouses a sexual double standard in this poem.[352] As is claimed, the 'Vevay' guides readers to the poem 'Pigmy seraphs –gone astray –', in which the damask rose garden is implied as an 'exclusive Coterie' for those velvet people.

Also, in her letters, roses often become 'obvious' riddles to her correspondent.[353] The rose enjoys prestige in Dickinson's poems like a princess served by green sepals with lustrous meek that even masters from Venice cannot paint. The poet, or the speakers of those poems, hold an extremely desiring attitude towards roses. Harebell, as a preferred flower in Victorian gardens, is only a substitute for the rose in the eyes of the bee. Rose is the Muse to the bee. Therefore, it flies to the desiring rose with a passionate visit. Differently, harebell does not enjoy this passion. Harebell acts merely as a lover of the bee, yet the rose always stands as a goddess. As a result, the position of the harebell and the bee in this love affair has been inversed so that the harebell has become the vulnerable side of desire.

The first line which depicts how 'loose her girdle' was, acts as a hint to illustrate that the harebell takes an active action with a strong desire to hold the bee. If the first question puts forward the doubts on the passion of the harebell, then the second question of this stanza seems to offer a protection to the harebell to ensure that the bee is that good bee. 'Hallowing' is a strong ironic word to refer to the impossible overwhelmed passion of the harebell. Therefore, the second question might be meaningless as no one will answer such an absurd question beyond the knowledge of non-existent sexual morals.[354] In the second stanza, Dickinson transfers her attention to the realm of human beings and God. Paradise equals harebell and Eden, or 'Earl' might equal that bee.

[352] Judith Farr and Louise Carter, p.183.
[353] Marta McDowell, p.71.
[354] Helen Vendler, p. 45.

Dickinson highlights the status once again to make a satire on the traditionally offensive attitudes towards the 'no-longer-virginal'[355] woman who is disrespected by the man. Vendler believes that Dickinson employs the poem to stress the so-called importance of virginity in the doctrine of the church. 'Hallow' puts the image in the background of religion. Therefore, in traditional society, the first question should receive a denial. However, the genuine purpose of Dickinson is to oppose the doctrine. Through ironic questions beginning with 'Did' and 'Would', Dickinson is to claim that women and men, the harebell and the bee are not guilty in sexuality no matter who takes the active action. In this respect, it can be regarded as a proto-feminist poem.

'Eden' also appears in this poem. Eden is Dickinson's diction to describe 'the paradise of sexual security and enjoyment'.[356] In the eyes of Dickinson, the marriage of the secular people might be 'hallowed'; however, it is only an enjoyment between the flower and the bee. Adam and Eve in the Eden never think about the concept of 'marriage' although they reach a pleasant harmony in sexuality. 'Paradise' is the shelter beyond the 'moat of pearl' for the two which is in the relationship of intercourse. Dickinson wants to know whether people in heaven (Eden) are the same as the people on earth when they face the problem of sexuality. Eden is a utopian place for Dickinson to imagine sexuality, which is latterly shown in another poem – 'Satisfaction – is the Agent', where 'To possess, is past the instant/We achieve the Joy'.[357]

Bees, flowers, Eden and night are typically erotic images in the poetry of Dickinson. They contain not simply a superficial connotation. Dickinson tactfully employs them to euphemistically express her sexual desire when she lives as a single and female recluse. Similar to Landry, Aaron

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[355] Ibid.
[356] Martha Nell Smith, *Rowing in Eden: Rereading Emily Dickinson* (Texas: University of Texas Press, 1992), p.55.
[357] *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Franklin, p.412.

Shakelford further confirms Dickinson's artistry of transferring the ideas of sex on to non-human entities.[358] Shakelford claims in his essay that Dickinson re-discusses the boundary between the animal and human beings. She tries to eliminate the limited perspectives and interpretations in our minds to nature, and she also reshapes our knowledge of nature on the basis of such empathy. Alternatively, these non-human entities are given human feelings and relationships. As a result, the personified nature enables the poet and her readers to give more open interpretations of the topics of religion and eroticism. Apart from botanical, anatomical and mythological metaphors of erotic relationships, Keats also explicitly addresses desire in some of his later poems. For example, in his poem 'Give me Women, Wine, and Snuff', women, or sex, becomes the wine of life. Wordsworth assesses that this poem shows Keats' as 'pretty pieces paganism'.[359] Rachel Schulkins points out that this is not a sign of innocence but an implication of conscious sexuality masked under virtue.[360] The blush and the sigh of the lady is associated with Eve's ardour to taste the forbidden apple, implying the lady's sexual pleasure. It belongs to feminine eroticism.

Keats and Dickinson's erotic poems show a combination of both physical and spiritual sense. Both poets choose to reflect desire partly as a way of displaying anxieties. Indeed, there exist associations between desire and anxiety. As gender hierarchies accompany their creation, the poems reflect a kind of anxiety that Keats and Dickinson want to identify themselves in a relationship, either in an imaginary or a realistic one. Desire and anxiety construct two sides of eroticism. From those poems of Keats and Dickinson, eroticism in their poetry often contains an intimate touch between the speaker and the imaginary lover. In fact, for many of Keats and Dickinson's poems,

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[358] Aaron Shakelford, 'Dickinson's Animals and Anthropomorphism', *The Emily Dickinson Journal 19(2)* (2010), 47-66 (p.51).
[359] Derek Lowe, 'Wordsworth's 'unenlightened Swain': Keats and Greek Myth in I stood tip-toe upon a little hill', *Keats-Shelley Journal 57* (2008), 138-156 (p.156).
[360] Rachel Schulkins, p.17.

they seem to have both religious and secular dimensions. They resemble a religious hymn in some ways and yet also seem passionate at a more intimate, personal and secular level. On a spiritual level, their interest in eroticism is a kind of struggling with an addiction, humiliation, anger and depression. Eroticism and its attendant anxiety of desire helps Keats and Dickinson approach closer to death. Such an approach to death exposes a darker side of their respective imaginations and the role that the anxiety of desire plays in the psychic economy.

Chapter 5

Approaching the Anxiety of Death:
Dwelling, Truth, and Possibility in Keats and Dickinson

> Among the possibilities from which Dasein flees, death is Dasein's own-most possibility, which Dasein has no way to escape and when which comes all the worldly relations are done up with.[361]
>
> Heidegger

In Heidegger's philosophy, death is a symbol of the appearance of truth after man dwells in anxiety. Death is also the final destination of all mortal beings. Heidegger regards death as a conclusion of possibilities to earthly dwelling that should be filled with results and fruits, not merely a measured end stop. Reading of Heidegger on death provides possibility as opposed to actuality, which offers a mode of thinking through the poetry of Keats and Dickinson as a quest for truth and beauty. Previously it has been stated that Keats and Dickinson try to measure the shape of life, the dimension of time and space, the possibility of art and imagination in their poetry to pacify their anxiety to some extent. We find in their poetic measurement some sense of truth as we also did when we saw desire for the divine giving sway to a secular erotic desire.

Keats and Dickinson spent their lives struggling to fight for one question related to death: does immortality really exist? In fact, the aesthetic treatment of death reveals three types of attitude that Keats and Dickinson have in the face of death: dread, resistant confrontation and acceptance. These three types of encounters with death witness how both poets try to transfer from an anxious 'thrown condition' of being to the one that they have choices not to follow 'being-outside-itself' so that Dasein has the chance to comports itself authentically. In the end, both Keats and Dickinson leave a space to observe if they have realized being free.

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[361] Heidegger, 'Existentialism and Death Attitudes', ed. by Denis McManus, in *Heidegger, Authenticity and the Self: Themes from Division Two of Being and Time* (Oxford: Routledge, 2014), p.89.

5.1 Death and Poetic Meditations on the Posthumous: Keats

> The indefiniteness of death is primordially disclosed in anxiety […] The nothing with which anxiety brings us face to face, unveils the nullity by which Dasein, in its very basis, is defined, and this basis itself is as thrownness into death.[362]

Keats repeatedly meditates on death and the afterlife in his short life. Metaphorical and actual death, for Keats, is the road to fantasy of the afterlife and immortality. Keats experienced an untimely death at the age of twenty-five. In his final days, Keats felt that he lived in a condition in which the space between life and the afterlife was blurred, as he writes in his letter, 'I have a habitual feeling of my real-life having passed, and that I am leading a posthumous existence'.[363] This ambiguous experience enables Keats to hold a protracted poetic conversation with death. Keats' early awareness of death contains fear, despair and melancholy. It is described as a kind of universal human fear coming from his premature death.[364] His poem 'When I have Fears' (1818) states,

> When I have fears that I may cease to be
> Before my pen has glean'd my teeming brain,
> Before high-piled books, in charactery,
> Hold like rich garners the full ripen'd grain;

This sonnet conveys the worries of the poet concerning the loss of love and fame as a consequence of death. The consequence of death disturbs fear for him, which will annihilate his worldly possessions. It feels like a fear of abandonment. At this stage, Keats' fear of death is closely connected with the things he cares about. Fear is not only emotion but also an integral part of the experience, which is known clearly by the speaker. This poem is a presentation of Keats' desire and expectation which, as have seen elsewhere, give cause to fear and anxiety. The first line is a

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[362] James Magrini, 'Anxiety in Heidegger's Being and Time: The Harbinger of Authenticity', *Philosophy Scholarship* (2006), p.80.
[363] Noor Al-Abbood, 'Keats and Fear of Death', *English Language and Literature Studies 5(2)* (2015), 103-116, (p.107).
[364] Noor Al-Abbood, p.114.

hypothesis when it says 'I may'. The speaker, who stands out of the boundary, is not imaginatively experiencing death like the speaker, say, in Dickinson's 'I heard a Fly buzz'. The speaker in Keats' sonnet keeps a conscious awareness and prepares to imagine the scene of death. 'Cease to be', which equals death, is what the speaker fears. 'Fears' show what the speaker really fears. The speaker is actually concerned about the external factors lurking beneath the realm of existence. This is a mind full of anxieties, recalling Hamlet, who considers the question of premature death.

The second to fourth lines are concerned with the first fear that the poet has – the premature death will make him lose the responsibility of a poet. He fears that death takes him away before he can achieve poetic success. Keats has ambition here. He had just a few years to write poems when tuberculosis comes and he is not prepared for it. Thus, when Keats feels the threat of death approaching at the end of his life, he speaks of his ambition. He wants his inspiration to become 'books' to be presented in charactery. 'Charactery' uses personality to symbolize character as a letter. Besides, Keats uses the metaphor of 'grain' to describe language and literature, the function of which equals books. 'High piled', 'rich' and 'full ripened' show Keats' expectation of the abundance of his oeuvre. We can see that Keats is expressing his respect for creation. He firmly wants his intelligence to become something tangible and visible. Writing and publishing poems are like harvesting grain. This harvest imagery gives the speaker dual identity: he is the field as his inspirations are the grain to be harvested in that field, which resonates with the scene in 'To Autumn'; and he, as a poet, in the meanwhile, is the harvester itself.[365] However, death will in no doubt cut short Keats' existence and poetic life. The fear of losing the future fruits of his imagination reveals Keats' measure of his present creative immaturity and his desired poetic

[365] Suryo Tri Saksono, 'John Keats's Sensuous Imagery in 'When I have Fears That I may Cease to Be'', *TEFLIN Journal 22(1)* (2011), 93-102, (p.97).

maturity in the future. In response to these fears, Keats hopes to eliminate time and accomplish his imaginative maturity.

> When I behold, upon the night's starr'd face,
> Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,
> And think that I may never live to trace
> Their shadows with the magic hand of chance;

The following four lines brings us to another fear, which is connected with the power of nature. This shows the poet's quest for man's existence. At this moment, the poet fears losing the chance of enjoying the beauty of nature and writing down its spectacular romance. Keats gives his emotion to the night, the stars and the clouds. He uses 'huge' to describes how marvellous nature is. On the one hand, the praise to the vastness of nature brings out the insignificance of human beings. On the other hand, the endlessness of the night gives dependence and security to the poet. It seems as if the night is the place where Keats should dwell. 'Romance', including the theme of love, stresses the unreality of the scene because 'romance', which connects with medieval chivalric literature, often tends to be unrealistic. This is why it is called 'high romance'. The unstable feeling is also seen from line seven in the use of the verb 'think-feel-think'. It reminds readers to wonder how death occupies both of our thinking and feeling.

Also, the speaker is telling the readers the interiority of his consciousness. 'High' enhances our sense of the remoteness of the celestial associated with vastness of the night sky. As a small human being, he cannot pursue the magnificence of the universe even if he is given a 'magic' hand. The night, starred face and the cloud have metaphoric implications. The night points to the ending of one day, and the starred face, which refers to the nightsky, can be regarded as the light of the dark, or rather, the last struggling of the life to an end. All these glorious natural elements are not able to be traced when the speaker is alive. Therefore, a

melancholic atmosphere arouses in such a romantic setting when the time does not wait for the poet. Keats combines his spirit with nature and the cosmos, which in his eyes is a high romance – filled with uncertainties.

> And when I feel, fair creature of an hour,
> That I shall never look upon thee more,
> Never have relish in the fairy power
> Of unreflecting love – then on the shore
> Of the wide world I stand alone, and think
> Till love and fame to nothingness do sink.[366]

In the following lines, the poet narrows his emotion down from a grand realm to a small and earthly one. He fears the loss of love that he associates with eroticism. Keats wants to touch the flesh and to love without fear. Thus, when he feels the outer beauty is fleeting ('creature of an hour'), melancholy comes. The poet believes that only when he falls in love with the outer beauty can he obtain satisfaction in spirit. He calls such love 'unreflecting', which is similar to 'high romance'. For Keats, the power of love is strong, even magic – 'faery'. In such a relationship his body and spirit can be relaxed thoroughly. 'Faery' is a word in the realm of myth, in which no time and death will be considered. Such kind of high romance is unrealistic. 'More' illustrates the regret of not looking on that beauty again. All these elements combine in Keats' desire and fantasy in the last few lines, as he states that he will 'never have relish' in the power of love. Nicolas Roe explains that this 'beautiful creature' is probably more associated with a beautiful woman he saw in Vauxhall Gardens in 1814.[367] Keats almost apotheosizes this woman by embodying her as the Goddess of Venus. The encountering of that woman, in reverse, strengthens the melancholic emotion associated with death. Besides, we feel that Keats temporarily loses his reason when he wants to seize love as he fastens his attention too much on sensation–crazy,

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[366] *Complete Poems*, ed. Jack Stillinger, p.166.
[367] Nicolas Roe, *John Keats: A New Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), p. 210.

stupid and even excited.

The last three lines provide readers with a clear picture that the poet stands on the shore alone, narrating his intense feelings of despair. 'Shore' is the dividing line of land and sea, as well as life and afterlife, which creates an in between image of two states. It seems as if the speaker finally understands the impermanence of everything, accepts the final result of himself and comes back to reality. At that moment, the poet is lonely as he realizes that the unreflecting love cannot be accomplished. Similar to 'huge' and 'high' in the above lines, 'wide' sets the poet's insignificance off once again. The words still deliver the sense of measuring. The last lines convey the relief of the poet as well as his acceptance of the fact that he must admit that something must be lost with the ending of his life. 'Nothingness' is a transcendental reading of the world and prefigures Heidegger's mention of the essence of 'nothingness'. Nothingness is the ending process of the world operating. Everything is reduced to zero, which is nothingness. Love and fame will finally become nothingness, which illustrates the fate of Keats' 'high romance'.

From the first quatrain to the third, the time is condensed from a season to a night (day) and finally to an hour. This resembles the way time is condensed in 'To Autumn'. Besides time, images are condensed as well. The first quatrain has concrete images such as pen, book, and grain. Then in the second quatrain, it is replaced with images of clouds, stars and night, which are distant from us. Finally, in the last quatrain, there only remain abstract signals like love and fame.[368] These concepts develop in the direction of progressively narrowing down; no wonder all things become 'nothingness' in the last with the implication of setting sun (sink). Human

[368] M. A. Goldberg, 'The 'Fears' of John Keats', *Modern Language Quarterly 18(2)* (1957), 125-131, (p.126).

beings experience night and the end of the day. The poet emphasizes death in a subtle way.

In this poem, Keats discussed two things that are important to him: love and poetry. However, the topic of poetry is clearly of more concern. The quatrain concerned with love topic composes of only three lines and a half, not continuing the form of the Shakespearean sonnet.[369] The focus of this melancholic poem concentrates on the fact that Keats consciously keeps his mind at the junction of life and death, imagination and reality. It is an exploration of the contrasting nature of life. It also contains his emotions in reality as well as in fantasy. In the poem, time decides where Keats is. The repetition of 'when' in the first sentence of each quatrain emphasizes the concept of time. It can be influenced by Shakespeare's sonnet twenty-nine and thirty, both of which begin by 'when'. The whole sonnet sounds like hustling the speaker to keep running and pursue after the time. Keats once asked about how long is such posthumous life of him to last.[370] This poem is actually a poetic transition for Keats from an earthly life to a posthumous one.

Time gives him a chance to realize the pointless value and meaning of love and fame when he says 'love and fame' are nothingness. Love and poetry are victims of time[371] as there is no time to expand these experiences. For Keats at that time, death is defined with fear and melancholy. His fear is less associated with mortality, limitations and death itself, but more with the loss of the significant 'others' that the early death causes. Therefore, Keats' early fear of death arouses his deeper longing for life in order to hold onto the things he cares about. Death and life seem to be two extremes in Keats' mind in this poem, when one side strengthens, the

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[369] Thomas E. Connolly, "Keats' When I Have Fears That I May Cease to Be', *The Explicator 13(3)* (1954), 33-35, (p.33). Marco Canani, 'Reweaving the Tapestry of Intertextuality. Keats' Dialogue with Shakespeare and the Italian Translations of 'When I Have Fears", *The Keats- Shelley Review 28(2)* (2014), 117-132, (p.121).
[370] Noor Al-Abbood, p.114.
[371] Noor Al-Abbood, p.113.

counter power from another side will equally increase. The more Keats fears death, the more he desires to be alive. However, this poem only reveals the fact that Keats accepts death without solving the conflicts between life and death or abating his fear mortality.

When tracing the origin of Keats' fear, it is believed that the origination is the childhood and early adulthood trauma of Keats, when he experienced the death of his father, mother and brother.[372] Death brings him fear, and this fear is more in a form of anxiety. Amy Lowell defines it as a 'vague fear'.[373] This poem shows that Keats' early fear of death comes from the anxiety that his promise of establishing everlasting fame cannot come to fruition.[374] However, as such fear deepens, a crisis appears to drive him to think about death more. We feel that at the first stage, he strongly hopes his memory to be immortalized. The more he pursues immorality, the more he needs to think about the position of death in the progress of a human being's life as well as the meaning of being alive. The concept of time is intensive in the poems of death. Therefore, when it comes to the next stage, death seems to be more profound in his poetry as Keats considers death as a rare maturity in his philosophy. Actually, in the final lines of 'When I have fears', Keats has already tried to make this transition. The first and second quatrains utilize 'may' to make an auxiliary expression of possibility. However, in the last lines, the auxiliary word of this possibility has become 'shall' and 'will', which sounds more obligated.[375] There exists a transformation from passive to an active state. Goldberg considers it as a self-awareness or an awakening, which struggles to relive these fears.[376]

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372 Noor Al-Abbood, p.105.
373 M. A. Goldberg, p.125.
374 Noor Al-Abbood, p.114.
375 M. A. Goldberg, p.127.
376 Ibid.

5.2 Speaking with and through Death: Dickinson

Death is a central preoccupation of Dickinson's poetry. Among 1775 poems of Dickinson, there are nearly six-hundred poems that are directly related to death. The poems with the theme of death occupy the majority of her oeuvre. When death is mentioned, fear appears in the mind. Like Keats, Dickinson feels scared in her early cognition of death as well. In the poem 'I heard a Fly buzz', she notes,

> 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 –

An early fear of death, for Dickinson, is mainly due to her experience of the loss of her friends and family. In this poem, Dickinson imagines a scene of the speaker recalling an agonizing picture. From the beginning, the atmosphere of this poem is solemn and harrowing. Death is around the corner, and the friends of the speaker are offering a farewell to him or her. Yet, there is another possibility: the person dying saying farewell to others. The 'Stillness' of that time is like the stillness before the storm arrives. It is so 'still' that the buzz of a fly can be heard clearly. This emphasizes the speaker's auditory sense. Dickinson is creating a providential picture: on the one hand, the 'Stillness' expresses the anxiety, dread and perplexity of ordinary people in the face of other's death. Voiced emotion, such as crying and shouting, is given up at that time. The silent and restrained emotion, in turn, delivers a more powerful feeling in this scene. On the other hand, the invasion of that fly breaks the stillness of that picture. From them on, 'stillness' becomes the calmness of people

watching that buzzing fly. The buzz of a fly is treated as noise in our lives. However, the fly is suitable for the corpse in that scene. The appearance of the fly is a deliberate arrangement, indicating that death has arrived, as flies are attracted to carrion.

Beyond this poem, Dickinson expresses her helplessness in the face of death in a letter, where she says she often thinks about how she feels powerless because she cannot prevent death taking away her friends and family. The 'dry' eyes and the 'firm' breath both describe an extreme state of sorrow in circumstances of loss. The word 'wring' delivers a twisty sense. It sounds as if the tears are not dry by their own accord, but by the power of death. Thus, the eyes contain not only pain but also dread. 'Gathering' is a way of confronting that dread. It seems that in a space where the breath of death is dominantly spreading, there appears a breath of life in quietly struggle against the end. This is a description of the speaker's visual and aural sense. Obviously, the sensation of the speaker has gradually degenerated when death approaches. Sure enough, it is for the last 'Onset'.

What is the symbolic meaning of the 'King' in the last two lines? The king appears suddenly with no foreshadowing. According to George Monteiro, when Jesus suffered crucifixion, the flies gathered on his body as well, trying to protect his finger nails from being driven into his body. Therefore, later on, the flies with privileges can dine with the King.[377] From a religious perspective, it can be reasonably proposed that the 'King' refers to God. However, Katrina Bachinger parts from Monteiro's idea by finding answers in theology. She agrees that the King is actually the personification of Death.[378] She argues, in the Christian tradition, the Lord is the King of Kings; and death means a significant moment when the King of Kings defeats the King of Terrors. Dickinson states that the King is to be 'witnessed' in the room, suggesting that death is Lord at that

[377] George Monteiro, 'Dickinson's I Heard A Fly Buzz', *The Explicator 43(1)* (1984), 43-45, (p.44).
[378] Katrina Bachinger, 'Dickinson's I Heard a Fly Buzz', *The Explicator 43(3)* (1985), 12-15, (p.13).

moment. As a result, the 'Onset', understood as resurrection, or births, in John Donne's sermons,[379] is access to heaven.

I willed my Keepsakes – Signed away
What portions 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 –[380]

With a neat twist, these two stanzas extinguish the hope of the speaker. She is waiting for the King to take her to heaven, and before that she has allocated all her possessions. At that moment, the tears of the mourners are worth treasuring more than those possessions. However, it is not the God or the King that comes, but a fly. In fact, when the fly appears at the boundary space between life and death, it forms a reverberating presence and becomes the harbinger of final truth.

