

國立政治大學英國語文學系碩士論文

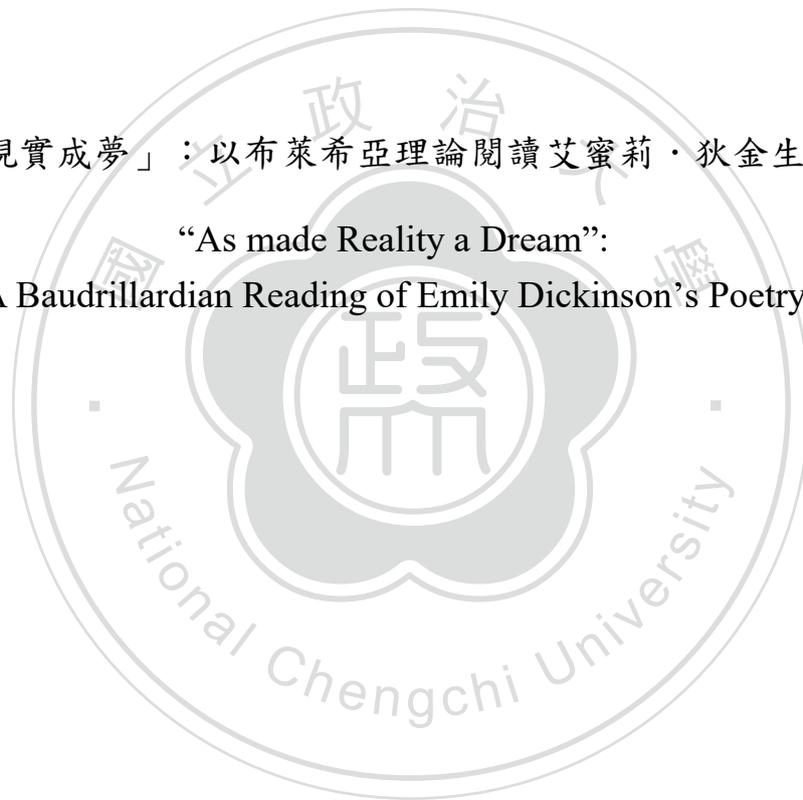
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「如現實成夢」：以布萊希亞理論閱讀艾蜜莉·狄金生詩作

“As made Reality a Dream”:

A Baudrillardian Reading of Emily Dickinson's Poetry



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碩士論文提要

論文名稱：「如現實成夢」：以布萊希亞理論閱讀艾蜜莉·狄金生詩作

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論文提要內容：

本論文試圖透過尚·布萊希亞對於擬像與複製之概念，探求艾蜜莉·狄金生詩作中「夢」這一概念的後現代面容。藉助布萊希亞對於符號霸權的思索，本文將狄金生的夢境意象視作一種空想，並察覺其招來人們欲求理想的符號。本文不僅於詩人關於夢與作夢的寫作中，深思其中符號的無所不在，並更將觀察延伸，在詩人思慮社會的其他詩作中，探詢這所謂「符號」的影響。

本論文周旋在三個面向之間：夢的概念、人類社會裡的社會關聯、烏托邦/反烏托邦夢境空間。藉著探討詩作〈我們作夢——正是好我們做夢著〉（強生 531）、〈夢猶如細微的嫁妝〉（強生 1376）、〈死期正像是無門的房屋〉（強生 475），本文首先深思「夢」一詞的各種定義，並試圖將這樣所謂的「夢」定義為欲求理想的空想。而在這個符號主宰的夢域中，必須注意的是，空想從不帶來理想，反而只是欺騙地招來理想的符號作為替代。

隨著分析另三首詩〈我一早出發——帶著我的狗——〉（強生 520）、〈瘋癲相當才是最神聖的理性——〉（強生 435）、〈文明——鄙斥——那花豹呀！〉（強生 492），本文探討詩文中對人類社會的視察。考量著人類社會裡的社會關聯，詩人對於人們追求理想的夢/空想，被扣於社會次序的問題，以及自我與他者的衝突上。

