Subjective Objectification vs. Objective Subjectification of Death in a Selection of Emily Dickenson’s Poems

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Abstract:
As a key figure in American literature, Emily Dickenson (1830 - 86) wrote poetry that dealt excessively with death as a metaphysical fact. What may be most original is that the poet’s preoccupation with death leads her to subject this metaphysical fact to epistemological queries whereby there occurs a discernible collision between the subjective imaginative construction of death and the sordidness of the objective world with its restrictions and bewildering enigmas. This paper seeks to gauge the degree to which Dickenson succeeds in founding in her poetry a compromise between the subjective and objective worlds – which, as I saw it, defines the crux of her poetic enterprise as a whole. In this respect, the study involves a probe into the poet’s construction of the ‘self’ that is made the territory of this collision between the subjective and the objective. The chief result this paper seeks to put forward is related to the inseparable interaction of both the subjective and the objective in shaping the mould of the ‘self’ in Dickenson’s poetry, thus giving birth to a self that is both ‘subjectively objectified’ and ‘objectively subjectified.’

Key words: death, epistemology, metaphysics, objective, self, subjective

Introduction
The main thematic concerns that Emily Dickenson’s poetry touches may reveal much anchorage in her frequently-used term, ‘the self.’ Elucidating the poet’s peculiar use of terms, Emile Fitzgibbon notices that ‘the self’ in Dickenson’s poetry is “a personification of the idea of individuality. It encapsulates the notion of ‘the soul’ or ‘the psyche,’ that which makes its person an individual.” (31) Thus, it is fairly equitable to argue that concepts like ‘self-actualization,’ ‘self-maintenance,’ ‘self-realization’ etc. are preached by the poet as striven for goals, inasmuch as they bear positive qualities allowing the ‘self,’ which is made in Dickenson’s poetic enterprise a prerequisite for ‘making its person an individual,’ to appear and claim its existence in the objective world.
It is deductible, then, that the major themes in Dickenson’s poetry concern the viability of constructing an idealized complete version of ‘the individual’ which has to encompass man at large from every side. Thus, not only life, with its variegated experiential cares and routines, constitutes a theme in Dickenson’s poetry. Also, man’s inner promptings and wrestles with meanings and (un)intelligibility, which are given a noticeable voice by the poet, do represent a major thematic platform on which the poet could find enough room to dramatize the almost inexplicable implication of the subjective and the objective in each other. Paula Bennett offers a succinct account of these themes, affirming that “Dickenson was intensely, almost obsessively, concerned with ultimate questions: the nature of God, death, immortality. She tends to locate these concerns in the isolated individual’s quest for understanding.” (51)

The corollary of such an ‘intense obsession’ with ‘ultimate questions’ and of ‘locating these concerns in the isolated individual’s quest for understanding’ is certainly illuminating in uncovering chief aspects of the poet’s peculiarities in handling these “metaphysical questionings.” (Weisbuch 10) Perhaps, the most striking feature that typifies Dickenson is her inscription of these ‘questions’ and ‘concerns,’ which irritatingly keep delineating the structure of the universal man’s “epistemological quest” (158), in man’s subjective conceptualization. In other words, the poet demands that any looked-for quenching of that epistemological longing to harness what is “beyond, above and beneath the floor of reason” (105) to knowledge be deeply rooted and gestated from within the individual before it be born and actualized. Thus, the poet never hesitates to implicate her own subjective view in the process of deciphering the contours of the objective world, no matter how much far-fetched and metaphysical this process may be.

**Research Objectives**

The aim of this paper is to cover the following objectives:

- To stress Dickenson’s peculiarities in constructing a ‘self’ that keeps exerting its presence in the journey of conceptualizing the metaphysical question of ‘death.’
- To emphasize the epistemological thrust of Dickenson’s questioning of ‘death’ whereby the latter is subjected to the precepts of man’s knowledge.
- To dwell on the poet’s succumbing in an imaginative verbalization of her own visualization of the image of ‘death’ as she desires it to be, which highlights the inscription of ‘death’ in highly subjective version.
To show the centrality of the objective world of reality which perniciously keeps exerting its might on the poet and deters her imaginative journey of subjectively anointing ‘death’ with sensually appealing constructions.

