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**Review Article** 

# Emily Dickinson's *I Died for Beauty*: Saying too Much Using Few Terminologies

Dr. Yahya Saleh Hasan Dahami<sup>\*</sup>(Associate Professor)

English Department, Faculty of Science and Arts Al Mandaq Al Baha University – KSA Previously receding at Sana'a University – Yemen

\*Corresponding Author Dr. Yahya Saleh Hasan Dahami

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**Abstract:** Emily Dickinson had a distinct talent for capturing the core of an event or emotion in her written expression. She is likened to a genius. She wrote hundreds of well-defined poems. This study attempts to spur the depth of one of the resounding poems, 'I Died for Beauty.' The paper tries to prove the greatness of the poem, Dickinson, in revealing too much using few words. The study starts with an introduction about the poet, then shifts to the next main point – critical-analytical description of the three-stanza poem, illustrating its style, themes, symbols, and the study ends with a brief conclusion and recommendation if there is any.

**Keywords:** American Literature, Beauty and Reality, Death and Mortality, English poetry, Extended Metaphor, Friendship.

# **INTRODUCTION**

## The poet

The poetess Emily Dickinson was born in 1830, in Massachusetts, to a young barrister, Edward, and Emily Norcross. Emily had an elder brother William and a younger sister Lavinia. Her father was a successful politician who was recognized for being energetic in society. A smaller amount is known about Lady Dickinson; however, various related agree that she engaged a love of education for most of her life principally in the sciences.

The poet, Emily Dickinson, was a keen student, and she grasped the chance to join college while she was still at the Academy in which she certainly thrived. Along with Emerson, Milton, and Thoreau, she involved the writings of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Charles Darwin, Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Emily and Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, Matthew Arnold, and Nathaniel Hawthorne. Dickinson corresponded with some editors such as Josiah Holland and Samuel Bowles, with literary figures like Minister Charles Wadsworth, and Thomas W. Higginson in which the latter "acted as a literary mentor to Emily Dickinson" [1]. As these friends of Dickinson started to marry and begin their own life, she investigated deeper into her own books.

Although college specialists regarded Dickinson as hopeless, she had a convincing sagacity of herself as an intellectual young lady. It was perhaps because some of her autonomous religious interpretations flew in the aspect of the dominant Calvinistic Puritanism. She left the college after just a year of learning to leave unanswered questions. Whatever the purpose, she went back to her parents' house to start her relaxed withdrawal from society. "Dickinson stayed at home (and mainly in her room) in Amherst, Massachusetts, and found the material of her poems both without and within" [2]. Dickinson commonly stayed adjacent to home but amused her companies and continued a few close associations. She, then, had little concern in the family works. She was satisfied to follow her own benefits, for instance, writing and horticulture-the cultivation of plants.

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Emily Dickinson composed a huge number of poems, more than 1,700 poems in almost ten years, that is between the years the 1850s and 1865, but by the passage of time, she began to have solemn difficulties with her eyesight to reach shocking losses during the last fifteen years to pass away in 1886. Before her death, Dickinson grieved from a swelling of the kidneys identified as nephritis. "Dickinson published few of her poems during her life and left almost two thousand poems—in various groupings" [3]. She published about seven poems in her period; she asked Lavinia to burn her writings. Lavinia, according to Emily's wish, smashed the private letters but kept the poems. Lavinia pursued posthumous publishing for Dickinson's poetic collections.

According to Benoit [4], "Emily Dickinson's famous poem 'I Died for Beauty' was first published by Thomas Wentworth Higginson in the Christian Union on 25 September 1890 with the title he gave of 'Two Kinsman [25]'". The first collection of poetry for Dickinson was published to great praise in 1890. *I Died for Beauty* is among the several popular poems that were probably written in 1862. "It was in 1862, a year in which she wrote a poem every day" [5]. Remarkably, it was printed eleven times in different editions for just two years. In some early edited volumes, there was an unusual style that was aggressively edited by several critics to make the poem more accessible. Still, later publications showed the poem in its unique style with the innovative punctuation.