最後，藉著探索詩作〈「天堂」帶著不同符號——對我來說〉（強生 575）、〈那裏有著某一道歪斜的光，〉（強生 258）、〈身在那狹小蜂巢中〉（強生 1607），一個飄忽在烏托邦與反烏托邦分界之間的夢境空間最終被察見。而所謂意義的曖昧不明也在此審視著。

關鍵字：艾蜜莉·狄金生、尚·布萊希亞、擬像、符號、夢/空想、社會、烏托邦/反烏托邦

Abstract

This thesis proposes to pursue a rather postmodernist landscape of Emily Dickinson's concept of dream in several of her poems, in light of Jean Baudrillard's idea of simulation and simulacra. With a Baudrillardian consideration that aims at the supremacy of signs, the thesis reads Dickinson's dream imagery as an equivalent of fantasy that brings signs to actualise one's desire for the ideal. The thesis not only considers the prevalence of signs in the poet's writings on dream and dreaming. More extensively, it also traces the effectiveness of the so-called "signs" in a wider range of her poems where locates the poet's concern over human society.

The thesis wanders around three aspects: the notion of dreams defined as ideals and deception, social relationships within human society, and the utopian/dystopian dreamscape. With "We dream – it is good we are dreaming –" (J 531), "Dreams are the subtle Dower" (J 1376), and "Doom is the House without Door" (J 475) examined, the thesis firstly considers the diverse definitions of the term "dream," and tends to define the alleged "dream" as fantasy about desiring the ideal. Yet, in the realm of dream where signs dominate, it is also noted that fantasy never brings the ideal but just deceptively summons signs of the ideal for substitution.

With another three poems "I started Early – Took my Dog –" (J 520), "Much Madness is divinest Sense –" (J 435), and "Civilization – spurns – the Leopard!" (J

492) discussed, a deeper concern about human society is then taken in the thesis.

Concerning social relationship within human society, the poet's concerns over the dream/fantasy about the ideal are thus anchored at the problems of social order and the conflicts between the self and the Other.

Lastly, with three poems of Emily Dickinson “‘Heaven’ has different Signs – to me –” (J 575), “There’s a certain Slant of light,” (J 258), and “Within that little Hive” (J 1607) explored, the manifestation of the utopian/dystopian dreamscape is a final focus in the thesis. The question of vagueness in meaning here is also sophisticatedly examined.

Keywords: Emily Dickinson, Jean Baudrillard, Simulacra, Sign, Dream/Fantasy, Society, Utopia/Dystopia

Table of Content

Acknowledgement	iii
Chinese Abstract	v
English Abstract.....	vi
Chapter One: Introduction	1
I. Literature Review.....	3
II. Problems.....	8
III. Methodology	11
IV. Chapter Organization	15
Chapter Two: Dream with Simulacra	21
I. Introduction.....	21
II. Warning against Dream and Dreaming.....	23
III. Dreaming about the Ideal	28
IV. Mistaking Dream & Reality and the Deceptive Ambiguity in Simulacra	30
V. Conclusion	36
Chapter Three: Dreaming in Society	37
I. Introduction.....	37
II. The Simulacra-constructed Social Order and Social Relations	45
III. The Social Order that “Baptizes” Us	53
IV. The Abatement of Individuality.....	61
V. Conclusion	67
Chapter Four: Dreaming in a Utopian/Dystopian Dreamscape	71
I. Introduction.....	71
II. A Fairer Paradise in Doubt: Utopian or Dystopian?	78
III. A Particular Slant on the “Light”: Signs of Meanings in Vagueness	89
IV. Conclusion	96
Chapter Five: Conclusion	99
Works Cited.....	105