'Blue' colours the sky and sea, which stresses the horizon of the eyes. It contains a lot of energy; however, the meaning of blue derived from colour also relates to death. In the last stanza, blue is associated with sorrow and loss, as well as with thoughts of death and eternity. The body of the fly presents as blue, and the mood of despair and depression is also described as blue. What is more, 'Blue' and 'Buzz', respectively as a visual and auditory concept, appear simultaneously, creating a condition of psychological confusion and sensational vagueness for that dying person. The 'uncertain' and 'stumbling' suggest that the poet is not sure about the road ahead and is exhausted in her expectation of the afterlife. Hesitation and dread are shown obviously here. Through the words 'blue', 'uncertain', 'stumbling', we might assume that the belief of 'I' in

[379] Katrina Bachinger, pp.14-15.
[380] *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Franklin, p.265.

immorality has been broken and given up all hope. Gradually, the 'I' in the poem has entered a condition of being unconscious. 'Could not' represents the incapacitation of a person, multiply exposing that Dickinson doubts the authenticity of immortality. The poem is a contradiction as it is spoken from a place of unconsciousness beyond the grave. 'Window failed' indicates that physical sight has been lost and the actual vision is of the window as object failing. The whole poem goes from hope to disappointment, with the last two 'see's, delivering a deep doubt that immortality can be realized.

The fly in this poem is blackly comic and the word might prompt ideas of 'flight'. As a fluttering image, it also stands for the soul flying to heaven and immortality – and earthly symbol of the eternal kingdom.[381] The first appearance of the fly in this poem brings hope, yet the second time its presence introduces doubt. The fly is the uninvited guest between the light and 'me'. The light is a symbol of God coming and of access to heaven. However, it is blocked by that fly, indicating that the speaker's expectations of immortality have been destroyed as well. In this poem, death appears not as a way of liberation and immortality, which is advocated in religious doctrine. The image of the fly clearly reflects the loss and confusion of the poet in the face of death. Apparently, the speaker is afraid of death and desires for immortal life. Therefore, the poem conveys a doubtful attitude towards the doctrine of Christianity. This is a negative and despairing cognition of death and also a kind of failure of consciousness. As James Magrini stresses, 'Dasein recognizes death as a constant and legitimate threat arising from anxiety's latent presence',[382] the lines in the poem deliver fear from the threat of death.

Yet, prior to mere fear of death, another manifestation is shown in Keats and Dickinson's

[381] Katrina Bachinger, p.15.
[382] James Magrini p.80.

poems not in the sense of melancholy and fear, but in a tone of relative peace and acceptance. For instance, in 'On Death', Keats does not consider death as a negative force, but treats death as a possible way to eternity.

> Can death be sleep, when life is but a dream,
> And scenes of bliss pass as a phantom by?
> The transient pleasures as a vision seem,
> And yet we think the greatest pain's to die.
>
> How strange it is that man on earth should roam,
> And lead a life of woe, but not forsake
> His rugged path; nor dare he view alone
> His future doom which is but to awake.[383]

The first question alludes to life as a dream and death as sleep, claiming that life and death are not that different. Both of them refer to the condition when a man's consciousness is ambiguous. The line is a hypothesis, in which death is considered as sleep only when life is treated as a dream. That is to say, Keats puts life and death at the same level of consideration. 'Sleep' appears as a metaphor of death in many of Keats' works, such as 'To Sleep', 'Sleep and Poetry' and 'Ode to a Nightingale'. Sleep has the power of healing as a kind of 'embalmer';[384] at least, sleep saves man in a space where a man can escape from 'night', 'gloominess', and 'woes' which lurk beneath man's consciousness – Keats calls this 'seal casket of my Soul'.[385] A measurement based on the sense of space is given to sleep. Sleep can be regarded as a euphemist of death as in the mind of Keats, and death has the power of healing too. What is more, 'sleep' endows death with solemn. For example, Shakespeare connects death with sleep from speaking of the prince. In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare writes 'To die, to sleep- to sleep, perchance to dream,

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[383] Walter Bate, *John Keats* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), p.39. Bate made a note by the end of the poem that the lines are found in Keats-Wylie Scrapbook by George Keats and his wife, but the poem is unsigned and there is no evidence to firmly indicate that Keats wrote the poem.
[384] In the poem 'To Sleep', the line goes like 'O soft embalmer of the still midnight'.
[385] Also addressed from 'To Sleep'.

[…] in this sleep of death what dreams may come'.[386] If death is treated as a long-lasting (here the sense transfers into time) sleep, it reveals that the poet is accepting death into his own awareness. It looks as if the poet is deliberately bridging a connection between life and death. As people dream differently, the scenes of each dream are various, which symbolizes both change and transience.

Then in the second question, Keats puts forward 'bliss', which equals extreme happiness. The poet uses the metaphor of 'phantom' to describe the bliss as uncertain, transient and mortal. What scenes are bliss? That must be the climax of life. Bliss shows a huge contrast to pain so that the great pleasure adds great pain to the death we think. Also, this bliss should happen while man is alive because it stresses a physical and tactile pleasure, which belongs to the earthly bliss. In the meanwhile, Keats is possibly referring a line in Wordsworth's *The Prelude*: 'Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive'.[387] However, no matter how many blisses we experience, in the end, they will disappear as 'nothingness'. The transient and ghostly pleasure ironically increases the tragedy of death. Yet, on the other hand, the poet emphasizes that this is just 'we think' as well. The truth might not be. The poet seems to know the answer. He believes that in death we rest in peace without pain. In 'Sleep' and 'Poetry', Keats further affirms sleep as the key to 'pleasure's temple'. Namely, death is the key to the world of pleasure. At this moment, the pleasure, or the bliss, becomes a posthumous one. In *Endymion*, Keats describes this as 'endless bliss'. However, in 'To Sleep', Keats emphasizes the conscience in the darkness, by claiming that conscience[388] is exploring things buried to the surface, which makes man

[386] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* Act Three, Scene one.
[387] William Wordsworth, *The Prelude: Or, Growth of a Poet's Mind (Text of 1805)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press on Demand, 1970), p.166.
[388] Heidegger connects 'conscience' with 'truth' in his statement of existential anxiety.

disturbing. This portrays an image in which the poet put pain and bliss together because things hidden in the darkness can be two extremes. Keats borrows the power of sleep and death to imply pain and bliss so as to control the strength of them. This is paradoxical with the impression of 'phantom'. Obviously, in 'To Sleep', Keats wants the memory to be preserved rather than disappear like a phantom.

In the second stanza, Keats questions the meaning of man's roaming on earth. The line suggests ironically that it might be 'strange' that we continue roaming. 'Roam' does not necessarily refer to the physical traveling of man. It can also be the process of spiritual experience. Undoubtedly, such 'roam' brings man negative feeling – the sense of unfulfillment that cannot even be removed. In the road of roaming, a man keeps struggling but cannot expect too much. It is a rough road, at least for the poet. This is actually a lesson from Keats of how to get used to death. When a man is awake, he/she will fear the pain of reality and of the end of their life. Death removes such confusion of man. 'Not forsake' means not willing to give up, the object of which further refers to roaming. 'Roam' for Keats, should be the suffering he has experienced while he is alive. It can be his disease, his frustration in poetic career and the loss of his beloved ones. Keats wants to remind us that we should give up these memories in order to escape from pain.[389] These memories are merely the space fillers of the universe.

The last line comes back to the definition of the essence of death. Different from what the first stanza says that the death we think is full of pain, in the eyes of the poet, death symbolizes the awakening of the spirit. We can question that if the poet means waking from the dream. Life is in sleep whist death is awake into another life. In this case, death and life overlap

[389] Keats states in 'In drear-nighted December' that trees and brooks will not feel misery in winter as they do not have memory.

with each other. There is an ambiguity here, which is similar to the last lines of 'Ode to a Nightingale', where the question is posed 'Was it a vision, or a waking dream? […] Do I wake or sleep?'. Readers are also not sure about whether Keats himself knows at that time whether the moment of awaking is in the realm of death or life. In the statement of 'On Death', death as the subject is to awake from life and in the afterlife, which can be understood as the generation of immortality as life and death alternate to begin the circle. Under such an interpretation, the shape of life could be conceived of as a circle when 'life is but a dream […] His future doom which is but to awake', and death becomes an afterlife of repetition when 'bliss pass as a phantom by […] transient pleasure as a vision'.

Keats' 'Ode to a Nightingale' uses the image of the nightingale to symbolize immortality, when he announces, 'Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!'. Nightingales are spring birds of love and meanwhile birds of tragic sorrow. Early than Keats, Milton has compared nightingale as the tragic and darkling bird. The nightingale and its associative thoughts enable the speaker to return to his 'sole self' even if in doubtful state. The song of the bird disappeared, and death is realized through the nightingale's song, which is actually buried. The immortal birds that were not born for death is figuratively and ironically buried and the poet survives in an uncertain state between waking and sleeping, life and death.

5.3 The Promise and Release of Death: Keats and Dickinson

Elsewhere, Keats welcomes death and wants to talk with death.

> I wish for death every day and night to deliver me from these pains, and then I wish death away, for death would destroy even these pains, which are better than nothing. Land and sea, weakness and decline, are great separators, but Death is the great divorcer for ever.[390]

[390] Walter Bate Jackson, *John Keats: A Biography* (London: Hogarth, 1992), p.508.

Similarly, Dickinson is also willing to talk with death in a direct way or confront death as an entity. In 'Because I could not stop for Death', again Dickinson has imagined a scene near death. Abundant dashes, as temporary pauses shown in the poem, present the measurement not only of death itself but also of a space where readers and the poet can take a fleeting breath before the poem and the imaginary death process continues.

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 –

'Could not stop for death' strikes a humorous tone and implies that there are other things to do. The humorous tone is regarded as another kind of emotionally poetic management by Dickinson. The first and second stanzas of this poem have conveyed an attitude of awe towards death, which is different from the first kind of manifestation because respect has been generated. The encounter with death sounds like a young lady keeping an appointment with a man.[391] At first, the poet expresses the idea that she is unable to stop for death. It is worth noting that this is not grammatically complete as the main clause is missing. Dickinson leaves a space for readers to imagine the result. Then the poet personifies death and immortality, putting herself, death and immortality in a sealed space – a carriage. Normally, death and immortality should exist antithetically in a space; and the poet needs to make a choice between them. On the one hand, death is personified at the beginning as a well-bred gentleman who wants to invite the speaker 'kindly' with his 'civility' to his journey.

[391] Marianne Noble, 'Emily Dickinson in Love (with Death)', *The Cambridge Companion to Erotic Literature* ed. by Bradford K. Mudge. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 155.

He never looks in a hurry. In this condition, it is hard to refuse such an invitation. Therefore, the speaker decides to give up her ‘labour’ and ‘leisure’ and gets on that carriage. On the other hand, the co-existence of death, immortality and ‘I’ in this carriage makes this journey accessible, and thus, not that frightening.

The slow and unhurried behaviour of death foreshadows the tour in the following stanzas. As the invitation comes from death, we can regard that ‘immortality’ gets on the carriage of his own accord. This also includes the poet herself. It is like a reserved girl with her first awakening of love for a man who is mature and experienced. Now that immortality has joined, what else the speaker should worry about? The arrival of love is sudden and irresistible. All the lines superficially convey that there is no need to fear death, and death is no longer portrayed as a demo. The picture becomes mild and adorable like an old friend’s behaviour, making the tone of this poem pleasant.

Yet, in fact, there exist confusions about the limitation of human being’s free will under that peaceful scene: when should human being get on the carriage of death? The lines tell us that it is not the person but death who decide the time. In other words, we cannot decide when to die; nor can we decide on immortality either. Although it seems that death calls the speaker kindly without any force, she must oblige. Power is concealed beneath death’s modest appearance. There is no wonder that even in Greek mythology, death is the half-brother of sleep. However, it should be believed that the poet tries to keep calm. She wants to expose the unfriendly and inharmonious nature of death: we can notice that in the third line of the first stanza, ‘ourselves’ only contain death and ‘me’, and ‘immortality’ emerges as a supplement from the fourth line. This, in turn, reveals that immortality takes a lower position whereas death still takes the dominant one. What is more, it is

death who controls the direction and the speed of the carriage; immortality and the speaker are just passengers. In this condition, 'civility' becomes a satirical expression of temptation and disguise of death. Through a series of comparisons between death and the speaker – poised and perplexed, experienced and innocent, powerful and vulnerable–the first two stanzas reveal the paradoxical emotions that the speaker feels towards the relationship between death and immortality.

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

From this stanza, the journey with death and immortality begins. 'Ring' is another example of Dickinson measuring of the life circle. Along the journey, they first passed the school, the fields and saw the sunset. The school and children refer to the childhood of a person; the fields and grain represent diligent adulthood and the setting sun is a symbol of the twilight years and the ending of life. These three images contain the whole life of a human being. In addition, there are friends, Death and Immortality, who accompany the speaker at all stages. The poet concentrates life into an afternoon, making it a journey with friends, transferring the way on the death from a dreadful experience to a humane one. Dickinson puts these images together as the scenery unfolds on the journey, indicating that they are positive and beautiful. Nevertheless, this actually shows a genuine attachment to life. Words of death are not mentioned in this stanza; however, death still exists and influences the mind of the speaker.

The image of children striving is in stark contrast with the speaker sitting in the carriage driven by death. The children stand for infinite vitality. Compared with the children, the speaker becomes a seeming prisoner trapped in the last station of life. This is the first contrast. Then they went through a field with 'Gazing Grain'. 'Gazing' again personifies the grain, conveying a state of

wondering; and grain resonates with the dews in the following stanza. Obviously, this is a field of autumn. The mature grain usually lowers its head. However, when the carriage passes by, the grain seems to be disturbed and gaze at (a sense of wonder) the carriage, which is different from the children of the last stanza, who immerse themselves in the play and pay no attention to the carriage. This is the second contrast. The behaviour of 'passing' does not fit well with the sun but portraying an image where the speaker grows larger than larger in the illumination of the sunlight. Again, the space of this poem is enlarged. In a word, whether it is what the speaker sees along the journey, or what the objects see of her, Dickinson conveys her reluctance to live.

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

Although it is an enjoyable journey, the speaker still feels 'quivering' and 'Chill'. This stanza continues with the action of the last stanza – the setting sun. The speaker feels chill as she just wears in gossamer tippet and the temperature from the sun has disappeared; yet I feel quivering because I have fear –the light and the warmth go away, leaving me in endless dark and coldness. This contrast delivers her hidden uncertain feeling about death. 'Dews' suggest the outside coldness whereas the gossamer tippet causes my inner coldness. At this moment, the atmosphere of this poem becomes intense: death seems to have passed 'us'–immortality and me. It is a signal of separation of the three. Dickinson intelligently divides herself into the components of immortality by using 'Us' and so claiming her desire for immortality. Gossamer and tulle have a romantic appeal, as they are fabrics traditionally associated with wedding ceremonies. The use of Gossamer is ironic as the speaker is on the way to grave and as a result, it becomes burial clothes. On the one hand, it might be proposed that the poet has hope when she gets on the carriage: if death is her true destination of this journey,

she wants it a romantic one in the afterlife. On the other hand, it illustrates that the poet is not well-prepared for death. Further speaking, the appearance of the death is not as humane as 'I' imagine because it frightens me, dragging me from light to dark, from warmth to coldness.

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

What kind of house is Dickinson describing? Is the house the one she lives in as a recluse? The house has significant meaning to Dickinson as she spent most of her life indoors. As this poem is related to death, it is proposed that the house here actually refers to the grave. Dickinson considers the grave as a house with a roof and cornice to indicate that she considers the afterlife as a moving house. Death merely means changing a house from one to another, and we can still continue living in the new house, doing what we like. She tries to persuade herself that there is no difference from earthly time. In addition, the poet chooses 'pause' rather than 'stop' to restate her attitude: death is a station on the way to immortality, not the end. These lines express a distinction between life and death when she says that death passes her and leads her to a house that is different from the one she earthly lives in. Ironically, death realizes that they have arrived at the final destination, and then it gives up the speaker and disappears without a trace. It implies that the deceptive image of death, compared with the friendly one before, has finally been exposed. The poet persuades herself and meanwhile persuades her readers to believe that they are not homeless after death. In fact, what unfolds is self-deceiving.

Since then – 'tis Centuries – and yet
Feels shorter than the Day
I first surmised the Horses' Heads
Were toward Eternity –[392]

[392] *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Franklin, p.219.

The final stanza of this poem goes as if centuries have passed since the speaker entered that house, which resembles recalling a story. The poet feels that the past centuries are shorter than that journey day. A space disorder occurs as the poet creates a space within a space: the former referring to the afterlife that Dickinson imagines, and the latter to the journey day. In that house, time passes with the unit of measurement – centuries, indicating that in the world of the afterlife, time is endless – naturally introducing 'eternity'. 'Feels' is a carefully chosen word as we 'feel' by our senses. It is the day the speaker realizes death through feeling, thus 'surmise' presents as a paradox here. Besides, 'Horse' has biblical significance because it will appear in war and keep the state of chasing, indicating going towards the new beginning. 'Horse head towards eternity' proves this connotation. Dickinson chooses 'eternity' to resonate with 'immortality' at the beginning, further confirming that death is a start of immortality. Eternity is followed by a dash. Death is not the premise of immortality, and Dickinson encourages us to understand that death is just a way which can be passed to immortality, as natural as birth, growing and dying. In this sense, death becomes the most obvious thing and, simultaneously, the most difficult thing to put in words. The time, place and occasion of death cannot be decided until death comes. Therefore, the poet does not fear death and does not have to stop for death.

In the third manifestation, Keats and Dickinson have accomplished metamorphosis and held transcending and liberating attitudes towards death in which there exist kinds of fantasy of the afterlife. It concerns about how the poet transcend their feelings about their own mortality and transience of everything on earth that passes and changes. This sort reveals that 'death is the limit that opens up the space within which our lives can be lived.'[393] This manifestation also expresses

[393] Jeff Malpas, *Heidegger and the Thinking of Place: Explorations in the Topology of Being* p.273.

the belief of Keats and Dickinson that they are willing to experience earthly death and accomplish devotional immortality, which is a symbol of their mental maturity and poetic maturity as well. Keats views death open to the possibility that death grants liberty to him. In 'Bright Star', Keats intensely expresses his new attitude towards death. Life is to be cherished but death is not terrible. The true world is filled with sorrow and loss. Therefore, the poet tries to explore the final meaning of life: can he be everlasting as the bright star? Like the nightingale, the bright star is a symbol of immortality, as well as an emblem of the constancy of love. Keats hopes himself to be the star, yet he is unwilling to stay and witness the iced and solitary world. As a result, he imaginatively replaces it with a warm and sweet one by fantasy.

Bright star, would I were steadfast as thou art–,
Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night
And Watching, with eternal lids apart,
Like nature's patient, sleepless Eremite,
The moving waters at their priestlike task
Of pure ablution round earth's human shores,
Or gazing on the new soft-fallen masque
Of snow upon the mountains and the moors–
No-yet still stedfast, still unchangeable,
Pillow'd upon my fair love's ripening breast,
To feel for ever its soft swell and fall,
Awake for ever in a sweet unrest,
Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,
And so live ever – or else swoon to death.[394]

This poem sounds like a gentle monologue to the star beginning from a wish. The starting lines portray the charm of the star to the poet–the art of the star lies in its steadiness and unchangeability, which is not defined until the ninth line. The poet confirms the genuine wisdom of the star from the nature. Keats precisely confirms why the star attracts him and what qualities he does not admire. The star hangs in the sky, shining in 'splendour' on a lonely night.

[394] *Complete Poems and Selected Letters of John Keats*, ed. Edward Hirgh, p. 365-366.

It is proposed that Keats is using irony here to describe himself. Keats wants to be on the scroll of fame as a poet. He has ambition, which is understandable. We are not sure whether Keats has a transformation of attitude towards fame when he writes this poem. He wants to be as steadfast as the star but not in an isolated state. In other words, he wants to leave his poetic memory immortally in this world but not in the form of loneliness. 'Steadfast' refers to the determination of not changing, which Keats may not have achieved. The star can bear the sameness and anonymity. However, Keats cannot. He hesitates about whether to highlight himself in poetry or to keep his place.

In Keats' own time, his poetry is not as well-known as nowadays. Keats should feel distressed about how to define his position. In the next two lines, the poet endows the star with 'eternal lids', obviously personifying the star in an attempt to answer his confusion above. 'Eternal' accords with 'sleepless'; but 'Eternal' stresses the concept in the realm of existence. 'Sleepless', on the other hand, describes the condition of living. Keats said that the star is sleepless, which is different from what he describes in 'On Death', that immortality equals sleeplessness. It seems that being sleepless has a purpose here. The poet is considering the star as nature's sleepless and lonely eremite that shines throughout the night, implying that the star is waiting for an opportunity so that it cannot close its metaphorical lids.

The following four lines describe what the star witnesses. Waters, snow, mountains and moors are the most representative factors of nature. The poet allows these natural elements to join in the human world and praise such movements as sacred and solemn ones by stating that it is a 'priestlike' task. In the eyes of the poet, the process of nature participating in human beings is sincere and gentle by using 'pure', 'new' and 'soft' to emphasize. Snow, as a symbol

of innocence and purity arguments that what the star watches is a bright, beautiful and clear space. Therefore, the process of nature combining with the human world becomes a 'priestlike' one, which is scared. Ablution is a religious word as well. Ablution in religion refers to washing and cleansing the body and soul, which accords with 'pure'. Images are considered as a naked female body in the eyes of David Ormerod, with Keats' attempt to welcome death in a sexual climax,[395] which implies a desire for intimacy.

Belonging to nature, the star represents the celestial realm whereas waters, snow, mountains and moors stand for the sublunary range of entites. The perspective of the star is actually the perspective of God. This reveals the profound admiration of the poet to values of nature. Keats wants to remind us that the star joins human beings as gentle as those elements on the ground. As nature is constant, the human world must be conditioned by mortality. The word 'priestlike' again reflects that nature is distant from human beings, and thus it witnesses the suffering of human beings indifferently.[396] What is more, the images of snow and moor represent winter and desolation, which is connected with coldness and isolation, just as the star might appear at a distance to the human world. 'Human shores' resonates with the 'shore' in 'When I have fears', which refers to the human realm. The star is distant from human shores and thus betray intimacy, due to which the poet is not satisfied. Nature joins human beings while keeping a polite distance and never over intervenes in human society but, in most cases, acts as an observer. This type of steadiness is neutral.

In the next line, Keats restates the word 'steadfast'; however, this is another kind of

[395] David Ormerod, 'Nature's Eremite: Keats and the Liturgy of Passion', *Keats-Shelley Journal 16* (1967), 73-77, (p.74).
[396] Brendan Corcoran, 'Keats' Death: Towards a Posthumous Poetics', *Studies in Romanticism 48(2)* (2009), 321-348, (p.335).

steadiness. If the star's steadiness is accompanied by distance and isolation, then the second kind of steadiness is surrounded by intimacy. Motionless and continually presenting through time is what Keats implies here by 'Still'. In the scene, Keats' speaker is cast in a male role and pillowed on the breast of the female. This position shows proximity between the two persons and further closes the distance of their emotions. The repeated use of 'for ever' reveals that Keats is longing for the unlimited extension of time in such an intimate embrace. Obviously, he desires the moment. Why does Keats suddenly insert such a scene of his love and himself? Brendan Corcorall calls this 'oblivion',[397] at which moment his awareness of death is suspended. During the process, the mind and the idea are incoherent. He is swallowed by this sweet unrest, something Keats desires and yet is doubtful about. To be awake for ever, in Corcoran's interpretation, constitutes that sweet unrest.[398] Indeed, Keats longs for the condition of immutability. 'Sweet unrest' puts two totally opposite words together, indicating that no matter how intensive, unrest and dangerous the outer world is, the poet still feels sweet as he owns the moment with his intense feelings of love. What emerges is that Keats uses the star to describe unchangeable love as a result of his reading Shakespeare's sonnet 116,[399] in which the star also symbolizes steady love as well.

