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**Metaphysical Elements of Death, Mythology, and Religion in Emily Dickinson's  
and Edgar Allan Poe's selected poems**

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fulfillment for the Degree of Master in Literature and civilization

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this work to:

My parents whose advice and help supported me when I was preparing this research.

My brothers and sisters.

My classmates, friends, and teachers.

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## **Abstract**

This work is an attempt to shed light on the thematic tendencies of two American poets Emily Dickinson and Edgar Allan Poe in terms of death, religion and mythology throughout a number of the poets' selected poems. Throughout this study, each poet incorporates the above themes to establish a specific effect on her or his work. As far as the problematic of this research is concerned, even though a great deal of Dickinson's poems deal with doleful themes that make one think that she is a Dark Romantic poet like Poe, she presents her ideas in optimistic views. When it comes to the hypothesis of this study, both poets seem to share an apparent similarity in terms of their gloomy outlooks and the use of the metaphysical elements of death, myth and religion. In order to accomplish this study and to be precise, the number of poems is limited according to their relevance to the above themes. The methods that I intend to use in order to achieve this research are descriptive and interpretative methods. This will be followed with a library research. Finally, the research ends with an overview of the findings that includes a comparative study between the poems of the two poets.

## ملخص

يهدف هذا العمل إلى تسليط الضوء على قصائد شاعرين أمريكيين هما أيمللي ديكينسون وادقر ألان بو. يبين هذا البحث من خلال دراسة عدد من مختاراتهما الشعرية انه بالرغم من أن هذه القصائد تدور حول فكرة الموت والدين والأسطورة إلا أن كل منهما استعمل هذه الأفكار لإنشاء اثر أدبي مختلف في عمله الشعري. تتطرق إشكالية هذا البحث إلى التشابه الظاهري بين عدد كبير من قصائد ديكينسون التي تتطرق لأفكار متشائمة قد تجعل القارئ يعتقد بأنها تنتمي لتيار الرومانسي المتشائمة رغم أنها لفكرة الموت من منظور أكثر تفاؤلاً أما عن فرضية هذه الدراسة يمكن القول أن كلا الشاعريين يشتركان في نظرتهم المتشائمة وإدراج مفاهيم ميتافيزيقية كالموت والأسطورة والدين.

ولإتمام هذا البحث بإيجاز حُدد مجال هذا البحث في عدد من قصائد كلا الشاعريين. أما المنهج المتبع في هذه الدراسة هو الوصف والتفسيري ويتبع هذا ببحث في المكتبة والانترنت. وأخيرا نختتم هذا البحث بحوصلة تتضمن دراسة تحليلية للمقارنة بين قصائد كل من الشاعريين.

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgement.....	i
Abstract (in English).....	ii
Abstract (in Arabic).....	iii
Contents.....	iv
Glossary.....	vi
<b>Chapter One: General Introduction.....</b>	<b>8</b>
1.1 Introduction: Background to the study.....	8
1.2 Statement of the Problem.....	10
1.3 Research Question.....	10
1.4 Hypothesis.....	11
1.5 Aim of the Research.....	11
1.6 Scope of the Research.....	11
1.7 Review of literature .....	12
1.8 Methodology .....	13
1.9 Structure of the Research.....	13
<b>Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework.....</b>	<b>14</b>
2.1. Introduction.....	14
2.2. Romanticism.....	15
2.2.1 Dark Romanticism.....	17
2.2.2 Transcendentalism.....	19
2.3. A Short Biography of Emily Dickinson.....	22
2.4. A Short Biography of Edgar Allan Poe.....	23

2.5. Conclusion.....	25
<b>Chapter Three: Metaphysical Elements in selected Poems by Dickinson.....</b>	<b>27</b>
3.1 Introduction.....	27
3.2. Death in Dickinson’s <i>Because I Could not Stop for Death</i> .....	28
3.3. Religion in Dickinson’s <i>the Bible is an Antique Volume</i> .....	31
3.4. Mythology in Dickinson’s “ <i>Lethe in my flower</i> .....	34
3.5. Conclusion.....	36
<b>Chapter Four: Metaphysical elements in selected poems by Poe.....</b>	<b>38</b>
4.1 Introduction.....	38
4.2. Death in Poe’s <i>the City in the Sea</i> .....	39
4.3. Religion in Poe’s <i>the Hymn</i> .....	41
4.4. Mythology in Poe’s <i>to Helen</i> .....	42
4.5. Conclusion.....	46
<b>Chapter Five: Overview of the Findings.....</b>	<b>48</b>
5.1 Introduction .....	48
5.2 Overview of the findings .....	49
5.2.1 Death in <i>Because I Could not Stop for Death</i> and <i>the City in the Sea</i> .....	49
5.2.2 Religion in <i>the Bible is an Antique Volume</i> and <i>Hymn</i> .....	51
5,2.3 Mythology in Dickinson’s “ <i>Lethe</i> ” in <i>my flower</i> and Poe’s <i>to Helen</i> .....	52
5.3 Recommendations and Future Perspectives.....	53
Work Cited Page.....	54
Appendix	

**Glossary**

**Poetry:** Poetry is a composition of words delivered in a specific pattern; such a form necessitates the recurrent supplement of Figures of Speech mainly Metaphor and Simile (Baldick 198). That is to say, poetry is a condensed form of writing in which the poet can use his imagination and exaggeration to deliver the meaning he wants.

**Metaphysics:** Metaphysics is a philosophical branch that is concerned with whatever exists beyond the physical world. It investigates questions science does not address and looks in what is beyond the human being's existence as the nature of non-physical entities like God (Audi 563). In other words, this branch deals with all what is linked with the spiritual world including mythologies and stories of ghosts.

**Mythology:** The significance of mythology is related to the imaginative stories that were believable among ancient nations. Myths were invented for different reasons for example to explain a natural phenomenon or to conduct customs to guide people's lives (Abrahams170). To sum up, myths are stories supernatural heroes or phenomena that people used to believe in the past.

**Calvinism:** Calvinism is the Christian doctrine that can be traced back to the French reformer John Calvin. According to Calvinism, it's only God, who selects his people to be saved and his satisfaction with them is shown in their daily lives (Martin 25). In other words, in this Christian doctrine, it is God, who chooses his

people for Paradise or Hell and this selection is shown throughout their daily life events and behaviour.

## **Chapter One:**

### **General Introduction**

#### **1.1. Introduction: Background to the Study**

The gloomy vision in the poetic works of Emily Elizabeth Dickinson and Edgar Allan Poe can place a great deal of their works into the same category. A number of Poe's poems reflect the hardships that he encountered in his deplorable life: he was orphaned early, suffered from poverty, became addicted to wine, which left their deep marks in his personality as well as his literary works. While Emily Dickinson's life was less crucial, her poetry seems to reflect the dark side of a human's experience either. She gave up studying after the deterioration of her health, her years of maturity were spent ambiguously because she withdrew herself from social contact into her room, dressed herself in white, avoided receiving guests, and had contact with the outside world merely through letters. Therefore, the recurrent dismal themes to which both were devoted make them in a way or another seem to belong to one literary trend, i.e. Romanticism, one of the dominant literary movements in America during the nineteenth century.

It is worth mentioning to mention that America during Dickinson's lifetime was undergoing crucial circumstances exemplified in the American Civil war from 1860 to 1865. In addition to the radical political upheavals, American society was still conservative in many respects. People were not allowed to discuss either political rights or certain taboos like sexuality, atheism, and women's rights. Women were not allowed to participate in political life and girls had to leave school as soon as they finish their primary stage.

Literary speaking, Romanticism was the spreading literary trend among writers at that time. It stressed on certain obsessive principles such as relying on the human's imaginative power to imagine whatever exists beyond the physical world like what will happen after one's death, feeling nostalgic through referring imaginatively to those ancient Greek and Latin mythologies, rebelling even against conservative religious doctrines that might restrict writers' freedom in their writings. Although both poets seem to adopt the above principles each one refers to death, mythology, liberal religious thinking, i.e. stylistically as well as thematically his/her own way.

On the one hand, Dickinson's most poems give one the impression that she meditated at death from an optimistic angle; for her the tomb is where a human being enjoys tranquility and freedom. Death in Poe's pessimistic poetry, on the other hand, is associated with the terrible separation that he suffered from after the death of his relatives. Besides, religion is tackled rebelliously by the two poets. Although Dickinson was well versed in the Bible and many of her poems are full of theological vocabulary and appear like hymns, she liberated herself from her religious conventions in her real life as well as in her poetry (Freeman-2-3). However, Poe was less rebellious in his life, he intended to refuse the destiny that separated him from his partner in some of his poems and sometimes he dared to appear as an atheist. Moreover, mythology is another common point wherein both poets meet. While Poe studied classic mythologies at an early age, he became obsessed with Greek, Latin and even Middle Eastern myths, Dickinson forged some biblical verses as her own myths that she might admire or mock at.

## 1.2 The statement of the problem

The investigation to be carried in this research is to lay emphasis on the problem that lies on the apparent similar orientation towards metaphysical themes that both poets seem to share, while if zooming deeper in their poetry, many different points can make the distinction; in terms of their individual style and ideas. As an example, the optimistic tendency that characterizes a number of Dickinson's poems about death such as *Because I could not stop for death* is typically unconventional compared to Poe's poems about the same theme. His pessimism in his *The Raven* shows him as a dark romantic poet. Another example of divergence could be detected in their *Valentine*. Dickinson's *Valentine* encompasses motifs such as immortality, heaven, nature. In this poem, words such as divine, Adam, and Eve have more religious connotations whereas Poe's *Valentine* has much to do with myth or magic (Loeda, talisman) than faith. However, both poets were devoted to use the above themes and lived in the same era, each poet refers to them from different perspective. This leads one to question whether both poets use such metaphysical elements of religion, mythology, and death to make the same literary effect in his/her poetry or not.