- To draw a synthetic account of the result of the interaction between the subjective and the objective in shaping Dickenson’s crisis of conceptualizing ‘death.’

**Research Questions**

The study will concentrate on the following questions:

- How does Dickenson’s poetry dramatize a ‘self’ that is torn between subjective weaving of ‘death’ and objective regularities that act only to deconstruct these subjective constructs?
- What are the suggested solutions Dickenson seems to posit to liberate such an inferably imprisoned ‘self’ from the shackles of the vicious circle of construction/deconstruction that keeps just shattering the poet’s mind from forming a settled meaning of ‘death’?

**Research Methodology**

This study will be based on textual analysis of poems whose theme is death. The poems selected are “Because I could not stop for death,” “I heard a fly buzz when I died” and “It was not death, for I stood up,” all of which are untitled (like most of Dickenson’s poetry) and therefore bear the first line as a title. Each of these poems represents one particular facet of the poet’s conceptualization of ‘death.’ Hence, they constitute the main three divisions in this article. The first poem shows vividly Dickenson’s subjective objectification of ‘death’ through portraying a bride-like ‘self’ (as an idealized ‘self’ with whom the poet may seek to project her own self) festively taken to a benignant ‘death’ that is personified as an ideal ‘suitor’ for that bride. Meanwhile, the second poem evidences the poet’s objective subjectification of another form of a ‘self’ that is clearly submerged under the shades of the objective world of reality while helplessly trying to mould its own subjectivity following such a world’s tenets. Lastly, the ‘self’ envisaged in the third poem translates the poet’s own crisis of conceptualization following the intertwined implication of the subjective and the objective in each other in relation to the question of ‘death.’

This paper will end with a conclusion I derived from these poems. The conclusion represents not just a synthetic reading of the whole analysis, but seeks to draw insightful results into Dickenson’s mind and its movements throughout the orbits of the subjective and the objective. The list of cited sources is given under the heading of References at the end of this paper.

**Literature Review**
Much has been written on Emily Dickenson’s poetry. Perhaps, the most influential works on the poet are compiled in *The Emily Dickenson Journal* that has been issued since 1992 and has just published its first number of Volume 24 in 2015. In these articles included in this journal, diverse sides have been studied. In Volume 1, nb.1, (1992), Daneen Wardrop tackles in her article “Dickenson’s Readerly Gothic” the presence of gothic concerns in Dickenson’s poetry, including the element of the macabre, the sense of enclosure in dungeons, nihilism etc. I find also a gender study provided by Sylvia Henneberg in her article “Neither Lesbian nor Straight” in the journal’s Volume 4, nb.2 (Fall 1995) where Dickenson’s shutting of herself indoors and her abstinence from marriage are studied within that gender prism. In addition, there are studies on stylistic innovations like the article written by Christiana Paugh, in Volume 16, nb.2 (Fall 2007), in which Dickenson as an innovator of poetic meter is propounded.

When it comes to articles that talk about the theme of death, I can cite Jed Deppman’s “Dickenson’s Death and the Sublime” that appeared in Volume 9, nb.1 (Spring 2000) of the journal. In this article, Deppman argues that ‘death’ is associated with memory. Namely, he focuses on showing how the poet dwells much on retracing the image of ‘death’ as she used to view it in simplistic terms as a child. Cate L. Mahoney’s article “Disavowing Elegy: That Pause of Space and Emily Dickenson’s Discourse of Mourning,” in Volume 24, nb.1 (2015), reduces the poet’s whole life and writings to an engulfed space of bemoaning loss wrought to life by death.

The present paper seeks to elaborate more on the theme of ‘death’ through focusing on the poet’s subjection of it to epistemological quests that makes of death an object of investigation, rather than a mere metaphysical fact.