The first 'still' of the last two lines means continuing a particular point, which is the same as the 'still' in the third quatrain, while the second one refers to being silent. At that moment, space is filled with no sound except the breath of his love. These two figures maintain such a position for a long time, which can also be regarded as 'steadfast'. As Keats also states in the

[397] Brendan Corcoran, p.333.
[398] Brendan Corcoran, p.337.
[399] Robert S. White, *Keats as a Reader of Shakespeare* (London: A&C Black, 1987), p.72.

last line, they are willing to die in this image. For Keats, such a condition of death has equalled the nature of the star as well, which enables him to be still, unchanging and eternal. Keats wants to be as steadfast as the bright star, but not in a way of being distant and lonely. He desires to achieve this steadiness through love. Although being alive is always the central wish of Keats, he calmly accepts and welcomes the approaching of death. He just begs for a peaceful and accompanying way of leaving with the witness of the star as the poet clearly understands that the dream of an eternal breath can never be anything more than a utopian fantasy.

'Bright Star' shows an exploration of the ambiguous limits to life and death by picturing the abrupt invasion of death to our horizon.[400] The poet expresses his desire for time stopping moving rather than he become unchangeable. He wishes the moment to still in the arm of his beloved one. Death is paused to find him at that moment. Different from 'When I have Fears', 'Bright Star' completes the transformation from the presence of death in his life to the presence of death in poetry. Survival has become an experience of keeping the existence of passion and confidence, as well as a sense of outer and inner space. However, it does not make a clear boundary between these distinctions. As Marjorie Levinson considers, Keats' readers may find it hard to draw a line between inside and outside in his poetry.[401]

There exist a huge number of images in Keats' poetry that symbolize immortality, not only the star but also the nightingale, the bees, the autumn, the grasshopper and cricket. These seemingly vulnerable lives, in the face of the infinite universe, present amazing vitality. All appear in the poet's immortal fantasy realm. Things have been subordinated to value and their own essence, and death has been there all along. In the eyes of Keats, death brings him peace, as he says in 'Ode to a

[400] Brendan Corcoran, p.323
[401] Brendan Corcoran, p.329.

Nightingale', that 'I have been half in love with easeful Death',

> Darkling I listen; and, for many a time
> I have been half in love with easeful Death,
> Call'd him soft names in many a musèd rhyme,
> To take into the air my quiet breath;
> Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
> To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
> While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
> In such an ecstasy!
> Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain –
> To thy high requiem become a sod.

Death here is made palatable. Keats calls death tenderly with a warm and loving tone. 'Darkling' is the environment where death dwells, which is consistent with 'sleep', and 'easeful' further accompanies sleep. 'Soft names' is not a surrender, but a controlling attitude. We can understand 'soft names' as a nickname that Keats wants to call death. Keats uses 'mused rhyme' to awake 'death', obviously personifying death as a friend or a relative of him. 'Muse' proves the fruit of Keats' thinking. This illustrates that his attitude towards death is not random; he gives his inspiration in getting along with death. Keats is persuading himself at the same time. Till now, we feel a strong seduction from death to the poet, just like the seduction of the Syren to the sailors in 'On Sitting down to Read King Lear Once Again'. 'Quiet breath' again resonates with the realm of sleep, which sounds as if Keats is sleeping with death. Keats is pretty dependent on death at that moment. In the next line, 'rich' proves the intensive atmosphere of the approaching death. Keats is open to such air, hoping to be taken away by that strong power – death. The midnight predicts the moment of being taken away, and 'cease' is the signal of his breath stopping. Coming to this stanza which is contrary to the third one, death has become alluding and desirable, and being taken away accords with his willingness. Thus, there is 'no pain' at all.

In the eyes of the poet, the singing of the bird is an emblem of how it spreads its spirit (soul) to the world. It is a spirit of positiveness, due to which ecstasy is the form. 'Ecstasy' shows the emotion of great joy, or rather, the bliss. This is consistent with the line in 'On Death' even if the poem's attribution to Keats is debateable. Keats utilizes ecstasy in order to describe how the singing rises to the climax. Nightingale is a romantic metaphor of joyful spring bird and also an Ovid metaphor of tragedy in literature, but from Ovid's time to that of the Romantics, there is a transformation of the nightingale's image from repressed grief to natural joy.[402] Besides, the appearance of ecstasy here is to resonate 'no pain' as well. However, it is the extreme description that arouses a doubt on the genuine emotion of the poet at that time. Underneath the overwhelmed pleasure, there reflects an invisible sorrow. In the following sentence, Keats soliloquizes to himself that he cannot hear the singing of the nightingale. It is the body in the afterlife as the voice of the nightingale remains in the earthly world. 'In vain' conveys a strong sense of disappointment as if death takes him to a world where his sensations are closed. While his spirit keeps active, he can only see what is happening before his eyes but cannot participate in it. This is paradoxical with the ecstasy before.

The last line ironically portrays a sorrowful moment when the poet imagines himself becoming a 'sod' over which the bird sings. 'Requiem' is the music associated with the Christian ceremony of death and burial. The dead body will be buried under the earth and actually become 'a sod'. This idea shows Keats' consideration of himself as a mortal and ordinary one. The fate of him is to be buried, absorbed and dissolved in nature. Questions appear again: should the result

[402] Leonard Lutwack, *Birds in Literature* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1994); C. Martindale, *Ovid Renewed: Ovidian Influences on Literature and Art from the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: CUP Archive, 1988)

be a tragic or a pleasant one? Does the decomposition of the body predict the generation of immortality? In fact, Keats has realized the difference between the nightingale and himself here. Paradoxically, the poet and the nightingale are inseparable. In the scene of this ode, the poet is a loyal listener. The poet listens to the whisper of all things and becomes one with the whole nature and even the universe, from which the mysterious experience comes that all things become one. In this experience, human existence is in a state of being chaotic, which is characterized by the world of suffering and consciousness.

The poet not only pursues the immortality of human life but also for poetry. Poetic immortality is significant for him as well, which can be a symbol of 'extra human ascent'. These poems are Keats' dialogues with death as they perform a deep analysis of death as a power to be noticed, and 'Ode to a Nightingale' is further praised as a dance of death.[403] However, it may be more accurate to say that 'Ode to a Nightingale' is the climax of the poet's maturity to death. When life and death can be matched with one another, a kind of ecstasy in 'posthumous existence' has been realized.

Dickinson attended a religious funeral at a young age, according to a letter to Higginson. That funeral impressed her negatively, making her misunderstand what the Clergyman asked 'is the Arm of the Lord shortened that it cannot save?'.[404] This arouses her doubt of immortality.[405] However, Dickinson came to acquire a deeper and more mature understanding of immortality from book, teachers and poetry. Gradually, her belief in immortality was strengthened over time. In 'I felt a Funeral, in my Brain', Dickinson endows death with a totally new sense and blurs the boundary

[403] Brendan Corcoran, p. 323, 327.
[404] See Emily Dickinson, letters 503.
[405] Carolyn Lindley Cooley, p.106.

between death and life. She claims,

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

As in 'I could not stop for death' and 'I heard a fly Buzz', the speaker in this poem also experienced death with mourners saying farewell to her. The difference is that the speaker of this poem experiences death in his or her brain. Namely, the consciousness of the speaker keeps temporarily clear. The poet divides the mind of the speaker, as mourner and mourned who experiences death. As Aliki Barnstone states, the speaker of this poem is not only observing the funeral but also feeling it and trying to be a part of it.[406] It can be regarded as an experiment of death. Also, this poem applies what Dickinson employs in 'I heard a Buzz'– psychological confusion and sensational vagueness to trace the process of consciousness dissipating. This stanza begins describing the rituals of the funeral. At first, it is a brainstorm of the death and preparation of the funeral. The speaker controls his mind, and his view is God's-eye view, which can observe all the details of those mourners in front of him. We should believe that the scenario in the brain of the narrator is what Dickinson actually saw at her young age. 'To and fro' and 'treading' reflect that the atmosphere of the funeral is going deeper. People get ready to begin the rituals.

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

In this stanza, the funeral officially starts. The scene accords with the traditional funeral of the west. The use of '-ing', such as 'treading', 'breaking', and 'beating' in these two stanzas

[406] Aliki Barnstone, *Changing Rapture: Emily Dickinson's Poetic Development* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 2006), p.83.

repeatedly stimulates the auditory nerve of the readers. The speaker is dying, preparing to go to the grave. However, these noises cannot offer her peace. They force her to think. We can feel that the speaker does not like these voices as his/her mind goes 'numb'. 'Drum' and 'numb' construct a correspondence with regards to the logic and the position in the poem. The sound of the drum influences the mind of the speaker; funeral music is sombre. All these noises reflect the agitated mood of the narrator. These voices come from the speaker's brain. All voices are imagined but reflecting the situation of the narrator's mind–pressed and nervous. It is actually a process of mental death.

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 –

The funeral has now come to the closing process when the 'Box'– the coffin – is transported to its destination. Again, new noises appear – the voice that makes soul creak and the tolling of the bell. Her soul is being undertaken and she feels people walking on her soul. 'Creak' is seemingly caused by the boots; and sound is from her soul being walked by people, which appears painful. The speaker is nearly on the brink of a state of insanity. The sound of the bell is deafening as it covers the whole heaven (even heaven becomes a bell). Dickinson describes beings as 'an Ear', resonating with the metaphor of heaven, which directly expresses how the sensation of the narrator is filled with the huge noise. At that time the world is silent. Intelligently, Dickinson wants to observe the certainty of the afterlife and the authenticity of God through this process. This is a struggle. Her senses try to

break the limitation of the body and enter the free field of the spirit to experience what immortality is. There exists an obvious change of consciousness in these stanzas. From the second stanza, my mind first went 'numb', then my soul creaks, followed by my being wrecked, and finally all voices of my free will (include mourners of the will of being alive and mourners of the will of dying) disappear. With self-consciousness weakening, in the end, the speaker belongs to the same race of silence. It is a process of dropping into the abyss of death, during which consciousness, acting as my ears, senses all.

> And then a Plank in Reason, broke,
> And I dropped down, and down –
> And hit a World, at every plunge,
> And Finished knowing – then –[407]

As Dickinson writes, every plunge hits a world. How to understand 'World' here? We can understand this switch from an opposite direction: from light to dark. In essence, every plunge means a power trying to break the dark and awake from that dark world. It is a sensation level breakout. That is to say, such a change of consciousness, brought by the plunge, can be physically sensed. However, the new world from which the speaker wakes up is known as the speaker exists in another way. This belongs to the dead zone of my consciousness. Therefore, as an abstract and general concept in its daily use, 'World' in Dickinson's lines conveys a genuine feeling of things, a visible change or boundary. At the end of this poem, the poet delivers a sense of consciousness breaking with a short dash between 'knowing' and 'then', implying that dead field beyond my consciousness. However, Dickinson makes her narration stop with the disruption of her consciousness as her poetry practice never really goes into the depth of death. She stops inventing the world of death with her imagination because the content

[407] *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Franklin, p.152.

of death is not what the disappeared consciousness can control. This scene is different from Dickinson's impression on the funeral she witnessed in reality. The finality of the cognition once again proves that the soul of human beings dismisses the destruction of the flesh. The end of life announces the loss of cognitive ability. Also, it implies that the ultimate destination of our knowledge is the collapse of our reason – to understand the uncertainty of the afterlife.

Dickinson's melancholy is shown on first reading of the poem. Different from 'Because I could not stop for Death', this poem portrays a vivid and integrated picture only with the process of the funeral. There is no conversation with death itself, or rather, there is no need to make a conversation anymore. In this poem, death is not personified. The speaker just recorded what she saw and how she felt before she said goodbye to this world. The funeral is presented as a metaphorical vehicle through which a transition from life to death will be accomplished. Besides, the funeral is also regarded as a note of the speaker's mind from rationality to inanition. The poem goes from a desire for the destination of the soul to despair for the chaos of the scene.

Dickinson lives as recluse through her long life, yet she longs for a companion on the way to death. This can be proved in her poem 'I died for Beauty'. She firmly believes that she will find the truth when she dies that will also be shared with others. In the eyes of Dickinson, immortality is the most faithful friend who will accompany her in the world of death. Meanwhile, she gradually understands that death seems to be greater than nature as it brings peace and increases the joy of being alive. Now that death is the way to immortality and the reunion with her beloved ones, Dickinson decides to welcome death: 'So give me back to Death, The Death I never feared'.[408] Socrates approves two kinds of death: one is absolute

[408] *The Complete Poems*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson, p.1449.

disappearance of consciousness, and another is soul immigration to another place. Evidently, in all death-related poems, Dickinson combines two kinds of Socrates' death, insisting on keeping her soul exist and trying to think of her soul as an independent mechanism that helps her decide the afterlife. All three poems show Dickinson's tendency of feeling death through imagining how a separated being has entered death, lived with death and talked with death. At that moment, death has been understood by the subject of 'negative capability' on behalf of the original being. This is different from two of her poems, 'There's been a Death, in the Opposite House' (389) and 'I Noticed People Disappeared' (1149), in which Dickinson considers herself as a spectator and a child, merely speculating death as an ordinary and natural process.

5.4 Keats and Dickinson's Posthumous Existence: God's Permission?

> Dying a good death is the same as living a good life, existing authentically through accepting death as a constitutive structure which is always with man.[409]
>
> Heidegger

Dickinson claims in her poem 976 that 'Death is a dialogue between the spirit and the Dust'. The dust represents the earthly remains of the spirit, and death bridges a conversation before the earthly form of the spirit is 'dissolved'. Death hopes the spirit return to the 'Ground'– a implication of hell; and the spirit responds by calling death 'Sir' and telling death that there exists another Trust – God – a symbol of heaven. Death continues persuading the spirit but, in the end, the spirit turns away and leaves off for heaven, remaining an 'Overcoat of Clay'. Dickinson pays attention to the use of diction in this poem so that the contrast is made more evident. 'Sir' implies the power and strength of death. However, the final choice of the spirit

[409] James M. Demske, *Being, Man and Death: A Key to Heidegger* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2014), p.157.

goes to its 'Trust' with God, indicating that the spirit does not need to fear death. Moreover, 'clay' belongs to 'Ground' and hell, implying that what the spirit leaves to death is something it gives up and something that will return to 'nothingness', conveying an ironic attitude of the spirit towards death. Dickinson writes about the struggling between the spirit and the death, highlighting the presence of God and showing the denial of the spirit to death. The poem is a debate between God and devil on where the spirit of a dead person will end up. Apparently, Dickinson chooses Trust with God. Another poem 664 of Dickinson also helps to state that 'Sense from Spirit flies away' implies 'brief Tragedy of Flesh is shifted'. Those poems convey Dickinson's belief that 'This World is not Conclusion' (373).

Both Keats and Dickinson make a life-long endeavour to explore what it is about to write immortality, eternity and the afterlife; they continue to portray death in their own unique way through their life. However, death manifests differently in its final state in Keats and Dickinson's poems. Dickinson's use of death contains experiencing others' death and imagining self-dying as dwelling; it includes writing beyond the grave and renouncing the actuality of death. He represents his knowing about death, and experiencing brutal death (suffering), and writing in tomblike enclose poetic spaces. The beauty of life lies in its unrepeatability and transience, which is the source of our sorrow. Death is the high meed of life.[410] Keats and Dickinson think about death early in their life. It will be called morbid in the psyche in today's youths. Death is not a popular topic among healthy people. Thus, what makes them think about death in depth? In their early time, it might be a trace of bitterness at the lack of time to make a permanent mark on their respective poetic worlds. With the passage of time, death must be considered if the truth is to be obtained. We

[410] M. A. Goldberg, p.131.

talked about the existential anxiety of the poets before, and death is the final termini of their anxiety. Death announces everything reduced to nothingness. Yet, it is neither a mathematical concept nor ethically meaningless. Goldberg interprets that nothingness means that the mutable, changing and mortal aspect of all things which are subject to space and time, will be removed.[411] Eventually, only those immutable, fixed and eternal aspects will exist. That is to say, the final destination of death, ideally, should be immortality and its unlimited values.

[411] M. A. Goldberg, p.128.

Chapter 6

Anxiety in Spirituality

Anxieties of existence, desire and death have revealed many critical issues with regards to spiritual problems in the poetry of Keats and Dickinson. Keats' spirituality is influenced by Greek theodic tradition, which is sublime but corrupt due to its sexual violence and depravity. It is a form of erotic divinization out of theological reflections of early Christianity.[412] In other words, Keats' attention to the union with spirituality is explicitly concentrated on erotic divination, which mainly aims to solve his anxiety of desire in an ancient and classical discussion. The context of Greek mythology enables Keats to infuse neo-paganism with the erotic theology of Christian Platonism.

Keats' early spiritual imagination depends on his contact with Greek myth. In one of Keats' myth poems 'On First Looking into Chapman's Homer', he illustrates how he first encounters Greek myth from Chapman's translation of Homer's work. In the mystical island of Homer's poem, the Greek god Apollo is respected by poets. This has a powerful effect on Keats' attitudes towards literature. Keats travels via Chapman's interpretation and his own imagination towards Apollo. As Keats' schooling also offers teaching on the history of Ancient Greece and Rome, the ancient and classical world permeates his life in every aspect. Cowden Clarke inspired Keats' huge passion for the ancient world by encouraging Keats to memorize reading on Tooke's 'Pantheon', Spence's 'Polymetis' and Virgil's 'Aeneid'.[413] In many of Keats' narrative poems, such as 'La belle dame sans merci', 'Endymion', 'Hyperion' and 'Lamia', a mythological influence is apparent. The visionary power of myth is strong for the poet.

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[412] James Hughes Reho, *Tantric Jesus: The Erotic Heart of Early Christianity* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2017), Chapter 12.
[413] Charles Cowden Clarke and Mary Cowden Clarke, *Recollections of Writers* (New York, NY: C. Scribner's sons, 1878), p.124.

Compared with Keats, who venerates the old and dead world of ancient Greece, Dickinson seeks spirituality in a living discourse of religion. The Amherst society in the nineteenth century is influenced by orthodox Protestantism with strong Calvinistic tendencies. It stresses the idea that man is sinful and completely at the mercy of God, and redemption becomes a predestined election in the will of God.[414] Dickinson is clearly influenced by Puritanism as a result of family tradition, but this does not mean that Dickinson is a loyal follower of this religion. Dickinson's poems reveal that she constantly satirizes those Puritan ideas that worldly success and religious belief are considered as signs rather than causes of salvation.[415] Dickinson's poem, 'Of course – I prayed – /And did God care' (376) conveys a frustration with traditional modes of prayer. In other words, the fading of Puritanism and the strengthening of Transcendentalism in Dickinson's life experience have reduced the emotional components of religion. Dickinson's redemption through spirituality is, in fact, a process of removing old Puritanism and absorbing the new Transcendentalism, during which man's spirituality is combined with nature and enters the level of the divine. Dickinson's bravery of defiant critique of religion is fully praised by Helen Vendler as 'unequalled among the other poets of her day'.[416] Coincidently, Keats' consideration on spirituality is also fraught with caveats and uncertainties. The interests on both the human and divine nature of God increase Keats' references to supernatural powers, divine desire, the afterlife, salvation and the soul, which make up the basis of what we might construe as his religious ideas.

6.1 Spirituality and the Sublimation of Eroticism and Suffering

[414] Greg Mattingly, 'Emily Dickinson's Religious Heritage', in *Emily Dickinson as a Second Language: Demystifying the Poetry* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2018), p.83.
[415] Linda Freedman, *Emily Dickinson and the Religious Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p.107.
[416] Helen Vendler, *Dickinson: Selected Poems and Commentaries* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), p.17.

Keats' 'Ode to Psyche' imagines an idealized eroticism through his portrayal of a Greek goddess. He is naturally positive in the opening invocation of the ode:

> O Goddess! Hear these tuneless numbers, wrung
> By sweet enforcement and remembrance dear,
> And pardon that thy secrets should be sung
> Even into thine own soft-conched ear:
> Surely I dreamt to-day, or did I see
> The winged Psyche with awaken'd eyes?
> I wander'd in a forest thoughtlessly,
> And, on the sudden, fainting with surprise,
> Saw two fair creatures, couched side by side
> In deepest grass, beneath the whisp'ring roof
> Of leaves and trembled blossoms, where there ran
> A brooklet, scarce espied:

The story originates from Greek myth: Psyche (her name referring to 'soul' or 'mind') is the youngest and most beautiful daughter of a merchant; the goddess of love Aphrodite dispatched Eros (in Roman myth Eros equals Cupid) to punish Psyche's beauty. However, Eros is so astonished by Psyche's beauty that he falls in love with her, but only to abandon her. Psyche is forced to do many tasks in order to win back Eros.

The ode begins with a religious exclamation and a passionate address to the goddess Psyche. The tuneless numbers stand for verses. It is replaced by a sweet power and memory. The speaker wants to tell the secret of Psyche meanwhile seeking her pardon. The ode turns on a secretive act of accidental spying. Then how important is the 'secret'? Is it one that actually wants to be known by the public? Then the speaker claims that 'I' want Psyche to know that I tell her secret, but softly and gently. Readers are in a Keatsian mist when first reading these lines. In the following statement, the poet formally introduces the protagonist 'Psyche' through a seemingly dreaming and awakening condition. Who is 'Psyche'? Psyche exists in an image of Goddess in the lines, someone with divine light. 'I wander in a forest' echoes 'On Sitting Down to Read King Lear Once Again', where Keats

writes ‘When through the old oak forest I am gone’. The forest in this ode is a space of dream and imagination. It shows as a subjective dream that the speaker is willing to enter. However, why ‘thoughtlessly’? It should equal ‘purposeless’, implying that it is a chance encounter of which the speaker is uncertain as to whether it takes place or was it dreamt. A surprise is meanwhile a shocking one as ‘I’ faint, but the surroundings such as roofs, leaves, blossoms, brooklet become intensely decorated with beautiful words.

> Mid hush’d, cool-rooted flowers, fragrant-eyed,
> Blue, silver-while, and budded Tyrian,
> They lay calm-breathing, on the bedded grass;
> Their arms embraced, and their pinions too;
> Their lips touch’d not, but had not bade adieu,
> As if disjoined by soft-handed slumber,
> And ready still past kisses to outnumber
> At tender eye-dawn of aurorean love:
> The winged boy I knew;
> But who wast thou, O happy, happy dove?
> His Psyche true!

The presentation of the two fair creatures lying together, embracing each other and barely parted from an intimate kiss. A series of descriptive words appear at the beginning of this stanza: ‘hush’ which stresses hearing, ‘cool’ which stresses feeling, ‘fragrant’ which emphasizes smelling and ‘blue’ which pays attention to seeing. As sensual words, all present an extremely beautiful harmony of the speaker and Psyche. ‘Fragrant-eyed’ uses synaesthesia to combine olfactory feeling with vision. Keats personifies these plants with breath and their surroundings with human’s equipment (bedded grass), as well as their gathering with behaviour of embracing. It is a touching picture. Lips and kisses convey a closer and interactive relationship as if they have emotions. ‘Tender’ and ‘aurorean’ lift this connection to an erotic level. He has wings (pinions) as Psyche. The happy dove is a symbol of Psyche as well, which comes from his reading of Mary Tighe’s 1805 work of the

same name. The beauty comes from sensation of the speaker through contact with Psyche, indicating that beauty is not just for its own sake, but elevating the figure of Psyche. The figure of Psyche is, ironically, an absent-presence throughout the ode. The most beautiful words connect sensation of language, something of religious awe (sublimity) in a bid to lift readers into the realm of worship and guaranteeing the quality of devotion. Keats' poetry again emulates a prayer or invocation.