## 1.3 Major Research Question and Subsidiary Questions

In order to address the above research problem, one has to answer the following major question: How do Edgar Allan Poe and Emily Dickinson converge and diverge in terms of their use of metaphysical elements in their poetic works?

The above question in turn presupposes putting forward a number of subsidiary questions. These are as follows:

1. What are the main metaphysical elements in Emily Dickinson's poetry? How do they consolidate major themes in Dickinson's selected poems?

2. What are the major metaphysical elements in Edgar Allan Poe's poetry? How do they consolidate major themes in Poe's selected poems?
3. To what extent does Poe's and Dickinson's use of metaphysical elements pertain to specific literary movements?

#### **1.4 Hypothesis**

In spite of the apparent similarity between the two poets in terms of their gloomy outlooks, Emily Dickinson's use of metaphysics in her poetry might differ to certain extent from Edgar Allan Poe's use of the same elements.

#### **1.5 The Aim of the Study**

This research is an attempt to explore Emily Dickinson's and Edgar Allan Poe's different ways of using metaphysics in a number of their poems, taking into consideration the similar and different literary effects of the same metaphysical elements.

#### **1.6 Scope of the Study**

Throughout this research, the study will not be exhaustive; it will concentrate on the investigation of a number of selected representative poems from each poet's poetic works. The selection of the poems will be based on the following criteria: on the high frequency of words and phrases that are associated with the metaphysical elements of religion, death, and myth such as God, Heaven, god, immortality, etc. Precisely the poems of Dickinson are: *Because I could not stop for death, the Bible is an Antique Volume* and *Lethé in my Flower*. And Poe's *the City in the Sea, the Hymn, and to Helen*.

## 1.7 Review of Literature

There has been a variety of responses about Dickinson's and Poe's different religious and mythological elements that form an integral part of their poetic works.

To begin with, critics like Martin argue that Dickinson intended to rebel against the Calvinist Christian doctrine of her times. Opponents in the other hand like Freeman judge Dickinson's reference to the Bible as the fundamental mark that proves her deep Christian faith. Siddall and other critics view Edgar Allan Poe's religious background in some of his writings reflecting certain religious elements of the Christian faith. While others disagree and judge him as a non-believer; they assume that religion is one of the themes that Poe dealt with in mysterious and denouncing way (24-25-26,-12-3, and Siddall). So, from these different opinions, one can say that even when it comes to Poe's own poems or Dickinson's critics disagree in their judgments concerning each poets way of dealing with death, myth, and religion.

What came after the Bible as an important source of inspiration was mythology. Equally compared to Dickinson, Poe was related to the use of the mythological vocabulary that seems to come directly from the eighteenth-century Neoclassicism. Yet, this illusive influence of classical mythology –some scholars as Fisher think- captured Poe's mental power instead of enriching his imaginative talent. Comparatively, Dickinson dared referring to some Biblical connotations as if they were myths, when she thinks that it doesn't fulfill her literary needs like Pollak presumes (39 and 49).

The fundamental ground of this research is to compare the poetic style of Dickinson's selected poem about religion with Poe's one. The second point is to explore Dickinson's consideration of death and compare it with Poe's concern of the same theme. The last point is to focus on the different literary effects of the use of mythology in each poet's selected poem.

## **1.9 Research Methodology**

The methods that I intend to use so as to accomplish this research are analytical and interpretative methods. I will do library research. I will collect the materials from library and internet. As for data sampling and procedures of analysis, a close reading of the corpora will allow me to select a number of representative poems, and then I will have recourse to comparing/contrasting the selected poems.

## **1.10 Structure of the Research**

The present research encompasses a general introduction, three main chapters, and a general conclusion. The first chapter will include the theoretical framework of the research. The second chapter will be an exploration of the metaphysical elements in selected poems written by Emily Dickinson. The third chapter will explore Edgar Allan Poe's use of metaphysical elements in selected poems. Finally, the research will culminate in a general conclusion which will include an overview of the findings along with a comparative analysis. This will be followed with a future perspective and the possible implications of the findings in the teaching of American literature.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

As in Europe, Romanticism in America came as a reaction against Neoclassicism or the “Enlightenment”. Most importantly, it encouraged writers to celebrate the national identity in their American texts focusing more on feelings and passions rather than the reasonable thinking. Romanticism came to America in coincidence with another literary movement that was Transcendentalism. This chapter will discuss the way that Romanticism and Transcendentalism deal with death, mythology and religion. Originally, Transcendentalism was born as a philosophical movement that rebelled against the religious institutions of the time, and then it became a literary trend, while when Romanticism was born, it rebelled against logic and reason rather than religion. However, what one can say is that both of them are linked to each other since both of them begun as philosophical movements and were deeply influenced by the ideas of the German philosopher Emmanuel Kant. Also many ideas of Romanticism are interrelated with Transcendentalism like their focus on the human being’s power of imagination and the spiritual side of the human being.

One of many similarities that Romanticism and Transcendentalism share is their rebellion against the social and religious traditions of the societies they were born in. When it was believable that humans’ life and future are already determined by God, who selected his best people beforehand, Romantics as well as Transcendentalists celebrated the sense of individualism which means that one is the first responsible for his or her future and it is only him who can decide for himself and not any outside spiritual power.

## 2.2 Romanticism

The literary scene in America paralleled with the nation's needs that influenced the whole cultural life of Americans in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Romanticism as the prevailing literary trend has influenced most of writers of that time which gave birth to the typical American literature (Grellet 35). Such movement as in Europe came to rebel against rationalism and the conventional institutions. Instead, it insisted on some alternative precepts such as reliance on human's creative power of imagination rather than logic, pursuing liberty in nature from all sorts of conventions and even religious institutions, reviving mythologies of the old days and involving them in the American present context, and referring to emotions instead of science.

As the eighteenth century began, religious revivals of Calvinistic Protestantism called "The Great Awakenings" were widely spread among Americans who thought that "cultures of Massachusetts...[ Puritanism] ought to be the models of national cultures" which means that religion was still influential (High 41). It was customary in the years of American Revolution to notice the Bible's presence in all concerns of Americans' life and "It was not difficult for them [people as well as writers] to support their arguments with citations from the Bible" (Ford 35). As the decades went on, it was a matter of importance for the coming intellectual generations of America to dwindle their interests in the traditional conservatism of their ancestors; "they rejected ...conservative Puritanism of their ancestors" and directed themselves towards new beliefs (High 42). That is to say, most of American writers of that century were fed up with restrict puritanical conventions that sooner pushed them to proclaim their intellectual independence even against such beliefs as the ones of the Protestant Church.

As it has been already mentioned, the Romantic era in America was emotionally associated with "the nostalgia for the old" by which writers mean mythology (Gray

107). American writers because of the lack of a folk-lore tried to Americanize myths for their newly independent literature; they had created myths about America and its history in order to attract immigrants to come there. Such a wish made them refer to either the ancient myths or the Bible to create legends, myths, and folk tales that fitted only the American context so as to sound authentically American (Ford 29, 33). So, because America was newly discovered country and its literature lacks authenticity, American writers were clever in the sense that they created myths by themselves so as to make their literature typically American.

The process of creating American mythology firstly made American writers of the nineteenth century question “the mythic past of the country” (Gray 109). The originality of the American myths has its roots outside. Like mythic stories abroad, myths in America dealt with the human being’s creation and his origins, gods, wars, the history of sun, moon, animals, and spirits, etc. Yet, the social and cultural changes that occurred in America during that century mixed with the American geography urged writers to create typical American myths. They have adopted some myths from Europeans because of their ancestral history (4). As an example, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, John G. Whittier, and other poets succeeded in forging foreign mythic elements and putting them in an American model according to the social and the cultural needs of the country (107). Thus, American myths were just a combination between the ancient myths mixed with the American social and geographical changes that did not exist in Europe.

Another source from which to adopt myths was Indians. Americans like Indians shaped some historical narratives about the original inhabitants of America, conflicts, mythic heroes who encounter adventures in the large landscape and defeat giant beasts at the end. Yet, because of the difference with Indians, American writers have

modulated the Indian myths according to the American life: landscape, food, customs, and so forth (5). To sum up, Indians were an essential source from which Americans got many myths. This is because Indians knew the land better than Americans and also because they were different people for Europeans, so that Americans forged the Indians myths with their in order to attract more immigrants.

Death, the inevitable end of any human being was most of time described by Romantic writers of the nineteenth century in a mysterious way that sometimes makes one meditates at it and asks many curious questions about the nature of death and non-physical world. Other Romantics dealt with death in a sort of a way that is “dramatizing death and the grave” (Vanspankeren 35). Perhaps because of their religious background which they inherited from their puritan ancestors, Romantic poets formed their vision about death as the beginning of the real life. Their essential belief was that “There are no final answers except, perhaps, death” (39). For them, death means the final solution for life’s problems and the only answer of the human’s inquiries. The description of death for many Romantic writers is associated in many cases with religious elements like hell, Heaven, angels.... Those writers imagine the afterlife according to its description in the scriptures and link this image with their own life’s experience and their own principles.