Nonetheless, as stated by Wolosky [6], "One of the most striking—if not also distracting—features of Dickinson's verse is its lack of punctuation. She omits commas, semicolons, periods. In their stead, she introduces dashes" [6]. Emily Dickinson is one of the furthermost compendious American poets, studied at essentially every scholastic level. Her writing is a continuing subject of exploration and investigative documents by literary scholars. Dickinson left us volumes of existing poetry, scholarly books, biographies, and collections of letters. "She made no mention of her own letters, or her figurative letters to the world, which it was, the luck or fate of Lavinia to discover" [1]. She is located along with the giants of American poets like Walt Whitman and Robert Frost. Many critics proclaim that Dickinson is the principal female voice in the chest of American poetry who elegantly define a poem saying "If I read a book [and] it makes my whole body so cold no fire can ever warm me I know *that* is poetry" [5]. Moreover, "Emily Dickinson is reported to have said, in the spirit of the Earl of Worcester: 'If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know *that* is poetry" [7].

#### The poem

*I Died for Beauty* is an allegorical poem by Emily Dickinson that depicts somebody who deceased for the purpose of beauty interacting concisely with somebody who deceased for the purpose of truth. The poem is a metaphorical effort in which the characters and activities represent bigger ideas or subjects. Repeatedly in an allegory, abstract thoughts are given corporeal form, as the same as in the poem of Dickinson. *I Died for Beauty* equates the two as similarly noble victims whose names are ultimately protected with moss, as if to designate that at the end, what one deceases for is insignificant. Although it is ambiguous when the poem was written, it is representative of Dickinson's verse in its length, style, and content. It is an apparently simple and candid poem that divulges a more profound meaning with the investigation. The size of the poem is three stanzas of four lines each, and the themes of passing away beauty and certainty are common in Emily Dickinson's work.

Dickinson did not write with the determination of creating a profession as a poet, unlike a great number of poets. Emily Dickinson "felt intensely, thought deeply, read widely, and managed to become our other central poet: a brilliant counterpoint to Whitman" [5]. Furthermore, Dickinson

Speaks quite often from beyond the grave, reimagining, and repossessing death as her own in order to dispel the terrors of literal death. However, within that figurative system, the poet embraces a self-destructive program that must soon have been poetically terminal, even if it did not bring about the actual death [9].

Dickinson kept most of her work reserved; that is why her poetry often has an approximate date indicating almost when they are composed. Her poetry was mostly published after her death through the assistance of her sister, who enlisted a reliable editor to help in her attempt. For such a reason, the dates when Dickinson's poetry was published massively differ from the dates of being written. *I Died for Beauty* was composed in 1862 and published in 1890.

The poem was published frequently to make it popular and widely today. *I Died for Beauty* is collected in almost every volume of Dickinson's poems, in addition to other collections of American poetry. The poem emerges in the comprehensive version of the literary works of Dickinson, which was published by Back Bay Books in 1976, under the title *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*.

**The first stanza** I died for Beauty—but was scarce Adjusted in the Tomb

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When One who died for Truth, was lain In an adjoining Room— $[^1]$ .

The poem called *I Died for Beauty* is spoken in the first person singular by a person who newly died for Beauty. The first stanza, like the other two, is just four lines each. In the beginning, the reciter presents herself then shifts into the narrative. It is realized that the poem starts with a vision of beauty being joined by loved ones. She is adjusted in the grave, as she is not by herself. She appears to have been somebody who is loved and has been appreciated by an appropriate funeral. But scarcely as she is left by herself, she obtains company. The narrator says she was just placed in her grave when another lately dead one is taken into 'an adjoining room,' having deceased for reality and beauty.

### The second stanza

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

Identifying her attendance, he speaks to her gently. This image proposes that he is anxious, afraid, frightened, or sensitive to what might be an agonizing subject for her. Assumed that he deceased for truth, he is not frightened of her reply, but might be scared disappointing her. He was also introduced by others and has been gone; consequently, he probably takes some relaxation in the recognition that he is not by himself. He asks the narrator how she passed away, and she replies humbly, 'For Beauty.' He replies by informing her that he deceased for certainty, making them associates. The two partake an instant kinship and reciprocal understanding. Both have afforded their lives on the stand of principle, and so both of them venerate one another. When she did at the conclusion of the initial stanza, Dickinson finishes the stanza with a dash[26].

This principally trails off the achievement and sentiment of one stanza and guides the reader/ listener right into the following without the requirement for setting up whatsoever new.

#### The third stanza

And so, as Kinsmen, met a Night— We talked between the Rooms— 10 Until the Moss had reached our lips— And covered up—our names—

The presenter denotes both of the two now as relatives although they fairly met. Their demise for noble reasons makes them morally analogous. Dickinson communicates the friendship with a thing the reader/ listener may have experienced a kinship with someone one night. The one who perished for Beauty and the one who perished for veracity speak through their rooms as long as they can. The appearance is familiar; new associations have eagerness and energy, and two friends do not run out of things to argue or know about one another.