> O latest born and loveliest vision far
> Of all Olympus' faded hierarchy!
> Fairer than Phoebe's sappire-region'd star,
> Or Vesper, amorous glow-worm of the sky;
> Fairer than these, though temple thou hast none,
> Nor altar heap'd with flowers;
> Nor virgin-choir to make delicious moan
> Upon the midnight hours;
> No voice, no lute, no pipe, no incense sweet
> From chain-swung censer teeming;
> No shrine, no grove, no oracle, no heat
> Of pale-mouth'd prophet dreaming.

Keats regards the scene as the loveliest, but also a remote one, as he situates it in Olympus's hierarchy. The speaker considers Olympus' hierarchy system as faded, an obviously unsupportive word, showing that the rigid hierarchy is not what he wants. Phoebe is the name of the goddess of the moon. Psyche is more beautiful than Phoebe. Vesper is a signal of time, which implies the approaching of the night, and the darkness, however, is illuminated by its glow-worm-like-light. The point implies Keats' patience of belatedness. Psyche did not have her place among the hierarchy of Olympus, which itself is now faded and risks the possibility that Psyche, without the imaginative action of the poet of the ode, will be entirely forgotten.

Then in the following lines, Keats' use of 'fairer' stresses the unique beauty of the picture of Psyche again as all things that appeared in these lines have reached the acme of perfection. Here the 'Altar' links with religion, and the flower is a ritual of remembering. From the next line, the colour

of the picture begins to change. Everything that symbolizes warmth and romance begins to fade, and the reference of the coldness of darkness begins to be strong. Although Psyche is beautiful enough, there is no worship of her as a goddess. The eight 'no's implies that Psyche is not as authoritative as other gods. In Greek history, Psyche does not belong in the pantheon. Censer accords with the previous reference to 'temple'. 'Shrine' and 'oracle' again link to religion. 'Pale-mouth' shows a dread emotion when the speaker is in a trance. 'Prophet dreaming' expresses a condition in which the speaker seems to have known the result of the imagination.

> O brightest! Though too late for antique vows,
> Too, too late for the fond believing lyre,
> When holy were the haunted forest boughs,
> Holy the air, the water, and the fire;
> Yet even in these days so far retir'd
> From happy pieties, thy lucent fans,
> Fluttering among the faint Olympians,
> I see, and sing, by my own eyes inspir'd.
> So let me be thy choir, and make a moan
> Upon the midnight hours;
> Thy voice, thy lute, thy pipe, thy incense sweet
> From swinged censer teeming;
> Thy shrine, thy grove, thy oracle, thy heat
> Of pale-mouth'd prophet dreaming.

'Brightest' reminds Keats' readers of the bright star, which elsewhere Keats associates with steadfastness and constancy. Why does the speaker say 'too late', and what does 'pyre' really mean? The former should be the same question of 'antique vows', implying that Psyche is too young, and the anxiety about belatedness. The 'faint Olympian' shows the decreasing of the religious spirit. Apparently, the speaker tries to preserve such spirit and the presence of Psyche. 'Thy' replaces 'no' of the previous stanza, expressing his determination of becoming Psyche's follower. The classical myth does not worship Psyche, yet Keats completes his worship through imagination, in which he endows Psyche with the same status and veneration as the other gods. Since there is no virgin-choir

to make delicious moan, let 'me' sing for you.

> Yes, I will by thy priest, and build a fane
> In some untrodden region of my mind,
> Where branched thoughts, new grown with pleasant pain,
> Instead of pines shall murmur in the wind:
> Far, far around shall those dark-cluster'd trees
> Fledge the wild-ridged mountains steep by steep;
> And there by zephyrs, streams and birds and bees,
> The moss-lain Dryads shall be lull'd to sleep:
> And in the midst of this wide quietness
> A rosy sanctuary will I dress
> With the wreath'd trellis of a working brain,
> With buds, and bells, and stars without a name,
> With all the gardener Fancy e'er could feign,
> Who breeding flowers, will never breed the same:
> And there shall be for thee all soft delight
> That shadowy thought can win,
> A bright torch, and a casement ope at night,
> To let the warm Love in![417]

This stanza continues to claim the speaker's loyalty to Psyche. His declaration of becoming Psyche's priest and building her temple in 'untrodden region' of his mind is sacred, definitely expressing that he is totally surrendered by Psyche. The speaker fears that it is too late to see the priest of Psyche, implying Keats' is concerned about belatedness of being recognized as a poet. Clearly, the 'region' is surrounded by thought. The speaker equals the region to the beauty of nature, which is cared for by the gardener Fancy. He promises Psyche a soft delight and keeps the window for her so that the winged boy can enter with warm love. 'Pleasant pain' sounds like 'bliss' as if the speaker clearly knows what suffering he will experience and he accepts it. It is no wonder that the story of Psyche attracts Keats so much as Keats regards love as a critical theme in his life. Keats respects Psyche's beauty and employs all his imagination to build a dream kingdom for her. The ode moves from an outward wandering 'thoughtlessly' to a deliberate and thoughtful construction within the inward

[417] *Complete Poems,* ed. Jack Stillinger, pp.275-277.

space of the mind itself.

The ode obtains immortal love which symbolizes, for Keats, a perfect relationship, which cannot be accomplished in reality. In the imagination, Keats achieves a perfect union with a perfect object; thus, we call his imagination the best vehicle of desire. 'Ode to Psyche' realizes a reunion of love and transience after death, which is also reflected in *Endymion* and 'The Eve of St. Agnes'. The classical myth involves endless artistic achievement where a human being's soul is divined.[418] Eros and Psyche must go through suffering to achieve their hope and accomplish their salvation,[419] which resembles the condition of arriving heaven in Christianity, thus building up a possible link between classical and Christian schemes of value. Suffering in both mythology and Christianity is equated with redemption, which helps readers understand Keats' deep interest in tragedy. It reaches truthful understanding of existence in accordance with Keats' idea of the 'vale of soul-making':[420] man enjoys eternity only after suffering. Keats takes a biblical image of a vale of tears, but transforms it into a secular one of the 'vale of soul-making' and its attendant suffering. The soul grows and matures through love and torture. This is what Psyche (soul) values. However, salvation from suffering is realized from embodied experience rather than an external saviour. This resembles Keats' question in *Hyperion* that man's suffering is out of physical and spiritual sickness. Apollo, who plays as that saviour, is the divine source of Keats' poetry as Apollo is the God of both poetry and light. In the worship of the soul, the natural world and the mind are combined together. Similarly, desire and spirit are linked by Eros and Psyche as well, through which Keats accomplished his hymn to this literary goddess.[421]

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[418] George C. Gross, 'Lamia and the Cupid-Psyche Myth', *Keats-Shelley Journal 39* (1990), 151-165 (p.152).
[419] Anahid Nersessian, ''Ode to Psyche", in *Keats' Odes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), pp.95-112.
[420] *Complete Poems and Selected Letters of John Keats*, ed. Edward Hirgh, p.505.
[421] Homer Brown, 'Creations and Destroyings: Keats's Protestant Hymn', *Diacritics 6(4)* (1976), 49-56 (p.49).

Psyche becomes a surrogate for Keats' aspirations as a poet. The ending stanza of the poem is very deliberately constructed by the mind and in the mind. It is after all the 'trellis' of a 'working brain' that differs from wandering 'thoughtlessly'. It is not only a movement away from any pretence to be out in the world but a movement from the woods into the 'rosy sanctuary'. It is also a movement away from carelessness to something very deliberately constructed. In Keats' conception of salvation, the interaction between mythological characters symbolizes the necessary sufferings to develop man's soul, which he calls pleasant pain. This conception constrains us to imagine God within the small range of our intelligence and sensation. Mythological characters will die, unlike Jesus, who wins death and grave. In the end, the immortal Christ and the dying mythological characters bring conflicts to Keats in judging the world genuine or fictitious. Keats is usually obsessed with things that seem eternal and contrasts them with the ephemeral nature of human beings. Greek myth opens a kingdom for Keats that is a source of beauty and a world of escapism.[422] Keats is aware of our desire of escaping when we cannot achieve immortal truth completely. Beauty encompasses suffering and tragedy.

Compared with Keats, Dickinson's treatment of spirit is more complicated because she chooses a living language – religion. On the one hand, she accepts religion as a kind of spiritual redemption from God. On the other hand, she has the sense of refusing completely to believe in religion to save her soul. Jordan Landry once found from Jane Donahue Eberwein's statement that Puritanism was 'Dickinson's first language. As such, it immersed her in a discourse which over-determined the value, place, and role of both men's and women's bodies'.[423] First, religion satisfies

[422] Homer Brown, p.50.
[423] H. Jordan Landry, 'Animal/Insectual/lesbian Sex: Dickinson's Queer Version of the Birds and the Bees', *The Emily Dickinson Journal 9(2)* (2000), 42-54 (p.42).

Dickinson's desire for love and sexuality, helping her confront rather than escape the question of an erotic being. Dickinson's treatment of religion is concerned with her imagined eroticism through physical and mental transformation of God. Although Landry's concentration was on Dickinson's imagination of gender, based on her knowledge or religion, it is evident that religion covers other dimensions of Dickinson's life, such as her state of being and the identity as a poet. Eberwein confirms that religion lay at the heart of Dickinson's poetry.[424] The influence of Puritanism even shaped her perception of existence and, in turn, caused Dickinson to re-evaluate Puritanism in her poetry.

Landry also regards that 'one dominant mode by which puritanism creates imaginary bodies is the discourse surrounding the process of conversion'.[425] After all, in Christianity, Christ is a male pilgrim with faith and hope. In traditional Puritan discourse, the female image is strictly controlled and the male image is fully allowed for desire. Puritanism shapes Dickinson's subjectivity, to some degree, by stimulating her imagination to fight for the female's identity. Consequently, Dickinson attempts to reimagine the possibilities of the female body of desire, corporeality and sexuality.[426] We regard religion as one way of Dickinson's self-redemption, not to mean that religion always plays a positive role, but to say that through adapting to religious convention, Dickinson finds answers on how to help female stand on a patriarchy-oriented society, 'a filthy pit from which Christian emerges beslimed'.[427] In her poem, 'He was my host – he was my guest' (1720), Dickinson writes,

> He was my host – he was my guest,
> I never to this day

[424] Jane Donahue Eberwein, 'Introducing a Religious Poet: The 1890 Poems of Emily Dickinson', *Christianity and Literature 39(3)* (1990), 241-260 (p.244).
[425] Jordan Landry, p.42.
[426] Jordan Landry, p.43.
[427] Ibid.

If I invited him could tell,
Or he invited me.

So infinite our intercourse
So intimate, indeed,
Analysis as capsule seemed
To keeper of the seed.[428]

The beginning of this poem seems to be an introduction of a male partner to Dickinson's readers. We do not know his identity, though. Yet, this male clearly dwells with her and even tries to co-constitutes her-self.[429] With his company, Dickinson ends her isolation in spirit. It is proposed that he can be a figure for Dickinson's religious imagination. In fact, her yearning for this company shows a combination of limited human desire and the divine presence[430] because this man possesses double identities – both host and guest. In religious poetry from the sixteenth century onwards, especially, Christ is seen as host and guest.[431] That is to say, this man owns the initiative. Why is the speaker unable to distinguish the position of this man and herself? There exists suspense. Her readers still do not know the identity of that man; however, the speaker soon admits how close they are.

'Infinite' implies possibilities, which is a praise of such a relationship and indicates her endless passion for this relationship. 'Intimate', on the other hand, emphasizes more on the physical contact between them. The speaker, or Dickinson herself, is satisfied with this relationship, physically and spiritually, and is even dependent on this. 'So' leaves a space for the speaker herself to wonder the level of intimacy. Their relationship is so intimate, entirely natural like a seed inside. 'Capsule', as a scientific word, delivers a meaning of code and dispassion. The 'intercourse' in the

[428] *The Poems of Emily Dickinson,* ed. Franklin, p.626.
[429] Glenn Hughes, *A More Beautiful Question: The Spiritual in Poetry and Art* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2011), p.66.
[430] Ibid.
[431] See George Herbert's poem, 'Love III', for instance, in which God is the host.

nineteenth-century America contains both social and sexual connotation. Dickinson's attitudes towards the man and the lover in the two poems have a sense of 'awe' towards their respective objects. Although she attempts to establish some kind of connection with God, her language is both erotic and religious. Its register belongs to a type of religious rapture.

Religious tradition should not be denied in illuminating Dickinson's spirituality embodied in her poetry.[432] Linda Freedman also puts forward how some of the biblical and theological elements in Dickinson's poems are positively presented although Dickinson frequently kept her ironic eye on Puritanism.[433] Emmanuel Levinas questions the position of 'the other' in philosophy; Dickinson's treating of the self and the other also challenges the mainstream ideas between these two concepts in Western philosophy. The primacy of 'the self' shows the suppression of the other, which is similar to Dickinson's imagery of bee-flower relationship. In fact, both Dickinson and Levinas, in their respective ways, query any 'assumed unity of subjectivity'.[434] Dickinson's treatment of the self and the other is tapping into a tradition of poems and hymns in which Christ is host and guest. The speaker should be a woman and within her language there exists a humility and compromise. Her ambiguous attitude, her confusion over the precise nature of the relationship, as well as her desire for physical intimacy, all put her in a difficult and complex position. As far as the host-guest relationship is concerned, 'self-other' reveals an inverted relationship between male and female. The host-guest relationship conveys two meanings. The first is that the immersion of this relationship shows 'hospitality'. The second is that it confirms the power imbalance in a male-

[432] Hyesook Son, ''Puritan Spirit' and the Question of the Other: A Levinasian Reading of Emily Dickinson's Religious Poems', in *Literature and Spirituality in the English-Speaking World Collection*, ed. by Kathie Birat and Brigitte Zaugg (Bern: Peter Lang, 2014).
[433] Linda Freedman, *Emily Dickinson and the Religious Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp.24, 26-27.
[434] Hyesook Son.

female relationship and how it defines women's identity. The concession of the self to the other is undoubtedly a challenge to individualism in religion.

Alternatively, Victoria Morgan finds Dickinson's preference of the 'bee' image not only making sense in an erotic relationship, but also in producing a connection with Puritan orthodoxy,[435] when taking bee's productivity into consideration. Religious men value business and productivity, thus, 'usefulness' becomes a key criterion to judge the status of people. Bees are shown as male in Dickinson's poetry, and flowers represent women, which are idle, and women are arranged to receive punishment in order to complete salvation in this context. This is the reason why bees are able to enjoy physical and spiritual pleasure (sex) whereas the flowers can only act as passive and vulnerable individuals as determined by their destiny. In the poetry 'the Flower must not blame the Bee', the bee's departure after the sexual behaviour underscores a male's lack of responsibility, which we call 'humiliation/humility'. At the same time, the flower being left alone suggests punishment after experiencing pleasure. Yet, the ability of the bee to escape after having fertilising the flower shows the inclining to male in religion. This religious doctrine is sceptical so that Dickinson arranges bees to experience despair after pleasure. To some extent, Dickinson's initial purpose is to refuse religion in her poetry. However, as the early desire of bees accords with the religious concept of rapture, through writing about bees' physical enjoyment, Dickinson tries to break the connection between bees with industriousness.[436] Keats gives up his masculine authority in the face of a divine female image, whereas Dickinson still keeps a subordinate relationship between the self and the other.

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[435] Victoria Morgan, "Repairing Everywhere without Design'? Industry, Revery and Dickinson's Bee Imagery', in *Shaping Belief: Culture, Politics, and Religion in Nineteenth-Century Writing*, ed. by Clare Williams and Victoria Morgan (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), p.75.
[436] Victoria Morgan, p.84.

6.2 Spirituality as Illusion: Scepticism and Belief

Keats called life a 'vale of soul-making', as he holds a secular view of the purpose of suffering through which 'souls' and 'identities' are made. 'The Eve of St Agnes' is written out of the darkness and coldness of religion, like Dante's hell, and the spirit of religion looms over the poem. On the surface, Christianity should be responsible for this world that forbids romantic love, yet in the deeper aspect, the eroticism of Porphyro and Madeline is allowed by the poet to be fully expressed. This can be viewed as a hidden rebellion against traditional religious thought and a sublimation of eroticism into the divine. Keats in his letter to Fanny Brawne claims that 'love is my religion'. 'My religion' stresses his own system. As his love Fanny is a Christian, Keats makes efforts in accepting the existence of religion in his life. Yet he still keeps a distance by stating 'you believe' in letters to Fanny Brawne.

For Keats, Christianity is melancholy, the gloomy church bells are soul-crushing which destroys romantic and erotic love. Keats believes a supernatural power that is higher than the human world but is different from religious power. As he believes that the soul of great artists Shakespeare and Milton are still surviving, he desires support from them. However, with the deterioration of his health, Keats begins to doubt immortality which he takes for granted as well. His dissatisfaction with suffering makes him refute Christ's death for our sins. All beliefs have become intricate concepts for him. In the last days of Keats's life, he realizes that his doubts over religion bring him great anguish. If he can accept some of the Christian faith, then death will be much easier. Thus, he asks his friend to read some of the works by theologian Jeremy Taylor as consolation.[437] Holy Living and Holy Dying bring calmness and relief at the moment of Keats' death, yet his spiritual

[437] John Keats, *The Letters of John Keats*, p.291.

horror and anxiety in the face of death is never removed. Ironically, such a temporary belief becomes the last cheap comfort. Christianity strengthens the power of suffering in order to rescue human beings from sins. Keats was genuinely committed to the idea that suffering was ennobling and necessary for 'soul making'.

Keats has unshakeable confidence in the existence of mysterious, doubts and uncertainties rather than absolute truth. His doubts on Christ and rebellion to religious expectation constructs his religious scepticism, as is defined by Ronald Sharp.[438] He rejected the idea that Christ alone can offer salvation to human beings beset by suffering. He even thinks that Christ does not exist. His 'God', which equals 'Christ' in religion, is actually in the Greek myth for Messiah.[439] In his letter to his brother George, he described human beings as a 'poor forked creature'[440] like beasts of the forest, quoting from Shakespeare's *King Lear*. Keats always believes that human beings must go through the same hardship to complete spiritual redemption and achieve eternity. Although God, Apollo and paradise appear as critical roles for salvation in his poetic language, they mostly play a metaphorical role.

Human beings are unable to will away suffering by flesh and spirit. Then a basic question will be put forward: how to believe in a religious God (Christ) who cared for his creation? The explanation of suffering by the church advocates rebirth through tortures, but the subject who bears suffering and pain has nothing to do with religion. This is agreed by Keats in his poem 'On Sitting down to Read King Lear Once Again', shown through the rebirth of the metaphor of the Phoenix wing in fire. It might relate to his close acquaintance with death. He still believes in the immortality

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[438] Richard Fadem, 'Keats, Skepticism and the Religion of Beauty (review)' by Ronald Sharp, *Philosophy and Literature 4(2)* (1980), 274-275 (p.274).
[439] Gail McMurray Gibson, 'Ave Madeline: Ironic Annunciation in Keats' 'The Eve of St. Agnes'', *Keats-Shelley Journal 26* (1977), 39-50 (p.44).
[440] John Keats, *The Letters of John Keats*, p.325.

of the soul and that suffering prepares him for the afterlife. However, the view of Glenn Everett, which defines Keats as lacking religious belief and unconcerned with religion, is inaccurate. Suffering, for Keats, makes sense in endowing humans with purpose and dignity. Instead, Dickinson's doubt on God is still rooted in her exploration of the host-guest relationship, for instance,

> The infinite a sudden Guest
> Has been assumed to be –
> But how can that stupendous come
> Which never went away?[441]

In the beginning, the guest is admitted as 'sudden' appearing, which accords with the 'Guest' before. However, who is the 'Guest' on earth? Under the inversion and ambiguity of the host-guest relationship in 'He was my host – he was my guest', readers do not know who it is that intrudes into whose domain. Dickinson evaluates this occasion as 'infinite' but also questions the stupendousness of such 'infinite'. 'Infinite' stands for thousands of possibilities with this guest coming. It is a symbol for a divine beyond, as Glen Hughes observes, 'a dimension of timeless meaning transcending anything in consciousness', trying to break the condition of 'in-between'.[442] Different from the 'infinite' in the previous poem, this 'infinite' contains uncertainty and dread in the meanwhile. As the guest implies 'infinite', we can infer the identity of the guest to the omnipresent God. God is the stupendous one as he infinitely exists everywhere and thus he does not need to come. On this occasion, the poem becomes a conception of the divine entering the constraints of humanity's space and time. Based on this possibility, it is proposed that Dickinson is considering the infinity of non-existence. Each of us emerges from this non-existence to infinity, including God. Yet, as mortals, the brevity of our time prompts us to doubt the truth of infinity and the truth of God. It is also a paradoxical nature of God both containing and entering his own creation. In the following

[441] *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. by Franklin, p.498.
[442] Glenn Hughes, *A More Beautiful Question*, p.68.

poem, Dickinson goes some way to provide an answer:

> 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 illume at all –[443]

The poem shows a kind of idealism for God's absence, a measurement between doubts and hopes. Dickinson answers at the beginning that people know where they go after they die. Dickinson tries to speak from the consciousness of dead people who believe in Christianity. They hope to go to God's right hand – which symbolizes a place of power and honour. This is undoubtedly a wish for all dead Christians as the right hand of God provides them with promise, protection and salvation. In Christianity, since Christ should be the one who stands on the right hand of God, he reigns with God in community and power. Yet, in this poem, God's right hand is amputated and, therefore, God disappears. Also, the power of Christ, which comes from God, also makes no sense. Previously, Dickinson says God is infinite – namely, omnipresent. Then what is the truth? Dickinson gives an answer in another poem 'I know that He exists', where she still believes that God exists 'Somewhere – in Silence –'.[444] It is just our 'gross eyes' unable to see him. This is Dickinson's way of implying her religious doubt and suggesting that God cannot be found.

The disappearance of God's right hand indicates Dickinson's difficulty in keeping absolute loyalty to religion. To be more precise, Dickinson is implying the failure of her religious faith. God's

[443] *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. by Franklin, p.582.
[444] *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. by Franklin, p.166.

right hand is removed in heaven; thus, rules and authority of God are challenged. In the second stanza, the poet admits that the abandonment of belief will make our behaviour small, which further indicates her doubtful state of faith. She describes such illusion as 'an ignis fatuus', a foolish fire, a will-o-the-wisp-that deceives or leads travellers astray. At the same time, she makes a compromise that a faint flickering is better than no hope at all, at least not completely illusion. That is to say, she may as well accept the possibility of no God after death. It is worth noting that death is the prerequisite of such possible failure of faith. The disappearance of God's right hand or the disappearance of faith is in essence the ending of identity as dead people will become nothingness.