### **2.2.1 Dark Romanticism**

Just when the eighteenth century turned off came another group among which was Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville and others upon whom “the influence of Romanticism is unquestionable” (Grellet 73). However, those writers molded their works in fairly darker image; they were more pessimistic especially when it came to issues like death. Death as a metaphysical theme is dismally expressed among

them. Within Poe's works, for instance, death always appears as the disastrous end of one's life. This unhappy end could not be lived only after facing death, but one can feel himself dead while physically he is still alive, if one of his relatives dies (Oakes 13). In most writings at that time, the major scene that was related to death often included the macabre, corpses, grave, and supernatural occurrences just like the coming of the dead people after spending long dark nights inside their graves.

Mythology that was created by the dark Romantic writers pointed out some of the dark motifs of the human being's existence. The past with all its memories, keeps haunting the present, dark Romantics were "obsessed with the guilt and burden of the past, riddled with doubt" (Gray 118). Besides, what characterized the mythic writings of that time was that the events usually took place in a landscape that is located in an unknown area. The hero, more dead than alive, is obsessed with the death of a pale allusive heroine who appears reclusively like a ghost after her death until she leads him to his mysterious ruin. Falling into decay means that there is a powerful evil surrounding not only one's spirit but the whole world in which one lives (118). In other words, myths that were included in Dark Romantic writings were presented in the doleful atmosphere that characterized the writings of this literary trend in America.

Religion as another important element for writers of the eighteenth-century was differently tackled among Romantics in the nineteenth-century America. Religion was used to threaten people from God's anger and punishment, believers found no logical answers to their questions (Bercovitch 136). This kind of restriction at the beginning of the nineteenth-century inhibited many issues as atheism and religious freedom from being mentioned or even slightly discussed in a single literary work (Oakes xii). However, this conservatism led many authors like Nathaniel Hawthorne to stand against the puritanical beliefs of the past in his works and especially in his novel *the scarlet*

*letter*. This novel, like other literary works of the time, “has strong feeling for the puritan past of seventeenth century New England” (High 50). So, when many writers stayed with Calvinistic conservatism, others tried to rebel against the strict Puritanism of the past especially when it comes to the idea that all humans are sinful by nature and there is no way to flee God’s punishments.

Another example is Henry W. Longfellow and some of his contemporaries who pointed out the issue of the enslaved African Americans and interconnected their situation to significant Biblical narratives. Likewise, other group of poets freed themselves from the traditional Christianity and suspected the “difficulties as doubt and sin in a human life” (53). Walt Whitman and Dickinson were probably the poets who dared to break these taboos like freedom of religion. Furthermore, they avoided the poetic formal standards of the age. Their poetic lines were interrelated with certain biblical connotations but in a different ways in terms of the selection of words or the content itself.

### **2.2.2 Transcendentalism**

Even though Transcendentalism shares many Romantic principles of Romanticism since it was the latter’s interrelated branch, Transcendentalists treated the issues of the era in their own liberal way, especially when it came to Religion. For instance, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, the two representative figures of the movement at that time, were “bonded by negative beliefs. They not only rejected Calvinism but Unitarianism as well” (Audi 959). Instead, one can say that philosophy for them played a role that can be regarded equal to the Bible.

Even though Transcendentalists regarded Christ with a kind of admiration, they “thought of the works of Shakespeare and the great philosophers as equally important”

(High 42). For instance, for Emerson, it is in nature that one can feel the presence of God and not in the religious institutions. Another example that shows the significance of nature for Transcendentalists lies in the lines of Dickinson's *the Gentian weaves her fingers*. In this poem, Dickinson compares the three natural elements of the bee, the butterfly, and the breeze with the Christian God that is exemplified in the trinity of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit in order to glorify the natural elements in the sense that they reach God's glorious position in a believer's heart.

The emergence of American mythology coincided with the time when writers like Emerson and Thoreau started seriously to create myths about America, the Promised Land. When Emerson declared the intellectual independence of American poetry, poets started to use their imaginative power so as to establish myths based on their own poetic talents (Bercovitch 21). Furthermore, poets had created legends about America itself; they looked for legends that could be comprehensive among their readers and acceptable in their society. The representative examples were the ones that dealt with the American wilderness, the origins of American culture, and the American uniqueness (Martin 21). That is to say, American writers focused on their geography and exceptionalism and mixed them with the previously known myths in order to create what is known now as American myths.

Transcendentalists raised the question of American freedom and individualism as the central idea in American mythology in their verses as well as essays. The Bible as "the prime mythology" was considered the ground upon which myths were standing and from which they initially emerged. What accompanied the Bible was the Greek myths. Poets using their imagination and the humorous tone of the American language in many ways attempted to declare the fakeness of their Holy books.

As mythic elements were involved in the poetry of Transcendentalists, religion was by its side. To raise the American fervor, poets stressed on the idea that America was their promised land that all of Americans deserve to dwell in. However, they believed that it was not God, who decided beforehand their destiny but it is the human being himself who determines his life. Moreover, Transcendentalists gave more impotence to myths at the extant of religion; they referred to some Biblical narratives in the same way that one does when he deals with legends or fairy tales (Bercovitch 393). In other words, Transcendental writers “reached the point of referring to Bible narratives as myth” which could be considered at their times a disrespectful behavior towards the Bible (Pollak 83). This is because poets were very knowledgeable about the language of the Bible, so to make their ideas more persuading; they like Dickinson used a lot of Biblical motifs to produce American tropes in her verse as if she is narrating a story that happened to her (49). The idea here is that their well understanding of the Bible made them able to include some verses easily in their writings even without showing the common respect to these ideas that people in their society believed in.

Transcendentalists meditated at the nature of death and the human being’s spiritual side through somehow positive views. When death was a source of unhappiness or maybe mystery for other writers of the same century, Transcendentalists found such fear groundless. According to them, it is the body that dies and is buried, while the soul doesn’t die and lives forever. The notion of death was accepted in an odd way among them especially Dickinson who insightfully thought of death and went beyond its physical sense. Moreover, Emerson pondered at the nature of death through his Transcendental personal way of understanding the afterlife; his philosophy of death insinuates that the soul joins the over soul that is God after the physical cease. This idea means that “from death life emerges, at the end” to live a new life that is the real life

(Vanspankkeren 40). For Transcendentalists, when one's physical organs stop working, his soul does not die but it stays alive to be unified with other souls and all of them join God soul.

### **2.2.3 A short Biography of Emily Dickinson**

Emily Elizabeth Dickinson was born in Amherst, Massachusetts, on the 10<sup>th</sup> December 1830 to a wealthy family. She had two siblings: William Austin who later became a lawyer and Lavinia who would share Emily the responsibilities of the housekeeping (Ford 153). When Emily reached nine years old she joined Amherst Academy and after seven years there, Emily attended Mount Holyoke Female Seminary. An institution established for religious purposes (Wendy 8). Just a year later, she returned home because of health decline and stayed there for the rest of her life (Oakes 100, 101). So, the infancy of Dickinson was spent between her home and the primary school, but later on she fell sick and could not continue studying. At home, she took care of their sick mother and lived under the censorship of her father whose censorship was restricted (Oakes 100).

Since Emily's infancy and until maturity, her love of nature was absolute; the garden played a refuge for her to escape society, household tasks and all about (Oakes 12). What equaled Dickinson's love of nature was her devotion to readings. Ralph Waldo Emerson had much influence on her poetry and the influence of transcendentalism impacted her own principles in life (Ford 153). Shakespeare and some controversial women writers of the time like Brontes, Mrs. Browning, George Eliot and others were Dickinson's favorite writers. Yet, in the forthcoming years while the poetess' own interest in writing and reading increased, the problem of her eyes was getting more dangerous in return (154). So, Dickinson's time was mostly spent

beside her flowers in her garden inside her home or reading her favourite women writers' writings.

In her late twenties, she began to feel more comfortable when she is alone. She clothed herself in white especially after the loss of her father (Wendy 18). After Dickinson's family settled again in the Homestead, she was introduced to men of the elite whom she considered her tutors: the lawyer Benjamin Franklin Newton, The minister Reverend Charles Wadsworth, Otis Philips, and Minister Thomas Wentworth Higginson. She exchanged letters with most of them asking them to evaluate her writings (Wendy 14). Although Dickinson led some affectionate attachments notably through correspondence, the woman remained unmarried and the reasons remained unknown.

In her later years, Dickinson lost her parents and dearest relative; her little nephew Gilbert whose death worsened her health situation until her died on May 15<sup>th</sup>, 1886. Although she had composed more than one thousand poem, only seven were published during her life time and the rest was discovered and published after her death by her sister friends (Grellet 122). The isolation that she lived in made her just like her poems unknown during her life time but fortunately later on her family and friends discovered them and finally they were published.

#### **2.2.4 A short Biography of Edgar Allan Poe**

Edgar Allan Poe is an American short story writer and poet. Poe was born in Boston on January 19, 1809 as the second child to two immigrant actors. After his parents got divorced, his mother fell sick and left him orphan in 1811(Hayes xv). Separated from his two brothers Henry William and Rosalie, Poe was taken by a Scottish tobacco merchant John Allan and his wife Mrs. Frances Valentine Allan to live

in Baltimore (Oakes 276). When he was 6 years old, Edgar went to Great Britain with them wherein he studied in different good schools (Fisher 2). At his return to America, Edgar resumed studying at *Joseph H. Clarke School* where he studied many subjects including Latin and Greek (Kennedy xi). In 1826, Poe entered the University of Virginia wherein he had done well at first, but the lack of money led him to gamble and to drink heavily (Hayes xv). So, the gambling debts led him to leave the university and return to Richmond. Consequently, this failure urged John Allan to dismiss him out of the house.