**I. Subjective objectification of death**

By ‘subjective objectification of death,’ I mean the poet’s tendency to immolate and, therefore, objectify death to the precepts of her subjective desire. This is what I gather in the poem “Because I could not stop for Death.” Throughout its five stanzas that are equally divided into separate quatrains, the poem tells the story of a ‘self’ seeking to be accommodated with death and, more importantly, attempting, in vain, to color it subjectively as an event promising complete quenching of desire satisfaction. Relying heavily on personification, the poem presents a trio that is made up of the ‘I’ (through whose voice the story is filtered), Death and Immortality:
Because I could not stop for Death,
He kindly stopped for me;
The carriage held but just ourselves
And Immortality (I. 1-4)

We are in front of a scene in which the persona is presented as a bride being festively taken to her bridegroom in ‘the carriage.’ The reader, then, might be reminded of the ‘epithalamion’ which is “a poem written on the occasion of wedding, usually celebrating the virtue and beauty of the bride.” (Quinn 108)

However, the ‘wedding’ the poem celebrates is made special and highly-venerated. It becomes an occasion in which the persona is being ‘kindly’ courted by the personified Death as a bridegroom. The equally personified companion, Immortality, certainly helps accelerating the rhythm of the gleeful bliss of the couple through enshrining their eternal conviviality. Hence, intense joy is hyperbolically accentuated through mythologizing the festivities accompanying such a wedding. Actually, the element of emotional intensity is a key convention of epithalamia, at large. As Rosemond Tuve maintains:

In so far as epithalamia are lyrical ‘praises,’ they find considerable room for ample sensuous figures; but although they are themselves pragmatographia of a sort (describing actions), they are bound to have less actions than emotional intensity.” (98-9, italics mine)

Certainly, such an ‘emotional intensity’ is suggested to deepen further, not merely owing to the supra-human context in which the gateway of eternal bliss is made open in front of the couple. More importantly, the supreme form of gallantry and courtship the personified Death builds with the persona translates the latter’s emotional state while being embraced subjectively with the thought of death. The poem, then, is presenting a rapturous ecstasy the persona is living, on the insinuation of the state of immortality expected to be got upon death.

Being subjectively-embalmed, the event of death is deracinated from its temporal objective reality as a sealing point of a culminating process towards man’s end of life. Death is made, rather, an object to be experimented with and apt, even, to be molded according to the subjective precepts of the poet’s persona. In fact, the use of the past tense per se could be telling of such a subjective casting of the story as a romance:
We slowly drove, he knew no haste,  
And I had put away  
My labor, and my leisure too,  
For his civility. (II. 1-4, italics mine)

It seems that the bride-like persona is so sure of the ‘civility’ of the personified Death that she forgets about ‘her labor’ and ‘her leisure too’ for his sake. This fact could be deduced from the use of the past perfect, often referred to as ‘the past of the past’ in ‘I had put away.’ It is as if she were born with the thought of death in her mind so that all the cares of life and its entertainments are utterly relegated to it. Such a postulation might be affirmed biographically with reference to the poet’s deliberate self-seclusion throughout her life. As Emma Hartnoll observes:

It is a well-known, and often the best-known, detail of Emily Dickenson’s life that she was a recluse, and this has been mistaken for as a sign of melancholia, eccentricity or nun-like piety. But it is apparent that Miss Dickenson became a hermit by deliberate and conscious choice. Her withdrawal made possible for her to apprehend life more fully and more concentration of purpose. (v- vi)

There must be, then, a ‘purpose’ behind the poet’s temporal distortion of death as to make it not just a past romance, but also almost being born with as a twin. Indeed, the voyage of courtship that amorously binds the bride-like persona to her personified groom, Death, in ‘the carriage’ takes the couple to see temporally dislocated scenes. In their congregate, these scenes trace telescopically the main phases known in life – childhood, adulthood and old age:

We passed the school where children played,  
Their lessons scarcely done;  
We passed the fields of gazing grain,  
We passed the setting sun. (III. 1-4)

Clearly, the first two lines are related to childhood. The third line refers symbolically to adulthood, inasmuch as ‘the fields of gazing grain’ signify “ripened grain, which is a common emblem of maturity.” (Fitzgibbon 18) While, the ‘setting sun’ in the last line is “a common
emblem of old age.” (18) The reiteration of the phrase ‘we passed,’ added to the successive use of commas, may communicate the underlying sense of brevity characterizing this voyage.