This poem seems like a longing for the reassurance of previous certainties (i.e past belief). Namely, it equals a longing for a transcendent God,[445] who may or may not come in the afterlife and whose love and salvation can bring one the most extreme spiritual experiences. In other poems such as 'Apparently with no surprise', 'I know that He exists', and 'He fumbles at your spirit', Dickinson affirms somewhat sceptically the existence of God and stresses his divinity as well. This shows that Dickinson's suspicion throughout is of the deified in religion rather than God himself. As she states in 'He fumbles' at your spirit, God keeps fumbling our 'naked soul' all the time. In the face of the question of eroticism and existence, Dickinson is used to endowing God with both gender and absolute power. No one is able to define what God looks like and what God will do after they die, but people will seek their own answers. Dickinson is seeking answers, too. By doing so, she has formed her own sceptical faith system.

6.3 Spiritual Anxiety and Religious Ritual

[445] Gleen Hughes, 'Love, Terror, and Transcendence in Emily Dickinson's Poetry', *Renascence 66(4)* (2014), 283-304 (p.283).

The invocation of Psyche has established a humanistic and secular religion in the heart of Keats. However, when dealing with the relationship between human beings and the universe, Keats finds religion deceptive, Christianity in particular. Wordsworth assesses Keats as 'a very pretty piece of paganism'.[446] In his poem, 'Written in Disgust of Vulgar Superstition', Keats notes,

> The church bells toll a melancholy round,
> Calling the people to some other prayers,
> Some other gloominess, more dreadful cares,
> More hark'ning to the sermon's horrid sound.
> Surely the mind of man is closely bound.
> In some black spell; seeing that each one tears
> Himself from fireside joys, and Lydian airs,
> And converse high of those with glory crown'd
> Still, still they too, and I should feel a damp, -
> A chill as from a tomb, did I not know
> That they are dying like an outburnt lamp;
> That 'tis their sighing, wailing ere they go
> Into oblivion; - that fresh flowers will grow,
> And many glories of immortal stamp.[447]

The title of the poem first expresses an unfriendly attitude of the poet towards some kinds of ritual. The first line describes the sound of the church bell 'melancholy', showing that at least the praying is not always associated with the 'bliss' in the tradition of Christianity. 'Some other prayers' are together with 'some other gloominess'. What is referred to by 'some other' that is even more dreadful than the church bells? That is the sound of the sermon. In the eyes of the speaker, the whole atmosphere of such a ritual is negative. Keats' position is slightly different from how Dickinson feels about prayer. Dickinson is unsatisfied with the form of the praying, disliking the institutionalized church. She does not want to go to the church, but she maintains instead her own private worship at home, just transferring the medium of communicating with God. Keats, however,

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[446] Clarence Thorpe, 'Wordsworth and Keats – A Study in Personal and Critical Impression', *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* (1927), 1010-1026 (p.1010).
[447] *Complete Poems*, ed. Jack Stillinger, pp.53-54.

detests the whole content of such religious ritual, which he even calls 'superstition', and names the sermon as a 'black spell'. His disgust not only stops at the form level but goes to the in-depth side. He regards that man in this ritual is like bewitched and controlled ('bound') so that everyone even gives up joys and beautiful music when they are in the act of prayer. People try to make their head full of dreadful cares – this points up Keats' disgust at the piousness of religion.

'Fireside joys' and 'Lydian airs' shifts the mood of the poem to a scene where a happy atmosphere has replaced the melancholy one. 'Fireside joys' is often connected with family and children which, symbolizing innocence and warmth, compared with the darkness of previous lines. 'Lydian airs' is more attractive. It alludes to John Milton's 'L'Allegro' as well: 'Lap me in soft Lydian airs'. Also, it can be found earlier in Keats' title 'To George Felton Mathew': 'Beckon me sternly from softy 'Lydian airs''. 'Lydian', as a Renaissance term, serves as a standard reproach for any vicious (not pleasant to the ear) element in music.[448] In Milton's poem, the 'Lydian airs' shows a traditionally theocratic pastoral model that connects with the folk and fairy tales,[449] delivering a softly sweet and slow tone. For a moment the gloom was saved by the appearing of this unknown man, with a pleasant talk with 'glory crown'd'. Meanwhile, it raises a question about whether the poet is attacking the religion itself or, like Dickinson, attacking ritualized religion. According to Keats' letter to his brother and sister (4 Feb 1819), he depicts the regulations of Bishops as 'absurdities'.[450] It seems that the poet is especially unsatisfied with the irregular behaviour of the clergy.

The sound of the church bell is still and then there is an 'I' appearing in this poem. The poem

[448] Merritt Y. Hughes, 'Lydian Airs', *Modern Language Notes 40(3)* (1925), 129-137 (pp.129-130).
[449] Christopher Grose, 'The Lydian Airs of 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso'', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philosophy 2* (1984), 183-199.
[450] *The Letters of John Keats*, pp.452-453.

gathers two groups of characters: 'I' – the speaker and 'they' – the glory crown'd. On seeing this scene, 'I' actually feel dread like 'I' am in the tomb as 'I' may know the destiny of those people: they are dying. 'Chill', and 'Tomb' are strong words to be utilized in opposition to religion. 'Tomb' is a biblical reference to death and eternal resting. The religion means a tomb for the poet, showing that it brings not only the feeling of death, but also a fear of being endlessly trapped. This is a tomb that buries his belief.

'Outburnt lamp' implies that religion once did light the way for people, but it did too much so that it burnt out. Keats illustrates here that religion is no longer as useful and inspiring as it used to be. 'Oblivion' stresses the condition of being unconscious in a seemingly sleeping time. In the end, the poet says that flowers will grow in the place where they die to symbolize some ambiguous kind of immortality, which emphasizes art. The reference to flowers seems to return us to a Greek pastoral realm – the realm of Flora (goddess of flower) and of Old Pan: new life coming around again. The cycle of nature implies that art is an immortal survival although religion dies with people. Keats expresses his disenchantment towards Christianity by finding its de-spiritualizing nature beyond beauty and art. Nature without the divine fails to lead its worshipers to the authentic spiritual light as churches are obsessed with such spiritually empty rituals rather than a passion for divinity.

Religious values have become uninspiring. Therefore, Christianity becomes just another form of superstition that is notorious and vulgar. Not only in this poem, but also in one of his letters to George, Keats mentions religion as like a superstition which the more it prostrates the Crowd and the longer it continues the more powerful it becomes just in proportion to their increasing weakness'.[451] Even worse, it misleads the authenticity of the initial religion. Keats expertly uses

[451] John Keats, *The Letters of John Keats*, p. 289.

irony at the beginning and the end of 'Written in Disgust of Vulgar Superstition', expressing his dislike towards established forms of religion. 'Fresh flowers' in the end, which reveals a classical and pastoral tradition, imply the ending of death and the changing of the time when this religion will be abandoned by history.

Keats' attitudes towards religion as superstition has not changed. The invisibility of God is to endow death with a blissful ambush. Death, god and immortality coexist in contradiction. The approaching of death is regarded as a murderous affair that brings neither God nor immortality, which makes religion a trickster. The attitude of God shows that human beings deserve to be cheated. 'Written in Disgust of Vulgar Superstition' presents the poet's uneasy anticipation, which expresses the possibility that God will not guarantee the immortality for us. His letter to Reynolds (May 1818) shows that '[…] the world is full of Misery and Heartbreak, Pain, Sickness and oppression […] We see not the balance of good and evil. We are in a mist'.[452] As a critic of religion, Keats eschewed religious rituals and excludes himself from being one 'the pious friends of Religion'.[453] He never understands the behaviour of dying Martyrs for religion and the blood Christ as well. In the period of tuberculosis, Keats has realized how false religion can be so that he would rather cut his throat than submit to it.

Some keep the Sabbath going to Church –
I keep it, staying at Home –
With a Bobolink for a Chorister –
And an Orchard, for a Dome –

Some keep the sabbath in Surplice –
I, just wear my Wings –
And instead of tolling the Bell, for Church,
Our little Sexton – sings.

[452] *Complete Poems and Selected Letters*, ed. Edward Hirgh, p.499.
[453] Gordon Stein, *The Encyclopedia of Unbelief* (New York, NY: Prometheus Books,1985).

God preaches, a noted Clergyman –
And the sermon is never long,
So instead of getting to Heaven, at last –
I'm going, all along.[454]

Similar to Keats', this poem announces Dickinson's crisis of confidence in Christianity. It suggests an essential and direct worship within the self to faith combined with an eschewed way of treating traditional religion. Religion remains sacred yet couched in scepticism in Dickinson's heart at this time. She considers that there is no need to go to the church to experience religion as the works of God can be viewed in nature. In the beginning, the speaker is disdainful of those obeying the tradition of going to church. Yet, it does not mean that she opposes it. Sabbath is the day of rest in the Bible when worldly duties are removed and religious individuals should be devoted to worship and spirituality. Different from those who insist on going to church, Dickinson establishes a domestic scene as an alternative to church going on the Sabbath. She considers 'Bobolink' as the church's 'Chorister' and the 'Orchard' as 'Dome', which reconstructing every key element of the church. Bobolink and orchard make Dickinson encounter the sacred. The place where she lives is her setting of the church. Based on such a beautiful setting, it is hard to say whether the church is more divine than Dickinson's private orchard church – the church of nature. The stanza partly shows that Dickinson has found evidence of religion in the beauty of nature, which is consistent with what the ancient Greeks discovered.

In the second stanza, Dickinson again states her attitude towards traditional kinds of religious rite. 'Wings' are metaphors of protection here to construct a contrast with 'Surplice'. The 'Surplice' is the dress code of the day for going to church. For the poet, however, her 'wings' are enough to bring her solace, as a surplice does for others. 'Wings' can be open as well as closed, which implies

[454] *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Reading Edition*, ed. Franklin, p.106.

the extent of liberty of choosing a posture. Then she implies that the sound of the bell is not as faithful as the singing of the Sexton. Dickinson's use of metaphor is allegorical. Bobolink bird, orchard and wings, all have their implications, at least, as they are all from nature. These things from nature are creatures of God at the same time. Thus, is it praise of God appearing in the world he creates? All creatures participate in the day when they can talk to God. Or, is it a deeper imagination of Dickinson by regarding orchard church as Heaven? Therefore, in the last line, she speaks as if she has already been in Heaven. In fact, Dickinson's preference for praying in her house means that she regards every day as Sabbath and indicates there is no limitation on ritual within her own domestic environment. There is a continual, simple and ongoing conversation with God. People with this belief can achieve spiritual resonance with God even if their place of worship is unconventional.

It feels as if Dickinson is always in her natural church with God at her side, which means she is already in Heaven. This poem is 'spiritual but not religious'.[455] Dickinson's church and religion are in the form of personal leisure, but it does not mean that this day is not important for her to remember God. Two elements in this stanza that confirm Christian faith is, God and Heaven. Her way of displaying her devotion to God is, though, not traditional and social, but exists in reality. It is also an announcement of her faith in life: sometimes she does not behave following the regulation, but she has her rule. Her real faith in religion is rendered thus, 'Faith – is the Pierless Bridge/ Supporting what We see/ Unto the Scene that We do not.[456] 'Pierless' shows a potent but invisible power to Dickinson. Naturally, she has confirmed the importance of faith to her. Faith and traditional

[455] Robert C. Fuller, *Spiritual but not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p.4.
[456] *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Reading Edition*, ed. Franklin, p. 410

Christian beliefs, in essence, do not contradict each other. Dickinson's choice of departure from social norms do not define her as a pagan. That is to say, Dickinson never denies the existence of faith in religion, what she doubts is conventional religion in the form of church worship. Betsy Erkkila considers this poem as Dickinson's celebration of her rejection of her faith.[457] This, in my view, is slightly inaccurate. Faith is different from religious doctrine. However, Erikkila's argument can be modified and we can read this poem as representing Dickinson's break with traditional religious requirement for women is more reasonable. Essentially, the poem is fighting for identity. Dickinson's attitudes towards religion are complicated as she keeps seeking a solution to the conflict between religion and her faith and doubt through her poetry.

6.4 Does Spirituality Offer Salvation in Keats and Dickinson?

> Of Paradise' existence
> All we know
> Is the uncertain certainty –
> But it's vicinity, infer,
> By it's Bisecting Messenger –[458]

Dickinson considers that paradise exists in the form of 'uncertain certainty' – as a paradoxical form. At first, paradise symbolizes eternal being because it divides divine presence and human beings' worldly consciousness.[459] As a result, we naturally produce a longing for such a religious mystery. On the other hand, we will subconsciously link 'existence' with the concept of time. 'Uncertain certainty' is considered as Dickinson's religious belief through language,[460] which implies that the faith includes 'uncertainty', and paradise has an 'uncertain' existence. A contrast between the realm of immortality (line 1-3) and the realm of death (line 4-6) has been established. As 'eternity' is also

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[457] Betsy Erkkila, 'Emily Dickinson on Her Own Terms', *The Wilson Quarterly 9(2)* (1985), 98-109 (p.105).
[458] *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Reading Edition,* ed. Franklin, p.540.
[459] Glenn Hughes, *A More Beautiful Question*, p.67.
[460] Don Gilliland, 'Textual Scruples and Dickinson's 'Uncertain Certainty'', *The Emily Dickinson Journal 18(2)* (2009), 38-62, (pp.48-49).

measured in the temporal dimension, this 'uncertain certainty' is a matter of Dickinson registering the dilemma of faith and doubt through paradox. The 'timeless reality' exists in-between of conscious existence rather than a separate being.[461] In other words, eternity is inconceivable to the moral mind. She also considers that our putting 'eternality being' into the understanding of 'time' is also a result of our conscious experience – a unity of time and timelessness.[462] Sometimes if our logic opposes this unity, which exists in our consciousness, then paradox happens, and all becomes a kind of 'uncertain certainty'. The five short lines actually reflect a sceptical attitude of Dickinson towards immortality and paradise.

Dickinson's 'uncertain certainty' resonates with the disappearing right hand of God, and the 'abdication of Belief' as in her previous poems. Transcendence fails when the condition of time and space has not been completed. This 'everywhere and nowhere' paradox increases uncertainties about the possibility of Paradise. Dickinson tries to make a bargain with God and signs a contract committing her soul to him as a guarantee of her immortality.[463] At the same time, she feels ridiculous. There is no affidavit of the existence of heaven and the knowledge of paradise is, at best, dim.

If we do not consider 'Some keep the Sabbath going to Church' as a signal of Dickinson's paganism, then the short poem 'Of Paradise existence' is clearly pagan and spiritual, in the sense of reaching for belief and not necessarily accepting the rituals organized religion. She questions the existence of paradise and breaks the promise to a good and departing soul to paradise in religion.[464]

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[461] Glenn Hughes, *A More Beautiful Question*, p.67.
[462] Charles R. Embry, *Voegelinian Readings of Modern Literature* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2011) p.188.
[463] Jane Donahue Eberwein, 'Emily Dickinson and the Calvinist Sacramental Tradition', *ESQ Journal of American Renaissance33(2)* (1987), 67-81 (p.72).
[464] T. D. Peter, *Living in Death: A Comparative Critique on the Death Poetry of Emily Dickinson* (Singapore: Partridge Publishing, 2013), p.22.

In fact, Dickinson's religious poetry is always trying to reconcile the issues of death, love and identity. Dickinson is not in a hurry to receive a definitive answer. She seemed to enjoy the process of the exploration and discussion, though in the process, she is given to certain capricious moods. Dickinson may doubt God and religion, but she doubts none of them more than she doubts herself. Her attitudes towards religion is always intricate. Thus, in 'This World is not Conclusion', she points out that Christian faith nibbles at her soul. As Dickinson felt uncomfortable for the relationship with God, she did not join the church even though her family did. It is not out of defiance, but a fact that religion paves that way for Dickinson to find out her true beliefs. She chooses poetry to construct her religious dialogues to find her way through her faith crisis and self- doubt and, eventually, finding her way to salvation.

To some extent, reverie in religion answers part of Dickinson's questions about identity, eroticism, immortality and death, which are also a source of her anxiety. Moreover, Dickinson's social environment is governed by religious doctrine. Those themes are sometimes presented as extinction, yet on other occasions, they are dramatized to express the survival of the soul. She once wrote that she stood alone in rebellion, and would never join any church in Amherst. Eberwein estimates that Dickinson is 'a doubter, a decidedly unorthodox quester for assurance'.[465] That is to say, the extent to which religion can redeem Dickinson is limited in her sceptical eyes. We need to understand Dickinson in both a religious and romantic literary tradition, as is believed that religion is organized spirituality while spirituality becomes a form of personalized religion.

Both Dickinson and Keats are loyal to spirituality rather than religion because religion is man-made whereas spirituality is God created. Keats and Dickinson alternately declare faith and doubt.

[465] Jane Donahue Eberwein, 'Introducing a Religious Poet: The 1890 Poems of Emily Dickinson', p.244.

For both poets, the essential question of salvation of the spirit was the feasibility of the survival of the soul. For both poets, spirituality is presented and symbolized in the realm of the wider nature. They see God in nature and feel him around them. The focuses on humanity's feelings, suffering and fulfilment in the poetry of Dickinson and Keats accord with many of those same concerns as religion. Both Dickinson and Keats remain a healthy sceptical attitude towards spirituality.

Spiritual concerns are stimulus for Keats and Dickinson as confronting their own posthumous existences they, imaginatively, yarn for answers from the divine. The mature poems of both poets reveal their fascination with the world of death and decay. They can be criticized for lack of religious faith but cannot be defined as having no sense of the importance of the spiritual even if their engagement with the spiritual question are fraught with anxiety. As the religious emotions of Keats and Dickinson are genuine and intense, traditional religion, to some extent, presents restraints on their soul and modes of behaviour. Keats and Dickinson make consistent imaginative efforts to maintain their personal, often sceptical faith as they approach ideas of the divine and hoped for salvation that finds expression in Keats' fascination with 'uncertainties, Mysteries, and doubts' and Dickinson's emphasis on uncertain certainty.

Chapter 7

The Anxiety of Nature:
Dickinson, Keats, and The Human Seasons

Keats is a critical figure in the nature writing of autumn. His ode 'To Autumn', in particular, reveals that the happiness of human beings largely depends on the welfare nature brings to us.[466] His letter to Fanny in the August of 1819 could provide further evidence that 'The delightful weather […] is the highest gratification I could receive […] Still I enjoy the weather I adore fine Weather as the greatest blessing I can have.' In fact, 'To Autumn' arguably offers a 'feminized' agent of natural process from the outset. It starts with images of being close visitant of the maternal and of the nurturing warmth of the sun and continues with those images:

> Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
> […]
> With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eves run;
> To bend with apples the moss'd cottage-tress,
> And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;
> To swell the ground, and plump the hazel shells
> With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,
> […]

The kingdom of plants is described with words that convey a sense of abundance, excellence, richness, as well as implying the gorgeousness of a female form. Autumn is manifested as a mature woman who is reproducing endless harvest in this stanza, and a combination of dynamic and still movement is intertwined in the lines. The dynamic scene is written along with the verbs like 'bend', 'fill', 'swell' and 'set', compared with the still scene of the existing harvest. The group of those plants shows the fact that different kinds of fruit trees and flowers coexist under the glory of the sun and contribute to the nutrition of the earth, and further suggests that the feminized autumn

[466] Jonathan Bate, 'Living with the Weather', *Studies in Romanticism 35(3)* (1996), 431-447 (p.440.).

cooperates with the wider processes of nature. In fact, the feminized image of the season is assimilated with the different harvests: the vines, cottage-trees and the hazel shells. In other words, the image of the season itself symbolizes the harvesting activities. There is no human speaker in the lines, but there is surely a technique of personification of the season. The natural speakers, however, ensure the harmony among human beings, plants, and animals, and symbolize Keats' love of the environment that possesses feminized characteristics. Reproduction, maternal instinct, and the nurturing ability of nature provides a reciprocal relationship between nature and human culture.

7.1 Harmony, Autumn, and Female Figures

Dickinson would have read Keats' 'To Autumn'. She could have alluded to Keats' 'To Autumn' and have written in the knowledge of Keats' ode, because nature in her own poems is presented as a nurturing and maternal figure. Dickinson's presentation of nature as a woman could be alluding to Keats' line, 'Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness […] Fill all fruit with ripeness to the core', which offers readers a positive view of the female figure of nature. Indeed, Keats' 'To Autumn' provide wonderful point of comparison with Dickinson poems about nature as women. For example, in Dickinson's 'Nature – the Gentlest Mother is', she notes:

> Nature – the Gentlest Mother is,
> Impatient of no child –
> The feeblest – or the waywardest –
> Her Admonition mild –

In the early tradition of Greek myth and Ancient Rome, mother nature come into being when Earth was personified as a goddess. Even the word 'nature' comes from the Latin 'natura'. The word itself has an implication of 'birth'. The first stanza presents nature as gentle, patient, and mild. Dickinson describes nature as a mother, a female image at first sight. This decides the tone of this poem: a

paean. Then the speaker stresses that nature is fair to everything as she is 'impatient' of none. It is proof of her gentleness. That is to say, nature is kind to all children no matter whether they are feeble or wayward. This stanza offers a positive praise which, paradoxically, is constructed through negatives.

In Forest – and the Hill –
By Traveller – be heard –
Restraining Rampant Squirrel –
Or too impetuous Bird –

The focus offers a partial picture of a forest and a hill. The surroundings are so quiet that the footsteps of the traveller are heard. The normally rampant squirrel and impetuous bird detect the danger of a human invasion that they restrain their action. Squirrel and birds are representatives of wayward children. Nature is vigilant towards (and wary of) human beings as if they are destructive, which arouses nature's attention to rebuke her naughty children. It is nature's motherly instinct to act in this way. In this natural scene, humans seem to be excluded, even unwelcome, as unexpected invaders, although the human being is just a passer-by and there is no intention of disturbing these natural habitats. Of course, there is a paradox. If nature is the mother of the universe, why are human beings excluded? Clearly, there is an antagonism between nature and human society. From another aspect, however, readers may find that human beings are allowed to roam in a small, but limited range of nature. This shows a more complicated relationship between nature and human beings. Human beings consider that nature is the creature of God; however, nature imagines human power over the world.

How fair Her Conversation –
A Summer Afternoon –
Her Household, Her Assembly –
And when the Sun goes down –

Here Dickinson returns to mother nature again, stressing her decent manner. The first line implies some measure of harmony between humanity and nature. The speaker is in tune with the preceding stanza, maintaining the 'gentlest' impression by adopting the synonym 'fair'. 'A summer afternoon' is a crucial time as it symbolizes warmth, relaxation, laziness and enjoyment. Henry James praises 'summer afternoon' as the two most beautiful words in the English language.[467] It accords with the personality of mother nature, spreading a maternal glory. The household and assembly include the squirrel and the birds, which represent nature and speak for her. The conversation is between nature and her household, with whom she shows her gentleness.

Her Voice among the Aisles
Incite the timid prayer
Of the minutest Cricket –
The most unworthy Flower –

The last line of the previous stanza gives a continuation to this picture as the darkness approaches. When conversation end, the voice of nature still echoes among the aisles. 'Aisles' often appear in the church, which elevates her voice to some kind of religious power that can incite prayers. Nature is seen as a church earlier in Dickinson's poem when she observes 'Some keep the Sabbath going to church', and that nature is likened to a higher church that is closer to the heaven. 'Timid', on the one hand, reflects the insignificance of the lives of crickets and small flowers; on the other hand, the word represents the unsteadiness of faith at a moment when faith can be on the wane. Mother nature decides the belief of all creatures in her realm and decides the rules by which they live. Nature itself is fair to all creatures. It is only in the second antagonism between nature and humans where we witness the selfishness and prejudice of human beings.

When all the Children sleep –
She turns as long away

[467] Edith Wharton, *A Backward Glance: An Autobiography* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1998).