In 1827, Poe joined the U.S. Army in Boston where he was promoted to the rank of sergeant major the following year. In this year, Poe published his first collection of verse; *Tamerlane and Other Poems* (Hayes xv). Two years later came his *Al Aaraaf, Tamerlane, and Minor Poems*. Suddenly Mrs. Allan died and Edgar went to live with his aunt, Mrs. Clemm and young cousin, Virginia who became his wife later (Oakes 277). Even though he entered to the US Army and got promoted, Poe's will to be a writer made him publish other poems and look for other opportunities in the literary career.

Poe entered West Point as a cadet in the next year and *Poems* came as his next collection of poems. After the West Point, Poe moved to Baltimore to join his poor family in order to help and support them (Oakes 276). At that time, he decided to write fiction. But due to of shortage of financial means, Poe took his way to *Saturday Courier Newspaper* in which he published other tales.

In 1836, Poe got married with his cousin Virginia Clemm. Yet, he moved to *American Museum* in Philadelphia in order to continue publishing his works such as *Ligeia* and *The Psyche Zenobia*.

In the same year, Poe became an editor in *Gentleman Magazine*, in which he published most of his best tales like *The Fall of the House of Usher* and other works. Later, he published more works like *The Tell-Tale Heart* elsewhere (High 55). The occupations that Poe worked in gave him the experience to get more fame and success to write more poems and short stories.

In 1845, came series of tales and a collection of poems entitled *The Raven and Other Poems*. *The Raven* poem brought Poe more Popularity because it is thought that he wrote it after the death of his wife Virginia to express the tragedy that separated the two lovers (Oakes 278). Only few months, Poe went to *Broadway Journal* to contribute as its editor and later as its owner who wrote series of stories before his arrival in Baltimore. Yet, the death of Virginia made him addicted to alcohol. Finally, on 3 October 1849, Poe was found drunk and dying in a Baltimore Street which ended his miserable life (High 56). The death of his wife and many other problems especially in his work contributed to worsen his situation that ended with his death drunk in Baltimore Street.

### **2.2.5 Conclusion**

The literary scene of nineteenth century in America witnessed the spread of two literary movements that are Romanticism and Transcendentalism. In spite the fact that, both of them came as rebellion against rationalism, celebrated the emotional side of the human being rather than logic, each one of them dealt with religion and death from different perspective.

Religion through a deeper sight was differently tackled between Romanticism and Transcendentalism. The latter emerged at first as movement rejected the rules of religion of the time. The followers of this trend believed that the church is not the only

place in which one can talk to God. Instead, God exists everywhere and within everyone. That is to say, they liberated themselves from religious doctrines that were questioned without any persuading answers for many writers of the era. Eventually, this led them to deal with as if they deal with a piece of literature.

Even though Transcendentalism and Romanticism shared the belief that death is only physical and the spirit of the body remains alive forever in an eternal world and joins the other spirits, there was a kind of difference between them in their basic views about death. Many Transcendentalist works were based on the idea that death is the doorway of the soul to fuse with the Over soul. Thus, death is positively viewed; for Transcendentalists death should not threaten humans because when people die, they would be unified with God. This opposes the Dark Romantic considerations about death. The latter is represented a mysterious and pessimistic image. For Romantics, death is what people should be afraid of and hate; perhaps it reminds them of cemeteries, sadness, grave, and so forth.

## **Chapter 3:**

### **Metaphysical Elements in Selected Poems by Dickinson: Death, Religion, and Mythology**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

Despite the fact that death, mythology, and religion are recurrent themes in the nineteenth-century American literature, Dickinson as a poet lived in that era was fascinated with the above themes but her fascination seems unconventional. In this chapter, the focus will be on Dickinson's selected poems that deal with the previously mentioned themes to show her unconventionality compared to her contemporaries.

Even though Dickinson's culture insisted on her to accept death just as the mysterious end of the human being's life, in many cases, she deals with it with certainty and in an optimistic way. This attitude towards death came as a result of her being influenced by Transcendentalists, who look at death as a source of happiness because it leads one to live in the immortal life. The transcendental philosophy of death had a deep impact upon many writers rather than Dickinson. On the contrary, other writers portrayed death not as the beginning of the real relief but as dark end of a person's life.

As far as Dickinson's milieu maintained the basic principles of Calvinism, after her birth the religious environment had gone through important changes. In the eighteenth century a wave of religious revivals had passed the town and Churches served many serious sermons like the one of Jonathan Edwards's *sinners in the hands of an angry God*. In this kind of sermons, preachers warned believers about God's anger that leads them to end in Hell. However, in the nineteenth century, churches were reformed and dissenters appeared. In spite of that, new religious revivals reemerged by the mid of the century to awake the hesitating believers and push them to attend the

churches' sermons like what their Puritan ancestors did. Yet, people of that time were less interested to attend and writers were more courageous to break many religious conventions.

When it came to mythology, Americans tried to Americanize Greek and Roman myths according to what fits America not according to their previous meanings. American writers were aware of the lack of typical American myths, so they adopted many from Europeans and Indians as well in order to create their own myths. Furthermore, they even referred to the Bible to create different kinds of legends, and folk tales, which became later on authentically American.

### **3.2. Death in Dickinson's *Because I could not Stop for Death***

Emily Dickinson's concern with death had always accompanied her throughout the different stages of her lifetime; it even differs from one occasion to another. For instance, in a letter written in her youth Dickinson wrote: "I think of the grave very often" (qtd. in Wendy 98). From this extract one may infer that she seems very curious to know about what would happen in the grave and whether she will meet her dear ones or not. Essentially this concern does not correspond to the common frightening illustration of human's end of life but to explore death like any ordinary issue. This idea could be exemplified in one of her poems that consists of six stanzas, believed to be written around 1863, and was entitled firstly *The Carriage* and later it became known as *Because I Could not Stop for Death*. Death in this poem can have the qualities and the appearance of a lover rather than a fearful ghost.

This poem consists of six quatrain stanzas; each one of them adds new details to accomplish the description of a journey towards eternity. Death is personified as a noble man comes in his carriage to take the speaker who seems to be a bride towards eternity.

The very gentle behaviour that this nobleman deals with makes the speaker forget everything in her life and accepts to go with him to the other world as if she is certain too that the afterlife is a better place than life itself.

This journey is not the kind of mysterious or fearful one, but it is a joyful trip when they pass by children playing, and magnificent natural scenes like large area covered by wheat and the sun set. However things begin to change when the climate turns chilly. Then, the speaker and death suddenly stop at a house that seems strange for the speaker at first as if they reach the house of the bridegroom or the place they are going to which means the end of the journey. In the final stanza, the speaker turns her intention towards the notion of time in this new place. She becomes surprised when she discovers that it took them just a short while to come to this place while according to human's considerations of time, it took them many centuries. From this stanza, one can guess that Dickinson wants to tell her reader that centuries in life can be merely a day in the afterlife which means that life in the afterlife is eternal.

Despite the fact that this poem deals with a doleful theme that is death, the tone of the speaker seems joyful when she describes death as if she describes a polite knight. Even though the climate changes suddenly into the coldness and darkness when the sun disappears, Dickinson remains optimistic and describes herself dressed up like a bride with her 'gown' and 'tulle', which means that the tone is still enjoyable even at the speaker's last moments.

In *Because I could not stop for Death*, Dickinson uses a variety of figures of speech: personification, repetition, and metaphors to portray death, not as a fearful ghost but as a lovely friend. Firstly, she personifies death positively as a gentleman. Gently, this noble man offers her a new accommodation with him in the afterlife. She uses words like 'tulle', and 'carriage' which make one think that death is a bridegroom

comes 'kindly' to take his bride. Though she could not meet him for unknown purposes, this man comes himself to carry her politely in his 'carriage'. If one compares such conduct with death, he will find that death also comes to humans without any invitation. Even when one is busy, death comes himself to take him toward eternity. Death and the speaker are with immortality in the carriage that rides slowly until the three passengers reach the grave.

Repetition is another figure of speech in this poem. In the third stanza Dickinson repeatedly begins the lines with 'we passed'. She passes many scenes which are supposedly seen in the daily life. Perhaps from this repetition she wants to set the idea that in our way towards eternity, all of us will pass by different stages in our lives and many events whether good one that we enjoy or hard times that we pass with difficulty, but our end is the same. She firstly passes by children playing and enjoying their times then she meets the green fields gazing at her as if there were saluting her. At the end, she reaches the grave. This clause may indicate that when one dies, he will leave everything behind him and he could remember the whole of his life and all his memories in just few seconds.

Another example of repetition occurs in the fifth stanza when the speaker repeats the word 'ground'. Dickinson repeats this word perhaps to make the reader think of it not as just grave but as something else. In that sense, the grave becomes like her house where she will live eternally. So, for her, just like for ancient Egyptians, humans in their graves will need the same things which they needed in the previous life ("Emily Dickinson's Collected Poems Summary and Analysis" Grade saver. Sec. 7. Par. 6). The roof of this house is scarcely noticed maybe because she arrives in a very far area where she sees all buildings very small. Or perhaps she finds the house where she used to live too small or unnoticeable at all compared to her new one that is very large.

What comes after personification and repetition is the use of metaphors. The first metaphor is derived from the general metaphor that life is a journey travelled throughout a carriage which takes humans towards the other world. The carriage here is like a coffin but this coffin has wheels and two other sets for death and immortality. Because death is too gentle and promised her that she will not need anything in this journey, the speaker comes with him and forsakes her job and forgets about her pleasures. Moreover, the next lines imply another metaphor. The natural scene of the 'gazing grains' makes the reader think that the grains are qualified with human qualities like eyes by which the grains gaze.