Chapter One

Introduction

This thesis proposes to pursue a rather postmodernist landscape of Emily Dickinson's concept of dream in several of her poems in light of Jean Baudrillard's ideas of simulation and simulacra. Among studies of Emily Dickinson's writings, including her letters and poetry, the subject of dreams has been attracting academic attention from Dickinson scholars. As Brian F. McCabe suggests in his introductory section "Dreams," collected in *All Things Dickinson: An Encyclopedia of Emily Dickinson's World*, "dreams were more than a passing subject in Dickinson's mind" (277). McCabe's comment here not only reveals great significance of the dream subject for reading Emily Dickinson's writings but also suggests excellent potential for exploration of a complete body of a Dickinsonian conception of dreams. In this regard, anatomies of Dickinsonian dreams abound, and numerous critical essays aim to shed light on the poet's consideration of dreams from various perspectives.

Dickinson critics such as Páraic Finnerty, Catherine A. Bernard, John S. Mann, to name a few, take pains to explore the nineteenth-century dream theories (McCabe 277). Páraic Finnerty, for example, offers a compelling exploration of dreams in Dickinson's period of time which emphasizes the prophetic implications of

dream imagery (McCabe 277-78). Perhaps, the scrutiny of dream theories of Dickinson's contemporaries promises us a better understanding of the ways the poet considers the conception of dreams in her dream poems. Yet, for readers in the twenty-first century, the historical and cultural foci of earlier study seem to reveal restricted comprehension of Dickinsonian dreams by putting too much emphasis on the role of the poet, whose biographical background seems to be under scrutiny too heavily to disclose more possible readings of Dickinson's dream poems.

A more text-centred concern from modern examinations of dreams is primarily derived from psychological readings of Sigmund Freud and Karl Jung "in which dream imagery has certain, specific meaning connected to the waking world, generally through the dreamer's subconscious" (McCabe 277). Indeed, this way of looking at dreams might present sophisticated interpretations of dreams for readers who are fascinated with the multiple meanings of dream imagery. It also helps delve into a dreamer's mind for an outright body of knowledge of dreams. Nonetheless, this psychological perspective of the dream study is heavily confined to the mental activities of a dreamer during sleep. In the postmodernist period, we might have different comprehensions of the idea of dreams. Taking a closer look at the meanings of the term "dream," we can witness a wide diversity of definitions which invite many critically intriguing examinations of the term.

Thus, with regard to definitions of the term “dream” to which former critical readings might pay less attention, I would like to propose a reading of Dickinson’s dream imagery which entails a postmodernist reader-centred perspective. To resolve questions left by previous studies, I also intend to explore in her poetry the poet’s delicate concerns over human society which might promise a better comprehensive understanding of Emily Dickinson’s poems.

I. Literature Review

Concerning its analytical scope, this thesis focuses on three main fields of critical reception on Emily Dickinson’s poetry: essays about her concept of dreams; about her attitude towards society; and about her perspective on paradise/heaven. The problem of dream in Dickinson’s writing, for sure, is a top priority that is taken into account. Dickinson’s literary treatment of dreams, among others, is always a provoking topic that intrigues and, perhaps sometimes, also bothers a great majority of earnest readers. Just like many of her other topics, this curious dream-issue indeed not only offers fuel for igniting numerous critical passions but also challenges an attempt of theme search dauntingly with interpretive vagueness. As David Porter suggests, it is enigma in Dickinson’s texts that immerses many readers, and readers, while encountering the poems for locating a certain theme, are often overwhelmingly

captured by enormous unexplainable and unmanageable mysteries through their textual absorption (196). Roland Hagenbüchle in his “Dickinson and Literary Theory” in *The Emily Dickinson Handbook* also recognises indefiniteness and indeterminacy in the poet’s writing. Yet, though positing the richness and also teasingly uncertainty of meanings, Hagenbüchle, by contrast, regards it rather positively as where “a sense of humility, admiration, and wonder” thrives in Dickinson’s poems (382). With the critical voices, there seems also inevitable indeterminacy which prevails within her designation of dream imagery and which must complicate a reading of dream.