Only a panoramic vision of life is given. All the scenes are even introduced metonymically as if to sharpen their brevity and, implicitly, their temporal insignificance in comparison to the highly-eulogized immortality accompanying the couple as a personified third partner. Essentially, the quick rhythm the set of commas establish may help imbibe that metonymical presentation of the different stages in human life. Being short-circuited, the voyage ends in a place hardly known by humans and, therefore, highly mysterious. It is the grave:

Since then ’tis centuries; but each
Feels shorter than the day
I first surmised the horses’ heads
Were toward eternity. (VI. 1 – 4)

The temporal deixis ‘since then ’tis centuries’ seems to cast the story in a legendary past, or let’s say ‘time immemorial’ which is starkly distanced from the persona’s normal scope of life. As a matter of fact, there is implied to grow that despicable shrinkage of the poet from her bride-like persona. Hence, that empathetic projection of the poet’s self with the persona’s own is inferred to be metamorphosed, eventually, into apathetic divorce, on the poet’s implied discerning of the anchorage of the story ‘centuries’ ago.

We are, then, in front of a ‘self’ being tolled back to its own ‘present.’ That process is collateral with the ultimate disaffiliation of the ‘self’ from the enticing glamour of ‘eternity’ – deemed to be experienced after death – which proves to be built just on ‘surmise.’ There is, even, much irony leveled at the personified couple (the bride-like persona and the personified bridegroom-like Death) when ‘each feels shorter than the day’ of their encounter. Rather than enshrining ‘eternal bliss,’ the courtship of the personified Death to the poet’s persona seems to be but an apocalyptically-loaded announcement of the persona’s severance not just from ‘eternity,’ but also from her ‘present.’ In reality, such a sharp degeneration of courtship into apocalypse is a parcel of the subjective / objective conflict within Dickenson’s mind in relation to the metaphysical question of death and eternity. In the words of Robert Weistbuch, “Dickenson’s symbolizing mind allies itself with an alternative, literally apocalyptic sense of time.” (7)

II. Objective Subjectification of death
Essentially, the apocalyptic itinerary the poem takes is revelatory of the failure of subjectively objectifying the image of death. We are talking about the tenacious superimposition of such an ‘apocalyptic sense of time’ on the embellishments of subjective fabrics of the poet’s ‘symbolizing mind.’ The poet, herself, seems to be aware of such a slippage of subjective flights under the thick layers of objective reality. Indeed, her poem ‘I heard a fly buzz when I died’ reveals her deep search to elaborate a ‘self’ that is objectively subjectified. In other words, no longer does the poet opt for a subjective objectification of the ‘self’ whereby she temporarily could build a highly mythologized romance between her bride-like persona and the groom-like personified Death, only to be tolled back after a while by the confines of the objective world. Now, the poet offers an objective subjectification of the ‘self’ through taking the objective world into account and, then, trying to experiment with death. Certainly, this particular stance is going to make “Dickinson resemble the critical author, not the dreamy heroine” (Weisbuch 8), and to allow her to effectuate what A. Dwight Culler calls “imaginative reason.”

Such an ‘imaginative reason’ is going to lead the poet to construct a ‘self’ that has to move within the territory of the intelligible world and, therefore, to be chartered within the confines of empiricism. In “I heard a fly buzz when I died,” the poet-persona registers the neurological goings-on within her mind while grappling with a conscious experimentation with death. The first stanza reads as:

I heard a fly buzz when I died;
The stillness round my form
Was like the stillness in the air
Between the heaves of the storm. (I. 1 – 4)

From the very onset, then, the sizable might of the objective world is strongly suggested through highlighting the survival of the poet’s acoustic sensory response in the throes of the experience of death. The dying persona is still capable of ‘hearing’ the ‘buzzing of the fly,’ as if she were signaling from the beginning her inability to experiment with death without bearing residues of life therewith. Actually, what is being narrated is not a cathartic moment of bringing death into closure and finality, but a state of suspension whereby the persona is inferred to remain caught in a nebulous zone between life and death. In this respect, Emilie Fitzgibbon argues that:
The intrusion of sound and energy into a moment of quiet suggests an inability to control the moment of death; the intrusion of a fly when the soul is waiting for his God suggests the pessimistic view that the physical world is more ‘real’ than the spiritual and that it may be a false hope to wait for God. (19)