In addition to the figurative language that Dickinson uses, this poem is rich with musical sound devices. For instance, Alliteration could be found in the fourth line of the third stanza. The repeated sound of /s/ in the 'setting sun' in the third stanza evokes the idea of death in the reader's mind and since the sun represents life, so its setting can indicate the end of life. Besides, there is an assonance of the vowel sound / o/ in the first line of the initial stanza in 'not' and 'stop'. This assonant sound can indicate the idea that when she dies, she will 'not stop' living, but she will just go to live in another place. Another musical sound device is consonance that lies in the second and fourth stanzas. The ending consonant sound in 'labor and leisure' can give one the idea that when one dies, he lives everything behind him, whether his job; the source of his tiredness or any kind of enjoyment.

### **3.3. Religion in Dickinson's *The Bible is an Antique Volume*–**

For Dickinson, the devotion to the Bible was different compared to the other members of her family and friends. When they professed their faith publicly, she refused to do it, and then she even stopped going to attend Church sermons. In one of

her poems that was entitled *Diagnosis of the Bible, by a boy*, which was changed into *the Bible is an antique Volume*, she believes that the best way to interpret the Bible is to deal with it as if one were dealing with a piece of fiction or music.

This poem was written in 1882 in the form of a letter sent to her nephew. She told him that the Bible, the most authoritative book for Christians, is merely an old book in which historical events are recorded. In this poem, the Biblical characters are not respectfully referred to; David, who is one of the Israelites respected prophets, is merely a travelling singer. Judas, the one who cheated Jesus is not blamed or cursed, but described just as someone who fails to do his duty. When it comes to Satan, Dickinson does not describe him in the way which people are accustomed to. Instead, he becomes a general officer.

Other Biblical elements are also unconventionally mentioned. For instance, Eden is regarded as a palace instead of Paradise. Besides, Dickinson describes sins as if she talks about boundaries of holes where it is very easy to fall down. Though the speaker thinks that some people can resist, she assumes that they are very few and alone. Moreover, she calls the ones who believe 'boys' as if they are naïve like boys. On the contrary, the non-believers are boys too but 'lost' ones. They are lost because they are easily tempted and helpless; no one has showed them the right path, so they got lost. And in order to gather the two kinds of boys, she suggests disrespectfully that the Bible should be told attractively like fairy tales or a piece of music

In the last lines, Dickinson refers to a mythological character who is Orpheus. According to Greek mythology, Orpheus is a famous musician whose music is harmonically played and eventually irresistible. In this blasphemous comparison, the speaker thinks that the best interpreter of religion is the one who uses musicality in his soft and attractive language when he interprets religion flexibly.

The poetic style of this poem is comprehensive and didactic. The poetess herself invented it when the case is to deal with religion. This serves the idea of dealing with the sacred issues in the same way of dealing with daily life matters. For that reason, the word diction, sentences, and the language are easily understood. As an example, words like: ancient, great and so forth do not need extra explanation to understand their denotative meaning. Yet, when it comes to some words or expressions, the case requires one to be knowledgeable about the Bible in order to understand their connotations. For instance, Judas—the Great Defaulter connotes the story of Judas treachery with Christ. Another thing one should know is some mythic stories like the one of Orpheus in order to understand the last lines when Orpheus' music is compared to sermons.

In her satirical description of the Biblical characters, Dickinson uses a disrespectful tone through the whole of the poem. Her intention is to criticize the blind interpretation of the Bible. Besides, her message suggests that preachers should soften their addressing tone in order to attract more believers since the Bible becomes somehow boring for the modern man and has no relation with the new changes that recently have emerged.

Another feature of poetry in this poem is the use of figures of speech: imagery and metaphors. The first lines for instance include vivid imagery about the Christian narratives written in the Bible. Dickinson refers to some Biblical narratives by using concrete descriptive words so as to evoke a mental image about these stories in the reader's mind. As an example, 'Eden' is mentioned in the Bible as "the garden of God", whereas in the poem, it is satirically described as 'the Ancient Homestead' (*The King James Version of the Holy Bible*, Ezek. 28.14). The word 'Homestead' here can illustrate the magnificence of Heaven, yet the latter will be no more divine but a common place that is earthly shaped. Imagery could be found again in the ninth line. In order to push

the reader to picture out the scene, Dickinson tries to illustrate the ‘Sin’ like a hole in the ground so as to help the reader to imagine the idea of being sinner and fall in Hell.

The coming lines include more metaphors. As an example, the last lines contain metaphor that could be considered again as blasphemy. Dickinson criticizes the condemning way of preaching sermons. Sermons are religious speech that guides believers in their lives. In this poem, two contrasting kinds appear; the captivating and the condemning ones. In the first former, the teller is like a narrator of a fictional story; he uses soft language to captivate listeners and fascinate them just like Orpheus’ musical sounds. The other kind of sermons is the condemning ones; preachers threaten people with Hell’s fire and God’s anger. So, the speaker wants preachers to orate their sermons in happier tones as if they were singing. In this way, the sacred becomes casual when people deal with it secularly as if they deal with a piece of music. Instead, music is elevated in its value that it must be treated with reverence.

What comes after the use of imagery and metaphors in this poem is the use of sound devices. As an example, alliteration of the /s/ established in ninth line between ‘sin’ and ‘distinguished’. This alliterative line may reveal Dickinson’s views that sins are noticeable holes in the ground, so one can easily avoid falling in them and resist the devil’s temptation. Another alliteration of the /b/ lies between ‘boys’ and ‘believe’. This example illustrates the idea that believers are naïve like boys; they believe anything told to them without doubt or hesitation.

### **3.4. Mythology in Dickinson’s “*Lethe*” in my flower**

In “*Lethe*” in my flower, the two quatrains poem, the speaker likens the scent of her flower to the mythological river ‘Lethe’ since this scent makes her forget about the whole world. According to the Greek mythology, all the dead people have to drink from

Lethe River in order to forget about all the sufferings that they passed through in their lives (“Lethe”. Wikipedia Par. 1). When Dickinson picks up a flower from her garden and scents it, she thinks that her garden becomes very large just like the ‘fadeless’ garden where Lethe was supposed to be located. In addition to the space, also, in this garden, the speaker imaginatively hears musical sounds of beautiful birds singing and floating around. Yet, when the speaker gazes deeply in the rose, she discovers that this rose can lead her to immortality.

The speaker’s tone in “*Lethe*” in *my flower* appears at first enjoyable and happy while in the second stanza it changes into a serious one. At the beginning, the speaker seems to be in a good mood among her imaginative ‘fadeless orchards’; she enjoys scenting flowers because their scent leads her to forget all about her life as if she drank from Lethe River. While in the second stanza, she shouts to Jupiter and not to God when she discovers the truth of her rose. In this case, she seems to respect myths rather than God then her tone is disrespectful.

The language of this poem is just as the one of the previous poems, i.e. formal and symbolic. The poetess includes some mythological concepts to hint her assurance about the enjoyable afterlife that people will live when they drink from Lethe that makes them forgetting any bad memory. Words and sentences that are used in this poem are not taken from the everyday language, so many of them can bear connotative meanings. In other words, the omission of some words makes the meaning incomplete and ambiguous.

The poetic structure of this poem is shaped by the use of imagery and metaphors. For instance, in the first stanza, imagery pushes the reader to imagine the deep mythological river that is located in the underground and how a scent of a flower intoxicates one until he forgets about his previous existence. Then, the reader figures

out some natural elements that surround this river and eventually attract him. For example, the green areas whose beauty is magnificent and the musical sounds of birds which please one's ears.

In the second stanza, Dickinson uses more figures of speech like metaphors. When she discovers the truth behind the rose's scent, she metaphorically begs Jupiter for help instead of God, the father. In that way, mythology is elevated to reach the level of religion which makes the speaker seem to believe in Jupiter's strength rather than God.

The use of symbols in this poem is another literary feature that characterized Dickinson's use of figurative language. The main symbol lies in the first line of the poem; that is the River of Lethe. In Greek mythology, Rivers personify gods, death, and rebirth. Lethe was one of five rivers that belong to Hades the god of the underground. It was believable that when the dead people drink from Lethe, they would experience full forgetfulness. Besides, Lethe can have another symbolic meaning for the Greeks, which is the name of goddess of forgetfulness ("Lethe". Wikipedia. Par 1). So, Lethe in this poem can have two interpretations; one in the river and the other is forgetfulness of any bad memory.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

In the poems that are studied in this chapter, Dickinson uses formal language to express her thoughts about life after death and the use of the Bible during her era. In addition, she makes use of concrete vocabulary like carriage, Bible, and flower to describe abstract conceptions like death, religion, and myth. Besides, she implies many figures of speech to point out her ideas about the above themes.

In *Because I could not stop for death*, death is personified as a gentleman who comes in a carriage to take her towards immortality. From this point, the grave becomes just a passage that leads to the eternal life. The use of metaphorical expressions, repetition, and symbols is all what characterizes this poem. The tone of this poem is kept cheerful until the end, even though Dickinson speaks about her last moments if life.

*The Bible is an antique Volume* is the second poem studied in this chapter in which Dickinson doubts the honesty of the men who wrote the Bible. The Bible itself in this poem appears as an old book in which history is recorded. Furthermore, she suggests that the churchmen's oratorical serious tone of preaching must be changed into more flexible one. What comes next is the use of metaphors and imagery that the poetess is known for in most of her writings. Finally, the tone of this poem can be described as disrespectful and unorthodox.