With respect to current trends in the studies of Dickinson, particularly in terms of the dream subject, a promising discovery of theories about dreaming might be found in Páraic Finnerty’s compelling article, “A Dickinson Reverie: The Worm, the Snake, Marvel, and Nineteenth-century Dreaming.” Finnerty focuses on the notions of dreaming proliferated in the nineteenth century and unfolds an emphasis on the prophetic nature of dreams. The divination of the future relies on the compulsion to narrate the visions of a dreamer during sleep. As “a form of demonic possession,” as Finnerty writes, in literary works a dreamer’s dream seems typically able to trap and posit its dreamer in a compulsive circumstance that he/she becomes “compelled to describe rather than understand the unfathomable phenomena encountered there” (96). The dreamer, in this respect, appears to be considered a prophet-like character. This

mythical characteristic of the dreamer as a prophet is examined by the nineteenth-century dream theorists such as John Bonner and James J. Belcher, both of whom pinpoint supernatural experiences brought from dreams of prophecy. According to Finnerty, Bonner outlines the popular idea that “the dreaming mind moved beyond the physical world and its body and communicated with the metaphysical universe, thereby receiving ominous messages of warning or ethical instruction, thereby gaining foresight into future events” (97). As Finnerty further summarizes, Belcher locates more active abilities of a dreamer to recognize “preternatural warnings regarding coming disasters” and change future events (97). In this way of looking at dreams, it is clear that dreams are treated not only as supernatural access to the metaphysical world with which a prophet-dreamer is able to communicate. Dreams also reveal protective significance of warning, thereby avoiding destructive disasters.

Through his exploration, Finnerty tries to locate Dickinson’s poetic engagement with the theoretical conventions about dreams and dreaming in the nineteenth century. As he observes, “Dickinson’s dream poems in general emphasize the prudent activity of dreaming as preferable to corporeal experience” (108). The world of dream, for Dickinson, seems more preferable, compared with normal everyday life. John S. Mann similarly argues that, “in the universe of her poems, dreams are the obverse of reality, which paradoxically deepen her understanding of it”

(qtd. in Finnerty 108). It would seem that Dickinson's dream poetry actually exhibits her deep concern about reality which is arguably viewed as the opposite of dream.

Another field of critical reception concerns Emily Dickinson's view on the social. Though Dickinson is widely recognised as a poet who secludes herself away from society, a vast body of her poems is in fact involved with a certain keen sensitivity and profundity that critiques and questions the stroke of society. Many critics also observe such a critical awareness implicit in her poems and tend to explore the magnitude of it. Kenneth Stocks, Audrey Curtis, and Christopher Benfey, for instance, offer an exhaustive explanation of how the poet stands as socially devoted and with her poems textually performs as actively voiced. Of most significance, with these critics, many of Dickinson's poems are in fact imperatively unfolded not only as imbued with doubts against the social, but also as evidences of a quest for a certain degree of individualism. As Curtis and Stocks similarly claim, Emily Dickinson is a poet who takes pains to displace in her poems a distrust of what seems generally correct and normal from the side of a majority (Stocks 86; Curtis 784-6), and in Benfey's reading, a sense of uncertainty on the social is even intensified, as several of her poems investigate the expressiveness of human beings and the presence of others (1-8).

Here, throughout these essays that contribute to Dickinson's social insight, it

is seen that critics mostly position the poet in a certain dual relation between herself and others. As Rachel Nicole Tie suggests in her discussion on the question of normality and abnormality, the “eccentricity” of the poet is apparently opposed to what a society conceptually accepts as general and normal (641). This social separation between the poet and society, as Jaji Crocker Hammer sees, even disassociates her from conventional customs that advocate social involvement and put into practice a certain degree of disconnection sensible in much of her poetry (216). Indeed, it is recognised that in Dickinson’s poetry, oppositions, the binary ones in particular, are fairly of much significance, and in many ways they hardly can be belittled.