It is what the two dead and buried people feel, and the comparison of the setting with the welcoming contact of the two, now they are in truth corpses, is typical of Dickinson's poetry. The scene is morbid, but the reader/ listener almost is unable to remember until Dickinson pronounces why the two stop speaking. "The deceased speaker converses congenially "between the rooms" of the cemetery with a man buried nearby, along with 'They Shut me up in Prose" [10]. She says that both speak 'between the rooms' for the time permits them. However, when their corporeal selves can no longer speak 'Until the moss had reached our lips,' they stop talking.

The reader/listener is sharply reminded that both of the two characters in such a metaphor of Beauty and Truth are deceased bodies. The unattractive reality of decay brings the joyful affiliation to a halt. The moss influences their lips; consequently, they cannot speak to one another any longer. More generally, the death ends their capability to speak out, representing Beauty or Truth. The lips that signify communication, conversation, and relationship are silent. They are silenced by the normal progression of life and death. The communicator closes with the picture of the moss enveloping their names, seemingly making them forgotten and unidentified. It does not just do the moss envelop the bodies' mouths, but it, in consequence, removes the recollections of those who are forgotten there. Their to-the-death symbolizes Beauty and Truth are buried (except for the poem), and the listener is left speculating for what did they both actually die? Was their demise in vain? Without understanding the particulars of their individual demises, it is intolerable to say. It is,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Lundin, Roger. 2004. Emily Dickinson and the Art of Belief, Michigan, and Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. p. 168. [All verse lines on the poem *I died for Beauty* in this study are quoted from this source unless they are included in a quotation from another source; the number of pages will be added].

nonetheless, probable to conclude that even such magnificent ideologies as beauty and reality are dependent on the damages of time.

The poem *I Died for Beauty* occurs entirely contained by a tomb. The speaker designates being positioned in the grave when another is located in a nearby chamber within the tomb. Scarcely there is a resilient sense of death than such a background. Therefore, everything concerning the poem needs to be taken into account within the milieu of death. The two numbers or associates have passed away and are now manipulating with that sense of truth, although they appear very comfortable with it. He and she were conscious of their own transience when they offered their lives for better advantages of beauty and reality. *I Died for Beauty* as a poem takes a stimulating twist; on the other hand, the conception of beauty and reality are immortal and comes into an interrogation. Originally, it seems that the two members have surrendered their temporal life for something that surpasses death, that is to say, beauty and reality. Nevertheless, at the end, when the two members are rendered inaudible and their names protected with moss, the speaker or listener of the poem must be surprised if those things for which they perished are also temporal.

*I Died for Beauty* copes very openly with the subjects of beauty and reality. Dickinson represents them as parallel in different ways. They are signified by somebody who accepted to die for them; they are buried in the same burial chamber close from each other; they pass away at the same time; they both names are concealed by identical moss. Additionally, the figures themselves experience an immediate union when they all learn why the counterpart died. The poem creates a strong and overt proclamation that beauty and reality are associates and relatives. Further, the two distinguish one another as kindred moods.

A stimulating point of explanation is whether Dickinson indicates that the two numbers deceased as victims for beauty and truth, or that the two numbers deceased in order to accomplish beauty and reality. The idiomatic title *I died for beauty* and *'And I for truth'* deserts the door unlocked to either explanation. Irrespective, the two numbers felt powerful enough about both of them – he and she – that their subsisting were less appreciated than beauty and reality.

In classic Dickinson's style, the understudy poem about decent deaths and the progression of dying also observing about something as normal and happy as friendship. In this instance, the talker 'who died for Beauty' supports a new visitor to the tomb of the one who passed away for truth. They are located in the grave and then left, but both are not isolated for long when they apprehend that not only do they have each other but also that both of them have pretty a lot in common. Emily Dickinson proves how simply some friendships arrangement and the passion with which new associates engage each other. In this circumstance, the two are fused by their disposition to sacrifice themselves for what they agree is the same thing 'Beauty and Truth,' but their surprising situations also unite them. Dickinson demonstrates how a friendly affiliation has the influence to make even the most uncommon and potentially terrifying state seem pleasant.

Nevertheless, similar to most friendships, this one is ultimately broken up by the passing of time. "Poets use syntax to various ends and effects. The extent to which a poet can also break the rules of syntax for his or her own purposes can be seen in Emily Dickinson" [6]. While the verse ends on a depressing note, the reader/listener cannot assist but feel that the shift from life to death was done easier by having designed one last significant friendship before turning over to eternity.