Finally, in "*Lethe*" in *my flower* Dickinson uses the myth of Lethe River from which the dead people will drink after their death to forget all their sufferings in life. When Dickinson scents a flower from her garden, she forgets about everything as if she had drunk from Lethe and eventually imagines herself reaching eternity. At the end, the speaker cries to Jupiter, the supreme god, in Roman mythology instead of God. The tone of this poem begins joyful while in the second stanza it becomes more serious. Furthermore, metaphors, imagery, and symbols are all what characterize Dickinson "*Lethe*" in *my flower*.

## Chapter 4:

### Metaphysical Elements in Selected Poems by Poe: Death, Religion, and Mythology

#### 4.1. Introduction

Dark Romanticism came with a gloomy vision of life. Writers like Hawthorne and Poe focused on the dark image of life in most of their works. In other words, they had more pessimistic tendencies compared to their contemporaries particularly if the case is about death. At that time, stories of death were delivered frequently in prose and poetry as well. However, unlike Transcendentalists, Dark Romantic poets linked it in a way or another to Gothic settings and characterizations. In most writings of the nineteenth century, death was related to spirits, cemeteries, and graves. And the dead ones who return to life with imaginary power not like human beings but as ghosts whether to take revenge if they were killed or to stay with their relatives and friends.

With similar darkness, Dark Romantic writers included myths in their writings in order to create a specific dark image about the human being's reality. For them, one cannot get rid of evil from his inner side; the heroes in the stories are mentally disordered and their houses are often haunted by a female ghost whom they knew in the past. Other writers included myths from another perspective in order to imply more positive motifs like love. For example, they compared the female character to the goddess of beauty and love and illustrated her romantically like a heroine rather than a dreadful ghost.

As far as this research is concerned, religion was another significant element that was differently dealt with by Dark Romantics. When American writers of the eighteenth-century roughly mentioned religious issues like treachery and adultery and warned people of God's severe punishment, nineteenth-century writers dared to write

about the previously prohibited issues with more freedom. They freed themselves from many religious restrictions that were established by the Churchmen and believed by society. Eventually, the Puritan idea that all humans are sinful by their nature started to change with the coming of Romanticism.

#### **4.2 Death in Poe's *the City in the Sea***

*The City in the Sea* is a poem was entitled *The Doomed City*, then *The City of Sin* until and finally *The City in the Sea*. In this cinquain-stanza poem, Poe personifies death as the king of an unknown city. Even though the buildings of this kingdom are 'palaces' and 'towers', the location of this city and time when all events take place is unknown. What makes this city seems 'strange' again is that although it is inhabited, the inhabitants of this city are the dead people who peacefully lay in their 'gaping graves' as if graves become houses to live in. From the whole description of this city, one may think of it to be Hell. However, the first stanza suggests that 'the good' and 'the bad' people are going to end together in this 'strange city'. Perhaps, Poe wants to set the idea that after one dies, he will go to Hell whether he was 'good' or 'bad' person. This goes against the Christian belief that God has chosen them to live in Paradise forever. According to them, Jesus' blood salved them from any punishment which means that they are saved and chosen to be the best creatures among all.

In the following section, the city becomes darker when the sun disappears and the night time comes and this description may hint the climate inside the grave. Suddenly, 'gleams' of light come from the bellow sea to lighten the city, buildings, graves, and everything there. At that time, the king appears to see what is going on in the town. In the fifth stanza, the 'gaping graves' are open and the dead lying there get

out but they discover that they are no more rich as they used to be. Here 'diamond' and jewelry are useless and all the dead will face the same destiny.

In the last stanza of the poem, Poe speaks about the end of this city. Now a strong storm comes near the city and a strange movement occurs in the sky as well as in the sea. This image may increase the impression of terror about this city and may also predict its end. Besides, this movement begins to destroy the 'towers' and all buildings of this city. At the end, 'redder glow' comes to this timeless city and it sinks irresistibly.

When Poe fearfully describes the city of the dead, he uses a solemn tone that can establish an atmosphere of horror through the whole of the poem. This may raise a feeling of dread and mystery upon the reader. Moreover, Poe uses phrases sentences that can convey connotative meanings so as to accomplish the image of terror in the reader's mind.

Concerning figures of speech, Poe opens this poem with personification. Death is the king of a deserted city located in the sea. Just from his tower, he controls his subjects and orders them to do whatever he wants. This king is not the fair one who serves his people and makes them live at ease in the city, but he is a strong fearful king whose people fear him and weakly lay in their graves to avoid his harm.

The next important literary feature after personification in this poem is imagery. Poe uses words and expressions like graves, night, melancholy waters and so forth in order to evoke the image of death and Hell and how people will end there just like the way this city sunk down the sea. Other example is the 'stone flower' that can also help the reader to imagine the lifeless situation of this city, the dead, and even the natural elements there.

The use of musical devices in *the city in the sea* is frequent; in this poem, one can detect some alternative and consonant lines. For example, when Poe tries to

describe the unknown location and darkness of this city, he uses alliteration between 'down' and 'dim' in the third line. Besides, coming line includes consonance between 'good' and 'bad'. The ending sound in those words may indicate that the two qualities of people become like each other when they die. This establishes an atmosphere of horror so as Poe wants his reader to explore and to imagine the scene of the graves sinking inevitably into the bottom of the sea.

### 4.3 Religion in Poe's *the Hymn*

*A Catholic Hymn* was the original title of Poe's *the Hymn* which appeared firstly in *Southern Literary Messenger* in 1835. In *the Hymn*, whose title relates it in some way to religion, Poe establishes a positive attitude towards his religious beliefs. Poe in this poem seems humbly devoted to Maria and tries to show his trust on her whom he thinks is the only one who can really change his miserable situation. In spite of the difficulties that the speaker has encountered through his life, he still believes that she will provide him with spiritual relief to establish a better life in the future.

As far as the language of this poem is concerned, the poet uses simple and comprehensive words and expressions which convey denotative meanings for the reader and make it appear like a song related to the Church.

When it comes to the tone of Poe's *Hymn*, the speaker uses a joyful one. From the beginning, Poe addresses God as if he is in a prayer or singing in the church. He hopefully waits for the 'bright' future in spite of his dark memories of the past and the hard present.

In order to establish the meaning that the speaker wants to convey, Poe uses metaphor and allusion. Metaphorically, the speaker talks about his spiritual relief when he feels Maria's presence with him especially in cases of illnesses and troubles. In other

words, time runs cheerfully and ‘the hours flew brightly’ whenever the speaker prays for Maria. Here, ‘the hours’ are compared to a bird that soars quickly up the highways as if time has wings to fly with like a bird. This metaphor implies the idea that whenever the speaker is close to Maria time passes quickly and he becomes protected from any harm.

Poe uses another metaphorical expression to talk about the hard and dark times in his life. By the expression of ‘storms of fate’ he wants to tell the reader that his life was very hard in the sense that he compares it with a strong windy breeze or storm that prevents any one from moving forward or even resisting it. However, Poe succeeded passing this ‘storm’ due to his belief that one day God will help him and keep him safe.

The musical devices are other important literary elements in *Hymn* poem. For example, the poet makes the lines end with couplet rhyme in order to make their sound more pleasant and attractive for the reader’s ears. This attractiveness smoothly draws the attention of the reader to read the poem and even to be affected emotionally by its musicality. This could also be applied to some alternative lines like the second line, where the speaker repeatedly begins the words with ‘h’ sound. Moreover, ‘thee’ and ‘thine’ are repeated in line eight and eleven for the same purpose. While the frequent ‘g’ sound in the fifth line indicates the poet’s gratitude to Maria, whose ‘grace did guide’ him when he was in need and lightened his life when it was dark.

#### **4.4 Mythology in Poe’s *To Helen***

*To Helen* is a poem that Poe wrote for Mrs. Jane Stith Stanard, the charming mother of his school friend. In this three cinquain stanzas poem, the speaker shows his admiration towards a beautiful lady whose physical and spiritual attractiveness makes him think that she belongs to him like those ancient ships used to belong to Nice, an

ancient nation which was famous for its beautiful ships. In the second stanza, the speaker tells his reader more details about Helen's idealistic hair and face that inspired him with a feeling of being at home. In the final stanza, this lady is compared with the Greek goddess "Psyche" which again illustrates the author's personal attractions towards this lady.

According to Greek mythology, Helen is the most beautiful woman in the world. Her story says that this heroine left her husband, King Menelaus of Sparta and eloped with a Trojan man named Paris. This treachery led Spartans to declare a war known as the War of Troy against Greeks for more than ten years until Troy was finally destroyed. At the end, Helen returned with her husband to Sparta ("Helen". Wikipedia. Par. 1). In this poem, one can notice that Poe focuses more on the beauty of Helen whose sight makes him feel happy rather than her treachery of her husband.

Poe refers to Trojan War ships as 'Nicean barks' in the first stanza to compare his attraction to Helen to the magnificent beauty of those ancient ships which in the past used to carry warriors to Nice or Nicaea, the ancient city whose ships are known for their beautiful sails (Wood, "Poetry analysis: To Helen, by Edgar Allan Poe". Par. 4). Furthermore, when the speaker compares the beauty of his lady with the mythological good looking of Helen, he compares himself in return with Odysseus, the warrior who fights bravely and mentioned in Homer's *Iliad* ("Poe's Poetry Summary and analysis". Sec. 9. Par. 1, 2). In the poem, this warrior spent long time sailing in the sea and wondering from nation to another without any direction until he meets Helen whose beauty would attract him and he finally stops in her shore.