Lastly, the thesis considers Dickinson’s images of paradise/heaven highlighted by several critical essays. Throughout the oeuvre of Emily Dickinson, the topic of paradise/heaven is indeed dominantly visible, and many critics tend to shed careful light on the importance of this distinctive concept around her poems. Robert Weisbuch, for instance, in his reading of the poem “I dwell in Possibility” (J 657), bestows upon the image of “paradise” the metaphorical testament of “possibilities” which a poet can strive to “gather” from his/her realm of poetry. (197). Judith Farr in her chapter “Gardening in Eden” of her book *The Gardens of Emily Dickinson* suggests the glorification of “Paradise” in the plain of “Garden of Eden” and

identifies Emily Dickinson as a “new Eve” who should reside in “Paradise” (74). Magdalena Zapedowska and Barton Levi St. Armand, in addition, also critically associate the images of “paradise” and “heaven” with the image of home. They not only present the dwelling of joy and ecstasy (Zapedowska 86-88), but also unfold a certain domestic, private domain which combats and supersedes any other socially dominant dogmas in order to claim her personal individuality (St. Armand 129, 131, 136). In Brian F. McCabe’s reading, this dimension of individuality that the “paradise/heaven” can indicate in ways also displays her withdrawal from any orthodoxy (439). With these readings of paradise/heaven, it is seen that, for Dickinson critics and readers, what often constitutes a paradise and heaven is usually tokens of certain idealism, which to some extent is pregnant with blissful thinking and even bits of personal satisfaction.

II. Problems

With these critical readings hovering around different topics about Emily Dickinson, it is seen that the poet’s oeuvre indeed contains excellent potential for various interpretations. Through the search of the contributory studies on Dickinsonian dreams, we witness a variety of the nineteenth century theories about dreams to which Dickinson’s dream poems are ascribed. Yet, in terms of textual

analyses, these discoveries seem to confine possible discoveries of poetic meanings for the emphasis on the role of the poet. Some issues located in the poetry might need to be explored more comprehensively. For example, the question of reality, from Mann's argument, seems to deserve further examination, since it involves the poet's keen consideration of the world. However, among the critical essays of Dickinson's dream poetry, we seem to observe less analyses of the poet's perception of the world. Another further problem less discovered is the poet's consideration of human society. If Dickinson's dream poems unfold her deep apprehension of the world, it is also worthy of analysis how the poet relates the poetics of her poetry including the dream poems to her critical awareness of human society which entails social orders and the self's encounter with the Other. Even though in several readings of the poet's social insights readers can access her awareness of human society, it seems still an enigma whether there is another way of thinking of her social critique out of the enclosure of the dual conflicts. It is also a mystery what aspects of society her poetry is genuinely aimed at.

Another intriguing problem less noticed in the majority of criticism on Dickinson dream poems is the definition of the term "dream." Among the anatomies of Dickinson poems, the subject of dreams seems to remain still located in a cycle of the single minded pursuit of meaning. Yet, the semantic diversity of the term "dream"

offers plenty of scope for analysis. As *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*¹ briefly defines, the term “dream” can suggest “a vision or hope for the future,” “a vain hope or idle fantasy,” and “an ideal” (“Dream,” *OED*). Here, interestingly, as opposed to the definition of mental activity during sleep, the term “dream” bears at least another equally dominant entry for potential explorations: the connotation of “an ideal.” The semantic association of dreams with the idea of “an ideal” seems to ignite possibilities for wider comprehensions.

More riveting might be the definition of “a vain hope or idle fantasy.” This associated meaning seems to imply an uncertainty on a positivity of the so-called “hope for the future” (“Dream,” *OED*). The conflicting aspect seemingly also suggests the deceptiveness of “an ideal” when the term “dream” denotes “a false idea or belief,” “an illusion, a delusion,” and “a sham” (“Dream,” *OED*). If the term “dream” connotes a perspective on “an ideal” (“Dream,” *OED*), positive or ambiguous, Dickinson’s dream imagery, to some extent, should also be able to be examined in the same aspect.

