

“The Unexpressed Expressed”: The Mystical in
Emily Dickinson’s Death Poems



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Author: Helena Martín Hernández

Directed by: Viorica Patea

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1.-Introduction

6.522 Est gibt allerdings Unaussprechliches

Dies zeigt sich, es ist das Mystische.

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*

"By intuition mightiest things

Assert themselves, and not by terms"

Emily Dickinson

I begin this work taking as a referent Ludwig Wittgenstein's definition of the ineffable shown in the mystical¹. The criteria that I follow in this work have to be with how the world is perceived through Emily Dickinson's eyes: what is knowable to her and what is an impenetrable mystery.

In this work I will study Dickinson's use of language and how this language allows us to know her poetic world. Language itself will never reveal the mysteries hidden behind the unknown or the inexpressible, but this gap is overcome thanks to the use of the mystical. Working out Dickinson's vision of the world needs a combination between language and the mystical and this is what this work does; it analyses Dickinson's linguistic features in order to study her poetic universe.

I have chosen Dickinson's poems on death and immortality because it is in these poems where we observe more clearly how the world and its limitations are perceived and, this can be extended to Dickinson's language. The particularities of her language are the reflection of the particularities of her life and thought. The private quality of her poetry makes language the expression of her inner world. Language is Dickinson's device to

¹WITTGENSTEIN, Ludwig *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*

explore the world and to transmit her insights.

She acknowledges that the limits of her language are the limits of her knowable world. Death, is a visionary experience where she meets the mysteries of existence. So, when she confronts these mysteries her language shows its limitations. The mystical is shown by contrasting moments of illumination and language limitations. The mystical shows how “the mightiest things/ Assert themselves, and not by terms”.

2.-State of the Art

Emily Dickinson's critical reception on the topic of death in her writings has been studied from many perspectives. An early approach on death as a thematic unit in Dickinson's poetry has been made by Conrad Aiken in his introductory essay to his edition of *Selected Poems of Emily Dickinson* (1924)² In *Emily Dickinson's Poetry: Stairway of Surprise* (1960) Charles Anderson also includes death as a theme in Dickinson's poetry: "man's knowledge of Death and his dream of Immortality." (qtd. in Porter, 186) He also noted the different thematic categories in Dickinson's poetry and pointed out the connections between them. Another study on the grouping of Dickinson's themes and their interrelationship is Fatima Ahmed's "The Themes and Motifs of Emily Dickinson's Poetry" (1995) as David Porter collects in his essay "Searching for Dickinson's Themes" (1998).

Death also has been studied in connection with Dickinson's biography, how deaths in her family affected profoundly her inner world:

Every death among her relatives and friends (and there had been many) had come as a peculiar shock to her; she adjusted slowly but this was the first of her immediate family and the first of the 'mighty' deaths that wracked her so in the decade of the 1870s' and in the early 1880s. (Sewall, 69)

Richard B. Sewall's (1974) *The Life of Emily Dickinson* captures the connection between Dickinson's life and the different facts that surrounded her life including her writings' composition and edition. Cynthia Wolff's *Emily Dickinson* (1986) is as well an influential study in order to analyse Dickinson's environment in connection with her poetry and language.

Barton Levi St. Armand's *Emily Dickinson and Her Culture: The Soul's Society*

² See. Marietta Messmer's "Dickinson's Critical Reception" (304)

(1984) establishes a connection between death in Emily Dickinson's poems and Lydia H. Sigourney's poems and the "Victorian Way of Death", in the chapter "Dark Parade". St. Armand's approach helps to the understanding of death in a specific cultural tradition and how this culture penetrated into Dickinson's vision and writings.

Critical approaches to Dickinson's consideration as a mystical poet and her connection with the tradition of mysticism has been made into historical-cultural context. The consideration of Emily Dickinson as a mystic poet has been posed by Sister Mary James Power in *In the name of the Bee: The Significance of Emily Dickinson* (1943) She ascribed Dickinson's poetry into the tradition of Roman Catholic mysticism, this consideration was criticised by Mary Humiliata's essay "Emily Dickinson-Mystic Poet?" (1960), she argues that Dickinson lacks of some of the features observed in "traditional" Christian mystic poetry:

One searches in vain for the more particular signs of the Christian mystic in the poetry of Emily Dickinson. The expression of personal guilt for sin, the feeling of Christian humility, the symbol of earthly love used to explain the Divine, the ecstatic joy of union, and the utter desolation of the "dark nights of the soul"-all these are recorded in the writings of the great mystics, but they are not found in the poetry of Emily Dickinson. (7)

Finally the study of mysticism in Dickinson's poetry moved to other aspects such as Dickinson's poetic voice and language features. A remarkable essay on this issue is Louise Bogan's "A Mystical Poet" (1960), Bogan studies Dickinson's "power to say the unsayable- to hint the unknowable . . . the power of the seer"³ My regard on Dickinson's mystical consideration agrees with Bogan's study.

Another important study into the historical-cultural context is Joanne Feit Diehl's⁴ (1981) exploration of Dickinson's imagination in relationship with Emerson, and how she faces

³ Bogan, Louise "A Mystical Poet" p.34

⁴ "Emerson, Dickinson and the Abyss" in *Emily Dickinson: Modern Critical Views* ed. Harold Bloom New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1985: (pp. 145-159)

the mysteries of death.

Psychological approaches examine Dickinson's response in the presence of death. In John Cody's "A Plank in Reason" (1971) is examined the expression of suffering in Dickinson's poems and attributes this to a psychotic illness:

For this reason let me state at the onset of my thesis that the crisis Emily Dickinson suffered following the marriage of her brother was psychosis. The proof of this consists in the poet's description of psychological states that occur only in psychosis and in explicit statements in prose and verse which can scarcely be interpreted in any other way. (147)

Sharon Cameron examined the problems arising when it lacks contextual specification and the effects of the overwhelming presence of death in "Naming as History: Dickinson's Poems of Definition" (1979).

Anderson's *Emily Dickinson's Poetry : Stairway of Surprise* (1960) also explores Dickinson's interaction between mind, feeling and poetry in connection with pain and despair which many times appear in presence of death.

In the study of the expressing the unexpressed we cannot diminish the study of the recurrent image of the circumference in Dickinson's poetry. The understanding of this image is essential in order to explore Dickinson's struggle to convey meaning from the ineffable and to study the concept of completion in her poems, since for her "ultimate circumference may well be the extension of understanding from mortal limits to absolute fulfilment in immortality." ("Circumference" 120)⁵ Dickinson's business, has been studied by Anderson. In "Circumference" he sees Circumference as a "pervasive image in her religious thinking and in her theory of art, though the meanings it carries are not always consistent." ("Circumference" 119)

Eleanor Wilner connects in "The Poetics of Emily Dickinson" (1971) Puritan culture and

⁵ Charles R. Anderson's "Circumference" in *Critical Essays on Emily Dickinson*, ed. Paul J. Ferlazzo, Boston: G.K. Hall & Co. 1984: (pp. 1119-122)

Dickinson's insights about death, including the expression of the limitations of language and how these limitations which are the limitations of human knowledge are overcome: "The limits of language for Emily Dickinson are exactly commensurate with the limits of human perception; the ultimate disclosure of the poet is mystery. This explains by signs 'and not by terms' (420), is essential truth revealed." (Wilner 12)

A remarkable study of Dickinson's use of language and more specifically about her particular structural and linguistic features has been made in Cristianne Miller's *Emily Dickinson's: A Poet's Grammar* (1987). This study has been a starting point for establishing connections between personal linguistic features and the development of a technique for expressing the inexpressible in the present work. In her essay "Dickinson's Experiment's in Language" (1998)⁶ Miller collects the different approaches, studies and responses made on Dickinson's characteristic features in connection with language and how these constitute an open ground for analysis.

A searching for poetic identity and poetic voice focusing on the dialogic aspects rather than language has been studied in Paul Crumbley's "Dickinson's Dashes and the Limits of Discourse" (1992) and in Kamilla Denman's essay "Emily Dickinson's Volcanic Punctuation" (1993) pointed out the importance of punctuation in the "process of decoding the way each fragment signals meaning."⁷

The importance of reader in attaining meaning has been also signalled in Crumbley's "Dickinson's Dialogic Voice" (1998): "Dickinson's multiplication of discourse possibilities through the dash also magnifies the importance of the reader in attaining meaning to language." (107) Crumbley exposes the necessity of polyvocality and

6 MILLER, Cristianne "Dickinson's Experiments in Language", *The Emily Dickinson Handbook*, eds. Gudrun Grabher, Roland Hagenbüchle and Christianne Miller. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press (1998): pp. 240-257.

7 Quoted in Crumbley's "Dickinson's Dialogic Voice" p. 105

multiplication of meanings in order to understand Dickinson's dialogic voice (Dickinson's Dialogic Voice 109) In this work it is assessed the relevance of the dialogic voice in connection with the multiplicity of meanings since the unexpressed can be observed through the interpretation of the different discourse possibilities.

The importance of reader as an active contributor in meaning's creation has been studied by Hagenbüchle (1993)⁸ and Smith (1992)⁹

We cannot conclude without mentioning the contributions on different subjects such as family, history, language, influence, study and teaching, translation etc. biannually made by the *Emily Dickinson Journal* and *The Emily Dickinson Bulletin*.

8 HAGÜENBUCHLE, Roland. "Emily Dickinson's Poetic Covenant" *EDJ* 2.2 (1993): 14-39

9 SMITH, Martha Nell. *Rowing in Eden: Rereading Emily Dickinson*. Austin: University of Texas Press, (1992)

3.-Analysis

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

This poem explores unachieved revelation through the search for an answer to a mystery concealed. The gap between hidden meaning and what is actually said in the poem motivates multiple interpretations arising from Dickinson's personal vision and treatment of the death topic. Dickinson's idiosyncratic punctuation and her particular syntactic features need to be further explored in order to explain how they work in connection with the technique of expressing the unexpressed.

In this poem we can differentiate multiple layers of meaning. A rough interpretation of this poem is that the "I" is attending to the agony of someone who is dying. Death is represented here by means of outward physical signs perceived by the eye of the speaker, but at the same time another observer is present and mute, that is, the dying eye of the seer. Confusion emerges when we try to separate the two terms: the seer and the seen, because both eyes: the "I" and the "Eye" are both seers and they see, thus, these two layers superimpose in this poem. The distinction between them is important to capture the poem's use of the mystical which is revealed in the projection of one world into another or the presence of multiple realities that cannot be expressed by language. Depending upon the point of view of the observer and the observed we will get different but equivalent conclusions that are those of Dickinson's system of thought.

First of all we need to distinguish the "I" from the "Dying Eye". The "I" is the speaker and the outward seer or the one who sees with the physical eyes. She observes the death of someone identified as the "Dying Eye", the "I" is who sees and tells, but at the same time her knowledge is restricted by the physical senses that do not allow her to reach the knowledge that the "Dying Eye" is searching for by running "round and round a Room". The physical seer tells us what is perceived through her eyes, that is, images of death and anguish which are emphasized by the searching for something unknown. The stunning image of the seer looking at the small circumference of the spinning eye running round and round until Dying Eye's vital thrust vanishes, provides us a necessary context to get involved in the searching of the mystery unexpressed and how this mystery appears reflected in the poem.

The speaker witnesses how the "Dying Eye" becomes lifeless and this is expressed physically by the loss of the eye's brightness: "The cloudier become" and the foggy vision which is finally "soldered down". It is not just the eye which get soldered it is the mystery of the vision enclosed in the "Dying Eye" which gets soldered too and remains inscrutable for the physical seer. This vision is the metaphorical representation for ultimate knowledge and it appears closed for the speaker in this poem who, unable to solve the mystery, is incapable of expressing what is this "Something".

The speaker witnesses the progressive vanishing of the opportunity to get in touch with the mystery enclosed in the vision of the "Dying Eye"; in looking at the dying eye, the "I" pretends to encounter a vision which cannot be perceived because it is not at the same layer. Thus, physical is separated from metaphysical in the same way that the knowable world is separated from the mysteries of death, mysteries which are not expressed but

shown. So, the barrier between these two layers is trespassed by the mystical.

The "I" cannot reach the meaning enclosed in death from which the centre of the circumference expands¹⁰: the small circumference begins with the Eye¹¹ and then projects to the infinite. The fog observed by the speaker is the metaphor for the impenetrability of what is unuttered but shown. This way we see how the limitations of perception are expressed through the metaphor.

Both the "I" and the "Dying Eye" are looking for a vision which is perceived from a different perspective. This poem is told from the outward observer's perception, which means that the reader also does not get that vision enclosed in death, but readers can learn to get meaning from the linguistic features and to answer the question of what is this "Something" by reading the silences, that is, the unexpressed. Two different perceptions are held in this poem and it is through the difference between the two that we can experience the struggle for getting meaning from images seen by the other, in this case, the "Dying Eye". Once that the separation between the "I" and the "Dying Eye" is established, one can start analysing each of the two visions. Thus, we can extend this separation between the physical and metaphysical to the object of our study: the mystical.

The poem is told from a first person perspective so rather than direct experience the action is filtered through the "I's" perspective and this is the reason why it is so effective, because the reader is confronted with the same questions and gets involved in the same quest for the unknown "Something" rather than passively observing to the agony and death of someone. This way the "I" seems to go round and round by itself in search of something. The "Dying Eye" does not speak so it cannot tell what it is seeing or

¹⁰ "The literal meaning of Circumference as the boundary of a circle (. . .) has been expanded by her special meaning into a sphere like the sun, irradiating its life outward to infinity." (Anderson, "Circumference" 122)

¹¹ For Emerson the eye is the "first circle" (Waggoner, 145)

what it is looking for, but the dying gesture filtered through the observing "I" symbolizes the active quest around the room for something kept quiet in dying lips. It is a metaphor for the impossibility of articulation and it shows the limitations of language when dealing with the ineffable but something that it is shown thanks to Dickinson's use of the mystical element in her poetics. In conclusion, the "Dying Eye" is the one which performs action i.e. "Run round and round the Room" and is the one that triggers the central thematic unit of the poem: the quest carried out by the "I" that is none other than the quest for unknown realities. Using this device in this poem, "The inner – paints the Outer –"¹²

The circular movement that the eye describes seems to try to delimit the circumference or to describe the unlimited invisible limits portrayed in the poem. We have two circumferences: the small circumference of the eye and the room where the eye carries out its search and the circumference that cannot be described. These circumferences both comprise a space whose centre is "the inquiring mind"¹³

The "I" is the observer and the speaker, the perceiver through which the scene is

12 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 is 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.