Another mythological example that Poe includes is the myth of Naiads, or the ancient Greek water nymphs. According to Greek mythology, naiads are nature goddesses whose beauty is very attractive and who inhabited waters and lakes

(Wikipedia, Naiad. Par 1). Then, in the poem Helen is as beautiful and attractive as those nymphs of the past.

Finally, in the third stanza, Poe uses another mythological allusion that is 'Psyche'. According to mythology, Psyche is a beautiful woman who was forbidden to look at her beloved Cupid, who got angry at her because she took a lamp and looked at him while he was sleeping (Wood, "Poetry Analysis: To Helen, by Edgar Allan Poe". Par. 5, 6). The use of this myth can lead one to think that Poe praises the beauty of his lady and makes it mythological like the one of Psyche.

The poetic diction of this poem is made up of positive words and precise expressions that create a fitting tone and optimistic atmosphere. Along the whole poem, the speaker evokes images of beauty, love, and light which can give the reader the impression that when Poe includes the myth of Helen, he intends to focus on her beauty and love rather than her treachery. Also, when he mentions Psyche's myth, he hints his eternal love for the pure Helen rather than focusing on her disobedience.

Poe in this poem uses a good deal of figures of speech. Firstly, he begins with Simile that likens Helen's beauty to small Nicean boats that were used to take travellers home. In other words, the sight of this lady makes him feel as if her beauty is the boat that takes home after a long tiring journey.

The following Simile can be found in third stanza. Helen becomes 'statute-like' woman standing 'in window' and waiting for her beloved to come home. She is erected like a goddess holding an 'agate lamp' by which this goddess lightens the speaker's dark life (Poe's Poetry Summary and analysis. Sec. 9. Par. 3). In that sense, the presence of this lady in his life becomes as necessary as the light that helps one to see all what surrounds him.

The second stanza includes another figure of speech that is imagery. The speaker uses words like 'classic face' to describe the face of his beloved lady whose beauty of the hair and face reminds the reader of the classical ideal beauty of mythological naiads and goddesses like Aphrodite (Poe's Poetry Summary and analysis. Sec. 9. Par. 2). With more details, Poe tries to illustrate the attractiveness of the lady's hair and face that become also as mythological as the lady herself.

Towards the end of the poem, Poe metaphysically compares his beloved lady to Psyche, whose myth becomes a symbol of immortal love and purity of the soul. This story implies that beauty and love in Helen's physical appearance and soul are above any mortality (Wood, Poetry Analysis: To Helen, by Edgar Allan Poe. Par. 6). That is to say, the speaker immortalizes this woman's beauty and love when he elevates her status to the status of goddess that came from 'Holy land'.

In *To Helen*, Poe uses alliteration in the fourth line of the first stanza. This can have a reference to Homer's Odysseus' adventurer in the far lands. This alliterative line that begins with /w/ reflects the tiredness that this sailor feels after his wars and before he sees Helen whose sight would please him and makes him forget his weariness (Analysis of to Helen (1830). Par 1). Another example of alliteration could be found in the second stanza. The repeated /g/ and /r/ sounds may Reflect Poe's admiration of those two great civilizations because of their contributions to literature and philosophy (Par 1). That is to say, Poe considers Greece and Rome his home which inspires him to write this poem. Moreover, the rhyme of this poem produces an attractive sound for the reader who ultimately will admire the poem as its speaker admires Helen.

#### 4.5 Conclusion

At the end of this chapter and as far as the studied poems are concerned, one can conclude that Poe's views about death, religion, and mythology differ from one poem to another. Firstly, he views death through deplorable vision and looks at the afterlife from a pessimistic angle. However, when it comes to religion in his *the Hymn*, the speaker is described as a real believer who praises God and hopes for better future. Furthermore, mythology is included in his *to Helen* for emotional concerns. The poet in this poem uses specific mythological allusions that imply the story of the beautiful Helen of Troy in order to illustrate his love for his own beloved.

*The city in the sea* is a poem in which the exact time of the events is unknown and the location where they occur is ambiguous too. Also in this poem, Poe hints that the dead people will go to a fearful place like Hell. This place is located far away in the sea, dark and low. There are buildings far above the ground and high tower where the ruler lives. The dead are probably the deceitful wealthy people whose wastes of wealth cause them to descent into the sea. At the end of the poem, the dead people fall into the deep waves of the sea like sinners fall in the fire of Hell.

In the *Hymn* poem, Poe sets positive feelings towards his religion. He uses an optimistic tone to talk about his devotion to God. Modestly, he tries to explain this through his praising expressions of Maria. Because the poet is talking about religion, he uses a simple and expressive language that makes the poem seems a praising song related to the church.

Concerning mythology in *To Helen*, Poe praises a good-looking lady whose beauty reminds him of the mythology of Helen of Troy. When the lady in this poem is compared to Helen, the speaker compares himself to Odysseus, the mythological warrior who returns from overseas wars to see his beautiful Helen. At the end, Poe

includes another mythological allusion that is Psyche. This symbolizes the speaker's emotions towards his lady and her divine status which make his love of her pure and eternal.

## Chapter 5:

### Overview of the Findings

#### 5.1 Introduction

Even though poets of the nineteenth-century in America were influenced by the literary movements of that time, Dickinson and Poe as well treat the themes of death, religion, and myth according to his or her own viewpoint. This chapter will show the influence of Romanticism and Transcendentalism upon Poe and Dickinson and how each one of them manages to forge this influence with one's own style. Dickinson was much more influenced by the transcendental ideas especially about nature and death. The latter was considered for her as the archway that one has to pass through in order to reach what they called the eternal world. However, Poe was influenced by Dark Romanticism that is known for its writers' doleful views about life. For him, death was considered the end of the human's pleasure, so when one dies, his sufferance begins which contrasts Dickinson's belief that death can be the beginning of the human's relief.

When it comes to religion, in some of her works, Dickinson refers to the Christian beliefs in less respectful way and doubting behavior compared to Poe who in some of his poems praises God and respects what was believable at his times. However, in other poems, Poe's feelings towards his religion were not that optimistic; he even implies an unorthodox tone to talk about his unfortunate destiny planned by God and how much this fate caused him to suffer.

Concerning mythology, in some of his poems, Poe includes mythological elements to talk about brilliant themes like love and admiration and sometimes he even involves himself in the story to create a positive impression upon the reader. While

Dickinson's use of myth takes another dimension; she makes use of myths to talk about darker themes like death and how her afterlife will be like the myth that she refers to. In addition, in some poems, she even addresses gods, heroes, and mythic characters of the implied myth with orders or requests until she makes herself part of the story.

## 5.2 Overview of the findings

### 5.2.1 Death in *Because I Could not Stop for Death* and *the City in the Sea*

Death in Dickinson's poem has different literary features compared to Poe's one. To begin with, in *Because I Could not Stop for Death*, death is personified as a gentleman comes to the speaker as if she is his bride in order to take her towards eternity throughout a bridal vehicle. However, in Poe's *the city in the sea*, death is personified as a strong sovereign rules the dead and keeps frightening them. Besides, in the first poem, the dead travels towards a place that looks like Paradise and the speaker looks like a bride with her tulle and gown. Thus, she will live there an eternal life full of happiness and relief. While, according to Poe's description in his poem, this place is illustrated like Hell or maybe worse; there is no life and the dead there are kept in open graves waiting motionlessly until they die sunk into the waves of the deep sea. Because of that, the speaker in this poem is not happy when he describes the place and the end of the dead people compared to the speaker of the first poem who seems happier. In addition, in *Because I could not stop for death*, the buildings begin to disappear gradually until they vanish totally when the speaker arrives next to her grave and leaves them behind. Yet, in Poe's poem, the buildings are huge and high. In other words, Poe describes the walls of *the city in the sea* like the walls of the Babylonians whose city was known for its high walls and skillful architecture.

The tone of the two poets is another element that one shall study here to determine the different atmospheres that each poet wants to establish in his or her poem. On the one hand, Dickinson in her poem uses a optimistic tone even though she deals with a mournful theme that is death. Thus, she sets up a joyful atmosphere that eventually reflects her pleased mood and also provides the reader with a positive impression about death and the afterlife. On the other hand, throughout the whole of his poem, Poe uses more serious tone that sets up an atmosphere of awfulness and terror. This reflects the mood of the poet that the reader can say is kept worried. Ultimately, this poet's distressing mood causes a feeling of anxiety and fear upon the reader as well.

In both poems, poets use formal and comprehensive language to convey their ideas about death even though from different angles. In Dickinson's poem, the used words and sentences are simple and communicative just like Poe's ones, In addition, the latter uses a good deal of words and expressions that are relevant to nature like no rays, melancholy water, lurid sea, stone flower, and others which reflect his literary belonging to Romanticism and exactly to its dark trend since he includes them in a special atmosphere to create the dark image that he is known for.

Poe as well as Dickinson had implied many figures of speech to point out their ideas about the above theme. In both poems, death is no more a concrete theme but personified as a human being and even endowed with some of the human's characteristics. In the first poem, death is positively embodied as a knight who behaves politely with the dead. While in the other, it is personified as a ruler of the city of the dead. Fearfully, death rules its subjects who lay still in open graves. This can reflect some literary elements of Dark Romanticism especially when Poe uses natural elements like the night, stones and so forth and implying them to portray a dark image that is the end of the human being in Hell.