Generally, "Poetry uses an elevated and preeminent literary language over everyday language; it is not the speech of the tongue only, but it is the language of the heart, mind, feeling, and [the] sentiment" [11]. "Emotion and feeling ... can only be fully expressed in the vernacular language, which a particular people has fashioned for itself through many generations [12], ... it is poetry than prose, which is concerned with the analysis and definition of emotion and feeling" [13, 14]. Furthermore, the idea is supported by Ali [15], who says, "Poetry is a piece of language which is creative in form and convention in meaning for its addressee; that is why it arouses a sense of sympathy in its readers." The matter is similar to the poetry of Emily Dickinson. Her poetry is typically formal in approach and regular in form and rhythm. However, "Dickinson, ignored many prosodic conventions" [8]. The poem *I Died for Beauty* is a seamless example of her consistency of style. This poem is composed of three stanzas of four lines each, and the rhyming scheme is abcb. "Dickinson's slant rhyme derives its effect from the hymn-like strictness of metre: where the metre is simple, strong and familiar" [16]. In this verse, the rhymes are more precisely consonance rhymes for the reason that the near-rhyming words are on an identical accent and finish with the equal consonants. As stated by Preminger [17], "Dickinson lines out, not sentence by sentence but word by word, single moments of perception and emotion" (p. 52). Furthermore, the poet "found that usual direct terminology was not satisfactory to express deep instincts, emotions, and ideas that the psychologists had defined and employed the same methods for clarifying their purposes" [18].

The lines in all stanzas follow a regular, respectively, design of iambic tetrameter followed by iambic trimeter then once more iambic tetrameter, and again iambic trimeter. "The brisk iambic meter of Dickinson's verse, hard to imitate in the language of translation, got replaced with a dactyl-based rhythm, resulting in a much slower pace" [19]. It can be opined that poetry in general and Dickinson's in particular "has acquired new receptivity and developed new metrical forms" [20]. This closeness of style and organization reflects the education of Dickinson at Amherst Academy and her capability to tell a tale and create her remarks within these limitations. Composing in such a way, requires a precise ability to model lines and employ an economy of words. The poem, from a reader's perspective, has a natural and relaxed feel that makes the lyric more manageable. "Poetry is marked by being free in the modern age" [21]. The regular rhythm gives the reader the freedom to focus on the plot and the subtleties of the metaphors rather than tripping up in unusual patterns.

An extended metaphor is a type of allegory in which essentials of the description represent something yonder that is instantly ostensible. Just as any metaphor is a method of relating two or more things for the interest of observing on one of them, an extended metaphor applies the same perception to a narrative. "Homans, for example, in an essay on Rossetti and Emily Dickinson, draws on Irigaray and other psychoanalytic and deconstructive critics to distinguish between metaphor and metonymy in 'Goblin Market' by showing the different relations these tropes have to the feminine body" [22]. In this poem, *I Died for Beauty*, the poetess, uses this kind of metaphor to remark on 'beauty and truth.' The narrative designates the bodies of those who perished for 'beauty and truth' being placed to rest in a similar tomb, in neighboring rooms. They talk and become 'brethren' right away because they passed away for basically the same aim. The two members are incarnate versions of the effects for which they offered their life, and demise is the sacrifice for better benefits. The two figures died for beauty, and truth reveals the lengths to which they would go in service of something they considered as superior to themselves.

Primarily, the perfection of beauty and truth is represented and symbolized in the fact that the two members are still attentive and speaking, despite the fact they are deceased. The reader/listener sees this as an observation, through a symbolic image expounded by the poetess that such things are eternal. However, the extended metaphor continues by presenting the members ultimately succumbing to corporeal decay, as their names are sheltered by moss. "The verse has the capability to map the whole situation in musical language" [18]; consequently, Dickinson's poem is a representative of great musical language. Since the language and visual exhibition is metaphorical, the reader is directed to marvel at what our poetess is trying to speak about the eventual destiny of beauty and truth. But with her narrators rendered mute, the reader/listener is left to decide his or her own ends.