As will suffice to light Her lamps –
Then bending from the Sky –

With infinite Affection –
And infinite Care –
Her Golden finger on Her lip –
Wills Silence – Everywhere –[468]

Mother nature then has her own space. The lamp of nature is the star in the sky, which is similar to Keats' bright star in the poem of that name. It is the light in the darkness and that also hints to the future (or next day). The behaviour of bending from the sky is like the sunrise and sunset. Nature is waiting for a new day and the continuing cycle of its operation. The last stanza explicitly divinizes nature, endowing her with infiniteness, which differs from human being's limitation. Nature incarnates as the protector of all things. Infiniteness encompasses everything in time and space. It refers to the immeasurability of affection, and immeasurability is also a criterion for measurement. This differs from the words 'waywardest', 'feeblest', 'restraining', 'minutest', 'unworthy' and 'suffice', which are all diminutive. 'Golden finger' implies sagacious silence and secrecy.

Dickinson is overcoming an enduring marginality as a woman poet in a patriarchal society. Combining nature and women has deep metaphorical significance in Dickinson's poetry, as it establishes a female discourse. In her poem 'Nature's Change', the line states that 'Till summer folds her miracle/ As women do their gown'.[469] Nature itself is ascribed the attribute of a woman. It is treated as a queen with her own rituals to perform. In fact, 'Mother' or 'She' nature is a common expression in Keats and Dickinson's nature writing, but they never limit the phrase to only the reproductive role of the female. Keats and Dickinson have thought about how to fit nature into a female body and how women have a closer association with nature in terms of their body and emotion. For instance, the 'feminized' spring and summer in 'To Autumn' are portrayed as a

[468] *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Franklin, p.331.
[469] *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Franklin, p.171-172.

graceful maiden flittering over the fields and taking a nap amidst the corn fields. Besides, Keats tries to establish a discourse for the feminized figure of autumn by metaphorically, absorbing the world of human affairs into nature, which Dickinson also attempts in 'Nature the gentlest mother'.

We read a hidden and tender dislike of humans in 'Nature the gentlest mother'. Although human beings are the children of nature as well, nature considers human begins as an entity that may threaten its own existence. Dickinson is actually questioning human behaviours which break the harmony between nature and human beings. Keats also believes that human beings are shown to need both social and environmental elements to survive and are intrinsic to the network of nature. 'To Autumn' subtly reveals his purpose. For example, in the second stanza,

> Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?
> […]
> Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours.

Compared with the previous stanza, this one endows the still 'harvest' with more participation of human behaviours. The frequent signifying words 'thee', 'thy' and 'thou' first present the shadow of human beings, and the performers of different labours are revealed in the series of harvesting actions. Keats' awe in nature is shown in his portrayal of the 'humanized' Autumn, who does not exploit and destroy nature, and is at the centre of the universe. On the contrary, the humanized season really melts with the wider nature through her participation within the natural process. Jonathan Bate finds in 'To Autumn' that there are linked pairs that are originally not natural, or even contrary: 'mist' and 'fruitfulness', 'bosom-friend' and 'sun', and 'load' and 'bless'; however, Keats dramatizes those hidden links by providing conflict and surprise between them, as well as establishing contiguity among those elements.[470] Therefore, an integrated and well-regulated ecosystem has been shaped in Keats' ode, which largely maintains the biodiversity. As for the

[470] Jonathan Bate, p.442.

harmony between culture and diversity in Dickinson's poem, 'The leaves, like women, interchange', where the elements and phenomenon of nature are feminized into a female manifestation and discourse:

> The leaves like Women, interchange
> Sagacious (Exclusive) confidence –
> Somewhat of Nods, and somewhat
> Portentous inference –
>
> The parties in both cases
> Enjoining secrecy –
> Inviolable compact
> To notoriety.[471]

This is a short poem that portrays the feminine power of nature. The poet starts from the leaves of a tree, personifying them as women. Readers may think in what way are women similar to leaves? The next line is the answer. 'Interchange' can be understood as a physical behaviour of personified leaves with one exchanging things with the other. The exchange between leaves is oxygen. Yet, how does this behaviour relate to women? The leaves seem to twine with each other, which resemble women's whispering in a group. The scene should be gossipy, but the poet combines this behaviour with confidence and praises it as 'exclusive'.[472] It looks as if the speaker assents to the wisdom of the women, considering such communication as intelligent conversations. Leaves, or women, are confident to release their ideas and exchange their faith. 'Interchange' reminds readers to imagine the relative positions of the leaves. As William Jones states, 'the whisper of the leaves appears an interchange of love'.[473] This is a kind of soft and firm power, very typical of female beauty. Later, the following line says 'somewhat of nods', which is an image of people talking and agreeing. We

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[471] *The Poems of Emily Dickinson,* ed. Franklin, p.444.
[472] The word is 'Sagacious' in Franklin's version. Another version which replaces the word with 'Exclusive' stresses sticking together, whereas 'sagacious' emphasizes wisdom and secrecy, not sharing too far but within a small range.
[473] William Jones, 'The Blind Man and Summer', *Bentley's Miscellany 1837-1868* (1842), 466-466.

may not know what exactly they nod about, but we feel that the leaves enjoy the current situation.

'Portentous inference' is a definite turn of the poem. The word 'portentous' suggests a solemn appearance and expectation. Dickinson appears to be invoking both meanings here. If leaves stand for different women, portentous inference implies that some of them are seriously talking with nodding. The leaves group has divided into two, and one of them is secretly hatching a plot. Insiders keep the secret as if a plan is about to be enacted. 'Portentous inference' has both implications of a sign (fate or destiny) and solemnity. However, 'secrecy' announces the end of 'interchanging'. The lines seem as though the secrecy will be spread at any moment. The speaker endows leaves, or women, with rigorous thinking and logic, which is not so common in her time. 'Enjoin' suggests insisting upon agreement at a risk of notoriety. Secrecy goes along with notoriety – that there is a kind of 'compact' or close relationship between them – if people keep quiet, they gain a reputation (notoriety) for secrecy.

'Portentous', 'inference', 'nods' and 'compact', all these words indicate something less certain than our knowledge, which also suggests mystery. It indicates how women stick together to hide their discourse even at risk of getting reputation for being silent, which implies the tradition of being silent is a virtue for women. Once the right moment comes, each leaf settles on a particular patch of earth, as each woman finds their partner. From then on, there is no longer communication among women and leaves. The second stanza is actually a debate about the subject and nature of truth. Notoriety, a matter of reputation, betrays the truth and counters the compact. It is unpredictable. Leaves, or women, should not keep secret for notoriety, and therefore, an inviolable compact can be realized. The arrangement of putting nature in culture shows Dickinson's desire for women to find themselves in patriarchal society and discourse.

Aside from showing the quality of nature being maternal or being acting like women, Keats' 'To Autumn' also delivers the aim of constructing a circling life mode through nature that links with immortality and rebirth. The 'full-grown lambs', as is claimed in the final stanza, implies the first being born stage of life. The 'gathering swallows', on the other hand, implies a return and a new circling of the year. Likewise, Dickinson may also allude to Keats' idea through her presentation of nature in her poem, 'It sifts from Leaden Sieves',

It sifts from Leaden Sieves –
It powders all the Wood.
It fills with Alabaster Wool
The Wrinkles of the Road –

It makes an even face
Of Mountain, and of plain –
Unbroken forehead from the east
Unto the east again –

It reaches to the fence –
It wraps it, rail by rail
Till it is lost in fleeces –
It flings a crystal veil

At first sight, the poem reflects a scene of labour that recalls the second stanza of Keats' 'To Autumn'. 'It' has a mysterious identity. Leaden sieves, wood and powders present a haze. 'Leaden' is dull grey, and implies a heaviness, which establishes a negative mood with a lack of spirit and animation. 'Alabaster', however, refers to colours like snow, which is pure white even pale and lithe. Meanwhile, it can also point to the hardest stone. 'Alabaster Wool' leaves readers to imagine a thing with white colour and soft feeling – freshness and strangeness. Besides, the road here is personified as an old man with wrinkles. Landscape is considered as human body. The whole picture is coloured in a white-grey hue. Later, in the second stanza, the power of 'it' strengthens as it gradually controls the appearance of the landscape. 'Even Face' and 'Unbroken Forehead', replete with wrinkles, helps

to personify the geographic landmarks such as mountain and plain. 'Unbroken' is intriguing here as it conveys a meaning of new and whole, which claims that 'it' will not miss any land. 'From the East' and 'Unto the East' construct a circle of natural phenomena, which implies an overlap of the starting and ending point. 'East' symbolizes the headstream of everything that is admitted in religion, too.[474] It is the routine of the sun and where time begins. This reminds the readers of Dickinson's measurement of life in which life's path is straight or circular.

Dickinson's poem seems to be in an imaginative dialogue with Keats' 'To Autumn'. It is confirmed Dickinson's next stanza as well when the view returns to the 'Fleeces', which resonates with the Wool at the beginning. 'Fleece' symbolizes white sheep – a feeling of being soft. Thus, a circle has been completed. The third stanza shifts from a grand geography to a pastoral scene. The four kinaesthetic verbs 'reaches', 'wraps' 'is lost' and 'deals' are filled with human motivations. In the course of Dickinson's poems, 'It' is so active that. finally, it fills up the vacancy of summer. The last sentence of this stanza goes back to the celestial realm and the starting point of this poem mimicking the idea that reincarnation begins.

The first three stanzas still do not tell readers the identity of the central 'it', but in all, there is a clue that the three stanzas show a downward movement of vision to a more concrete and realistic scene. 'It' keeps a shifting presence and continuous movement. Martin Bickman points out by referring to some of Dickinson's manuscripts that 'it' is more a process and event rather than a clear noun referent,[475] which sounds convincing. The last line of the third stanza seems to fly back to the sky, but the last two stanzas depict a typical rural picture again. The 'vail' seems to be a bridge from

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[474] Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Post-Colonial theory, India and The Mystic East* (London: Routledge, 2013), p.147.
[475] Martin Bickman, "The Snow That Never Drifts': Dickinson's Slant of Language', *College Literature 10(2)* (1983), 139-146 (p.140).

the sky to field. 'crystal veil' makes the transition a heavenly beauty and also endows the harvest fields with. Snow will make the air look like a veil and feels emptiness. Different from the previous three stanzas, 'it' suddenly disappears in this one.

Summer and autumn (with the image of harvest) compresses into a single picture like all those elements crowded into a concentrated moment of harvest in Keats' 'To Autumn'. 'Summer's empty room' demonstrates something the speaker looks forward to in summer but does not happen in the end so that the whole season looks empty for the speaker. The mood feels relieved and delightful overall. However, the ambition of 'it' is far more than that. As a result, 'it' stills the knights and artisans like ghosts, covering their original appearance. The ghost does not have footsteps and leaves no trace on earth and shows only the silence and serenity of 'its' movement.

> On Stump – and Stack– and Stem –
> The Summer's empty Room –
> Acres of seams – where Harvests were –
> Recordless – but for them –
>
> It ruffles wrists of posts –
> As ankles of a queen –
> Then stills its artisans- like Ghosts (Swans) –
> Denying they have been –[476]

Stump, stack and stem, respectively stand for winter, autumn and spring. 'Empty Room' suggests that there is nothing left in summer. 'Recordless' shows the emptiness of scene. 'It Ruffles…a Queen' keeps a nice picture by adding to the shape 'ruff", a kind of white feather for queen. 'Artisans' represents people who are working hard, whereas the snow scene contrasts as no one is devoid of people. Dickinson seems to seek for female equality in the poem. All seem to vanish in the face of nature and under this implication, Dickinson depicts how difficult it is for her as a woman to make

[476] *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson* ed. Martha Dickinson Bianchi (Boston, MA: Little Brown, 1927), p.106-107. Franklin's version of this poem has been extensively condensed and abbreviated.

her identity out. The snow is figuratively a consulter and dealer. 'Denying they have been' indicates no record of 'we have been', a way of making her presence out. For Dickinson, writing on a white page confirms that 'she has been'.

Martin Bickman proposes that the metaphor of wood, powders and fleeces refer to a winter scene in which there is falling snow with great beauty.[477] Margaret Freeman, however, defines it as a snowstorm poem.[478] This sounds reasonable although winter does not directly appear in the lines. H. D. Adamson supplements that 'sifts' compares the snow to flour, showing the feature of falling lightly, in contrast to the leaden sky.[479] The insertion of summer and harvest then has a tone of irony. The snow has power and ambition in its attempt to conquer nature. Yet, it does not realize that nature is unpredictable. It is a poem of the snow encountering all forms of nature.

The poem appears to show us snow filling the spaces once occupied by summer and autumn. Dickinson captures the movement of snow, which connects with the movement of time in one year. It begins with a sad mood but quickly changes by a few healing factors. Snow is bright, compared with grey leaden sieves, which implies that snow is a positive object. The vision of the speaker moves from celestial to the field, from high to low. It contains the happiness of harvest in the end. The field brings the beauty of heaven due to its harvest. Snow, however, adds vitality from another aspect of nature. Dickinson tries to leave the landscape before the covering of snow as snow will obscure what it blankets. The snow itself is a miracle and the poet, who inherently beautifies snow, is in awe of nature. Under the cover of snow, every element of nature is connected. Or rather, snow makes all things equal and ensures there is no distinction between them, including the difference

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[477] Martin Bickman, p.140.
[478] Margaret Freeman, 'Cognitive mapping in literary analysis', *Style 36(3)* (2002), 466-483 (p.468).
[479] H. D. Adamson, *Linguistics and English Literature: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p.56.

between royalty and working people. Similar to the poem 'The Leaves, like women, interchanges', Dickinson hides a language puzzle in this poem, which encourages its readers to propose the dual even trebling implication of each word. It exposes nature's mysticism.

From revisiting Keats' 'To Autumn' and Dickinson's nature writing about autumn, we see how both poets have found the motherly individuality of the natural world, which constructs a dualism between human beings and nature, male and female. Through their presentation of nature, they are trying to change the inferior position of nature in the face of human beings and elevate the status of women in patriarchal context. Both Keats and Dickinson have maintained the caring personality of nature, but they also have tried to treat nature as independent object without oppression that is based on sexuality or physical capability.

7.2 Questioning Nature: Keats and Dickinson

Jonathan Bate defines Keats as a typical 'quasi' ecofeminist due to his constitution of wise female passivity and responsiveness to nature.[480] Bate claims that ecofeminist especially concentrates on woman's closeness to the rhythms of nature.[481] Many natural images employ the code of the woman's body. In many of Keats' poems, women and nature are combined as integrity. The beauty of nature is both physical and spiritual. Yet, at other times, nature seems indifferent to him. Keats mentions Wordsworth in a letter about chamber of maiden thought (May 1818). The letter shows that each time you move between the different rooms of a mansion, you move into a gradual darkling kind of awareness. Keats shares Wordsworth's vision of nature – being positive, but Keats wants to explore what the darkness of nature offers.

[480] Jonathan Bate, *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism* ed. by Laurence Coupe (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 260.
[481] Ibid.

Keats' 'To Autumn' is also a poem that responds to the anxiety of death. The process of dying in 'To Autumn', to some extent, announces the end of a season in natural process, and also the end of a season in Keats' life, which implies a farewell ceremony to glory and a step closer to fading into winter and darkness. The dark side of nature shown in 'To Autumn' also influences the manifestation of nature in other poems by Keats, in which nature is endowed with indifferent, awful and terrifying force that does not really care for humanity. In Keats' earlier poem 'In drear nighted December', he has the following descriptions,

> In drear nighted December,
> Too happy, happy tree,
> Thy branches ne'er remember
> Their green felicity –
> The north cannot undo them
> With a sleety whistle through them
> Nor frozen thawings glue them
> From budding at the prime

Compared with Keats' 'To Autumn', this poem is an imaginative gift directly to winter in which he tries to keep its gorgeous outlook through portraying the emotions of trees and brooks in its landscape. He depicts that happy memory in warmer times can touch one in the dark, drear and cold hours of December. 'Drear' is a poetic term for dreary, which represents being unpleasant, dull and depressing. The first octet describes how trees grow and exist in nature. Trees have their green times, which is regarded as 'felicity'. 'Felicity' of those trees is like the bee's felicity in Dickinson's line where 'The Flower must not blame the Bee –'. Dickinson's bee clearly knows this felicity, and with it, he gets to the flower on purpose. However, Keats' trees seem not to feel and remember this impulse as a consequence of the 'feel of not to feel it', where the absence of sensation is so acute that it is palpably felt. They lose all memory of what has previously happened even though this felicity has equal importance to trees as to bees so that even the 'sleety whistle' and the 'frozen

thawings' cannot 'glue' them. The suffering of the coldness and darkness is unable to deny past happiness. The contrast between the wintry coldness and the summertime light is the essence of the contrast between death and viridity.

That Keats' trees are 'too happy', in 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', as reminders, which implies that the trees probably have not realized their dilemma in the current landscape. The poet is arguably trying to protect the trees by colouring the season with his own emotion. In the eyes of the speaker, no matter how cold and dark the winter is, the trees will not memorize it, just like they cannot memorize the season before the winter. At last, they will return to their 'prime'. The freezing winter cannot destroy their creative ability, which is for trees' own good. The happiness of trees does not depend on the things they experienced, but what they lost. 'Too happy' implies that the poet realizes the emotion is not permanent, but is a part of continuing process. In the third stanza of 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', Keats claims 'happy, happy boughs!', 'happy melodist' and 'happy love' to symbolize part of the urn's fixed and sculptured permanence. 'Too happy' in this poem stresses 'feeling loss' in order to know what is 'true happy', which accepts that there will be loss.

In 'The Human Seasons', Keats also advocates that we should accept winter as a part of loss to gain true happiness. It sounds like desperate jealousy on the part of the speaker, but of course Keats comes to realize that happiness can co-exists with loss and melancholy.

> In drear-nighted December,
> Too happy, happy brook,
> Thy bubblings ne'er remember
> Apollo's summer look;
> But with a sweet forgetting,
> They stay their crystal fretting,
> Never, never petting
> About the frozen time.

The stanzas of 'In drear-nighted December' remind the readers that they should not forget that it is

still in this cold winter. The amnesia of trees and brooks is neither good nor bad as they cannot remember both pleasant and unpleasant times. This, to some extent, supports them to live from one season to another and to keep unaffected in the harsh conditions. On the other hand, we can understand that not being bothered by the kind of surroundings is another way to maintain 'felicity'. The stanzas reveal that Keats is fascinated by nature for its sensuous appeal in this poem. Trees have colours, which satisfies his visual requirement, whereas the brook has its coolness and calming sounds, which appeals his touch and auditory senses. Besides, the scent of flowers and the softness of petals in other plant poems realize his pleasure in olfaction and touch. Nature provides a feast for all the senses.

> Ah! Would 'twere so with many
> A gentle girl and boy –
> But were there ever any
> Writh'd not of passed joy?
> The feel of not to feel it,
> When there is none to heal it
> Nor numbed sense to steel it,
> Was never said in rhyme.[482]

The final octet changes to discuss humans' memory. Girls and boys stand for humans. Two exclamations after 'Ah!' and 'boy!' conveys a mood of relaxation as if Keats has found the answer. Next, the speaker questions whether human beings are like trees and brooks. We humans do have memories of the felicity, or the 'passed joy' that is short-lived. At the same time, we suffer in the process of wishing to keep it. We should have this feeling of the past whereas trees and brooks, representatives of other natural elements of the world, do not have. We cannot be as happy as them. This is human beings' specialty in the world – the capacity of remembering good and bad times and the capacity of feeling melancholy when enduring loss.[483] The word we normally use about nature's

[482] *Complete Poems*, ed. Jack Stillinger, p.163.
[483] Duncan Wu, 'In drear nighted December: The Newly Acquired KSMA Manuscript', *The Keats-Shelley Review*

incapacity in this respect is 'insentient'. Of course, the speaker of the poem does also refer to the trees and the brook as 'too happy', which is more than just a fond illusion on the speaker's part. Feelings are not actually feelings, which may become nothingness at any time. 'The feel of not to feel' is a wonderful phrase by Keats, sharing a sentiment with the beginning of 'Ode to a Nightingale' might have alluded to the phrase: 'My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains […]' The phrase is often wrongly understood as referring to loneliness, sensation and feeling, but the fact is that it stresses the absence of sensation and feeling, and it is so acute that it becomes almost a sensation in the sense itself. It is a paradox of course. The absence of feeling is being felt like Dickinson's claim that 'I could not see to see' in her poem.

7.3 Nature and Temporality

In the poem 'The Poet', Keats divides time into four parts again, 'At morn, at noon, at eve, and middle night'. Similarly, he says that a man 'passes' through time as well. In the time challenge of this poem, the man has a talisman to shelter himself. In the last line, Keats' stresses the mortal head of the man, which shares similar concerns with 'mortal nature' in the Human season poem. In Keats' sonnet, 'On the Grasshopper and Cricket', there are descriptions of natural beauty in a warm spring and summer depicted through Keatsian 'luxury'. In the opening, Keats' claims 'The Poetry of earth is never dead',[484] which speaks to the possibility of immorality. Winter in this sonnet is also tough for animals; however, he believes in the seasonal return of warmth and attendant new life. Keats' dialogue with nature addresses two key questions, one to do with beauty and the other to do with eternality. The significance of the human world depends on the significance of the natural world.

32(1) (2018), 22-27 (p.24).
[484] *Complete Poems,* ed. Jack Stillinger, p.54.

Therefore, the time of nature in Keats' poems is always a metaphor for various stages of life.

As with Keats, Dickinson has a poetic sensitivity towards time. Dickinson, however, stresses time fragments in her poems, focusing on things that happen within a span. Compared with Keats' preference of experiencing change and transience itself, Dickinson's interest rests with the abundant stories offered by the eternity of nature. There are seasonal poems such as 'Before you thought of spring', 'The springtime's pallid landscape', 'I know a place where summer strives', 'The one that could repeat the summer day', 'Farther in summer than the birds', 'Twas later when the summer went' 'A something in a summer's day', and 'Besides the autumn poets sing'. There are also poems concerned with daily occurrence and the measure of time such as 'Will there really be a morning?', 'The sun just touched the morning', 'Angels in the early morning', 'Morning is the place for dew', 'Bring me the sunset in a cup', 'This is the land the sunset washes', 'How the old mountains drip with sunset', 'A spider sewed at night' and 'The moon was but a chin of gold', which demonstrate Dickinson's imaginative ability to construct stories of significance for each living being no matter how insignificant they may appear to be. She is continuing to deal with the question of how to be recorded. Her writing is a kind of record of these glories of nature, but it is laced through with an anxiety about her own posterity, as she does not know if her work will be read centuries later.

Dickinson's unique observational view and her anxiety about her posthumous legacy makes her many images of nature not merely pictures, but also cultural artefacts that can reflect existential issues and crisis. For example, the back of the birds and the return of the seasons, in the eyes of the poet, is observed as a signal of rebirth and the cycle of life. In her poem 668,

> ''Nature'' is what we see–
> The Hill – the Afternoon–
> Squirrel – Eclipse – the Bumble bee–
> Nay – Nature is Heaven–

Nature is what we hear–
The Bobolink – the Sea–
Thunder – the Cricket–
Nay – Nature is Harmony–
Nature is what we know–
Yet have no art to say–
So impotent Our Wisdom is
To her Simplicity.[485]

The first line of this short poem admits the visual field of human beings. The line states that nature shows its originality in the face of human beings without any hiding. It also suggests that we tend to take for granted what we habitually see. Yet nature is more than meets the eye. Or rather, nature is more than our physical vision of it; we do not perceive nature enough in a heavenly kind of way. This explains the repeated 'Nay' in lines four and eight. Then the following three lines exemplify what we actually see in nature: the hill (topographical), squirrel and bee (zoological), afternoon and eclipse (astronomical). Dickinson's selection of natural reference is meticulous by considering different dimensions in nature. For instance, 'afternoon' stands for warmth and light, whereas 'eclipse' is a symbol of coolness and darkness. 'Nay' in the fourth line functions in the sense of working more as an intensifier, adding emphasis, as if to say 'even more than this'. The word advances this relationship of praise via describing nature as 'heaven', lifting it to a sublime level and divine status.