13 In his essay "Circumference" Anderson says about Dickinson's use of the circumference: "Her centre is the inquiring mind whose business is circumference, intent upon exploring the whole infinity of the universe that lies before her." (119)

described and experience is distilled. The "I" is present in the agony of someone; her experience is recollected in her words but they do not express pain for the loss of that someone's life. She is not sensitive or feeling pity for the dying one. Instead, the "I" observes and regrets the mystery never understood by living eyes and the opaque mystery undisclosed only in the dying eye which outwardly becomes cloudy and then soldered. The "I" not being able to disclose the mystery of this "something" that is unnamed, wonders what are the secrets disclosed by this moment in which the physical eye, which cannot see, is allowed to "see" when vision transcends the sight sense into something beyond the mortal condition, and a metaphysical secret is revealed. Pain becomes linked to the mortal condition and it is the feeling from which the underlying anxiety manifests in the observing "I". Anxiety is expressed in the physical description of the spasmodic movement of the eye running round and round, but pain is manifested by the observer who fails in grasping the mysteries concealed by death and interprets this movement as if it were part of her own quest. The only way of expressing this quest is by recollecting the outer physical signs. Despair is expressed by the "I" as she undertakes a metaphysical quest in which she asks herself: what is this "Something"? What is the vision achieved by the dying eye? The answer to this question is unuttered by the dying lips, it surpasses the limits of language and knowledge and for this reason it cannot be expressed.

There is a two-way movement between the outer and the inner and this can be applied as well to meaning. As Dickinson says in one of her poems "The Outer – from the Inner/ Derive its Magnitude" and later in this poem she adds "The inner – paints the Outer – " In the poem "I've seen a Dying Eye", the outer or physical description of the dying eye leads to the inner quest of the observing I, or it moves between the outer or

physical and the mysteries never disclosed of the metaphysical. The difficulty here arises when the speaker, confronted with the language available, is unable to put into words the outward vision that comes into the inner realm. Subsequently this vision becomes an indeterminacy that prevails in the poem.

Symbols present in the poem also echo this quest. The eye is the outward receptor of the vision and when it loses touch with the outer it becomes part of the mystery which is closed off to living eyes. The room is as well a small projection of the universe, a small circumference in which the centre is the curious dying eye in searching for the "Something". Circumference, though not overtly stated in the poem, is present in the small circle of the eye that concentrates the power of the unknown expansive borders of existence. What this circumference contains is the mystery outside this room projected in the infinite and not determined by the living speaking lips.

The words "Something", "seemed", "cloudier", "obscure" and "fog" expressed by the "I" are metaphors for indeterminacy and confusion. "Run" and "search" express the active quest whereas "seemed", "soldered down", and "disclosing" help to build up the semantics of the circumference's borders; that is, the mystery held in the dying eye's "blessed" vision.

Death and its mysteries are only revealed when we die and these are the main concerns of this poem. The first verse, is a statement in which the speaker acknowledges the topic of the poem, followed by the events that take place and finally there is a conclusion in which we do not see what happens. That is, the one who is "blessed" by this vision is the dying eye. The barrier that separates the understanding of this ultimate knowledge is life and the drama is that we are the victims of our limitations. This poem contrasts with other

Dickinson's poems that deal with the death issue, because in her other poems we experience a recollection of the experience such as in the poem "Just lost, when I was saved"¹⁴ in which the initial paradox lead us to see more clearly the two sides of human existence and the mystical is in this way easily perceived. In "I've seen a Dying Eye" there is mainly description. There is no explicit mourning for the dying person, nor explicit regret about how hard is to assume our mortal condition without being able to grasp any knowledge about what is beyond death. There is no glimpse of the infinite or any image that provokes in the speaker a paralysing reaction. Instead, there is a curiosity a philosophical reflection about the mysteries unperceived by the physical eyes and it is through this reflection that we seen how Dickinson perceives the mystical. She knows that there is something beyond but she cannot state this beyond, because it is unspeakable, to overcome language limitations she uses devices that show what it is beyond.

The speaker observes and narrates what she sees, only at the end of the poem does the observing attitude becomes a reflective one. At this stage, the "Dying Eye" is closed and when it does not belong to the living world this eye becomes blessed by a vision: "Without disclosing what it be/ 'Twere blessed to have seen –".

If the "I" attitude is that of passive observation then moving to a reflective attitude, the dying eye is the one which executes the actions described in the poem; First, it looks for the unknown vision: "run round and round a Room/ In search of Something – as it seemed –" The dying eye's searching movement is active. When it dies, it is able to see what the speaker is never able to see. The reader is persuaded to think that the triumphant

14 "Therefore, as One returned, I feel/ Odd secrets of the line to tell!"

element in this poem is beyond death, but it is not said explicitly by the dying eye which experiences death and gets the vision. We assume the speaker's perception and in her perception the dying eye is "blessed to have seen". The speaker is not saying anything about what has been seen by the eye and by doing this the speaker acknowledges the limits of mortal perception. In death, one is able to see what cannot be seen in life but this vision still a mystery, "something" closed.

Such as Lilly Briscoe in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* the speaker composes the whole picture by getting fragments of perception and experience. Dickinson's observer is unable to complete the whole picture because, unlike Miss Briscoe, the "I" lacks the essential piece of information and the means to transmit this information. Her canvas is life but she cannot complete it because the secrets beyond are never revealed, that is, she just expresses what she sees but she hasn't had her "vision."

The compressed quality¹⁵ of this poem makes it powerful and susceptible to multiple interpretations. It is powerful because it transmits distilled ideas, therefore the effect on the reader is immediate. It is implied that the awe-inspiring images of death overlap with the foggy and confusing quest of the speaker who ends up assuming that the mystery is soldered in the dead eye.

This poem has a circular structure it begins with the verse: "I've seen a Dying Eye" and it ends "Twere blessed to have seen –", thus life's cycle ends with the blessing of being

15 In this work I take as a referent Cristianne Miller's *Emily Dickinson: A Poet's Grammar*. As the analysis of the Dickinson's grammar. Miller's work is very extensive and the present work embraces a smaller area of study I just will use it in connection with the relevant features of the poems here analysed that were linked with the creation of particular meanings out of language in order to show how Dickinson manages to express the inexpressible.

Compression is defined by Miller as: "Compression denominates whatever creates density or compactness of meaning in language. It may stem from ellipsis of function words, dense use of metaphor, highly associative vocabulary, abstract vocabulary in complex syntax, or any other language use that reduces the ratio of what is stated to what is implied." (29)

able to see what we cannot see while alive. In the first verse the vision is that of the living who confronted with the vision of the dying, realizes that her vision is foggy and begins to have doubts. These doubts are the same as the eye, and are resolved when the circle is apparently closed. This happens in the moment the dying by the eye becomes obscured and finally soldered down, and it is when the living speaker finally acknowledges that the one who was blessed to see was the dying eye. The circle is apparently closed because the dying eye dies and gets its vision. On the one hand, the "I" filters perception through her limited vision and it is a subjective vision, so we can say that according to the "I" the dying eye is blessed because it has seen and, it has dissolved its vision into the infinite. On the other, as the "I" is restricted by her mortal perception, she is not able to provide us the whole vision, but Dickinson leaves a room for interpretation and, she provides a clue for us to realize that the mystery is disclosed neither by the speaking "I" nor by Dickinson herself. This clue is the final dash. Rather than closing the poem with a period she decides to use a dash which allows us to question the end of this poem and the meaning of this final dash. The hidden meaning here is not stated but is implied and still present in the poem. The dash incites us to go round the circumference in which meaning is contained and to acknowledge the infiniteness of its limits. The same happens in "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain," and this dash is what provides us the visual evidence of uncertainty and also suggests meaning beyond the universe of the poem. "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain," ends with the dazzling verse "And finished knowing – then –" this verse leaves the poem open to interpretation. Both poems share the topic and their conclusions are similar. The dash suggests an open end and the ultimate search for eternity and immortality beyond. In this poem this interpretation of the dash meaning makes sense

since we have seen that limited perception leads to a questioning of the limits of mortal experience and the mystery revealed.

Though the use and meaning of dashes is one of the more conjectured topics in Dickinson's poetry, what is clear is that they sometimes contribute to expanding meaning and that they work as reflective pauses of the discourse. For instance, if we look at the first two dashes appearing in the poem: "In search of Something – as it seemed –", we observe how this "– as it seemed –" acts as an aside commentary that clarifies that the action described in the poem is perceived by a limited and reflective observer. Limited because she is not the one who experiences death and reflective because she is reflecting about what the dying eye is doing i.e. it is going round and round in search for something. Instead of associating this movement with a dying spasmodic movement, she associates this movement with her own search. The verb "seem" is ideal to express how reality is perceived, it is not absolute but it is limited and filtered through a personal perspective. The verb "to seem" together with the adjectives that follow in the next verses e.g. "cloudier", "obscure", emphasize the difficulties arising in the search for the unknown. The next dash is in the following verse. "The Cloudier become –" precedes an enumeration of the things perceived by the "I" and, the verb also has a significant meaning since it indicates the beginning of a process, i.e. the movement from the outer to the inner, that is, the outer perceived by the eye leads to an inner reflection¹⁶.

The repetition of "and then" is used to enumerate the progressive obscuring of the vision not yet achieved and which never will be achieved by the observing "I". Dashes and

16 One of the function of dashes as described by Weisbuch and observed in this poem is: "... to far a greater extent, her dashes, suggest a poet en route to an idea within the poem. One of the many functions of the dashes is to serve as a hinge, with meaning moving forward and back in a poem like a swinging door." (Prisming Dickinson 213)

repetition give rhythm to the poem by creating a feeling of searching that gives shape to the anxiety of the mystery never revealed.

Substantives in capitals remark the thematic content of the poem and contribute to the creation of meaning by foregrounding thematic issues: "Dying Eye", "Room", "Something", "Cloudier" and "Fog" emphasize what the "I" is trying to transmit: the dying eye is the object of the "I's" observation, the room the place where it is enclosed the action and where the "Something" is looked for. These capitalized words acts as allegorical elements¹⁷ that try to help to express the quality of the reality beyond that cannot be put into words.

Although my aim is to revisit the poems through the mystical perception in order to fill the gaps of the untold, if we pay attention to Dickinson's cultural background we can also extract valuable meaning that will allow us to explain why she chooses not to describe explicitly the ultimate life pursuit that for her is eternity and immortality. Dickinson's life was touched by many deaths therefore, she was especially sensitive to death and to the sight of funerals and the morning scenes surrounding death¹⁸. The description of the manifestations of death in this poem could only have been made by someone who was present at someone's death bed¹⁹. The detailed description of the

17 This is illustrated by Miller by proposing as an example the poem "My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun,":

For example, in "My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun," the word Gun is metaphorical: we understand it to represent repression or containment and potential explosively destructive power, particularized in the concrete form of the tool as a powerful "Owner." The capitalization here has much the effect of capitalized personifications or allegorizations of things and qualities (*A Poet's Grammar* 59)

In the case of this poem the allegorization of "Something" provides a referent to name the unnamed, capitalized "Something" represents the vision which cannot be described by the speaker because of the limitations of language and perception.

18 St. Armand takes into account Dickinson's culture to explain the death images that were part of the popular tradition which were not alien for Dickinson: "Dickinson's death poetry can be understood only by realizing that in the popular tradition from which she drew her imagery, the death themselves were considered frozen emblems of resurrection, actual tokens of the longed-for afterlife." (60)

19 "Many times Dickinson witnessed deathbed behaviour but she could never be sure exactly what

circular movement of the eyes and the loss of the eyes' sparkle suggests that Dickinson had seen this before. In this poem the death topic is dealt with through observation and it is this observation which allows us to connect the poem to a deeper insight. When death is outwardly observed, the mystical is both present and hidden to the speaker's vision. The mystical is ineffable which means that cannot be stated, but it is shown. Here, the mystical is shown in the language and linguistic features that conveys the expression of a mystery never revealed to the living and which is vouchsafed in dying lips. This poem is very useful for comparing the different ways of dealing with the mystical and, in this case it does not deal with a mystical experience but with how the language depicts the outer world. The mystical is always present in Dickinson's death poems and when reason and language fail to explain or mind fails to interpret, it manifests in the limitations of the mind and in the limitations of the language. For this reason the perception of the mystical element is an exercise of analysis and, it requires an effort of perception to cope with the limits of language penetrating through both the poem's interstices and other issues, such as culture or genre.

It is frequent to find paradoxical the contrast in Dickinson's death poems. Unexpectedly while the dying eye is the active element, the living observer is passive. The same can be said about action in this poem; in this poem, an event is described i.e. the agony of someone, but since what happens in the poem is told from the passive living observer's point of view, this action becomes a reflection. It is in this reflection we can observe how meaning is conveyed in this poem: visual description and personal reflection are combined to obtain a new layer of significance. What is perceived through the eyes becomes confusing and finally it reveals an inner search through the outer.

'Visions' were vouchsafed the dying person." (Cody, "A Plank in Reason" 53)

The mystical in this poem works as follows: literally, this poem is the narration of things observed by the speaker. In this reading, we have clues that suggest that the vision is not fully achieved so we lack information the same as the observer has limited knowledge of the whole vision. In a literal interpretation of the poem the last statement comes to be a “rest in peace” message of condolence. This last statement persuades us to think this because there is no doubt uttered by the speaker and this contrasts with the previous foggy confusion. Doubt has arisen by “soldering down” the window and, there is no way to know what is beyond or if the eye is really blessed with a vision. We must not forget the verb “to seem”, that in the previous verses to this conclusion dominates the poem indicating to us that it is the speaker's limited perception from which the experience is told. In order to achieve meaning we need to dive into the gaps and take into account the poet's specific language features. Under the mystical perspective, the final statement reveals that there is something hidden that cannot be perceived at first sight and which needs a reflection on death. Elements used by the poet to convey meaning will provide us the necessary context for reflection to discover a meaningful open end. Knowledge is get through a reflection, a visionary moment which in the living triggers meditation and in the death a vision, an ultimate transcendence of the physical limits inexpressible and expressed as “blessed”.