### 5.2.2 Religion in *the Bible is an Antique Volume* and *Hymn*

In Dickinson's and Poe's above poems, the major theme is relevant to religion. Yet, in the *Hymn*, Poe praises Maria, and asks for her help and blessing. And even though the speaker had passed through hard experiences and sufferings in his life, he still believes in God's mercy and support. In other words, Poe respectfully talked about his religion and how his faith was the only way to resist hardships of life and to keep him hopeful for the future.

On the contrary, Dickinson in her poem distrusts the truthfulness of the men who wrote the Holy Bible and thinks of it merely as an antique volume. Despite the fact that, the poetess' Christian community believed in and respected what is written there, she describes some of the Biblical characters in less respectful way as if she describes historical personages. Compared to *the Bible is an antique Volume*, the speaker states that the ones who believe are 'lonesome' which may indicate that they are weak and alone, while in Poe's poem, the one who believes in Maria's blessing and support is the one who will gain at the end and be helped to encounter any danger.

Another point of difference between the poets is their tones. Firstly, Dickinson in her mocking portrayal of the Biblical characters uses an unorthodox and disrespectful tone through the whole of her poem. By this poem, she wants to set her message which is to advice preachers to change their tone into more flexible one in order to attract more believers. Instead, in Poe's *Hymn*, the speaker uses an optimistic tone as if he is in a prayer or singing in the church. The optimistic atmosphere that the speaker establishes in this poem can reflect Poe's message is to be positive and devoted to God whatever happens in one's life.

In the above poems, each poet uses specific words and expressions to convey the meaning that he or she wants to say. For example, Poe as well as Dickinson write in

formal language and include some symbolic and precise expressions in order to communicate their thoughts straightforward and to make their poems easily interpreted.

Through the use of imagery and metaphor in their poems, Dickinson and Poe deal with religious beliefs according to their different individual considerations. At the beginning, Dickinson in *the Bible is an antique volume* criticizes sermons, the harsh way of preachers, and reduces the spiritual value of the Bible and some respected religious characters and elements there. On the contrary, when Dickinson gets bored of religious preaching, Poe in *the Hymn* implies the imagery and metaphor which evoke the image of a believer singing in church in order to talk about his love of Maria and how much he respects her. In this poem, the speaker shows a profound trust towards his faith that whatever happens, the future will be 'radiant'.

### **5.2.3 Mythology in Dickinson's "Lethe" in my flower and Poe's to Helen**

Even though the words "Lethe" and "Helen" in the titles are related to mythology, each poet uses the story behind the myth according to what fits the poem and how this myth is going to serve the general theme of the poem. On the one hand, Poe uses myths in *to Helen*, and his intention is to express his emotions towards the beautiful woman whom he loves. The main idea here is relevant to love and feelings not to destructions and wars. In other words, Poe has changed the negative connotation of Helen's myth into positive one that deals with the beauty of a lady brings one happiness and relief when he sees her not causes wars and damages. In the poem, her sight gives the speaker an impression of being at home, by contrary in the myth, her beauty causes people to leave their houses in order to fight.

On the other hand, Dickinson in *Lethe in my flower* implies the myth of Lethe River that leads anyone who drinks from it to forget about any bad memory that he had

experienced in his life. In this poem, the speaker drinks from this river, thus she forgets all about. While the story of the river says that it exists in the afterlife, Dickinson gets the feeling of forgetfulness during her lifetime just throughout a scent of a flower. In that sense, this scent and this feeling takes the speaker from life into eternity. From this point, Lethe myth is used to express the speaker's thoughts about death and how much she wants to forget about her life and all its miseries not like Poe who uses mythology to express his emotions of love and his desire to live with his beloved an eternal life.

Concerning the tone of the two poets, both of them use positive tones that create an optimistic atmosphere. In the first poem, the speaker appears in a good mood enjoys scenting her flowers whose scent leads her to forget about her life. At the same time, in *to Helen*, the speaker's optimistic tone and positive description of his beloved creates cheerful atmosphere and reflects his joyful mood.

The poetic diction of the two poems is made up of symbolic words and accurate expressions that require the reader a close reading so as to understand the surface meaning and the hidden as well. In both poems, the language is formal, yet Dickinson sometimes prefers to omit some words to leave the interpretation for the reader as she is known for in many of her works.

The poetic structure of both poems is built on the use of good deal of figures of speech like metaphors and the use of mythological symbols. At first, in *to Helen*, Poe uses allusions to compare the beautiful lady with small sailing boats and then with a Greek goddess in order to elevate her status from a human entity into divine. On the contrary, Dickinson uses figurative of language like metaphors and imagery in order to tackle a gloomy theme that is death. However, the poetess deals with it from an optimistic perspective that is about eternity and forgetfulness of bad memories.

### **5.3 Recommendations and Future Perspective**

From this study that is based on a number of selected poems by Dickinson and Poe about the use of the metaphysical elements of death, mythology, and religion, one can come up with the idea that those poets do not refer to the above themes to establish the same literary effect. When Poe focuses more on the dark side of the human life and describes the afterlife through his dreadful way, Dickinson looks at death from the opposite side that is optimism. That is to say, Poe is Dark Romantic poet, while Dickinson cannot be classified under any specific literary movement of her days. Eventually, this study may help the coming researchers and teachers of American literature in the process of classifying each poet and particularly Dickinson in the literary trend that she belongs to.

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## Appendix

712

Because I could not stop for Death-

He kindly stopped for me-

The Carriage held but just Ourselves-

And Immortality.

We slowly drove - He knew no haste

And I had put away

My labor and my leisure too,

For HIS Civility-

We passed the School, where Children strove

At Recess - In the Ring-

We passed the Fields of Gazing Gram -

We passed the Setting Sun-

Or rather - He passed Us-

The Dews drew quivering and chill-

For only Gossamer, my Gown-

My Tippet-only Tulle-

We paused before a House that seemed

A Swelling of the Ground-

The Roof was scarcely visible-

The Cornice - in the Ground-

Since then - 'tis Centuries - and yet

Feels shorter than the Day

I first surmised the Horses' Heads

Were toward Eternity-

### **1545**

The Bible is an antique Volume-

Written by faded Men

At the suggestion of Holy Specters-

Subjects- Bethlehem-

Eden - The ancient Homestead

Satan- The Brigadier-

Judas - the Great Defaulter

David-The Troubadour-

Sin - a distinguished Precipice

Others must resist-

Boys that "believe" are very lonesome

Other Boys are "lost" -

Had but the Tale a warbling Teller

All the Boys would come-

Orpheus' Sermon captivated-

It did not condemn-

### **1730**

"Lethe" .m my flower,

Of which they who drink

In the fadeless orchards

Hear the bobolink!

Merely flake or petal  
As the Eye beholds  
Jupiter! my father!  
I perceive the rose!

*The City in the Sea*

Lo! Death has reared himself a throne  
In a strange city lying alone  
Far down within the dim West,  
Where the good and the bad and the worst and the best  
Have gone to their eternal rest.  
There shrines and palaces and towers  
(Time-eaten towers that tremble not!)  
Resemble nothing that is ours.  
Around, by lifting winds forgot,  
Resignedly beneath the sky  
The melancholy waters lie.  
No rays from the holy heaven come down  
On the long night-time of that town;  
But light from out the lurid sea  
Streams up the turrets silently—  
Gleams up the pinnacles far and free—  
Up domes—up spires—up kingly halls—  
Up fanes—up Babylon-like walls—  
Up shadowy long-forgotten bowers

Of sculptured ivy and stone flowers—  
Up many and many a marvellous shrine  
Whose wreathed friezes intertwine  
The viol, the violet, and the vine.  
Resignedly beneath the sky  
The melancholy waters lie.  
So blend the turrets and shadows there  
That all seem pendulous in air,  
While from a proud tower in the town  
Death looks gigantically down.  
There open fanes and gaping graves  
Yawn level with the luminous waves;  
But not the riches there that lie  
In each idol's diamond eye—  
Not the gaily-jewelled dead  
Tempt the waters from their bed;  
For no ripples curl, alas!  
Along that wilderness of glass—  
No swellings tell that winds may be  
Upon some far-off happier sea—  
No heavings hint that winds have been  
On seas less hideously serene.  
But lo, a stir is in the air!  
The wave—there is a movement there!  
As if the towers had thrown aside,

In slightly sinking, the dull tide—  
As if their tops had feebly given  
A void within the filmy Heaven.  
The waves have now a redder glow—  
The hours are breathing faint and low—  
And when, amid no earthly moans,  
Down, down that town shall settle hence,  
Hell, rising from a thousand thrones,  
Shall do it reverence.

*The Hymn*

At morn—at noon—at twilight dim—  
Maria! thou hast heard my hymn!  
In joy and wo—in good and ill—  
Mother of God, be with me still!  
When the Hours flew brightly by  
And not a cloud obscured the sky,  
My soul, lest it should truant be,  
Thy grace did guide to thine and thee;  
Now, when storms of Fate o'er cast  
Darkly my Present and my Past,  
Let my Future radiant shine  
With sweet hopes of thee and thine!

*To Helen*

Helen, thy beauty is to me  
Like those Nicean barks of yore,  
That gently, o'er a perfumed sea,  
The weary way-worn wanderer bore  
To his own native shore.  
On desperate seas long wont to roam,  
Thy hyacinth hair, thy classic face,  
Thy Naiad airs have brought me home  
To the glory that was Greece,  
And the grandeur that was Rome.  
Lo ! in yon brilliant window-niche  
How statue-like I see thee stand,  
The agate lamp within thy hand!  
Ah, Psyche, from the regions which  
Are Holy-land!