Line five to line eight stress our auditory sense of nature by capturing the sound of the bobolink, the sea, the thunder and the cricket. The sea and the thunder show a grander sight (and vision) of nature, the sound of which is awe-inspiring. The bobolink and the cricket, however, represent small creatures whose sounds are like murmurs. Dickinson intersperses her descriptions of big things and small things, implying that she sees all things equally and as equal to one another.

[485] *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Franklin, p.322.

The sense of size reminds us of Dickinson's habit of poetic measurement. Another 'nay' concludes the personality of nature – although there are various voices from creatures, phenomena, and geography, which all coexist harmoniously.

The third part of this poem takes readers to a cognitive understanding of nature by comparing the greatness of nature's art with the limitation of human knowledge, which is crucially important for both Dickinson and for Keats as poets. This shows that human beings often consider nature as something overwhelmingly complicated, a view with which the poet does not agree as Dickinson advocates nature's 'simplicity'. Human beings think they know about nature but, as Dickinson points up, they do not recognize the fundamental gap between word and world.

Dickinson lists three qualities of nature: heaven, harmony and simplicity. 'Heaven' lifts earthly existence to a transcendental level, building a connection between divinity and humanity. The relationship between human beings and nature, as is claimed, is complex but always intertwined. When nature is endowed with sublimity, the poet opens an imaginative door for human beings through which to glimpse God. 'Harmony' here is equated with peace and compatibility in a bid to find a balance and coexistence between ecology (nature), society (human beings) and spirituality. Dickinson has an acute sensitivity to environmental matters and her idea of nature as a source of harmony anticipates a good deal of current day thinking about eco-critical concerns. Spirituality combines nature with divinity, and in this way, human beings can really reconcile with nature. This, resonates again with what 'heaven' wants to achieve. It is not easy to reconcile these three forces, for there is always one that attempts to be dominant. 'Simplicity' shows the most inexpressible quality of nature when its magnificence lies in mysterious simplicity. In her poetry, Dickinson has explored a great number of botanical (flowers, trees), zoological (birds, squirrel, bees, butterflies,

cricket), topographical (seas, rivers, hills and ocean), meteorological (wind, clouds and forest) and astronomical (sun, moon, stars, sky, seasons, day and night) aspects of nature. Imaginatively representing these various aspects of the natural world, Dickinson explores the following issues: from nature: woman discourse, sensation, immortality, rebirth, temporal distance, and immortality.

However, there actually exists confusion and frustration in Dickinson not being able to fully accept the mortality of humanity. Immortality and mortality alternately emerge in her poetry. The small, fragile (cricket, bumblebee and squirrel) and temporary (eclipse) sides of nature represent mortality, which means replacement will soon happen. The vast (hill and sea) and circling (afternoon) aspects of nature, however, stand for immortality, as they will, at least, not change for long periods. In essence, Dickinson always admires nature even, if at times, she is terrified by its power. Sometimes she represents nature as awesome, depicting its sublime qualities and characteristics, and presenting it as baffling, elusive and destructive force. In some of her nature poems, a darker mood and sense of nature prevail. For example, in 'What mystery pervades a well', Dickinson narrows her view down to a small well, and finally gives way to the anxiety of death. 'An abyss's face' is a perfect metaphor of abstraction, arousing her sceptical feeling towards those philosophers and researchers of nature. The link between nature and death balances her feeling about nature as a saviour. Any natural phenomenon, in the view of the poet, has a potential metaphorical meaning for human life. For example, the unhooking of the leaves and scooping of the dust in Dickinson's poems often convey an expectation of the release of power. Summer in some of Dickinson's poems is presented as endless. This abundance of summer conveys her desire for immortality. Finally, though, our body goes to the clay in nature. Put differently, to know nature fully is to be dead.

The charm of nature offers Dickinson's imagination both a source of harmony, but also a

means to encounter more terrifying existential concerns, such as loss, death, and destruction. Dickinson sometimes feels nature distance us human beings, too. She experiences such feelings by doubting the reasonability of the immortality of natural processes and the intimacy of nature with human beings. In 'Of Bronze–and Blaze', Dickinson values her artistic creations and ranks the universe of natural products over her own. The universe, as an extension of nature, shows its indifference to everything except itself. The speaker of this poem tries to imitate nature and in an act of imaginative bravado seeks to transcend her own mortal condition and achieve the same aloofness adopted by the universe.

Of Bronze – and Blaze–
The North – tonight –
So adequate – it forms –
So preconcerted with itself –
So distant – to alarms –
An Unconcern so sovereign
To Universe, or me –
Infects my simple spirit
With Taints of Majesty –
Till I take vaster attitudes –
And strut upon my stem –
Disdaining Men, and Oxygen,
For Arrogance of them –

The feeling of this poem differs from 'Nature is what we see', as Dickinson expands her horizon to the largeness of the universe and is no longer focused on the small and concrete creatures of nature. Dickinson's choice of language constructs a riddle in the poem. It starts from an astronomical reference – aurora,[486] the celestial signal of North. The language transfers to 'bronze and blaze' to reveal the dazzling of the lights. The colour is mysterious and fluctuating, constructing shades of dark and light sky. 'North' is the central direction in the poem, equal to the 'East' in her 'It sifts from

[486] David Hiatt, 'Dickinson's of Bronze and Blaze', *The Explicator 21(1)* (1962), 10-13 (p. 11). In modern references, it is called 'aurora borealis', the so-called Northern Lights.

Leaden Sieves' poem. Malina Nielson and Cynthia Hallen have counted up the number of place names that appeared in Dickinson's poems, up to a hundred and sixty-two,[487] among which directions show clear metaphorical significance. Different directions symbolize different civilizations in which religions, cultures and beliefs are represented variously by Dickinson. Christopher Benfey further points out that as a northerner, Dickinson buries most of her mystery in that region.[488]

In this poem, the North is an 'adequate', 'preconcerted' and 'distant' 'sovereign'. The three adjectives reveal that the North is a well-organized, systematic and mysterious territory. 'Unconcern' highlights an aloof indifferent attitude as the North aurora keeps its distance from anything within the universe. Based on a series of compliments, the poet considers The Northern Lights as a sublime phenomenon.[489] It is, for Dickinson, an independent union of lights, which is endowed with inaccessible divinity. The speaker of this poem may not fully satisfy the aloof attitude of the North aroura, as she describes such attitude of the North 'infects' her 'simple' spirit, which reminds Dickinson's readers of the 'simplicity' of nature. Human beings feel the terror from this sublime light.[490] Naturally, the speaker is complicating the organization of the North. 'Taints' can be regarded as slander of the North as the poet uses an ironic combination of 'taints' and 'majesty' (royalty). It may also be in a light-hearted way of implying that her simple spirit is corrupted by the glory of such majestic sights. Yet, she also means 'taints' in the older sense of tinted or tinged to suggest that her spirit will be coloured with majestic effect.

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[487] Malina Nielson and Cynthia Hallen, 'Emily Dickinson's Place names', *Names 54(1)* (2006), 5-21 (p.5).
[488] Christopher Benfey, *American Audacity Literary Essays North and South* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2010), pp.48-50
[489] Carol Quinn, 'Dickinson, Telegraphy, and the Aurora Borealis', *The Emily Dickinson Journal 13(2)*, (2004), 58-78 (p.60).
[490] Carol Quinn, p.60.

At the beginning, the speaker treats the aroura with awe. However, 'And strut upon my stem' creates a turn of the poem and achieves a final balance with previous lines. The speaker has been influenced by the North. As a result, her view becomes as destructive as the light when she 'disdains' men and oxygen. It could also be the interior willingness of the speaker. Men and oxygen are earthbound metaphors. Men should be the centre of nature. Oxygen, however, is essential for men, as well as other creatures to exist in the universe. The close of the poem ushers in a new perspective more closely attuned to mortality and the fate of the individual:

> My Splendors, are Menagerie–
> But their Competeless Show
> Will entertain the Centuries
> When I, am along ago,
> An Island in dishonored Grass–
> Whom none but Daisies – know.[491]

The second part of the poem seems to be a trace of individual destiny and a process of separation when the speaker places himself (herself) in a small position. The tone is not as aloof as it is in the former text as if the speaker attempts to keep out of the battle between the North and the universe. 'Splendor' should be connected with Dickinson's poetic creation, which claims the glory of one's life. 'Menagerie' is a metaphor for her talent, reflecting how diverse her poetic creations are and will be.[492] However, it is noticeable that although the menagerie shows diversity, there exists a sense of limitation, boundary, and captivity, which might be Dickinson's sense of her own poetic dilemma. Compared with 'me', the North is competeless,[493] the glory of which will remain for centuries – a signal of immortality. Yet, 'I' will finally die in this century, and the body of me will make the Grass 'dishonored'. The sublime light does not bring hope to the speaker as Dickinson

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[491] *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Franklin, p.142.
[492] There is an interesting comparison with W. B. Yeats, who talks about his poetic dives as circus animals (see 'The Circus Animals' Desertion')
[493] This word is presumably coined by Dickinson herself. It is understood as 'peerless', or without competition.

imagined so that 'I' can escape outside of time.[494] 'Moreover, 'Daisies–' makes the condition of me even more inferior as the noun shows the extreme smallness and meanness of life.

The last few lines of this poem not only refer to the temporary and unvalued nature of a human being's life but also connect with death. The general splendour of nature shows the 'aroura' overwhelmingly surpassing the ability of human beings because nature creates marvelousness only through its self-contained power.[495] Dickinson's treatment of human mortality is no longer confined merely in comparison to the immortality of nature. She takes actions to positively alienate herself from the naturally immortal process: she criticizes the cool aloofness and, ironically, shows that her splendours cannot compete for the nature's light; she admits the 'competeless' show of nature, but feels eager to display her own 'menagerie'. Richard Brantly considers this process as a naturalization of Dickinson's idealism and secularization of her reverence for divinity.[496]

7.4 The Anxiety of Nature Writing: Keats and Dickinson

Nature is alluring and terrifying, but it is an important muse to Keats and Dickinson. The positive images seem to offer a resolution to the problem of self-dwelling, but the negative images remind us of the dark and indifferent qualities of nature. It is too naïve to regards nature as absolute salvation for Keats and Dickinson. Both Keats and Dickinson are raising and exploring the issue of anxiety through nature. Nature is the inspiration, the muse, and the living force to both poets. Moreover, nature permits Keats and Dickinson to examine their complex and conflicting attitudes towards idea of the divine and the sublime. Unfortunately, neither divinity nor nature do assure Keats or Dickinson of redemption and, ironically, often heighten their anxieties about existential concerns.

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494 Carol Quinn, p.60.
495 Carol Quinn, p.68.
496 Richard Brantley, *Emily Dickinson's Rich Conversation: Poetry, Philosophy, Science* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp.52-54.

Nature writing, for Keats and Dickinson, is not an end to their anxieties, but a further manifestation of their anxieties about temporality, death and posterity.

Chapter 8

Coda

The Anxiety of Imagination:
Nature, the Divine, and Conflicted Selfhood in Keats and Dickinson

Imagination creates a means by which poets travel back and forth in time, starting from the present and moving into the past. After a series of these kinds of imaginative journeys, the mind returns to the present and obtains a higher recognition of reality and self-understanding. Stephen Gurney proposes a Heideggerian reading as a way of understanding the limitation of imagination and transcendence in Keats, as a mode of 'finite transcendence'. He claims that Keats' nightingale does not represent a total transcendence due to our finite limitations.[497] Or rather, the nightingale dies like other creatures in nature, and there is nothing infinite. However, the symbol is that the song, rather than the bird, is persistent.

Similarly, Dickinson's imagination foreshadows this sense of 'finite transcendence' – a power of surpassing present accomplishment for future potential during an unfinished human life.[498] Dickinson once noted in her letter that 'The possible slow fuse is lit by the imagination'. In the world of imagination, truth is exposed exquisitely. In Dickinson's imagination, the external world is the signature of her spiritual reality. It constructs an intelligible world in which the poet has a concept of the world at first, and then is able to feel it. This is different from the real and visible world as Dickinson knows already what the external world is. This sense of imagination grows out of Dickinson's reading of Plato's theory of forms.[499] Imagination is the transcendental horizon of

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[497] Stephen Gurney, "Finite Transcendence' in Keats' 'Ode to a Nightingale': A Heideggerian Reading', *Soundings*: *An Interdisciplinary Journal* (1983), 46-69 (p.46).
[498] Stephen Gurney, p.47.
[499] Richard Brantley, 'The Empirical Imagination of Emily Dickinson', *The Wordsworth Circle32(3)* (2001), 144-148 (p.144).

being, and poetic language attempts to capture the concept of what the poet perceives.

The finite transcendence of imagination implies that the process of redemption is in some way an immanent one. That is, God is not contained within the world but within the limits of human reason. The topic of imagination divides the poetry of Keats and Dickinson into two categories, one is focused on the external existence – out of the self; the other concentrates on the inner self. As for the external existence, the beauty and the importance of the universe pertain to them and yet are abstract, so the mission of imagination is to make them visible through language and lend them into concrete poetic shapes. From the lens of the inner self-existence, on the other hand, imagination is an outcome of a poet's insight into the world. Thus, imagination should act as a broker between the self and the outer world. The dualism of the self and the other construct a compound vision[500] that enables the existence of eternity from transience of external from inner. Imagination is both positive and negative experience, and it indicates a mediate anxiety about the ideas on the reality, art and its limitations. Is the ideal achievable and the real tramped by it? Keats and Dickinson explore this tension in the poetic debates of the self.

8.1 The Transcendental Dream: Constructing an Ideal World in Keats and Dickinson

Keats senses of things are sublimated through his imagination and into his unremitting pursuit of artistic beauty. Imagination contains his ideal kingdom of beauty, in which beauty and truth form a highly idealized and immortal muse. As is stated in Book 1, *Endymion*,

> A thing of beauty is a joy forever:
> Its loveliness increases; it will never
> Pass into nothingness; but still will keep
> A bower quiet for us, and a sleep
> Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing.

[500] Judith Banzer, 'Compound Vision: Emily Dickinson and the Metaphysical Poets', *American Literature 32(4)* (1961), 417-433 (p.417).

Mythologically, ‘A thing of beauty’ refers to Endymion’s encountering with Selene. Endymion considers this sort of beauty as a joy of immortality, but, in ‘Ode on Melancholy’, Keats proffers that ‘beauty must die’. Transitory beauty and eternal beauty create, for Keats, a tension about the perishability. ‘Loveliness’ is connected with that sleep ‘full of sweet dreams’, where an ordinary mortal falls in love with a goddess. Keats allows a story to develop within a story, a dream within a dream, which anticipates the dream of Madeline. Endymion encounters Selene in his dreams, and there exists a question about the authenticity and validity of his dream. Keats considers that beauty and loveliness in the dream will never become ‘nothingness’, which implies the immortal nature of the dream. ‘Increase’ pushes loveliness into a positive extremity by contrast with ‘nothingness’, which is the opposite of extremity and hints at a set of terms for a philosophical debate. ‘Sweet’ is consistent with beauty and loveliness, all of which suggests Keats’ imaginative to supplement the losses of a dreary reality. Tortured by the dearth of reality, Keats works hard to maintain the ideal of a ‘sweet, ‘healthy’ and ‘quiet’ sleep. Readers feel from these lines that Keats’ appeal to the ideal is maintained by holding in abeyance a more tragic sense of reality.

> Therefore, on every morrow, are we wreathing
> A flowery band to bind us to the earth,
> Spite of despondence, of the inhuman dearth
> Of noble natures, of the gloomy days,
> Of all the unhealth and o’er-darkened ways

By contrast with all beauties in the previous stanza, this one hints at the existence of negative aspects of the real that haunt Keats’ imagination. Endymion’s dream pauses here while Keats continues his own imagination. ‘Bind us to the earth’ reveals that Endymion is stopping putting himself in the divinity and is accepting his mortal limitations. Finding things of beauty makes Endymion content with earthly connections, but ‘Despondence’, ‘inhuman’, ‘dearth’, ‘gloomy’, ‘unhealth’ and

‘darkened’ suggest a more disturbing sense of the real lurks beneath Endymion’s dreams. Keats’ imagination resists a return to the tragic awareness of reality. Keats’ use of ‘Spite of’ shows a clear concession to the real, but also indicates his imaginative determination to hold out or the ideal:

> Made for our searching: yes, in spite of all,
> Some shape of beauty moves away the pall
> From our dark spirits. Such the sun, the moon,
> Trees old and young, sprouting a shady boon
> For simple sheep; and such are daffodils
> With the green world they live in; and clear rills
> That for themselves a cooling covert make
> ’Gainst the hot season; the mid-forest brake,
> Rich with a sprinkling of fair musk-rose blooms:

In the space of imagination, the power of beautiful things is stronger than the darkness when Keats believes that all the ‘pall’ will be moved away. Such a description, however, makes beauty less abstracted and see Keats’ imagination conceded to a more troubling awareness of the real. ‘Our dark spirits’ implies that Endymion is directed back to an earthly identity. ‘Dark’ stands on the opposite side against ‘beauty’. The shape of beauty includes the sun and the moon, which stands for brightness. ‘Sun’ and ‘Moon’ have the nature of divinity as they are heavenly bodies, and ‘Selene’ is the goddess of the moon.

‘Trees… sprouting a shady boon’ reminds Keats’ readers of what trees symbolize in ‘In drear nighted December’, where the speaker thinks that spring or hope will return no matter how dark the current time. Trees, sheep and daffodils represent the voice of small creatures in the world, the life of which are initially simple and mortal. ‘Green’ here not only stands for vitality but also is a symbol of sustainability, returning and eternality. ‘Green world’, for Keats’ imagination, symbolizes expectation and hopeful prospect. Keats quietly endows the mortal creatures with the potential of immortal significance. ‘Cooling covert’ stands against ‘hot season’, which aims to give those

creatures a period of mediation and respite. Keats' momentary poetic pause puns on the word 'brake' and depicts the scene replete with musk-rose blooms. These small creatures fall, momentarily, under Keats imaginative shelter and protection from life's stark realities.

> And such too is the grandeur of the dooms
> We have imagined for the mighty dead;
> All lovely tales that we have heard or read:
> An endless fountain of immortal drink,
> Pouring unto us from the heaven's brink.[501]

Keats gives 'the dooms' the plural form to stressing the existence of that 'doom'. Until we die, each time we wake up we will be suffering. Death is the destination of the 'doom'. Keats admits there is 'grandeur' in the doom as he regards the annals of time. The record and memory of those beings, symbolically, creates the 'immortal drink', which equates with 'heaven brink' and implies a link between sublimity and death. Keats uses the perspective of Endymion to praise what he does not dare to admit in reality – the beauty of death. Through *Endymion*, Keats develops his ability to wander on the boundary of reality and imagination, but, eventually, we see a braver Keats in imagination when he confronts more directly those gloomy aspects of this mortal world. At his most positive, Endymion believes that 'fellowship divine' is the highest form of happiness, and this dream is the realizing process of such a relationship. Beauty exists in the relationship with the goddess, the symbol of beauty. Such a relationship enables the combination of souls to reach the heavenly level of love: immortal and transcendent joy. The excerpt shows Keats' aesthetic sense in his imagination: earthly life is full of tests and despair, and beauty assists us to temporarily forget those hatred things. Beauty will not be extinguished with the death of mortal beings, and it will never cease to exist.

Endymion resembles what is addressed in Keats' letter of chamber of maiden thought. There

[501] John Keats, *Endymion* (London: E. Moxon, Son and Company, 1873), p.1-2.

is a house with many rooms moving from chamber of maiden thought into the darker – the over dark and passageways. The phrase Keats uses in fact show movement from the possibilities of ideal world of harmony, nature and beauty. The darker implies a more troubled disturbance of the world. Keats mentions Wordsworth by saying that poetry of Wordsworth touches on the darkness, but never quietly explores those darkened passageways. Keats will appreciate the ideal world of beauty and natural harmony, but the world will press more closely to those fantasies of the barrier of the reality and explore the darker avenue.

Imagination can transcendentally escape from reality as much as it provides a tragic encounter with the real. These tensions between the ideal and the real are captured in Keats' insistence of a connection between beauty and truth. The world of spirit, however, fancies and makes up what reality cannot give him. The validity of imagination is confirmed as Keats finds beauty and truth which approach sublimity. He considers that imagination and its empyreal reflection is the same as human life and its spiritual repetition.[502] Newell Ford defines this mode as 'prefigurative imagination', which aims to seek the identification of beauty and truth and the implication behind it. Spiritual beauty is the source of true joy, and thus can be forever. Imagination endows beauty and truth with permanence. In Keats' letter, the well-known statement in relation to imagination and beauty is that 'What the imagination seizes as beauty must be truth, whether it existed before or not,'[503] which can be interpreted that imaginative beauty is an embodiment of the truth.

Endymion is finally reunited with Cynthia (an embodiment of his moon goddess lover). He leaves the mortal world and goes with his divine live. Yet his sister, Peona is left to find her way home through a gloomy wood. This is a wonderful contrast between Endymion's union with the

[502] John Keats, *Selected Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p.36.
[503] Ibid.

divine, ideal, and transcendental goddess lover and his sister being left finding her way through the dark world of the real all by herself. The ideal and the real exist in anxious tension, as Endymion finds his lover between the ideal beauty of nature and the darkling passageways in which he wanders. The ideal forms of beauty, nature, and harmony contrasts with reality of darkness and gloom, which usher into a world of romance a more troubling and tragic sensibility

Similar to Keats**,** Dickinson, imaginatively, constructs her ideal world in a transcendental dream. In 'I started Early – Took my Dog –', Dickinson writes,

I started Early – Took my Dog –
And visited the Sea –
The Mermaids in the Basement
Came out to look at me –

In Dickinson's imaginative seascape dream, the dog, the mermaids and the speaker are harmoniously interactive. Dickinson chooses the 'sea' as the context arguably because the sea implies infiniteness and possibilities, and the speaker can occupy an equal position as other creatures in the scene. The image of the 'Sea' is open and moving, unlike a garden, which might suggest a closed and still surrounding. The 'Sea' indicates Dickinson's ambition of extending the boundary of her imagination to endlessness, as well as magnifying her ideal world so that it can contain numerous possibilities.