Another issue connected with how meaning is conveyed arises when we encounter the difficulties in defining why is the eye blessed to have seen, that is, what has it seen that makes it blessed. This vision is described by the speaker as “Something”. The indeterminacy when describing the vision is an example of how the mystical works in Dickinson's poems: what is seen cannot be described but is shown, the limits of speaker's

perception are the limits of speaker's language, that means that what is not known, i.e. "Something", is shown but ineffable.

To deal with meaning in connection with language and the difficulties when trying to convey meaning through language, it is specially difficult when we try to put perceptions into words and even impossible when we try it with metaphysical issues. The mystical makes meaning not stagnant but interdependent and open. As we have seen in this poem the mystical is not always evident but can be observed in the two perceptions, in the images, and in linguistic devices such as compression, capitalization and repetition etc. It is this element that triggers multiple interpretations and it is infinite and projects outside the poem. It is an essential part of Dickinson's philosophical system; Dickinson neither closes the door nor leaves it completely open, she leaves the door ajar. Meaning is always achieved not through direct observation or superficial experience but through an inner reflection that has as a result revelation, which leaves us as life leaves us when confronted with its mysteries; curious and wondering what is the blessed vision waiting for us beyond mortality.

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

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

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

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

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

This reverie-like poem expresses the speaker's subconscious experience. The speaker attends her own funeral and, through its description the reader takes a journey to the speaker's mind and there we experience the asphyxiating atmosphere that magnifies every element surrounding the funeral ceremony. Finally the speaker wakes up violently from this reverie, falling to life and having learned from the experience lived. The journey goes again from the inner to the outer.

The speaker states that we are attending to a subconscious experience with the line: "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,". She chooses the verb "to feel" as a prelude to the different feelings expressed in the whole poem. The election of this verb in the first line is quite significant since it implies a direct experience, which together with the first person voice strengthens the intensity of this subconscious experience that pierces speaker's mind.

This poem is dominated by movement that is reminiscent of a wave that comes and goes, a mental tide that when rising, shows moments of higher awareness and when it retires it leaves the remains that the highlights of this mind has brought. The first instance of this movement in the first stanza is the appearance of the mourners: "And Mourners to and fro" The speaker recalls orderly the phases of a funerary ceremony when, first, the mourners enter the church from outside to inside. Their movement, described as "to and fro", suggests the mental chaos that the subconscious is facing. Mourners are the first

image of this dark parade that enters the scene felt in the speaker's brain. Mourners are individual black entities that bring to the mind the setting where the funeral is going to take place: disturbance, a constant movement that with the description "to and fro", appears like small dark atoms spinning and disturbing the speaker's mind. The appearance of the mourners is the first instance of the immersion in the funeral and in the subconscious mind. The immersion becomes stronger and at some points unbearable as we gradually advance in the poem. Mourners bring with them not only movement but sound, their treading penetrates into the mind creating a repetitive sound, monotonously annoying, like a nervous constant murmur that comes and goes and which provokes a final mental breakdown.

Mourners' treading is the initial reaction of this subconsciously felt funeral and, the speaker tries to define the effect that the sound and the movement of these mourners provoke in her mind: "Kept treading – treading – till it seemed/ That Sense was breaking through". Past tense narration in which this funeral is recalled is what allows the speaker to take a distant, safe position and at the same time allows her to take a meditative position as she is connecting inward reflection with outer images belonging to the religious cultural environment of the poet. This way a connection between the persona and the poet is established.

The sense that is being broken through in this stanza is the ear. In this first stanza mourners are the conjunction of images reunited with the effect of their treading recreated by the ear. She cannot see because her vision is that of the unconscious mind, but she learns by sound what is going on in the funeral. Mourners act as an unsettling element in the speaker's mind and such entities of uneasiness flow freely in her brain filling every

interstice with sound.

The introductory first stanza prepares us for what comes next as, mourners have entered the space and now they sit: "And when they all were seated,". This short respite of order and quiet contrasts with the rhythm and the intensity with which the previous stanza ends. The speaker seems to have briefly settled the mental chaos and when she finally gets her thoughts ordered, the second step of the funeral ceremony strikes more violently: "A Service, like a Drum – ". The religious ceremony bursts in the mind as if all the seated mourners suddenly stood up to begin the service. Instead of bringing peace to the dead, the service brings sound and no words only an unuttered sermon followed by mourners mute whispers and laments. The Service is compared with a drum that produces a sharp sound which alters the speaker's consciousness, and this sound of the drum is repeated as it was repeated by the mourners' treading in the previous stanza. Here, again the sound is another annoying repetitive and sickening sound: "Kept beating – beating – till I thought". The reaction triggered by this drum-like service is paralyzing: "Kept beating – beating – till I thought/ My Mind was going Numb". She feels threatened by this sound and she experiences an unsettling reaction. She recognizes the dangers of a death in the brain when what is thought to become numb is not her limbs but her mind.

When the service is over another step of this funeral comes: the transportation of the corpse in her coffin. "And then I heard them lift a Box" and again she does not see how they lift her coffin but she hears it but as a distant experience. She knows it is her own coffin but she chooses to say "a Box" instead of "my Box" and this is both an estrangement and a reminder that the experience which we are witnessing is not a physical lived experience but a subconscious experience. As in the previous stanzas, this

stanza starts with a sound which interrupts, a collapse of sound which alters the mind. The sound of the lifting of the box is almost mute, but soon this is interrupted by an unpleasant shrill sound that trespasses the barrier of the physical and affects the metaphysical: "And creak across my Soul". Once the box has been lifted, some of the mourners carry her coffin and start walking out of the church. Their steps are heavy as they are carrying the coffin and when they come out the church they hear the church bells: "Then Space – began to toll, / With those same Boots of Lead". The use of the word "same" refers to the collapse of sound of both bells and heavy steps and, this sound recalls the sound made previously by the mourners and without repeating words she persists in the repetitive unpleasant sensation perceived in her mind. In contrast to the previous stanza, here the sound does not directly refer to something that threatens her consciousness but which affects space. As the funeral is felt in her brain, this is the space in which the sound is produced by the "Boots of Lead" and the reverberating sound is produced and "again" they have the same effect. Here, the steps of these "Boots of Lead" become confused with the bell's toll, the two similar sounds create a confusion only perceived in the next stanza where everything becomes sound magnified in isolation, as isolated as the corpse in her coffin:

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

At the peak of the poem this thunderous sound collapses the speaker's mind, confusion transfigures the self into an ear. After this turmoil, the end of the funeral comes and when the corpse is closed in her coffin and left alone another auditory sensation comes into play: silence which is for the speaker foreign, unknown. Silence becomes so great that it

assumes the form of a partner in the coffin: "And I, and Silence, some strange Race". The result of all the noise she heard during the funeral places her in risky territory, where her psyche is menaced by the feelings that the sounds perceived arise, but once that everything has ended and the silence is magnified there is no anxiety, no rest, no feelings, just emptiness. The journey has taken her to this unknown place where silence is her only company.

When she rests in empty calm a sudden "Plank in Reason, broke," she wakes up from the reverie and tries to reach the surface but instead of coming out she drops to an abyss:

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

When she is pushed to a precipice and almost falls into madness, she recovers when reason appears. Reason is the element that allows her to wake up from the funeral reverie. As when we dream that we fall, she plunges into consciousness but in her fall we discover the point of this falling. The journey to the subconscious and the death reverie bestows knowledge only found in death. Does it mean that one can grasp this knowledge by travelling to this remote places of the subconscious? The answer is given and appears open to interpretation in this poem's last line "And Finished knowing – then –" This last line suggests both options: through this journey the speaker has reached meaning and she finally knows what cannot be expressed. She has ended knowing because she is back from death. From these two options we can draw a third interpretation: when she loses touch with the physical world and becomes absorbed into her subconscious, everything is magnified; sound, feelings, uncertainty, etc. She chooses to experience a funeral and all its phases because she knows that death and near-death experiences are higher forms of

awareness. This experience is risky as she pushes her mind to the limits but she is able to experience the magnified elements that surround her knowing and experiencing what, in full possession of all her mental faculties, would have been impossible. In the funeral she gets the necessary awareness to start knowing but when she is left alone she is not able to interpret the big silence that accompanies her and wreck her and in the thought of never coming back again to life, she wakes from the empty lethargic state by breaking "a Plank in Reason". She drops and in this whirlwind of experiences she meets the remote places of the human mind: "And hit a World, at every plunge," but these worlds that she meets, pass very quickly before her eyes. When she finally stops falling she discovers that she knows something that she did not know before but unable to express it leaves again not completely an open door but the door ajar.

If in other of Dickinson's poems we find physical scenes of awe lived by others and observed by her, here we experience in first person a funeral not through her distant observation but through the close observation of her own prodigious mind. She cannot describe how one feels when dead, but she takes the mystical approach of describing her feelings in order to show the inexpressible. In this way she experiences a funeral ceremony in which she is inside the coffin, a metaphor for being trapped in a body which limits her perception.

In this poem language is limited by the fact that what she felt it is not part of her outer physical world. She hears and can describe sound but when this sound is overwhelming her mind collapses and she cannot describe the outer because she is deprived of sight, consequently, she can extract no image, all the images are created by the reader through a synesthetic association that in our minds links visual images with auditory descriptions

i.e. "and then I heard them lift a Box", she describes what she hears not what she sees but in our mind it evokes the image of the mourners lifting up her coffin. The same happens with "Then Space – began to toll," space has not auditory quality but this space became solemn from the sound attributed to it. The bell's toll also suggests the service has ended and a new phase in the funeral starts and; by extension, a new state in the speaker's subconscious mind.

The interpretation of this poem is quite complex from the beginning to the end because, we cannot say that she is fantasizing about death because the process involved in this journey to the subconscious does not call forth pleasure in her. Yet it is a far more intense experience than mere imagination, as the speaker confronts the unknown dimensions of events by suspending her consciousness, this is what has led that some scholars to interpret this poem as an evidence to assert that Dickinson suffered from psychosis²⁰. The immersion in her own funeral is menacing to the speaker consciousness because she undergoes a trance-like experience in which the surrounding sounds threaten her. It is a mystical experience in which she connects not with the highest being but with the highest state of awareness. When she says "Wrecked, solitary, here –" she refers to a cosmic vision in which she can distantly discern knowledge in isolation, but life calls her back when the plank breaks and she recovers reason. She hits "a World, at every plunge," because reality is not plain, it has many layers and this is the secret revealed by Dickinson's poems and never put into words, since an omniscient knowledge is impossible to be captured in words. She has visited a region in her mind where she has

20 John Cody's reading of this poem is stated in his essay "A Plank in Reason": In poem no. 280 (about 1861), "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain," the poet describes an experience of gradually increasing depression which finally becomes overwhelming to such a degree that it seemed to her "That Sense was breaking through." Finally there comes the line "And the a Plank in Reason, broke, / And I dropped down." She is here saying that she suffered a prostrating depressive illness which culminated in a loss of rationality. (148)

been able to discern knowledge, but she cannot say what this knowledge is, because this knowledge can be only experienced. Once we have assumed that life is made up of multiple realities and that an absolute reality can only be reached when we finally understand that, absolute knowledge becomes a picture that can only be seen when the limited perception and the acknowledgement of the existence of the mystical merge. In this poem we see this combination of the knowledge of the world expressed through language and the mystical not expressed but shown in the limitations of language.

In this poem there is a two way movement from the outer to the inner and *vice versa*: she travels from the outside to her mind, when she felt the funeral and, from the inner to the outer when reason calls her back. It is from this outer perspective that she recalls what she has experienced during the funeral. The circle seems again almost complete but not at all: the travel to the subconscious implies an immersion of the speaker in her funeral, in this funeral the corpse inside the coffin is at the centre, but the borders of the circumference, the limits beyond, cannot be traced and they appear shaped by silence. She starts describing the elements that are part of the funeral e.g. mourners, service, box, bell's toll, but her perception is overwhelmed by the vision of what is beyond. When she is left alone and in this silence she can start depicting the borders of the circumference, life reminds her that she cannot define those borders and she comes back to reason, plunging into an abyss where multiple realities pass vertiginously.

As it happens in other of Dickinson's poems knowledge is reserved for the illuminating moment of death. One could argue that death in this poem is not directly experienced and that this poem is closer to description of a mental breakdown than to a reflection on death but death is the underlying topic and it is essential to understand the important revelation

achieved at the end of the poem. Death helps to draw the outer from the inner and, for this reason it is the best resource to illuminate both meaning and the mysteries untold.

The death experience described in the poem is so intense that is similar to a mystical elevation in which the physical is transcended. In contrast with other poems in "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain," there is no avid desire for attaining knowledge or regret for the mystery never revealed to the living. Knowledge, comes from experience lived when the funeral is over and death fills the space in her coffin. Silence, her partner at the coffin is the one who almost reveals her the secret that she never fully gets because she comes back to a conscious state.

Dickinson observed funeral parades passing by her window and she describes deaths in the neighbouring houses. The Dickinson's house was on the main street in Amherst that was the way to the cemetery and funeral processions passed before the house, so she was familiar with these corteges. We can trace this influence in her poems in which death passes before her eyes and she observes it. Rather than participate as a mourner, she is a reflective observer²¹. In this poem she is able to recreate a funeral from

21 "From her upstairs bedroom window of their wooden house on Pleasant Street Dickinson could almost daily watch funeral processions winding into the village cemetery (L 1:31)." (St. Armand 70)
The proximity of this processions can be clearly observed in the following poem:

There's been a Death, in the Opposite house
As lately as Today –
I know it, by the numb look
Such Houses have – alway –

The Neighbors rustle in and out –
The Doctor – drives away –
A Window opens like a Pod –
Abrupt – mechanically –

Somebody flings a Mattress out –
The Children hurry by –
They wonder if it died – on that –
I used to – when a Boy –

The Minister – goes stiffly in –

all these quotidian images and funerary traditions but on an inner level where she can partially extract knowledge.