Again, the apocalyptic undertone seems to resurface to the scene, on the insinuation of such a ‘pessimistic view’ which, while stressing the ‘real’ aspect of the ‘physical world,’ seems to relegate ‘the spiritual’ and, even ‘God’ to it. In fact, the dying persona appears noticeably meek and restlessly agitating in front of the ‘buzzing of the fly.’ For sure, the image of the ‘fly’ is but a synecdoche of the whole objective reality with its “natural vitality.” (Weisbuch 101) Thus, the image of ‘the heaves of storm’ which is suggested to threaten the persona’s equanimity and ‘stillness’ might serve hyperbolically to underpin the resuscitating effect of the insect’s ‘buzzing’ on the persona’s sensory responses. Rather than being silenced and hushed, the persona’s senses remain well-functional and noticeably operative ‘when [she] died.’ So if ever there were to exist that ‘pessimistic view’ in this poem, it would be mostly due to the way the objective world of reality not just keeps exerting its existence in the texture of the persona’s subjective experimentation with death, but more importantly minimizes and dislocates such a subjective enterprise. Robert Weisbuch points to “the idea of dislocation, both sensory and metaphysical, as the persona is stalled between worlds.” (100)

Inferably, rather than galvanizing the persona’s clear-sightedness, the superimposition of the sensually-apprehensible objective world of reality on the elusiveness of her futile subjective experimentation with death seems to result in further ‘sensory and metaphysical dislocation’ within her. What the persona gathers is her becoming too limited omniscient, even in perceiving objects as they are, while still being caught in metaphysical wondering. This is what the second stanza dramatizes:

The eyes beside had wrung them dry,
And breaths were gathering sure
For that last onset, when the king
Be witnessed in his power. (II. 1 – 4)

We are in front of a persona whose sensory responses can hardly function, as though to announce leaving the objective world in its entirety while being moved towards death. So, we
have an instance of “a conventional death-bed scene” (Fitzgibbon 19) in which the mourners can hardly be seen by the dying persona. In fact, the metonymical use of ‘the eyes’ and ‘breaths’ to designate the mourners could be read metaphorically in connection to the way “the objective world seems to be coming apart for the persona.” (Weisbuch 100)

The persona, on the closing of this stanza, is presented as about to bring her experimentation with death to catharsis. All indices of death (including mainly the persona’s inability to sensually apprehend the mourners properly) are complete and there needs only God, as a ‘king,’ to come and finalize the persona’s severance from the objective reality. As a matter of fact, the dying persona hastens to make her will in the beginning of the third stanza: “I willed my keepsakes, signed away / What portion of me / Could make assignable.” (III. 1–3) Ironically, it is at that very moment that the ‘storm-like’ noise of the ‘fly’ raids the persona’s subjective world:

............... And then
There interposed a fly,

With blue, uncertain, stumbling buzz,
Between the light and me. (III. 3-4 / IV. 1-2)

Clearly, the advent of the fly is not welcomed by the persona who does not seem to like its coming altogether. The fly acts only to thwart the persona’s desire to finalize her experimentation with death. Symbolically, the ‘buzzing of the fly’ prevents the persona to apprehend the ‘light’ of eternity that is deemed to be neared when the persona is about to finalize death.

Underlying this scene is the play of irony directed against the persona whose symbolic blindness to grasp ‘light’ is suggested to emanate from a double retribution she has to face in the aftermath of experimenting with death. On the one hand, such experimentation cannot be sifted from the ‘stumbling buzz’ of the fly, which ironically acts as a comic parody of the persona’s spiritual pretensions and longing for eternity while still alive. On the other hand, the persona’s sensory apprehension of the fly does not allow her to fully recapture her sight and, by implication, to possess a normal sensory responses of objects. So, neither the persona’s subjective construction of a spiritual reality animated by moving towards finalizing death, nor her disillusionment with it, on detecting the ‘fly buzz,’ which signals the outweighing aspect
of the objective world of reality, could redress the persona’s sight. In fact, the poem ends with the persona’s affirmation of that implied exhaustive blindness wrought to her: “I could not see to see.” (IV. 4)

It is a state of utter paralysis the persona is incurred in. This paralysis is all-inclusive, for it covers, as it were, the persona’s objective and subjective reality. After undergoing that ‘unwelcomed’ yet fatal visitation of the ‘buzzing’ of the objective world to the deep labyrinths of her subjective realms, the persona grows so destitute of both worlds that she forsakes the boon of sight, both physically and mentally. So, “instead of seeing both worlds linked, the persona sees neither. The poem ends and we are left, quite literally, in limbo.” (Weisbuch 102) That state of ‘limbo’ which designates incompleteness and uncertainty keeps blurring the poet’s adequate apprehension of both the objective and subjective worlds, as neither of them could move towards actualization. Georges Poulet reads that implied exhaustive loss dramatized in this poem in more generalized terms. He argues that:

All of Dickenson’s spiritual life and all her poetry are comprehended only in the interpretation given them by two initial moments, one of which is contradicted by the other, a moment in which one possesses eternity and a moment one loses it. All duration is made to be the eternal exclusion of an instantaneous eternity. (346)

III. Dickenson’s crisis of conceptualization

1- Manifestation of the crisis

Having a ‘self’ that is kept forever caught in the whirl of ‘contradictory moments,’ the poet’s ultimate challenging project seems to revolve around her attempt to conceptualize what Paul Lauter labels “the precise kind of ‘omitted center.’” (295) In this journey of conceptualization, the persona’s act of subjectively experimenting with death, which tends to be soon counteracted by the tight regulations of the objective world, has to be questioned and its essence to be explored. Equally, there needs to be studied the persona’s ultimate inability to fully ‘see’ and apprehend the objective world which, despite its outweighing the subjective one, remains alien to the disillusioned persona. Perhaps, the untitled poem “It was not death, for I stood up” represents the most authoritative example that seeks to provide a pathological diagnosis to such a dramatic disjuncture within the ‘self’ of Dickenson’s persona. The poem begins with a scientific exploration of that inexplicably irresponsive state which renders such persona as that in “I heard a fly buzz when I died” mentally and physically unable to
apprehend the world. In this exploratory program, the poet gathers the impossibility of considering that state a prelude to death: “It was not death, for I stood up, / And all the dead lie down.” (I. 1-2)

Such an inapprehensible state besieging the persona’s mental and physical responses ought not, then, be thought of to bear the least affinity with the pangs of death. Even external markers, including the postures of the prostrate ‘lying down’ of ‘the dead,’ on the one hand, and the persona’s ability to remain ‘standing up’ while undergoing that bewildering state, on the other, serve but to refute any sort of similarity whatsoever. The poet continues to provide a set of other natural phenomena in order not to be, equally, deemed to resemble such “catatonic trance or mental dislocation experienced in these death poems.” (Fitzgibbon 25) In fact, that disordered state from within Dickenson’s persona ought not to be taken as resembling “night” (I. 3) in its muffling somber darkness, nor “frost” (II. 1) in its chilling aspect, nor, again, “fire” (II. 3) in its burning potential. Yet, despite its deracination from all these experiences, that state “tasted like them all.” (III. 1)

If ever there were to have common aspects between the states of ‘death,’ ‘night,’ ‘frost’ and ‘fire,’ as phenomenological objective realities and the shattered inner state of the perturbed disabled persona, it would have to be symbolic, rather than literal. All these phenomena become, then, tormenting forces from within, not from without the persona. In other words, they are but concretization of the persona’s inner reality whose ‘blindness’ and inability ‘to see’ the essential truth of her own ‘self’ seems to be metamorphosed, eventually, into a cause of wail. Not only does the persona’s subjective ‘fictive patterning’ submerges under disillusionment, but also her sensory ability to grasp the objective reality is suggested to be severely smitten. Actually, the persona seems to bemoan her senselessness when she laments: “As if my life were shaven / And fitted to frame, / And could not breathe …” (IV. 1-3) There is implied a high measure of suffocation created out of being entangled and ‘fitted to a frame’ which is starkly insupportable and, therefore, shares aspects of the pangs of ‘death,’ the repugnant darkness of the ‘night,’ the chilliness of ‘frost’ and the burning of ‘fire.’