And Frigates – in the Upper Floor
Extended Hempen Hands
Presuming Me to be a Mouse–
Aground – opon the Sands –

There is a downward movement in the scene. 'basement' and 'upper Floor' are closed to the narrative of terrestrial space. 'Basement' has the sense of domestic room on the lower level. It is an unusual description of the sea. Hempen Hands, however, is in relation to upper floor and implies the rope. The metaphor reflects Dickinson's reclusive condition where she tries to imagine the Sea

in the sensation with which she is familiar with. More disturbing thoughts and presences unsettle the primary harmony established earlier in the poem:

> But no Man moved Me – till the Tide
> Went past my simple Shoe –
> And past my Apron – and my Belt
> And past my Boddice – too –

The language takes the sea from a magical place to a threatening and unfriendly surrounding. Dickinson uses irony by pointing up how nobody notices 'me' on the sand until the tide comes. The poet uses 'no Man' here, revealing that the isolated feeling stems from the indifference of the human begins rather than nature itself. The words show the masculine figure of sea, which increases a sense of urgency. My 'Shoe', 'Apron', 'Belt' and 'Boddice' portray a typical image of a family female. The tides come and wets all of my belongings, which suggests a sense of invasion. The intrusive image reflects that it should be a relaxing trip, but there is conflict:

> And made as He would eat me up–
> As wholly as a Dew
> Opon a Dandelion's Sleeve–
> And then – I started – too –

In this stanza, Dickinson returns from an interaction with human beings to the world of nature again when it focuses on a small plant – a Dandelion. The image of Dandelion is light and easily dispersed, which implies the smallness and the fragility of life. 'He' here is the personification of the tide, but 'He' is unfriendly to me at least. It is the first image of nature that brings pressure to bear upon the poet-speaker. 'Start' seems to resonate with the same word in the first stanza, but actually now carries the connotation of, 'I' am startled by the threat of the tide. The 'sea' deeply impresses Dickinson's mind so that she longs for speaking out this symbol in nature. There exists a balance between the essence and the representation. Likewise, the Dandelion already mentioned is the representation of tenacious vitality while the tide is representation of a threat as well. The scene is

strange when the tide seems to 'eat me up' and becomes a 'dew' falling down to the dandelion. On the whole, Dickinson's poem offers a compromise between opposing forces and supporting forces, imaginative acts of rejection and acceptation.

> And He – He followed – close behind –
> I felt His Silver Heel
> Opon my Ancle – Then My Shoes
> Would overflow with Pearl–

The tide is still not yet out, and its power remains strong. The speaker tried her utmost to escape from its domain, but the speaker finds it hard to avoid its pursuit. It sounds as if 'He' is the hunter. The 'Silver Heel' may refer to the colour of the tide from a macro view. When its heel touches 'my' ankle, the speaker feels as if she is consumed by the masculine sea. The 'Pearl' is symbolic as well, as with Silver Heel, which implies the attraction of the sea – captivating and enchanting. The poet is imagining a possibility of being swallowed by the sea, possibly, an implication of dangerous beauty in sublimity. It goes against the initial calmness of visiting the sea with which the poem started emphasizing the movement from calm start to startled emotions. Eventually, there is a point when threat and beauty coexist:

> Until We met the Solid Town–
> No One He seemed to know–
> And bowing – with a Mighty look–
> At me – The Sea withdrew [504]

The speaker keeps running from the real and escaping through a journey of imagination and, by the end of the poem, she sees her own destination. 'We' accomplishes a temporary combination of the speaker and the Sea. However, in the face of human creation, the tide emerges a 'mighty' look to bow to 'me'. 'Mighty' suggests sublimity in nature. It is also a word used of God the creator, and this points to the power and majesty of nature in the form of the sea. It resembles the majestic sense

[504] *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. R. W. Franklin, p.293.

of the sea in 'Wild Nights'. 'The Sea withdrew' because he enters the realm of human beings, where he loses his dominant position. On this basis, the beginning of the poem hints that the speaker actually invades nature. It is observed into two different 'me' (a capitalized 'Me' in the third stanza and a lowercase one in this stanza) as well. Therefore, initial harmony is broken. The beginning and the end of the poem convey two different emotions from a relaxed one to a frightening one. It reflects a reality of the relationship between nature and human beings. 'I' feels a sense of loss in the end. Dickinson's idea resembles Keats with regards to the principle of believing that the surprise of truth can remain in the world of imagination.

The poem starts with fancy but ends in the sublimity of imagination. It is hard to say if Dickinson exaggerates the power of the sea; however, it is no doubt a symbol of infiniteness in and sublimity of imagination. If the sea symbolizes infiniteness in nature, the brain of human beings symbolizes, for Dickinson, a divine realization of the imagination. In this poem, the brain includes the external world as represented by the sea. It reminds readers of Dickinson's another poem (632), in which she states 'The Brain – is wider than the Sky –', 'The Brain is deeper than the sea –' and 'The Brain is just the weight of God'.[505] The poem can be understood from Dickinson's sceptical religious tendencies as it relies on the hymn form. Keats and Dickinson are establishing their ideal world through defining a poetic space that include all the hopeful and darker possibilities of their imagination. The two sides of Endymion's romance world and the two different attitudes of the 'Sea' indicate a conflict between reality and the imagination.

8.2 Division of the Self and the Other: Keats, Dickinson, and Negatively Capable Poetics

Dream is an important context for imagination. In *Endymion*, Keats has created the space of dream

[505] *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. R. W. Franklin, p.269.

for Endymion to accomplish his union with the divinity. Firat Karadas believes that metaphorical language is always an invisible aspect of imagination in Keats' poems.[506] Keats often uses the physical sleep of a speaker as a medium to enter imaginative realm. In addition to *Endymion*, 'Ode to a Nightingale' also presents such a state of dream, caught between sleep and waking:

> Forlorn! The very word is like a bell
> To toll me back from thee to my sole self!
> Adieu! The fancy cannot cheat so well
> As she is fam'd to do, deceiving elf.
> Adieu! Adieu! Thy plaintive anthem fades
> Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
> Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep
> In the next valley-glades:
> Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
> Fled is that musicz: – do I wake or sleep? [507]

In this stanza, the word 'Forlorn' brings the spirit of the speaker back from the fancy world to reality. 'Forlorn' acts as the knell to remind the speaker of the wakeful anguish from which he sought relief. The appearance of the word 'Forlorn' is sensory and unexpected, reflecting an intensification of mental activity and aesthetic perception.[508] At this moment, the speaker does not belong to any realm, neither imagination nor reality. The return to identity[509] seems to encounter difficulty, and imagination is deliberately suspended. 'Sole self' implies an emphasis on self-reflection, and by the end of poem, the nightingale is finally absent. 'From thee to my sole self' reveals that Keats wants to summon his spirit back to his body. This is the indication of returning reality, which meanwhile implies the generic difference between mortal and immortal.[510] Three 'Adieu[s]' reflects his urgency to say farewell to this fancy world. Not only does imagination fail to satisfy the speaker's

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[506] Firat Karadas, p.65.
[507] John Keats, *Complete Poems*, ed. Jack Stillinger, p.281.
[508] James O'Rourke, 'Intrinsic Criticism and the 'Ode to a Nightingale'', *Keats-Shelley Journal 37* (1988), 43-57 (p.45).
[509] G. L. Little, ''Do I Wake or Sleep?': Keats' Ode to a Nightingale', *Sydney Studies in English 11* (2008), 40-50 (p.49).
[510] Andrew Kappel, 'The Immortality of the Natural: Keats' 'Ode to a Nightingale'', *ELH 45(2)* (1978), 270-284 (p.270).

fancy at this point, but also there seems to be something dangerous about it that makes the speaker tries to push it away.

Keats denounces the imagination as a 'deceiving elf'. A tone of conciliation enters the ode when the poet admits imagination is only as 'deceiving elf' because it cannot cheat. Cheat contains a more real reversal compared with 'deceive' because 'deceive' implies a past illusion, a kind of tragic consolation. The nightingale once occupied a sublime position as now reduced to that which is buried in the next valley'. The bird's voice fades through meadows and streams, and finally disappears. Keats' attempts to erase what Andrew Kappel defines as a 'generic difference' between the nightingale and him. In the meanwhile, however, the question reflects the fact that the speaker is not sure whether he ever entered the fancy at all. 'Waking dream' shows his doubts on the authenticity of his experience. Moreover, the oxymoron arouses the problem of distinguishing between the sleep and 'reality'.[511] Paradoxically, the more Keats endows the nightingale with metaphorical symbolism, the more the authenticity of imagination will be doubted. No wonder, then, that Vendler defines Keats' nightingale as 'deciding for beauty alone without truth-content'.[512]

This goes to the heart of Keats' concept of 'negative Capability', which relishes states of confusion and uncertainty, as well as permitting unresolved debates about self and world mind. On the one hand, the song of the nightingale releases the speaker from day-to-day 'weariness, fever and fret'; on the other hand, the bird's immortality points up the transience and fragility of human being's life. This accelerates the antagonism between the self and the other in imagination. As in 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', Keats has a kind of debate with himself. It is his imaginative response to what the urn

[511] G. L. Little, pp.45,50.
[512] William Ulmer, 'Tragic Consolation in 'Ode to a Nightingale'', *Studies in Romanticism 55(4)* (2016), 449-469 (p.458).

and the nightingale as figures of the imagination that allow him to debate the advantages and limitations of art, poetry and ideal beauty can offer us. Do they compensate us for a distant debate about the value of the purpose of the art and poetry? The ode provides the possibilities of the positive idea about one kind of escape by saving the same kind of bliss the nightingale or urn enjoys. Such imaginative flights return Keats back to a heightened awareness of the reality of suffering. For Keats, this is the double-edged movement of imaginative debate and negatively capable poetics.

Dickinson is sympathetic to Keats' 'negative capability', but she situates her own poetic debate in a heavenly conversation with the divinity. The discussion on the division of the self and the other in Dickinson's poems is on the base of sensation as well and in the realm of imagination. For instance, in her poem, 'Alone, I cannot be –',

> Alone, I cannot be–
> For Hosts – do visit me–
> Recordless Company–
> Who baffle Key–
>
> They have no Robes, nor Names–
> No Almanacs – nor Climes–
> But general Homes
> Like Gnomes–
>
> Their Coming, may be known
> By Couriers within–
> Their going – is not–
> For they've never gone–[513]

Here imagination shows the depth of Dickinson's poetic consciousness. 'Hosts' describe a host of spirits or a heavenly host of angles and recalls Wordsworth's 'host of golden daffodils'. Thus, the poem is endowed with a sense of religious ritual. 'A host of spirit' calls for a sense of God in the poem. 'No Robes' is actually what a spirit may look like – they do not belong to any realm yet they

[513] *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. R. W. Franklin, p.135.

are always there. ‘Recordless’ is because they have no names. ‘Key’ is the thing that lest you into a room, which conveys a domesticated sense. If ‘Robes’ and ‘Names’ pay attention to social events, ‘Almanacs’ and ‘Climes’ are concerned with changes in nature and time. The last stanza resonates with the first one through the association made by the speaker of the poem. As ‘they’ve never gone’, ‘I’ cannot be alone; as they are ‘recordless’, ‘their going – is not –’. It is a poem related to identity and spiritual growth established on the transience of poetry and by borrowing the medium of imagination, the characteristics of which can be traced in the poem ‘I dwell in Possibility’ as well. As is so often the case, Dickinson’s inner self, imaginatively, strives touch the invisible and lend form, conceptually, to infinite things in order that we glimpse sublimity and the potential fullness of the spirit.

8.3 Imaginative Doubts and Uncertainties: Keats and Dickinson

In Keats’ sonnet, ‘The day is gone, and all its sweets are gone’, a conflict between the imagination and the darkness of reality continues, and finally defines imagination as a series of ‘barren dreams’ to show Keats’ realization of the limits of the imaginary.

The day is gone, and all its sweets are gone!
Sweet voice, sweet lips, soft hand, and softer breast,
Warm breath, light whisper, tender semi-tone,
Bright eyes, accomplish’d shape, and lang’rous waist!
Faded the flower and all its budded charms,
Faded the sight of beauty from my eyes,
Faded the shape of beauty from my arms,
Faded the voice, warmth, whiteness, paradise,
Vanish’d unseasonably at shut of eve,
When the dusk holiday- or holinight
Of fragrant-curtain’d Love begins to weave
The woof of darkness, thick, for bid delight,
But, as I’ve read Love’s missal through to-day,

He'll let me sleep, seeing I fast and pray.[514]

This sonnet is ironic in tone. The exclamation point at the end of the first line looks as if all fancy now becomes a delusion (a deceiving elf). This exclamation contains emotions, which might be disappointment, anger or despair. 'Sweets' might equal the 'sweet dreams' in *Endymion*'s section, but it can also be interpreted as the fruit of those 'sweet dreams', which strengthens the tragic effect of the delusion of imagination. Keats depicts from his imagination a female, who is 'soft', 'warm', 'light', 'tender', 'bright', 'accomplished' and 'lang'rous', all of which represent her 'sweetness' too. Those beautiful descriptions reveal that the female image occupies a critical position in Keats' imagination.

Keats endows the scene of imagination with many positive words, serving as a foil to the cruel and tragic reality. Clearly, it is indeed cruel as all of these beauties 'faded'. Then a series of 'fading' show in front of Keats' readers, along with all illusive beauties. At this moment, the female enters the body of the flower, and in the meanwhile, the sight, the shape and the voice of this beauty begins gradually, to disappear before the poet. At the end of the 'fading', Keats uses 'whiteness' and 'paradise' to imply that the female of his imagination is connected with divinity. If so, it resonates with the 'forlorn' part in 'Ode to a Nightingale' because the fading of divinity indicates the returning of reality. However, Keats does not accept the fact when he says 'vanish'd unseasonably'. He is dissatisfied with the result.

'Holiday- or holinight' is a word puzzle that Keats intends to utilize to stress the word 'holy'. He still stands at the side of sublimity. Or rather, he is still unwilling to accept reality. The ending part of this poem is confusing as it seems that Keats is still memorizing the beauty although she has

[514] *Complete Poems,* ed. Jack Stillinger, p.374.

already left him. The beauty comes at the beginning of the day and leaves with sunset. The disappointment extends outwards as a distance in time and space. Primarily, Keats blames the dusk, considering that it is the approaching of the night that separates her beauty from him. However, the ending lines still provides a reversal with a positive attitude from the poet when he believes that the darkness, like a fragrant curtain, contains another kind of delight. It is also a use of synaesthesia, as Keats combines the 'woof' with the visual word 'darkness'. Perhaps it is the extreme depression that makes the poet-speaker feel an abnormal delight of being away from his beloved one. This also emphasizes the illusion of imagination.

Thus, the lover, with her sweetness, finally fades. When such grief happens, the speaker takes refuge from God to redeem him from misery with the belief of ''reading a 'missal''. God allows him to 'sleep' peacefully, in which he can see his beauty again. However, the sleep reserves rather memories of the beauty; thus, the sleep is deceiving as well. Naturally, there exists a tendency to personify something into a human figure in this poem so that imagination is no longer that insubstantial. As a result, the combination of beauty and imagination seems to be both natural and reasonable. Although Keats' tone in this poem does not change from depression, the last lines still convey that he leaves a sign of positivity for no need to mourn as the image of the beauty can always be imaginatively, present in his mind.

Imagination absorbs reasoning for Keats' living. Keats admits at this moment that his vision gradually becomes deceptive. The reality is dreary thus the imagination vanishes. No wonder Keats will regard that 'beauty'[515] must die in 'Ode to Melancholy'. The poem exposes a sort of delusive fantasy, which generates a reality that lingers in uncertainty. Similarly, in 'Ode to a Nightingale',

[515] It is considered that there are different kinds of beauty – some that are natural, organic and transitory (that must die) – and others that are eternal and durable (a joy forever).

the bird is a potent metaphor, but also a fleeting phenomenon of nature. Keats' impatience for truth, in turn, buries the truth itself. 'In faery lands forlorn' exposes his attempt of escape. Keats is escaping to the nightingale's world when he finds that thoughts in the earthly world are 'full of sorrow'.

Like Keats, Dickinson also realizes the problems of imagination, and she claims that imagination is not merely fantasy but a serious concern, in 'The Tint I cannot take – is best –'.[516] Dickinson's 'The Tint I cannot take – is best –' considers imagination in two conditions of a human being that steps over the boundary between life and death, which makes the poem more serious. The first stanza examples what is the best colour – 'the one I cannot take'. It connects with the process of dyeing, during which the fabric is tinted. Dickinson admits that this best colour cannot dye on the fabric of her own body, which means that the self and the external remain independent. Dickinson's self is not immediately affirmed by its surroundings. Then it exposes what the colour it is – it is gold–the colour like 'Guinea'. However, it is a 'remote' colour that is rarely seen in the market and implies that it is hard to obtain. The reference to 'Bazaar' proves the rarity and exoticness of the item.

The second stanza explains that the Guinea is fully shinning that there just remains the flare of light to 'swagger' the eyes. A reading of 'impalpable array' is the sunset clouds.[517] The image of 'Cleopatra' echoes the golden colour of the Guinea and its exotic rarity in the eyes of the speaker. It is noticeable that 'Cleopatra' is a female ruler, who shows the audience an impression of extreme beauty, luxury and honour. The poet regards that the array of all these colours are the ones that she still cannot own. The picture seems to be a total golden one that contains incomparably bright light

[516] *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. R. W. Franklin, p.309.
[517] Sister Ellen Fitzgerald, 'Dickinson's the Tint I Cannot Take Is the Best', *The Explicator 28(3)* (1969), 52-55 (p.53).

– evidently, it rises to the light of the 'sun'. This shows that nature and human beings, both in imagination and in reality, complement each other and cannot be separated.

The third stanza continues with the imagery of Cleopatra. However, the poet admits that the dominion is of emptiness. There is discontent under Cleopatra's time. In other words, the 'dominion' right cannot tint Cleopatra as well. Previous criticism interprets the 'dominion' as the poet's artistic domain.[518] Moreover, such discontent is deep to the 'soul', and the soul has its memory of recording the details of being conquered. That is to say, the soul does not need to be identical to the surroundings. Yet the colour of nature is more appreciated in the eyes of the poet. It is the one that most close to the soul. The five stanzas present five souls seeking their tints. However, a conflict is that if they pursue being identical to the surroundings, it will lose the capability of judging and will betray the 'impalpable' intention.

This poem partly resonates with 'Alone, I cannot be' in relation to Dickinson's imagination; however, most of it reverses the imaginative idea. Dickinson strikes a paradoxical note capturing the interaction between anxiety and wonder. 'The tint I cannot take', 'The moments of Dominion', and 'The Pleading of the Summer'…, those fancy phrases reveal moments of desire even if we are not told what it is. The poem allows human beings to be a part of the landscapes so that when the last day comes, we see these scenes in another way. The way of 'knowing' changes to an exquisite manner that we return to nature and circle ourselves in winter and summer alternation, which includes a great combination of nature and imagination. In the poetry of Keats and Dickinson, imagination comes from nature but surpasses the entity of nature. The poem also reflects a deep mediation on the question of death. 'Another way – to see –', is the moment when we enter the

[518] Sister Ellen Fitzgerald, p.53.

world of the afterlife.

Both Keats and Dickinson notice the anxiety in imagination. In 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci', the narrator is dreaming on the cold hill's side, reacting the scene of dream and sleep. In 'On Sitting Down to Read King Lear Once Again', Keats implies that reality is a sort of purgatory which needs the action of fire clean himself and realize rebirth from heaven, lifting imagination to the sublime level. In 'Bright Star', Keats dwells in imagination as he dwells in poetry. In some of Keats' mythological poems, such as *Endymion*, 'Ode to Psyche', and 'The Eve of St. Agnes', he imagines lands of God, of heaven and of romance, in which he temporarily escapes from 'barren dream' and enters 'realms of gold' only to realize the tragic reality from which he sought escape. Keats enlarges the imaginary beauty of Greek mythology. Keats accomplishes an ideal image of the poet via imagination, though, there still exists debates in Keats' minds of whether a great poet is realized through imagination. However, it must be admitted that imagination allows Keats to adapt to other objects, reflect and become them, which lays the foundation for being a great poet like Shakespeare, gifted in negative capability.

In Dickinson's 'Who goes to dine must take his Feast', she uses metaphors of the feast, the Banquet and the table to dramatize the existence of imagination and to reveal that our human brain is confined by patterns whereas nature breaks patterns through its random phenomena. Our imagination can follow nature and take part in the disorder. Such randomness creates more possibilities, which echoes Dickinson's 'The possible's slow fuse is lit by the imagination'. In turn, the possibilities endow imagination with pleasure. If the world is disordered, the order of the human mind should give way to this disorder in essence. The relationship between the other and the self could be tense. Sometimes the world is beyond the mind's reach as if human beings feel difficulties

in approaching sublimity.

As with Keats, Dickinson's imaginative poems cannot avoid discussing the bridge between the inner self and the external world. We always feel that she tries to make the external world satisfy the subject in the imagination. The Sea, the Hosts and the Guest…, they are not ordinary visitors for the poet. They bring divinity. The inner self and the external world always have conflicts, but they still permit a poetic space of combination. The paradise of imagination confirms the identity of the spirit. God, heaven and divinity are defined in her own terms. Symbolism matters in imagination as it depends on the art of the poetic language. It allows a space of comparing resemblance between the signifier and the signified, and creating a new concept in mind. Imagination enables a fictional harmony between the inner self and the external world. It is a transcendental experience that goes beyond reason and relies on sensations. The finiteness lies in the process when the ritual of death- the funeral- is considered to be chaos, a disorder that betrays the order of the physical world, resulting in the loss of balance of existence, of language, of comprehension also awareness. The poem 'I've seen a dying eye' (547), conveys the same disorder even though the funeral is embodied with a 'dying eye'.

Dickinson's poems that are centrally concerned with the role of imagination reveal her enigmatic references and allegorical puzzles of truth. Her concentration on the feelings of the inner self enables her to approach subjectivity and the exploration of the limits of imagination. Of course, these poems reveal her mediation on poetry and art, as well as the issue of truth and beauty. The imaginative travel of Dickinson is a process of slowly exposing truth from her own the sense-based knowing.[519] Besides, the chapter of spirituality reminds us of Linda Freedman's exploration of

[519] Richard Brantley, p.145.

Dickinson's religious imagination, in which how religion constructs her imagination does not have to do with her belief in God. Her religious reading of the Bible, the classical methodology, Milton and Shakespeare stimulate Dickinson's imaginings about divinity.

Dickinson's imaginative method resembles Keats' in a typically romantic mode so that, as Richard Brantley calls it, a 'late-romantic imagination'.[520] Joanne Feit Diehl directly defines it as 'romantic imagination', which again finds out Dickinson's connection with romanticism. Joanne observes Dickinson's intertextuality not only with Keats but also with a wide range of English Romantics such as Wordsworth and Shelley, as well as American transcendentalist Emerson.[521] Imagination shows Dickinson's individualism and inspiration. Her thoughts on nature cannot escape from discussing imagination as well, for instance, the poem 'A Bird, came down the Walk –', reflects a 'leap plashless' scene of nature. Yet this poem is a child fascination style that tastes a shallow view of existential philosophy. However, Dickinson's imagination still distinguishes from Romantics at some points. Romanticism pursues a perfect combination between human beings and the universe; Dickinson, however, allows the existence of conflicts because her creation depends on a diverse and variegated nature.

Keats and Dickinson see the world as a moving and changing entity in the flux of time, and their attitudes towards religion and nature transform over time. Imagination can seek to go beyond the known and circumscribed world to suggest what it is like on 'the other side' of life. Heidegger's perception of 'finiteness' emphasizes the physical being of humans. Yet in the poetic imagination, death is always waiting in the wings. Such an anxiety of death, for Keats and Dickinson, in poems such as 'I felt a funeral, in my Brain' and 'To sleep', can be an inhibitor and a spur to the imaginative

[520] Richard Brantley, p.147.
[521] Joanne Feit Diehl, *Dickinson and the Romantic Imagination* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014).

transformation from a mortal being to a posthumous entity.

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