As with other Dickinson poems, "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain," is also characterized by compression²², which "increases the ambiguity and multiplicity of meaning in a poem; it allows the poet to express more than one thought at a time or to disguise one thought behind another." (Miller 26) Uncertainty, is the feeling that is transmitted in the poem through the oppressive images recreated in the mind. Oppression is transmitted by the sounds the speaker describes and as I previously mentioned these sounds form images that are deciphered by the reader. These images build the poem's inner context where there is a speaker who is experiencing a funeral in her subconscious. Readers extrapolate these inner images linking them to a physical funeral ceremony, therefore, penetrate into the poem's context and meaning is easier to us. The reader recreates the whole picture abstracting it from the subconscious experience, the same as the speaker does just by evoking sounds and feelings of this very intimate experience. Pain inherent in the human condition is the destabilizing element that shakes Dickinson's system of thought, and when death comes into account, everything becomes questionable and reality becomes a series of images that build a recreation, a possible answer which

As if the House were His –
And He owned all the Mourners – now –
And little Boys – besides –

And then the Milliner – and the Man
Of the Appalling Trade –
To take the measure of the House –
There'll be that Dark Parade –

Of Tassels – and of Coaches – soon –
It's easy as a Sign –
The Intuition of the News –
In just a Country Town –

22 See Cristianne Miller *Emily Dickinson: A Poet's Grammar* pp. 24- 44

illuminates shadowy meaning. It is reasonable that uncertainty appears linked to the moment of death, since death is a mystery and it does not belong to immediate experience. In "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain," uncertainty is emphasized by the final statement and because she is perceiving the experience through her reasonable mind although the experience takes place in a moment when her mind is suspended. To emphasize this uncertainty she uses verbs and expressions that manifest that she feels menaced by not knowing what is going to happen next. In the first stanza the verb "to seem" appears for defining the effect that the sound of the mourner's treads have in the speaker's "Sense": "Kept treading – treading – till it seemed / That Sense was breaking through –" she is describing that she does not know when the treading is going to stop. The next step occurs when the mind is menaced by the beating of a drum-like service: "Kept beating – beating – till I thought/ My Mind was going numb". Here, "numb" acquires a special connotation under a mystical interpretation, the route that she takes to the road to knowledge first starts with senses and then follows the mind which is menaced by numbness that reflects the impossibility of establishing a connection with the ultimate reality. Later, in the next stanza her soul is tested and sound appears as a creak that pierces her soul : "And creak across my Soul". This is the last step that the speaker reaches, then, the surrounding elements are collapsed by sound and the heavens become a bell and the self dissolves totally and enters in trance.

The last line is very interesting from the point of view of compression. The vision collected through the sounds and images in this poem, achieves its conclusion in this last line, and more specifically in the isolated " – then – ". The ambiguous characteristic of the verb "to finish" leads us to think that there are two possibilities: she stopped knowing

or she finally knows. In my opinion the word "then" clarifies the ambiguity arising from the verb. It is a pause in discourse and a pause in reading, and the framed "then" is open to interpretation by the reader. The speaker has seen things but she cannot express them with words as reason and language fail to produce an explanation that can be put into words. The mysteries contained in death and knowledge beyond life's experience are symbolically expressed and compressed in the final framed word " – then –".

If we interpret this journey to the subconscious mind as a mystical experience in which the speaker passes through different phases, we can observe how structure is very important because it marks the steps of the route that she follows in order to get knowledge. I prefer to use the word "knowledge" rather than "eternity" because this word is linked with this poem's final line, and in knowing what is beyond, it is contained the knowledge that there is eternity. At the same time, eternity together with immortality embody in Dickinson's philosophical system the ultimate reality. The difficulties arising when we try to define this experience as mystical are mainly concerned with the fact that it is not the body but mind which undergoes this experience, but for Dickinson mind and body are part of the same physical reality. In the self it is contained the body and the menacing consciousness.

Connectors are the nexus to events that constitute the steps of the road to knowledge, they also mark the rhythm of the narration making it slow at the beginning and becoming faster and faster till the end, when the successive addition of information leave us unprepared for the final sudden reflection that is motivated by the vertiginous rhythm of the fall. All these sensations are conveyed thanks to the use of language features which allow us to get shades of meaning. Apart from connectors there are other

elements that gives rhythm to the narration: repetition creates a specific rhythm, and at the same time conveys annoyance and anxiety. There is repetition of the structures of the stanzas i.e. stanza one and two have the same structure, and there are repetitions within a line, here we find instances of alliteration: "Kept treading – treading – till it seemed" in which the poet emphasizes the two elements previously mentioned: annoyance and anxiety and it also recreates the sound perceived by the speaker's ear: i.e. In the last example, it is recreated the mourner's treads.

Punctuation in this poem is important as well and puzzling since it is very difficult to determine why she chooses a dash or why there is a comma. In this poem, we find a combination of both dashes and commas. Both represent a pause in reading but what is more interesting is the combined use of both commas and dashes and more specifically the choice of using one or another. Since there have been many attempts to define what is the function or meaning of Dickinson's dashes, I am going to adjust my analysis to accept the hypothesis that dashes are similar to commas, that they are used to isolate words, and consequently, they help to create meaning by underlying specific semantic content²³. Some of these dashes frame words which are very important for the interpretation of the poem. For instance, if we look at the first two dashes that appear in the poem: "Kept treading – treading – till it seemed" we observe that dashes frame the word "treading" which is in this line reduplicated. The emphasis on reduplication, and repetition is a powerful tool that creates meaning in this poem; by the sound that arises in our minds a mental picture of the scene that it is being described and it also helps to penetrate into the

23 These dashes correspond to pauses for breath or deliberation, or to signs of an impatient eagerness that cannot be bothered with the formalities of standard punctuation. Dickinson's dashes operate rhetorically more than syntactically. . . . Dickinson's dashes often function in predictable ways to isolate words whose meaning suggest isolation or otherwise to reflect the semantic content of the words they surround, and to create suspense in a text. (*A Poet's Grammar* Miller 51)

speaker's state of mind as repetition by depicting the sensations felt by the speaker. We are not feeling the funeral in our brains but we are reading the narration of this funeral, but the multiple connections between feeling, thought and self that a single mind can create are shown in this poem. When dashes appear at the end of a line there is a pause in discourse, like a momentary respite to take a breath for the coming increase in the narration's intensity and rhythm: "That the Sense was breaking through –" the intensity of the moment of anguish created by the mourner's treads stops here and then, in the next stanza when all they seated the treading stops: "And when they all were seated,". The next dash, "A Service like a Drum –", marks the transition between the previous brief moment of calm and the new sound that oppress her mind. The same happens with the next dash appearing in the poem, "My Mind was going numb –". This dash marks the transition between the moment of intensity and the new step. In "Then Space – began to toll," the dash indicates that a new sound starts and this sound implies a new step in the funeral i.e. when the corpse is taken to the churchyard. When she reaches a step further in this particular journey, it appears another dash that coincides with the end of this state and the beginning of her fall into the conscious state of mind: "Wrecked, solitary, here – / And the a Plank in Reason, broke,". The depth of the fall is marked as well with a dash: "And I dropped down, and down –" It indicates that a final conclusion is at hand, and the two final dashes of the puzzling end frame an open conclusion: "And finished knowing – then –". The final " – then – " represents a transition, it is the movement bridging the subconscious state and the conscious state, from the inner to the outer. It also is the transition between the moment of illumination and the moment in which she "wakes up". Finally, it represents a revelation that is the result of the experience acquired during this

journey and the preparation for a new state: the beginning of a new phase in which the speaker has seen and shows a veiled quest completion not yet achieved. Then, the final two dashes seem to mark two states: the end of her fall, that is the perspective from which the narration is told. And the onset to a new transition not expressed but shown since the thematic unit of this poem makes us consider death as a transitional estate²⁴.

Thus, in trying to answer the question "what is the meaning behind the final line?" we need to consider different aspects: Dickinson's death poems try to convey meaning by making manifest the limits of human perception. Death then becomes a visionary experience in which the onset of eternity is felt; likewise, death is the beginning of a process of transcendence and ascension which ends when immortality is achieved. In this poem we do not experience the longing for death or the long for knowledge, and there is not an overt exclamation of her desire for learning the mysteries beyond death or a regret for being deprived of this absolute knowledge. But there is an experience of exploring the personal reality of the speaker's self, through the limits of language and the abyss²⁵. In other Dickinson poems dealing with the same topic, the anxiety or the desire for getting knowledge only revealed at death is present. In contrast this poem contains a flow-through the remote spaces of the mind where she gets involved into the funeral. If death is the means for getting knowledge, the funeral is the preparation for getting this knowledge and, the steps followed in this poems correspond to the steps taken in order to meditate on death. Although in this poem we have a disturbing, asphyxiating and menacing experience it is not death that causes this reaction but the abyss which reflects

24 We observe clearly again in this poem the function of the dashes described by Weisbuch: "... suggest a poet en route to an idea within the poem. ... as a hinge, with meaning moving forward and back in a poem like a swinging door." ("Prisming Dickinson" 213)

25 "He who fights with monsters should be careful lest he thereby become a monster. And if thou gaze into an abyss, the abyss will also gaze into thee." Friederich Nietzsche (qtd. In Feit Diehl)

on the speaker's words and the description of her feelings.

Capitalization is one of the most representative features of Dickinson's poetry, if we try to build up a pattern for these capitalized words in "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain," we will observe the effect of capitalization in expressing the unexpressed. In other of Dickinson's poems we find capitalized words which are in the majority substantives and, this is not striking since the proportion of nouns in Dickinson's poems is bigger than any other part of speech²⁶. We have seen how capitalization seems to emphasize and support coherently the topic of the poem and, it seems that this visual element helps the reader to fix his attention on capitalized words²⁷. If we analyse the present poem under this scope, we will see that this hypothesis fits: In this poem we find in each stanza capitalized nouns: "Funeral", "Brain", "Mourners", "Sense", "Service", "Drum", "Mind", "Box", etc. These capitalized nouns highlight the topic of this poem, that is, the experience of a subconscious funeral and the elements that help to construct the meaning of the poem which sometimes are concrete and sometimes abstract, sometimes they appear connected with sounds and sometimes with images, but all of them are entities that help to the poem's understanding. The striking thing about capitalization in this poem is the ambiguous capitalized verb "Finished" in the also ambiguous last line. It is surprising because it is a verb and as previously mentioned are rarely capitalized. But what is more interesting to consider this capitalized verb from the semantic point of view, as in the hypothesis elaborated for the dash-framed " – then – " does this capitalized "Finished" emphasize the ambiguous nature of the last line, or is it a mere coincidence? This

26 The proportion of words capitalized as it has been demonstrated in Miller's *Emily Dickinson: A Poet's Grammar* is the following: "To demonstrate: taking a random ten poems (. . .) as a example and not counting the first word of each line or the word 'I,' Dickinson capitalizes 108 nouns, 10 adjectives, 2 verbs and no words of any other grammatical category." (Miller 58)

27 "By flagging so many of her substantives, Dickinson seems to invite the reader to make as much of them as . . . she will." (*A Poet's Grammar*, Miller 59)

question is a matter of speculation. In my opinion is not coincidental that she used the verb "to finish". The verb suggests that the previous action has come to an end, she finished feeling the funeral in her brain. But in this last line: "And Finished knowing – then–" is linked with the verb "to know", which is also ambiguous because it does not state what is known, mainly because it is not definable. So, is this "Finished" indicating the end of an acquired knowledge? Or is it indicating the end of her knowing? the answer to these questions is: "– then –" there is no finish but a possible continuation to something impossible to explain, that is, the knowledge to which we have previously referred. When we think that the door is closed, "– then –" leaves it not open wide but open enough to discern that there is something behind that incites us to go on. Thus, "– then –" is a clear example of the mystical.

Despite that fact that punctuation and capitalization remain matters for speculation, they are important for the analysis of Dickinson's poetry, as they are particular features of her poetics, and it is very interesting to observe the effect of their peculiarities with the analysis of how meaning is conveyed in her poems, because meaning can be extracted not only from what is said in the poem literally but also from the analysis of the mystical. Dickinson nourishes the mystical through her features i.e. dashes are pauses but at the same time they frame and highlight words otherwise equated to the rest of the words and likewise capitalization are not just a way of writing but are a way to catch the reader's attention and highlight the keywords in a poem. Thus, the language barrier is overcome by using these features to depict Dickinson's mystical dimension in which the ultimate achievement is immortality.

Tense and person are peripheral elements that also help to elaborate meaning. This

poem's tense is past simple. It indicates that the speaker is recalling experience from a safe and meditative position. This experience is told from a first person perspective which also helps us to see how she deals with the experience. Person and tense support the speaker in the narration of a deep experience, but since this experience is unutterable the speaker gives a significant "Silence" before the speaker's falling. In this silence it is shown an impossibility of relating the intensity of the experience with words. It is no coincidental that it is the highest point in the narration. When there is a sound collapse; one of "those evenings of the Brain"²⁸ This can be extended to how the speaker's subconscious mind and language collapses. When she stops hearing and becomes an ear herself she cannot speak but she transmits the hidden by a significant silence which not coincidentally is "some strange Race", she is confronted with a new reality that cannot be expressed in words but which is in fact expressed by the mystical.

28 From the poem "We grow accustomed to the Dark -":

We grow accustomed to the Dark —
When light is put away —
As when the Neighbor holds the Lamp
To witness her Goodbye —

A Moment — We uncertain step
For newness of the night —
Then — fit our Vision to the Dark —
And meet the Road — erect —

And so of larger — Darkness —
Those Evenings of the Brain —
When not a Moon disclose a sign —
Or Star — come out — within —

The Bravest — grope a little —
And sometimes hit a Tree
Directly in the Forehead —
But as they learn to see —

Either the Darkness alters —
Or something in the sight
Adjusts itself to Midnight —
And Life steps almost straight.