# DISCUSSION

The year 1830 witnessed two important events; the first was the birth of Emily Dickinson and secondly witnessed the beginning of the Romantic Period in American literature. Dickinson is connected with the Realistic American literary movement, which continued from 1865 to 1900. The American Realistic Period emerged from a nation fighting and conflict after the Civil War and facing industrial, intellectual, and economic change. Dickinson did not move off to become a Realistic writer because she kept to herself and did not intermingle with various writers of the day. Emily was the invention of her time and personality. The writers of the time were less perfectionistic than their romantic forerunners; in addition, they were ready to write about the unstable skirmish collectively or individually. Several writers such as Karl Marx[<sup>2</sup>], Charles Darwin[<sup>3</sup>], and Auguste Comte [<sup>4</sup>] dealt with mainstream thought in their writings. In this period, as Dickinson understood, there were direct challenges between science and religion. There were three authentic, graceful voices among a number of followers of Romantic poetry during the Realistic Literary Period; they are Sidney Lanier, Walt Whitman, and no doubt Emily Dickinson.

Many historians have observed that Dickinson's attraction with death was exposed in her letters. Dickinson asks correspondents to portray what it was like to observe someone dying. She sought to see his/her last hours, their attendance of mind, and whether they sensed peace or not. All of such interest, resourcefulness, and detail is poured into Dickinson's poetry, as noted in *I Died for Beauty*, which portrays two persons who have died, and what emerges after their funeral. Dickinson's first volume of poetry was published in 1890 to great approval, in which our poem *I Died for Beauty* was included. Critics praised the poem as original and striking that its quality is a surprising grasp and acumen, and the poem though sharp, is surprisingly and genuinely stimulating. The poem enjoys an offbeat style but distinctive,

 $<sup>^{2}</sup>$  Karl Marx (1818–1883) is a German political philosopher, journalist, and revolutionary socialist best known not as a philosopher, whose works inspired the foundation of many communist regimes in the twentieth century.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Charles Darwin is an English theorist known for his work as a naturalist, improving a theory of evolution to prove biological change.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> The founder of positivism, a philosophical and political movement that enjoyed a very wide diffusion in the second half of the nineteenth century. (from Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)

decisive, and unswerving. Dickinson holds a place of significance, and she was surely paramount energy of American poetry during the nineteenth century. Emily is among the pronounced poets in the English language. Dickinson, through a deep reading of her amazing poems, authenticate, is reckoned among the great ones.

Dickinson often writes about life, love, time, nature, eternity, and death; actually, her poems powerfully fall under thematic categories, which the original collection of her verse arranges her poetry to be dominant on the concepts of life, time, nature, love, and perpetuity. "Poems about seasonal events, life cycles, relationships, and the interpenetration of the natural and the cosmic draw upon the often overlooked tradition of American women poets, including Emily Dickinson" [23]. Furthermore, "In an essay on Emily Dickinson, Cynthia Griffin Wolff asserts that 'Emily Dickinson was a great poet who happened to be a woman.' And although the point is, I think, to privilege the poetry over the gender – and to be fair to Wolff her larger argument is about the surprises, the wit and the richness in Dickinson's work" [24]. In her poetry, she is known for being preoccupied with the concept of death and the inclination to slip into the horrid in her handlings of such a theme. Emily writes about the trice of death, and about the occurrence of death, in addition to the tombs. Dickinson, in *I Died for Beauty*, adopts the approach of the first person *I* to her story, which takes root in a tomb.

The speaker, in *I Died for Beauty*, announces that she died for the purpose of beauty, then when she was located in her grave, another individual is positioned in a close room. After the death of both, she talks to him, and when they realize that the purpose of her death was beauty and his death was the truth, they sense a close kinship. The poet produces strong matches in this poem between the two themes of beauty and truth. She and he seem enchanted to have seen each other; then they continue talking until death eventually makes them silent.

# **CONCLUSION**

Emily Dickinson, in 'I Died for Beauty,' revealing supreme mastery and skill, used elegant terminologies to prove the saying that poetry is the best concise words in the best profound order. The poet successfully divulges themes, concepts, and ideas through swinging spontaneously in time and space. The poet skillfully combines beauty with reality and death with mortality using proper and concise extended metaphors. 'I Died for Beauty' proves a certain conclusion that the images of beauty-reality and death-mortality in the whole work is a poetic depth of concise usage of poetic language.

The poet appropriately could employ symbolic ideas and images to suggest the melody, theme, and argument that challenges utterance through devices of poetic expression, providing appropriate terminologies to the internal engagement that can be expressed either in words or in symbols. Symbolism is one of the devices that Emily Dickinson has struggled with triumph in her piece of poetry, 'I Died for Beauty.'

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