Working predominantly to conceptualize such confusion within her persona’s ‘self,’ the poet seeks, in the last stanza, to position the scale of loss whose magnitude covers the persona’s proper apprehension of both her subjective and objective realities. Essentially, the poet opts for standing on the degree of ‘despair’ in this process, while stating:

But most like chaos, – stopless, cool, –

Without a chance or spar,
Or even a report of land
To justify despair. (VI. 1-4)

The marked use of diction related to marooning in the sea, like ‘chaos,’ ‘spar,’ ‘a report of land,’ is communicative of a considerable rate of threat jeopardizing life. Bearing a ‘self’ deprived of ‘chance or spar’ through which she could be saved and receive a reassuring ‘report of land,’ the poet’s persona seems to find no outlet looming ahead in her symbolic journey of conceptualization. As a matter of fact, her alienation from both her subjective world, which keeps disillusioning her, and from her objective reality, which resists granting her any sort of apprehensibility whatsoever, is suggested to become an imminent doom she has to face. There is no need to put ‘despair’ in bet with ‘hope’ after gathering enough certitude of the sheer monopoly of the former one. In the words of Emile Fitzgibbon, “to despair, one must once have been aware of hope; this state however is void, empty and null in this poem.” (26)

2- The constructive essence of the crisis

Despite the all-invading ‘despair’ I find in these poems, I gather an underlying ‘hope’ in the midst of the most strenuous toil of Dickenson’s search for meaning. I recollect, here, David Porter’s comment on the real nature of Dickenson’s sense of failure accompanying both her subjective objectification of the ‘self’ (in poems like “Because I could not stop for Death) and her objective subjectification of it (as in the poem “I heard a fly buzz when I died”) – a failure which extends even to the poet’s ability to conceptualize the inner shattered state of her persona who grows, ultimately, alien to both her subjective reality and her objective world (as in “It was not death, for I stood up”). Porter deduces:

Each of Dickenson’s attempts was an original birth. In among the variants, we see the moment when figures crucial to individual poems are created from phenomenological experience. They are high-risk performances in defiance of the drag of familiar language patterns. In this engagement, we come close to the hidden precinct where, as Ernest Gombrich has said of the creative act, ‘the angel stands guard with the flaming sword.’ (192)

The essence of that sense of failure, in the variegated forms it takes across the whole gamut of conceptualizing the subjective and the objective wrestles within Dickenson’s
persona, remains ‘an original birth.’ Certainly, the implied transformation of the inextricably hard moments the poet’s persona tends to face in relation to her subjective and objective ‘self’ into moments of ‘an original birth’ involves ‘high-risk performances’ in order to see light. Yet, before it is generated, that ‘birth’ has to fight against ‘the drag of familiar language patterns.’ This entails the necessity to de-familiarize the conventional paradigm governing the structure of the ‘self,’ whether in relation to its own subjective fabrications, or its way of apprehending the objective world, or, again, its methods of conceptualizing both worlds. Hence, to accentuate that de-familiarizing process and bestow visibility to it, the poet seems to find nowhere to go but to militantly ‘stand guard with the flaming sword’ of her word in order to underline the ‘creative’ potential her word entertains owing to its springing from an ‘angelic’ prism.

However, the poet’s adoption of that ‘angelic’ spectrum never comes to negate her being deeply anchored in a ‘self’ which remains well-aware of the limitations it is perpetually encountering, both at the subjective and objective levels of apprehension. In a nutshell, Dickenson’s suggested ethics is in W. K. Wimsatt’s words “not a teleology towards a nameable further end.” (351) Any sort of subjective or objective ‘birth’ of meaning in her poetic enterprise has to be forever ‘original’ and therefore, is just meant to further entrench the never-ending process of what we might call ‘meaning-settlement.’ Accordingly, the space the ‘self’ entertains in Dickenson’s ‘creative’ and ‘angelic’ mode of apprehension becomes that of amplitude and ever-expansion, despite its suggested vulnerability to fragility and its being built out of “a shaky sense of subjectivity.” (Walker 31)

Conclusion
This paper has studied the dialectics of the subjective and the objective in delineating Dickenson’s thematic concern with death. Endowing the ‘self’ of the diverse personae of her poems with the capacity to experiment with death, or what Robert Weisbuch calls “dying in drama” (94), or again “the practice of dying” (132), the poet does well in covering a whole range across what we might call ‘explorative journey to death.’ This range vacillates between subjectively objectifying death and objectively subjectifying it, only to end in an underlying awareness on the poet’s part of a crisis of conceptualization which can be considered, nevertheless, as the motor force sustaining the ever-regenerative epistemological quest of Dickenson.
References
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“I heard a fly buzz when I died.” 168 - 9.
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“It was not death, for I stood up.” 164.