In this poem the physical and the metaphysical and the connection between the two help to establish connections that help us to perceive different layers of meaning. The elements belonging to the physical world in this poem are those which are connected with the physical events belonging to the external world, that is, the funeral and all the elements that take place in the funeral such as the presence of the mourners, the service, the box etc. and sound in general. The problem that we find when we put these elements in the physical layer or the external, is that they are concepts belonging to the outer world of the speaker but she is internalizing all these elements and putting them together with inner, metaphysical elements such as the soul and the creaking of a box: "And the I heard them lift a Box/ And creak across my Soul." All these elements come together in the subconscious experience lived by the speaker under the mystical scope. The mystical experience brings together the elements that can be recollected in the outer images and sounds of a funeral and the revelation that she had when she put together these elements. Even when the mystical experience has finished i.e. it is narrated from a past tense and she is recalling what she felt, she is able to transmit the whole by putting together the physical and the metaphysical. So we can decipher meaning as we advance in the reading of the poem, and we get the whole when at the end the ultimate knowledge acquired is not attainable but is hinted at.

I have used the word "mystical" to describe the funeral experience held in this poem because she passes through different phases in order to achieve an absolute awareness the ultimate knowledge. These phases can be distinguished and are here identified with the steps of a funerary ceremony. She chooses a funeral, because for Dickinson death is itself a necessary step to illumination, when the ultimate truth will be revealed. During the

funeral she experiences different sensations, many anguishing and paralysing, but we can follow the stages until the poem reaches its highest point when she feels stagnant: "Wrecked, solitary, here –". Since it is impossible for her to put into words the knowledge she has arrived at and she is overwhelmed by the situation, she remains silent. In my view, the last step in this journey shows that she partially achieves the goal of this mystical experience: ultimate knowledge. She has experienced part of this knowledge by transcending the limits of conscious limitations and acknowledging the existence of other realities, for this reason the inexpressible revelation is shown. Thanks to the mystical, she learns to show moments of shadows and moments of illumination. In this poem Dickinson's uncanny capacity for blending extremes is present in these expressions of the mystical which allow her to overcome the limitations of language and to develop meaningful connections through the combination and exploration of these elements: mind and body, the inner with the outer, the physical and the metaphysical.

Just lost, when I was saved!
Just felt the world go by!
Just girt me for the onset with Eternity,
When breath blew back,
And on the other side I heard recede the disappointed tide!

Therefore, as One returned, I feel
Odd secrets of the line to tell!
Some Sailor, skirting foreign shores –
Some pale Reporter, from the awful doors
Before the Seal!

Next time, to stay!
Next time, the things to see
By ear unheard,
Unscrutinised by Eye –

Next time, to tarry,

While the Ages steal –
Slow tramp the Centuries,
And the Cycles wheel!

In this poem the poetic persona tells us how she returned from a place which does not belong to the world where she lives, that is, the physical world. She regrets having lost the vision of this unknown world that is death. In death she can contemplate and experience things reserved for this moment.

This poem is structured in four stanzas which is an the elegy for the lost universe of death and all that it comprised, increasing in intensity as the poem advances and the lost becomes more painful. Stanzas are structured in parallel and the first two stanzas explore how the speaker experiences death and how she returns to the living state. In these first two stanzas there is a regret for coming back to life, an analysis and a narration of the lost things, and a reflection about the lost vision. In the last two stanzas this regret becomes stronger and we can observe a final desire for recovering all that she lost when she came back to life and a meditation about the nature of life and the visionary experience of death.

In the first stanza there is a strong regret for the lost stage, the stanza begins with the paradoxical line: "Just lost, when I was saved!" the two antithetical words "lost" and "saved" are in this line united to emphasize the contradiction of death as a release of life and how difficult is to assimilate death for the living. The first line and the first stanza in general are paradoxical, but we find out that these contraries are almost necessary to understand what otherwise will be problematic to interpret and to express. Meaning arises from the paradox, "lost" which contrasts with "saved" but as we have said they are part of the same reality, that is, she is "lost" because she experiences death and comes to life,

and she is "saved" because she experiences salvation in death. Paradoxically, in death are contained both the loss and the salvation, but the two antithetical terms here appear connected in coherent relationship.

In lines two and three, the speaker goes on by regretting what she has just experienced: "Just felt the world go by! / Just girt me for the onset with Eternity," where in death she felt the knowable "world go by". When life passes, she starts to experience death that is a new comfortable reality in which revelation is at hand and where eternity starts to be experienced. When life comes back, it does not produce in the speaker a healing effect but instead, disappointment: "When breath blew back, / And on the other side / I heard recede the disappointed tide!". The speaker acknowledges that life and death are different separated sides and what is achieved in death cannot be achieved in life. The speaker is about to experience eternity, but when she recovers life, she just hears the murmur of the receding tide, that previously soaked her, now receding and leaving her with anxious, "wet memories" of what she really lost.

She feels that she has witnessed revelation and, she tries to put into words what she saw and as this experience is still fresh in her memory, she feels able to recount what she felt, but she realizes that her language is limited and she can just report images of her experience that will seem "odd secrets" to those who have never experienced death as she did:

Therefore, as One returned, I feel
Odd secrets of the line to tell!
Some Sailor, skirting foreign shores –
Some pale Reporter, from the awful doors
Before the Seal!

Her experience has left her with memories of the journey and, she puts herself in the

place of a traveller, she is “One returned”, “Some Sailor”, “Some pale Reporter”. After coming back to life she has acquired knowledge that the living cannot achieve, and although her journey to death has been very brief, she owns “odd secrets”. If she is a traveller and she has travel to death in which secrets are held, death is a line, a foreign shore and the “awful doors” are the outward entrance considered unpleasant by the living who are unaware of its mysteries beyond. Death constitutes a division between the living and their limited vision and, infiniteness, eternity and truth. The first line in this poem makes more sense as we advance in the poem, and after reading the second stanza we observe how the speaker has glimpsed part of the mysteries, but she has been deprived of death’s sealed secrets.

In the next stanza she longs for the “next time”, that is, when she definitively will die and experience what it has been impossible to fully experienced during her journey to death. In the third stanza she expresses part of the secrets that are not overtly told or enumerated but shown by the contrast between presence and absence:

Next time, to stay!
Next time, the things to see
By Ear unheard,
Unscrutinized by Eye –

Thus, for the speaker, death is desired because it represents a visionary moment. Death allows the living to experience “the things to see”, that is, revelation that can only be seen when the self is released from her physical limitations. These things are “unheard” because the sound of these things is unknown to the living and, the nature of this sound does not belong to the knowable world. Liberated from physical limitations the ear can heard. Death is a visionary experience that allows the self to overcome her physical limitations, and also furnishes the self with ultimate knowledge, that is, knowledge that

cannot be revealed by the senses which are limited and imperfect. So when she is back from death she longs for recovering the lost vision. "The things to see" is a sum of many things unperceived by the senses, they are metaphors for the highest way of awareness, from this metaphor we obtain the information that the speaker wants to transmit us, her desire for getting all what she lost. Metaphor is a device to show what it cannot be put into words, "the things to see" are unnamed bits of information that show revelation. The speaker is "Some pale Reporter, from the awful doors/ Before the Seal!" so she is not telling us all what she feels, what she has seen, but she is reporting her experience facing the inexpressible. The reason why she cannot tell the "odd secrets" is partly because these secrets are sealed to the living and partly because language is limited and it has no words for describing the transcendent experience. Her recovered perception does not allow her to tell the things that are "By Ear unheard" or the images "Unscrutinized by the Eye -". Thus, her desire for waiting for the "next time" to achieve total awareness becomes stronger from the lips of someone who both struggles with the limitations of language and who has partly experienced eternity.

Through the poem the speaker does not report images unseen, sounds unheard, mysteries, knowledge or wonders. She just reports her experience and her feelings about her experience. But are these images secrets that reveal that all that we know and see it is partial and limited in comparison with the promise of infiniteness? As she has been in touch with the onset of eternity she yearns for the things she lost when she came back to life and justifies herself by saying that she is like the returned traveller that tell what she has seen, but she cannot cope with the unlimited and the secrets sealed for the living, so she regrets and wishes to stay in the place where she travelled to.

In the last stanza her desire goes on. The speaker moves to another remarkable quality of death: its stillness and timelessness. Life advances slowly and she feels trapped by her human condition and by human fate, that is the "Cycles wheel". Human beings are trapped by their mortal condition in a cycle that tediously goes on and on forever. Physical limitations tie men to life and do not allow us to see, hear, or to experience a different reality. In this last stanza the temporal limitations are highlighted by her desire to stay in a timeless place: "While the Ages steal – / Slow tramp the Centuries, / And the Cycles wheel!". Humans are trapped in "Ages", "Centuries" and "Cycles", whereas death allows men to overcome this spatial-temporal trap.

Unlike other poems that we have analysed so far in connection with death, in this poem there is no direct allusion to the "death" itself, but the images and vocabulary used by the poet in this poem help us to identify the topic. In this poem death is a travel and it is salvation and, as in other Dickinson's poems, we find the narration of a experience that is connected with death but in the case of this poem the narration it is quite particular. In "Just lost, when I was saved!" we do not find images of awe and sorrow connected with death and there are scarce or hardly any metaphors that can be identified with death. In this poem we find many of the images of Dickinson's poems : Eternity, the eye, the wheel etc. these images suggest or have connection with the promises brought by death. With these images appear the figure of a sailor which in Dickinson's poetry is the explorer of promising horizons. In this poem death is the horizon from which eternity can start to be glimpsed.

The speaker of this poem is in first person and it blends past and present tenses. The experience is told from a present perspective. After telling this experience the speaker

reflects on it, and finally expresses a wish for future, for the "next time". The experience lived previously to this reflection is a mystical experience in which partial truth is revealed and in which the speaker can experience things that she cannot experience as a mortal being. In this poem we notice some similarities shared with other Dickinson's poems. For instance, in "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain," the speaker undergoes a sort of mystical experience through which comes to the conclusion that knowledge is in death, and in many other Dickinson poems we arrive at a similar insight. In this poem it is shown how symbols and images convey a journey, an ecstatic experience that makes identifiable the mystical in this poem.

In Dickinson's poems we find two extremes of observation and experience: when death is observed it brings doubts and disturbs the human mind raising questions about the mysteries never seen by the living eye. When it is tasted, death becomes desirable and this feeling surpasses and overtakes the doubts and descriptions of what is seen by the eye. So rather than the eye's vision, we have an "inner" vision, a reflection about "the things to see". In this poem we also find a contrast between life and death. If death is the liberating element, life appears constricting and though undeniable, it both deprives the self eternity and it does not allow to achieve immortality.

This poem's structure is parallel, corresponding with the path of the narration and its increasing intensity. There is repetition: "just" is repeated at the beginning of the three first verses and it gives the sensation of close proximity in time, that is, the experience she has just lived is over and she returns to life. "When" is also repeated to indicate the consequence of what it has finally happened. It gives us the result of the proximity of events that never took place. The speaker also repeats the indefinite "some" to identify

and equate the "One returned" with the "Sailor", and to extend this identification of the sailor to the "Some pale Reporter, from the awful doors". The speaker becomes an intrepid sailor "skirting foreign shores –" and, these shores are the mysteries enclosed in death. Again, metaphor reveals us the existence of something beyond but it does not tell us what are these "foreign" mysteries.

Repetition is also used to increase the intensity of the speaker's desire for permanence, to highlight the limitations of the living and to provide a promising future liberated from time's restrictions: "Next time."

Punctuation in this poem shares features with other poems analysed so far. Here, we need to add analysis of exclamation marks²⁹ which, as with other signs of punctuation in Dickinson's poetry, provide semantic information about the nature of the speaker's utterance and also emphasize the importance level of information. We find the first exclamation mark in the first line: "Just lost, when I was saved!" and obviously, the speaker is emphasizing the main idea that she wants to transmit in the poem. The confusion that arises from paradox shows the uncertainty confronted by the speaker. Thus, contradictory feelings arise when she experienced death and she returns having partially seen. The exclamation here provides a necessary emphasis to transmit speaker's feeling about her experience.

We find another exclamation mark in the last line of the first stanza: "I heard recede the disappointed tide!" she expresses uncertainty by the use of the image of the "tide", the exclamation mark highlights this uncertainty.

Exclamations in the second stanza emphasize the secrets and mysteries concealed for the

²⁹ "The exclamation marks occurs most frequently early in Dickinson's writing years, and like italics and the dash, gives the poetry an air of breathless or urgent speech." (Miller 57)

living: "Odd secrets of the line to tell!", "Some pale Reporter, from the awful doors, / Before the Seal!".

The last two exclamations that appear in the poem refer to the desire for never coming back when she ultimately dies. To remain in death will allow her to obtain knowledge, the secrets that cannot be told, these secrets that have been lost when she came back to life. The poem ends in an exclamation which underscores the cyclic nature of the universe in which everything returns to its initial state, a "dust to dust" end, which also points out the mortal fate that subjects men to the "Cycle's Wheel", inconsistent and uncertain. Death liberates us from this wheel, so this final verse expresses tedium and emphasizes the speaker's feeling of being lost and trapped. It contrasts with the promises of immortality and eternity previously experienced by the speaker.

In this poem we have both dashes and commas. Dashes appear at the end of some lines, as well as commas which appear in final and middle position within a verse. If we analyse where dashes appear, we observe that they mark a pause between one verse and the following. Dashes in this poem also suggest meaning³⁰. The first dash appears in "Some Sailor, skirting foreign shores – /Some pale reporter from the awful doors", this dash marks a pause between lines and also suggests an open meaning of the unknown, "foreign shores". If we compare these two lines we see how the adjective "foreign" emphasizes uncertainty, on the other hand "awful doors" is a metaphor for death and it represents the generalized vision of death. For this reason I am inclined to think that she is being deliberately ironic by using a generalized vision of death as something awful

³⁰ Miller recollects in her "poet's grammar" the function of dashes in Dickinson's poems. In this poem we can observe the uses that she recollects: "These dashes corresponds to pauses for breath or deliberation . . ."

In Sewall's *The Life of Emily Dickinson* he points out some of the works on Dickinson's punctuation including dashes. He says about Dickinson's dashes: "In her poems and often in her prose the dash became a sensitive instrument to regulate rhythm and gain emphasis." (350 n.)

when in the poem death is the opposite to awful. "Foreign shores" is a metaphor for the unknown regions of death and these cannot be defined, as it happens in other Dickinson's poems in which dashes become room for interpretation. The next dash that appears in the last line of the third stanza: "Unscrutinized by Eye –" this line refers to the previously mentioned "things to see" yet, these things cannot be expressed in words or seen by the physical eyes and for this reason they remain a mystery for the living. The promise of a vision and the impossibility of saying what are those things "Unscrutinized" makes a pause necessary. The dash, in this verse is used to separate the ideas expressed in the following stanza, also to leave this vision unexpressed and as part of the mystical.

Finally, the last dash appears in: "While the Ages steal – / Slow tramp the Centuries" and here the dash separates two similar ideas in the same verse but, the problem is that the following verse is separated from the last with a comma and not with a dash: "Slow tramp the Centuries, / And the Cycles wheel!" I have two suggestions: first, the dash is used as a connector by the poet to unite two similar ideas or ideas belonging to the same stanza and they mark a thematic itinerary, whereas in "Slow tramp the Centuries," we do not need a visual sign to know that the two last verses are connected, since the last one begins with the conjunction "And" which connects the two and, as it is the end of the poem, we do not need a sign that indicates to us the "idea en route"(Weisbuch 213). The most plausible hypothesis is that this dash is put here for metrical reasons as in the case of the previous dash, but since we have seen the suggestive power of dashes we have the right to suspect that behind this dash lays a hidden meaning.

Capitalization in this poem follows the pattern followed in other poems. The capitalized words are all nouns, that in each verse seem to emphasize ideas, that all together express

what the poem wants to transmit.

One remarkable semantic aspect of this poem is the creation of meaning through the "coming and going" movement and, to convey this movement, the speaker uses paradox: "Just lost, when I was saved!". This paradox indicates that from one state "saved", to a different state "lost", and this movement is sudden, as modified with the adverb "just", and dramatic because the speaker is torn from a desirable state to an uncertain state in which she feels lost. Life and death are separated by a line and the movement is like a tide that comes up and brings the speaker closer to death or that ebbs and moves the speaker away from death: "And on the other side/ I heard the disappointed tide!". Verbs and their tenses also help create this sensation of movement. For instance verbs like "blew back", "recede" or "returned" indicate transitional movement from one place or state to another i.e. from not breathing to breathing again or in the second example, from going to returning. When the movement stops we observe how stagnation affects the feelings of the speaker who having returned wishes to stay not in the life's side but in the death's side.

Images and symbols also underline this movement: "disappointed tide", "Sailor" or "Cycles wheel". Movement in this poem is associated with uncertainty and the mutable quality of life which at the same time is emphasized by the ephemeral moment of salvation.

Movement has two stages and, in the first two stanzas, movement and the speaker's thought fluctuates between the two worlds. The speaker contrasts and weighs what she lost, but once she acknowledges that the secrets she once experienced are sealed, she begins to wish for the future a permanent stay.

Prominent symbols and images appearing in this poem are mainly connected with travellers, movement and uncertainty and, those connected with travellers are identified with the speaker since the speaker is a traveller herself. The image of "Some Sailor, skirting foreign shores" is interesting from the semantic point of view and it can be connected to other poems by Dickinson, in which the sea is "an emblem of life itself_ not only its risks and dangers but its alluring mysteries." (Sewall 522) Sea, in Dickinson's poems also appears as a transforming element that brings bliss³¹. In "Just lost, when I was saved!" the sailor is identified with the speaker travelling to unknowable death. Travel in Dickinson's poetry associated with death and transformation. In this poem the speaker recounts her particular resurrection where, she is brought back to life but she does not feel saved. This travel to death brings her illumination and she knows what the living do not know. Thus as a prophet of death she acknowledges the wonders and the secrets, but her words are mute. She preaches salvation in death, the tone of the poem is that of a preacher, but she just can transmit her vision by establishing contrasts between the knowable and the unknown, and by expressing a strong desire for remaining in eternity. She felt the onset of eternity, and she talks about it but she does not describe it with words but through her desire to experience everlasting illumination and by contrasting this timeless space with the limitations of time and man's fate:

Next time, to tarry,
While the Ages steal –

31 In Weisbuch's "Prisming Dickinson" he takes as an example the poem "I started Early – Took my Dog –" to talk about the sea symbol as a symbol of death but also transformation: "It is something like [death], of course, but it is also the transformative if destructive sea of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*- Dickinson's shoes hypothetically overflowing 'with Pearl' recalls Ariel's 'Those are pearls that were his eyes' . . . The sea in this poem . . . is not merely death and not merely evil since, for it promises a pearly bliss . . . by which ecstasy is bought at the price of sanity and ordinary selfhood." (204)

In "Just lost, when I was saved!" the transformation occurs when death is experienced, sea is the vehicle through which the sailor skirts "foreign shores" and this vehicle is death but also a vehicle for transformation.

Slow tramp the Centuries,
And the Cycles wheel!

A remarkable symbol of movement is the "tide" which also appears in other Dickinson's poems, symbolizing the momentary, and the uncertainty it embodies is a destabilizing element³². In this poem this quality of the symbolic tide is conveyed by the adjective "disappointed".

The Eye and the Ear are symbols that appear frequently in Dickinson's poetry. They are connected to perception and with the two sides of perception: limited perception, that is, the living perception and ultimate perception and, that is, the perception only achieved in death. In this poem the former appears connected and contrasted with the latter; the phrase "the things to see" does not refer exclusively to images but they represent an ultimate entity of knowledge impossible to describe with words but described instead thanks to the contrast provided by the physical ear and the physical eye, these unknown "things to see" are expressed and the extraordinary quality of these things revealed by the poem's context: "Next time, the things to see/ By Ear unheard, / Unscrutinized by the Eye –".

At the end of the poem a powerful symbol arises "Cycles wheel" and this circular symbol is linked with human fate and life's cyclic quality. This interpretation is coherent providing the context of the poem and specially due to the connection that this symbol establishes with the other images in the last stanza, where it is contrasted the promise of permanence of eternity, with the temporary and movable quality of life.

If we think about Dickinson's "business", that is, "circumference"³³, the symbol of the

³² This can be observed in Dickinson's poem "I started Early – Took my Dog –"

³³ "Perhaps you smile at me. I could not stop for that – My Business is Circumference –" (qtd. in Sewall 556)

“Cycles wheel” acquires a particular connotation. Existence is a circumference. We know the impossibility of describing and defining the limits of existence, that is, the borders of the circumference³⁴. Life is structured around this circumference, but the limits are never reached while living, the borders cannot be described so for this reason the speaker cannot define them, what she shows is the feeling of being part of the surrounding elements of the circumference. She has experienced the onset of eternity and she has been able to glimpse the “things to see”, but as she has come back, she is trapped in this “Cycle’s wheel”. The wheel becomes the symbol around which all life and all the experiences go round, so it contrasts with the desire for timelessness and stability of the ultimate reality.

We can establish two sides: temporal and spatial in this poem. The temporal sides are “the Cycles wheel” and “Eternity”. This way, the temporal and the timeless contrasts; individuals are subjected to the temporal, they move and change.

Space, physical and metaphorical, can be also divided into two sides: the living side and the death side. The physical is on the living side whereas the death side belongs to a different dimension. Metaphorically they are two separated worlds divided by a “line”. The speaker reaches the line and looks beyond into the unknown, death is only the first step on the road to illumination. So, she feels that she has stepped onto this road and has been liberated from the limitations that the world of the living imposed, and she visits unknown places that goes beyond the physical. In her travel she acquires a higher awareness but this journey is interrupted because she returns to the physical world and in it, she is subjected to the temporal and spatial restrictions of the living.

34 “Ultimate circumference may well be the extension of understanding from mortal limits to absolute fulfillment in immortality.” (Anderson, “Circumference” 120)

Narration in this poem differs from other Dickinson's poems analysed so far. Instead of being ordered by conjunctions which helps to enumerate the events that take place in the poem, and which sometimes provide a sense of immediacy, spontaneity and even naivety³⁵. In this poem we find a solemn and elevated tone in which we scarcely find conjunctions and in which the narration has a particularity: the poem moves with the "coming and going" movement of the narration and the speaker's reflections about her experience. The speaker's feelings, insights and the poem's tense is what structure narration. So we pass from one feeling to the other, from one insight to the other and from one tense to the other throughout the narration.

In other poems visited so far such as "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain" death was experienced in the subconscious mind. The speaker after she comes back from this experience and after having seen and experimented the mysteries veiled for the living, tells us what happened when she was in touch with death. In "Just lost, when I was saved!" the process is similar. The speaker narrates an experience that allows her to experience death and its mysteries. The speaker becomes visionary when she reaches the death stage, despite of all the confusion which surrounds the journey. She comes back to life victorious, with her vision furnished with the knowledge gained and she does not lament but has instead a strong desire to complete life's cycle and in death, ultimately to meet eternity. It is for this reason that I have used the word "resurrection" to describe the journey of this poem, she has seen, she has heard, she has felt "the odd secrets of the line to tell!". She finishes her travel enriched by the experience. But from this interpretation one question arises. Why if she feels the transmitter of all this knowledge, does she not

35 "Her juxtaposition or simple linking of independent claims helps create the dramatic and impulsive effect of a speaking voice, often that of childishness or naiveté." (*A Poet's Grammar*, Miller 32)

say anything about “the things to see”? And why if she feels enriched from this experience does she say that she is lost? In her journey there is a sacrifice: life, and in returning to life there is another sacrifice: knowledge and eternity. Bearing in mind all this a new interpretation arises. She is lost because she was overwhelmed by all that she gained, like an eye getting accustomed to a sudden brightness of light. The gleam is so strong that one needs to adjust one's vision for the light and, this ecstatic experience will serve as an visionary experience, a preparation for “meeting the road erect”³⁶. A consequence of this sudden gleam is the series of images and feelings she had, all of them glowing and promising. The problem is that these “things to see” belong to a different layer which cannot be transmitted through words. Meaning is shown through the collection of elements that are used to express her mystical experience.

In this poem she furnishes her narration with images that suggest eternity and the promise of revelation and with feelings that express the speaker's desire. When the

36 We grow accustomed to the Dark —
When light is put away —
As when the Neighbor holds the Lamp
To witness her Goodbye —

A Moment — We uncertain step
For newness of the night —
Then — fit our Vision to the Dark —
And meet the Road — erect —

And so of larger — Darkness —
Those Evenings of the Brain —
When not a Moon disclose a sign —
Or Star — come out — within —

The Bravest — grope a little —
And sometimes hit a Tree
Directly in the Forehead —
But as they learn to see —

Either the Darkness alters —
Or something in the sight
Adjusts itself to Midnight —
And Life steps almost straight.

ecstatic experience: "Just lost, when I was saved!", is recalled the speaker uses different devices to show what she cannot be expressed with words. She gives us hints about the absolute experience, but this poem is less paralysing than others in which we observe a speaker unable to utter words, even sometimes the speaker remains silent i.e. in a "I felt a Funeral in my Brain", the speaker undergoes the mystical experience, remaining silent when she abandons completely her body and gets immersed in a subconscious trance. In "Just lost, when I was saved!", the speaker recalls the experience and describes it without transmitting the privileged visions she has seen but by contrasting these visions with the limited visions of the living and it is from this perspective which the experience is told. The mystical helps the speaker to overcome the physical boundaries of language. By recalling the mystical, language is liberated from all restrictions and meaning is conveyed using the different poetic elements that incorporate semantic content. This way, the mystical in Dickinson's poetry expressed and enriched by the multiple layers and meanings provided by Dickinson's poetics.

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

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

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

And Spirit turned unto the Dust

“Old Friend, thou knowest me”
And Time went out to tell the News
And met Eternity.

In this poem the speaker narrates an ecstatic experience in which her body and her physical limitations are overcome. Her physical senses are touched by the experience lived. Little by little the physical is surpassed and an ultimate knowledge unfolds. At first she fails to explain what is happening until a sudden revelation illuminates her and provides knowledge. In this poem the speaker fantasizes about death and the absolute moment when eternity will be met. The mystical quality of this poem makes the speaker struggle with language, that is, she faces the difficulties arising when she tries to express something inexpressible. It is precisely, these limitations that show us how Dickinson manages to express what reason fails to explain and it is in poems like “I heard as if I had no Ear”, where I am inclined to reassert the importance of bearing in mind the mystical element in Dickinson's death poems.

The poem is structured in four stanzas. Three of which narrate the experience of the speaker, and the last one is the expression of a desire resulting from the experience lived and asserted in the three previous stanzas. Reflection in this poem is made through the successive images that appear connected to a particular sense. Thus, when the speaker talks about the sense of hearing she reflects upon the limitations of this sense in order to express how these limitations are overcome by the introduction of some element not belonging to the physical world, that cannot be perceived by the limited physical sense, and needs a higher awareness. This way, what is perceived contrasts with the physical nature of the sensory organ and from this paradox meaning arises by confronting the physical senses with the unknown element. Final understanding comes when the senses

break the physical barrier. The physical is transcended and the body is released from the physical boundaries and, the understanding of the unknown elements is revealed when the body dissolves its materiality and becomes absorbed by illumination.

The physical is represented in this poem by three elements: eye, ear and body. The first two: eye and ear, frequently appear in Dickinson's poetry and they are commonplace in connection with death e.g. "I've seen a Dying Eye" and "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain," the ear perceives sound and words, and the eyes perceive images in the outer physical world are perceived. Ear and eye witness the world and through them knowledge is filtered. They sometimes observe beauty and sometimes the awful effects of death, as we have seen in "I've seen a Dying Eye". The body is the frame in which the senses are trapped and it is the main limitation, but when we die and become dust, body disappears, liberating humans from all that does not allow us to reach eternity.

Through ecstatic experiences the self becomes aware of experiencing a superior reality in which it is able to transcend the limitations imposed by the body. When the self is liberated from these limitations illumination starts to be glimpsed. In this poem, not only absolute knowledge is glimpsed, the self is also able to overcome physical limitations, transcend them and meet eternity.

In the first verse we find a paradox, "I heard as if I had no Ear", and as in other cases this paradox is an evidence of the mystical: Reason fails to explain the nature of the thing experienced by the physical sense of hearing and, looks for an approximation in language for expressing what cannot be expressed because it does not belong to the physical world. As in other Dickinson poems, we find here the collapse of language when the speaker tries to state what cannot be stated. Paradox is invoked to create a confusion between the

different layers of meaning. Hearing, is a physical sense and sound is perceived through the physical ear and, in this verse she is expressing that the sense was limited because it is physical. The limits of her perception are shown in language, for this reason paradox is a device for showing the mystical.

What triggers the overcoming of the physical in this stanza and what provides illumination to the speaker is the "Vital Word". This phrase implies a rebirth of the speaker's hearing sense which is liberated from its limitations, as a consequence, she starts hearing what until this moment she is unable to hear. The moment in which this liberation takes place is death, the paradox is extended: what provides life and vitality is death, and the mystical too. The ineffable mysteries revealed in the mystical:

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

The speaker experiences a visionary moment in which she is aware that a reality beyond the one perceived by senses exists. When the activity of hearing sense stops, is when she hears the "Vital Word" that brings her the real perception composed by the knowable and the mystical. Only by confronting the two; (both the physical "ear" and the revealing "ear") when the activity of the former stops she realizes the nature of the "real" sound. The knowledge perceived by the ear is experienced when the "Vital Word", which paradoxically is the word of death, comes to her from life: "Came all the way from Life to me". Life both reveals and conceals the secrets beyond the human experience but death is what provides the power to discern the truth and to furnish life with meaning. In this poem, ultimate knowledge can be reached only when the speaker dies. She does not say anything about the moment in which she dies. However we can make a distinction

between this and other poems in which we have observed that the result of a mystical experience is a visual or conscious approximation of death. In contrast, in this poem the ecstatic experience is the centre of the poem and it is so powerful that it allows the speaker to surpass the temporal and spatial limits of life and reach eternity, something that would have been impossible if the self had been bound to a physical body or the mind, to reason. We can assert that in this poem absolute knowledge comes, remains and allows an encounter with a supreme knowledge or being, this is shown by the apparition of the word "eternity" at the end of the poem which is the speaker's acknowledgement of the existence of an ultimate reality.

In the next stanza the structure of the previous is repeated. On this occasion the sight sense shows its limitations, and is later released:

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

Vision is connected with knowledge. It shows how the speaker interprets reality and how this reality is filtered through her eyes. Reason intervenes in the analysis of reality and, it is not odd that the eye of the living appears in this poem as a short-sighted eye. The vision is confusing and reflects strangeness, the eye is blindfolded by the limitations of living and it is not able to discern clearly what it sees. A reflection such as the reflection made in the two first lines in this stanza, is only possible from an experienced point of view, that is, from the eye of the speaker liberated from the bandage covering her eyes.

"Another" can be interpreted as an estrangement of the self, then, "Another" would refer to the speaker's "Eye". This "Eye" is not recognized by the speaker as hers but as the another's eye. The contrast between the knowable and the mysteries revealed by death,

allows the speaker to distinguish between the things that she sees. Limited vision is for her “not to see”, for this reason she does not recognize the “Eye” as hers. Her estranged vision remains limited until she is illuminated by “a Thing” which overwhelms the eye creating an initial confusion. This “Thing” is new to the eye which fails to interpret what is it until it is illuminated by the “Light” that appears in the next line. The speaker undergoes a scaled process in these two stanzas, and we can distinguish an initial stage, a “blind stage”, in which the senses attached to physical limitations and are unable to interpret the whole picture provided by death, and a second “illuminating stage” where once the speaker undergoes a transformation in which she abandons her body, she is able to distinguish between what was her limited hearing and sight and the acquired knowledge. When the speaker is illuminated by the “Light”, which provides true knowledge she realizes that what she saw was not seen by her eye but it was seen by another³⁷.

In this second stanza, the temporal division is clearer than in the first stanza because here the past tense and the present tense mark the moment from which the speaker is talking, therefore we learn that she possesses knowledge provided by the experience in the moment of speaking, this is shown by the tense: “And now I know 'twas Light, because/ It fitted them, came in”

The unknown and unnamed “Thing” becomes meaningful and it is shown by “Light” which symbolizes knowledge and truth. In this poem light is not blinding, is not an overwhelming flash that cannot be seen by the speaker but, it fits to the eyes and illuminates the vision, furnishing it with knowledge. As in other step of illumination this

³⁷ “This other is consciousness, that awful internal stranger that she must repeatedly to confront.” (Feit Diehl, 153)

light comes in and it is not the eye which needs to fit to the light, but it is light which fits to the eye. This way when knowledge is revealed, the eye is able to distinguish between the otherness of the first stage and the vision belonging to the physical world, and the revelation provided by this "Light".

In the next stanza it is the physical body which undergoes transformation, and the poetic structure is parallel to the previous two stanzas. The two stages that the speaker undergo are as well discernible, that is, the step from the physical state to the highest state of awareness. If in the first stanza the revealing element is "a Vital Word" and in the second a "Thing", in this stanza it is a "Might" which allows her to know her position in the universe.

The separation between the self and the body is an aware quest for hidden knowledge. The speaker undergoes an ecstasy in which the connection with her physical body disappears and the liberated self begins her journey to illumination. The problem emerges when the speaker realizes that she possesses a limited knowledge and feels estranged, so she cannot unite self and body:

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

The speaker uses the verb "to dwell" to emphasize stagnation in the first stage when the speaker remains alienated to the unknown. As in the previous stanza there is a estrangement of the self whose identity, inclusive of consciousness and body, is split: her consciousness is "out" and her body "within". She seeks out life's meaning and specifically her place in the universe. The answer to "who am I?" is disclosed by a vision revealed by a "Vital Word", a "Thing" or as in this case a "Might". This "Might" provides

an answer for the dislocated self who, illuminated by knowledge, is able to discern true knowledge, and makes her realize where her place in the universe is: "Until a Might detected me/ And set my kernel in."

The self is looking for an answer while the body remains still. The speaker is narrating the process that takes place after dying, the body is the frame of the self which after dying dwells in uncertainty. "Might" is a clear example of the mystical, we cannot say that "Might" is a metaphor for God, but the mystical nature of this element is shown by the limitations of language in defining this element. The "Might" provides an answer and helps the self to find the road to eternity. Finally the "Might" returns the self from the outer higher level to her body endowing it with knowledge but finishing her ecstasy:

And Spirit turned unto the Dust
"Old Friend, thou knowest me."
And Time went out to tell the News
And met Eternity.

The speaker gives "Spirit" the right to speak and "Spirit" talks to the "Dust" with a biblical voice: "Old Friend thou knowest me." The "Dust" is referred to as an "Old Friend" because it is part of the mortal condition: "ashes to ashes, dust to dust". "Spirit" is locked in the body³⁸ and for this reason when the body becomes dust, the spirit is liberated. In this dialogue the "Spirit" is meeting the "Dust" for the last time.

In the previous stanza the "Might" sets the speaker's kernel and bestows her place in the universe. Once the "Might" has placed the speaker on the road to eternity, her voice is silenced and the "Spirit" speaks. When the cycle is completed time disappears and it

38 Charles Anderson's analysis of "Despair" in "It was not Death, for I stood up," remarks the idea of the spirits trapped in bodies: "But spirits are locked in bodies, and since coffin and corpse are one here, her vital life 'could not breath without a key' to release it from the body of this despair." (Anderson 28) In "I heard as if I had no Ear" we observe how limitations disappear and spirit is released by the disappearance of this "body of despair."

becomes eternal. The annunciation of the promised eternal life is here represented by the personification of "Time" which "went out to tell the News" and blissfully became infinite "And met Eternity."

This poem progresses as a series of revelations which allow us to establish a connection between the imperfectness of the physical senses and the limitations of the human body and, the process through which the body is liberated and placed into eternity. This poem concludes by locating the speaker in the universe and reaching the ultimate knowledge and completion. The speaker is united thanks to a "Might" and liberated from the mortal condition, becoming immerse in this timeless space and experiencing a union with the eternal. In this poem the speaker gets ultimate knowledge through this union with the eternal. This cannot be stated but drawn from the linguistic features that show the mystical.

This poem is narrated in first person and it uses direct speech to give voice to the "Spirit" in the last stanza. The first person narrator allows us to experience and to be witnesses of the different stages that the speaker undergoes in order to find the road to eternity. The speaker narrates her ecstatic experience that she has had, the steps in this experience and she reflects upon the different revelations.

A second voice appears in this poem, when the speaker is "detected" by a "Might" and, "Spirit" then speaks and establishes a dialogue with "Dust", and in this instance the poet gives voice to the "Spirit" by using direct speech.

The dominant tense of this poem is past but the contrast between the two stages and the final verse makes the tense of this poem an experience suspended in time, rather than an experience that is being recalled from the past. The speaker uses the present tense in the

second stanza to emphasize the contrast and the temporal separation between when she was living and when she experiences the ecstatic experience.

The structure of the poem as we have seen in other of Dickinson's poems is symmetric; it helps to establish and to mark the contrast between the limited and the unlimited, the finite and the infinite, the physical and the metaphysical. Structure, together with tense, person, tone and language help to create meaning; thanks to the poem's structure the reader is able to establish contrasts between two stages: the moment previous to the acquisition of knowledge and the moment in which knowledge is acquired. This poem's tense locates the time in which the action takes place and how this time progressively dissolves into the eternal. So from the initial narration of a series of events in which the speaker realizes that she possesses limited knowledge and limited experience, we pass to a moment of revelation in which time stops. Time suspended expands its limits further than the physical or the measurable and finally, time becomes a personified entity that escapes the limitations imposed by the physical. Tone and language also help semantically to the reader to realize the limitations of the speaker's vision through uncertainty and to illustrate how the speaker overcomes these limitations ultimately making the tone more blissful and free. Tone and language also make "Spirit's" voice solemn when it uses the biblical voice in its dialogue with "Dust". Finally first person narration helps us to focus upon a recalled personal experience and its insights.

This poem can trace some of the features already seen in other Dickinson's poems such as compression. We find difficulties in completing some bits of information that are deleted or compressed in some lines, though some of them are recoverable³⁹ and some

39 "in Dickinson's work what is omitted between sentences or phrases is most often nonrecoverable or multiply recoverable, depending on the reader's interpretation of the poem." (*A Poet's Grammar*, Miller 30)

others can be deduced from the poem content, but others still are difficult to identify. Compression conveys "the impression of withheld power"⁴⁰, it creates a sensation of suspension in the verses: "I saw, as if my Eye were on/ Another, till a Thing / And now I know 'twas Light, because" after the verse "Another, till a Thing" we expect that the speaker tells us what does this "Thing" do, but instead of revealing what reaction triggers in the process of illumination, in the next verse there is an acknowledging of what she knows and when she knows it i.e. "now". Then, this "Thing" acquires the value of a sudden apparition, a flash that interrupts the previous discourse. Semantically we can connect the deletion of what it was expected to be in the next verse with Dickinson's industrious way of creating the sensation of withheld power. If we bear in mind the distribution of the time, that is, the two stages in which firstly, the speaker is not able to explain what she experiences and, secondly, the speaker freed from her limitations uses experience to explain what the mortal limitations does not allow her to explain. It is clear that the sudden apparition of "Light" overwhelms the speaker's discourse. Deletion is a device for capturing this overwhelming feeling and transmitting it to the reader who completes the fragments that are not expressed by words but shown. The distribution of time is as well important in creating this feeling. We just need to contrast the previous stanza with this one: in the first stanza the speaker tells what happens before and after the element that provides knowledge appears. The same is done in the other three stanzas where the illuminating element i.e. "Vital Word"; "Thing", "Might", appear. The difference is that in the first stanza the tense remains past, whereas in the second stanza the speaker switches to "present" tense. If we compare the first three stanzas we observe

40 "Second, compression may convey the impressions of withheld power: the poet may conceal her strength." (*A Poet's Grammar*, Miller 26)

that stanzas one and three are almost symmetrical except for the placement of “until” in slightly different line order, but this does not alter the semantic content. Stanza two is as well almost symmetrical and, what it is exceptional in stanza two is the use of present tense and the temporal marker “now”, because it switches the narration to the present moment and because after the illuminating element there is no verb which immediately before the apparition of this element, tells us what are the consequences or what is the knowledge acquired after the apparition. The explanation of what this “Thing” is appears in the last line of this stanza. Meaning appears once more struggling with reason but it finally adapts and finds meaning because the answer to “what is this “Thing?”” is “fitted” and associated with a definition: She is sure that it is “Light” not because she can explain it rationally, but because it fits and it is explained, it is revealed and adapted to the poem's frame. The switch in tense puzzles me, but my hypothesis is that this is the centre of the poem. Once acquired, experience becomes suspended in time. We have a narration of a past experience from a present perspective but all the elements that surround the poem and the process of searching for the total liberation from the physical senses has as a result, becomes free and infinite. This reference to the present tense places the revelation moment in present, after having lived the ecstatic experience she is able to associate every image, every perception to the “Light” she saw, the result of a visionary experience. So the present tense used in this stanza gives us the clue to where the insights and the narration originate. She has been able to experience a rapture through which multiple realities are shown.

Retaking the analysis of compressed elements in this poem, we observe how the compressed statement “Till a Thing” does not need a verb after it because the following

verse reveals all the information contained in the poem. The description of the object of vision in this verse is vague, it is an unspecified "Thing", but if in other verses we learn the purpose of the illuminating elements in this verse what it is revealed is what is this thing is, and the answer is "Light".

If we go on in the same stanza we see how in the next verse there is another instance of compression, "Light" is discerned because: "it fitted them, came in", but to what is it fitted? In order to recover information we need to look backwards in the stanza to see what elements correspond with the plural pronoun "them", that is, which elements fitted this illuminating "Light". We find two referents "Eye" and "Another". The difficulties in associating this "Eye" with the "Another" is that they are contraries. The "Eye" embodies the speaker's vision, that is, the speaker's conscious perception of the physical world that surrounds her including her own physical self, whereas "Another" refers to the estranged vision of the "Eye". These two concepts represent the familiar and the alien and they are interdependent In this poem. The familiar, or what is known by the "Eye" is what is perceived by the sense of sight and the unknown covers the mysteries that are necessary to complete and give meaning to the existence of the self. These two concepts are reunited by the power of the illuminating "Light", which triggers a revelation in the limited "Eye" which recognizes the "Another" not as an alien, but as a part of the same illuminating vision. It is then, when the two elements accommodate each other and are "fitted" thanks to that revealing power of "Light". So, we conclude that the pronoun "them" does not have an immediate referent that can be located in the line. Complications arise when we try to identify the two contraries reunited under the same pronoun, but as we haven seen in this same poem paradox and contraries are used to illuminate shadowy

meanings. Then, here we have an instance of Dickinson's strategy to convey meaning. Reason fails to explain contraries and language also fails in expressing them, and thanks to the union of these two extremes the reader can extract meaning by filling the spaces that language leaves, this is the mystical.

The last stanza is as well characterized by compression, and we guess that it is "Spirit" who dialogues with "Dust" but the biblical voice appears from nowhere in the middle of the line raising the question of who is speaking this sentence. The first impulse is to try to recollect this sentence from the Bible and when we cannot find the source of this quotation we start to look for the voice which utters the sentence. As it is impossible to identify this voice with the speaker and as we do not have any other physical person in the poem we look backwards in the stanza and we find an enigmatic "Spirit" turning to the "Dust", it is when the question is answered. The spirit then, is the one who utters the sentence: "Old Friend, thou knowest me." This dialogue shows how the spirit encounters dust, recalling the biblical dictum and remembering human fate.

In the last line we find another instance of compression, perhaps the most obvious instance of this feature in the poem: "And met Eternity". Here, the compressed language is evidenced in this verse by the deletion of the pronoun. In order to recover the information deleted, we need to look for an antecedent that answer the question that is arisen "who met eternity?". A possible answer is "time" as it is the immediate referent and, it makes sense to think that eternity implies infiniteness. Therefore, it is reasonable to think that it was "time" who met eternity. Another possible answer is "Spirit", the speaker in this last stanza. So, if we take "Spirit" as a symbol of immateriality as it develops as the performer of the action i.e. first talks to the "Dust" and we can interpret

that as a consequence "Time" is freed and "went out to tell the News", after the body symbolically disappears when she finds her place in the universe and is liberated from the physical ties. As both options are possible here we can see how compression is used to create multiple meanings⁴¹ since both "Spirit" and "Time" are likely to meet eternity. Compression then is not used to confuse or to raise doubts that remain unsolved, even though we find that the fragment or the information is not recoverable, it can nonetheless be hypothesized thanks to the poem's context. Compression, as in the case of the example mentioned in the last verse is used to confuse two possible referents in order to leave a room for interpretation.

In terms of punctuation, in this poem we do not have any dashes which are odd and because it is one of Dickinson's most characteristic features, this leads to a plausible hypothesis: this poem has been touched by the hand of an editor. In a poem such "I heard as if I had no Ear" which deals with the overcoming of physical limitations and the suggestive topic of death in connection with eternity, it seems unconventional not to find the "doors ajar" as we have found in other poems that deal with the same topic.

In this poem the speaker is certain about her experience. Uncertainty is introduced by the first limited stage but it is soon overcome and then the hidden is revealed. It is odd to find a poem by Dickinson in which every stanza is closed by a period⁴². The use of periods is also odd, evidencing a contrast between the process of liberation the speaker is undergoing and the compact and closed stanzas. She is undergoing a mystical process in

41 As Miller points out in her poet's grammar: "Because there is much deletion in Dickinson's poems, and because some of it is both nonrecoverable and essential to understanding the poem the reader approaches all deletion cautious expecting indeterminacy or multiple meaning at every instance." (29) And this is how I have approached to this poem, that is, acknowledging the potentiality and multiplicity of meanings that this feature creates.

42 "Dickinson uses the period infrequently, and most often in her early and late poetry." (*A Poet's Grammar*, Miller 53)

which it is expected that a free flux in the speaker's perception is found but periods make this ecstasy appear as an ordered process. Periods help us to recollect the different phases of this ecstasy but it is true that the ordered structure lacks the whirl of sensations and images that make poems such as "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain" so powerful and overwhelmingly chaotic as if images and symbols rush to wake up meaning.

On the other hand, the ordered structure of this poem creates a solemn tone that can be only reproduced when this poem is read aloud and the mystical experience becomes the result of a reflective process in which the speaker reports how she overcomes every limitation and experiences wholeness. Periods, help to enumerate the steps that the speaker follows in order to achieve completion. Stanzas are also thematic units in which a physical aspect is referred to and, in which we learn how the mystical process in which an intervening, illuminating element helps the speaker to realize that what she experienced before was imperfect and limited. Thanks to the periods and the ordered temporal sequence we can elaborate a scheme which helps us to follow the mystical process carried out by the speaker.

Finally I just want to add that the use of periods is enigmatic especially in the last verse where a period closes the poem after the word "eternity". It is worth remarking that it appears after the word "eternity" because in other poems we have seen that eternity is itself an open end⁴³, sometimes mentioned as something desirable but distant and

43 A Death blow is a Life blow to Some
Who till they died, dis not alive become –
Who had they lived, had died but when
They died, Vitality begun.

impossible to achieve⁴⁴, and sometimes appearing as a promised after-life⁴⁵ when it is connected with death and the privileged that experienced death. Finally, it also appears associated with mystical experience as it is a way of connecting the human body with the wholeness when physical limitations are overcome, this is the case of this poem. When eternity appears it leaves an open end, the dream of immortality and it is for this reason that while perceiving eternity we do not have a closed end. So, in this case the period at the end of this verse is puzzling because it closes the door of interpretation, Eternity has been achieved and that is all, but the question of who has achieved this eternity again leaves the door open, as in other poems visited so far Eternity in which the mysteries of death are not completely revealed, that is what we have called the "door ajar". Mysteries, are shown in the poetic elements conveyed by Dickinson's mastery in the use of the mystical. Compression in the last verse does not allow us to identify who meets eternity and although is part of the self it is something split⁴⁶.

One of the punctuation symbols that provides semantic content to this poem and which is key to understanding the last step in the mystical process are the inverted commas that appear in the last stanza. They not only indicate that there is a foreign voice which does not belong to the speaker but appears under the first person "I", but also it gives the "Spirit" voice, introducing direct speech discourse in which we see how it is this

44 (...)
 Eternity's disclosure
 To favourites – a few –
 Of the Colossal substance
 Of Immortality.

45 See "Just lost when I was saved!"

46 (...)
 You left me Boundaries of Pain –
 Capacious as the Sea –
 Between Eternity and Time –
 Your consciousness – and Me –

utterance which shows the connection between "Spirit" and "Dust".

Capitalization in this poem is also another way of creating discourse referents around which meaning is distributed and around which meaning is mobile. Capitalization is a way of establishing multiple and meaningful connections between words thanks to Dickinson's polyvocality⁴⁷. Capitalized nouns emphasize semantic aspects and transform images or symbols in entities charged with meaning in themselves. Thus, capitalized nouns function in a double way movement: first calls the reader's attention and highlights a semantic aspect of the poem, and second, this semantic aspect expands to the other elements establishing meaningful connections which are part of a poetic universe in which meaning is not fixed but fluent and, in which unexpected connections between elements from different origins, such as feelings with nature, are established. For instance if we take a capitalized noun from this poem such as "Thing", we see that it highlights the unknown and unknown nature of this entity which is seen, and transforms it into an element that provides experience and through which knowledge is achieved. Then, this "Thing" uncertain and unspecific in its beginning becomes a vision which establishes a connection with the next capitalized noun "Light" and with the previous "Another", like a dialogue between these parts. In fact we have proved how from capitalized words we can establish a poem's inner network of meanings, and if we take this poem as an example we will see how each capitalized word acquires meaning in isolation and extends this meaning to the rest of the capitalized words in a stanza to finally create a network of meanings in the poem. So, for instance the capitalized word "Ear" emphasizes the sense

47 "Bakhtin's observation that 'there are not voiceless words' but, rather, that 'each word contains voices that are sometimes infinitely distant . . . and voices resounding nearby and simultaneously' (Speech Genres 124) has especial implications for Dickinson's highly disruptive style. Her punctuation, line breaks, and capitalization appear designed to isolate words and release voice possibilities that challenge the view of the self as unified and singled-voiced." (Crumbley 102)

of hearing and becomes a metaphor for perception which in connection with the capitalized words "Vital Word" and "Life", it expands its metaphorical meaning for perception to the context of absolute perception or true perception.

Capitalization elevates capitalized words to the category of meaningful entities which in the poem represent awareness, illuminating elements etc. "Ear", "Eye" and "Body" become metaphors for perception. Another metaphor and images that contribute to the creation of meaning are: the "Spirit" which is part of the self and which is part of the human condition as well as its "Old Friend" the "Dust" which is a symbol of the ephemeral and the mortal fate. When these two symbols i.e. "Dust" and "Spirit", encounter the contrast between them emerges but, this contrast soon dissolves with the apparition of the fleeing time which is suspended and becomes eternal. Finally "Eternity" appears as the representative of absoluteness.

The symmetrical structure of this poem, allows the reader to follow the steps undergone during the mystical experience. The mystical state is triggered by an element which helps to transcend the physical and which provides the speaker a privileged revelation, a truth unfolded from the human experience. The steps in this mystical ascension began with the acquisition of the capacity of discerning true knowledge from the imperfect senses, this way sound transcends and becomes knowledge thanks to the illuminating element "Vital Word". The use of the mystical element to show the elevation achieved when death is experienced is a valve of escape for the poet when she faces the limitations of language. Death is not reduced to a mere recollection of images, it has many ways of representation sometimes as something familiar which happens in the neighbouring house and sometimes as a mystery concealed for human perception. When

it is familiar it appears the anxiety of experiencing outside what is trying to be explained from the inside, that is sometimes an evidence of the gap between Dickinson and the poetic persona, the self and the other, consciousness and body etc. When it is experienced by the speaker the struggle moves to the explanation of this inner experience in an outward physical environment, that is, a dialogue between Dickinson and the poetic persona. Anyhow, the account for the recollection of the experiences perceived when death appears is marked by the appearance of a special way of conveying language, meaning arise from this language and it appears connected with many aspects that suggest multiple interpretations or which clarify an aspect that it is clouded because it escape living experience. Thus, the mystical element helps to express what is impossible to express due to the boundaries of reason and language, this mystical element is connected with language and Dickinson's poetic universe. For her, eternity represents the fulfilment of all human experience and the measure for achieving eternity is overcoming the physical, death is the vehicle to achieve eternity and the mystical is the element to express it. Images such as what I have denominated "illuminating elements", are sparks that illuminate the shadows created by the limitations and these elements come to light meaning, when the mystical is assumed. So when the speaker states "I heard as if I have no Ear" she is acknowledging her physical limitations, by using paradox as a safe-conduct for start developing the mystical. When reason and language fail to explain the nature of the perceived, the mystical element helps to mount this obstacle. As we have seen, the mystical is conveyed in this poem through elements which are as well recognisable in Dickinson's poems and which frequently appear in death poems, these elements are paradox, images, metaphors, punctuation, compression and capitalization.

The mystical in this poem is registered through the ascension of the speaker and with the subversion of the physical, temporal-spatial limits. Previous poems studied in this work left the speaker at the doors of immortality i.e. "Just lost when I was saved!", in some of them the speaker is just allowed to fantasize and/or hypothesize with this process i.e. "I've seen a dying Eye", whereas, in this poem we have the complete achievement of life's realization. So, if for Dickinson this is the way of experiencing the wholeness, that is, through certain steps which involve acknowledging her limitations, we can assert that all the poems analysed so far lead us to the process depicted in this poem and to extend the mystical analysis to her death poems. Even in poems in which it is difficult to discern the mystical element we can find traces of its presence by analysing the poetic elements which appear more clearly connected with expressing the unexpressed.

We can conclude that the mystical is commonplace in Dickinson's poems on the death topic, but it requires a close reading of her characteristic poetic features in connection with this topic as I have attempted to do in this analysis. Finally, I just want to point out that despite of the end of this poem where we observe the transcendence of the physical and spatial-temporal orders, "Eternity" is not the end but the beginning of something that cannot be stated, as Harold Bloom asserts in the introduction to *Emily Dickinson's Modern Critical Views*: "Better perhaps than any other poet, she knows and indicates what is worth representing is beyond depiction, what is worth saying cannot be said." (6)

4.-Conclusion

Miss Dickinson's poetic universe embraces all human experience. Under her vision the finite and infinite are reconciled, and the biggest mysteries of human existence meet the familiar.

For her, death is both desirable and a mystery that overwhelms her soul. When death is confronted, the mysteries of existence begin to unfold as she approaches the ultimate reality, that for her is immortality. In this confrontation between the lyrical self and the death, a special way of conveying language is observed. This language acknowledges its own limitations, but at the same time it shows how the boundaries between the knowable and the unknown are overcome by the use of the mystical.

In the analysis of these poems we have defined the mystical as the device that Dickinson uses when she confronts the limits of human perception and language. When she deals with the mysteries of death and immortality her system of thought and her poetic world become overwhelmed. The language that she uses to surmount the boundary between the ineffable mysteries and the knowable world, is the language of the mystical. Thus, the mystical is conveyed by the use of a series of linguistic features that are specific in Dickinson's poetry, such as compression, capitalization, punctuation etc.

We have studied the mystical in connection with language structure and meaning, and more specifically, with how meaning is transmitted when it combines different linguistic and non-linguistic features. The mystical encompasses not only linguistic features, but also other factors, such as cultural or biographical factors.

The mystical is a wide concept that can be studied from different approaches. For instance, the mystical could be studied from a psychological approach in order to show

how language is conveyed to express psychological states. It can be also studied in connection with the powerful image of the circumference and the multiple meanings that both convey.

From a cultural approach, the mystical can be studied in connection with the Puritan culture and Dickinson's insights about death.

Perhaps the most interesting study, could be made in connection with the poetic voice and how the mystical could help to the expand discourse throughout linguistic features such as the dash.

Finally, it would be very interesting to study how the readers fill the gaps left by language limitations and how the mystical is used in order to create meaning.

The mystical is part of the enormous power of Dickinson's poetic universe, in which visionary experience becomes the expression of multiple realities that convey potential meaning. Thus, mystical is the irradiating light that illuminates the shadowy gaps of the unexpressed.

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