*Emily Dickinson Lexicon (EDL)*² might also offer plausible considerations of the connotations of Dickinson’s term “dream.” As noted in *Emily Dickinson Lexicon (EDL)*, the term “dream” is associated with “fantasy” and “utopian vision of

¹ In this thesis, *Oxford English Dictionary* is abbreviated to *OED*, as seen in the brackets here.

² In this thesis, *Emily Dickinson Lexicon* is also abbreviated to *EDL*, as seen in the brackets here.

perfection” (“Dream,” *EDL*). Both definitions confirm the reasonability of the ideal-matter aspect. In this respect, the critical attention can plausibly be a different way of reading Dickinsonian dreams with the associated idea of “an ideal” (“Dream,” *OED*).

In this regard, I intend to explore how Dickinson suggests the pursuit of ideals and the deceptive nature of ideals. With the anatomy of dreams and ideals, I also aim to locate how the poet relates her poetry including the dream poems to her awareness of human society.

III. Methodology

To elucidate the problems which seem less explored, my reading is based on a postmodernist perspective. For most readers of Dickinson, it is odd to associate Dickinson with postmodernism. Yet, Jed Deppman, in his *Trying to Think with Emily Dickinson*, finds the philosophical compatibility of Dickinson with modernist and postmodernist thought. Deppman discovers that “Dickinson’s oeuvre is interpretable as an early, intense response to the fragmenting epistemological conditions Lyotard identified in *The Postmodern Condition* as attending the weakening of authoritative Western narratives of history, God, nature, the self” (7). Moreover, hopefully explored further is the intertextuality of reading between Dickinson’s poetry and certain strains of postmodernist theory, as Jed Deppman pinpoints that “certain strains

in postmodern thought can help make visible central aspects of her poetry, and her poetry has the power to illuminate and respond to contemporary situations” (8).

Deppman seems to crystallize an intertextual connection with the nineteenth century poet and postmodernist thought.

Deppman’s discovery of a “postmodern” Dickinson seems to unfold the brilliant possibilities of reading Dickinson in a diversity of theories. In this respect, among postmodernist theories, a Baudrillardian reading of Emily Dickinson’s poetry seems plausible. The compelling book *Simulacra and Simulation*, by the thinker Jean Baudrillard, might promise a sophisticated theoretical examination of the issues from these preliminary problems. Jean Baudrillard reveals the arrival of “the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal” (1), in which the omnipresent precedence of simulacra achieves its dominance over the real through simulation. Baudrillard sees in simulation the supremacy of simulacra, for the simulacrum “never hides the truth” but “is truth that hides the fact that there is none” (1). The throne of the real seems to be taken over by simulacra, which brings about the hyperreal. Baudrillard ascribes the absence of the real to the presence of simulacra, which indicate “a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real” (2). This question of the sign substitution, for Baudrillard, seems to surpass that of imitation, duplication, or parody, for its challenging quality over the relationship between the

real and the imaginary.

Of the greatest importance, concerning the replacement of the signs, is the fundamental operation of simulation in which Baudrillard distinguishes simulation from other models of copying. Apart from the endangering of the real, Baudrillard witnesses in simulation an ultimate threat to the distinction between the real and the imaginary. As Baudrillard contends, “dissimulating leaves the principle of reality intact: the difference is always clear, it is simply masked, whereas simulation threatens the difference between the ‘true’ and the ‘false’, the ‘real’ and the ‘imaginary’” (3). In fact, the difference in treatments of the real-imaginary distinction in different models of copying entails a further question of absence and presence. While dissimulating preserves the intact presence of both the “real” and the “imaginary,” simulation, however, makes ambiguous the presence and absence of the two extremes. Clear distinctions between the presence and absence of the “real” and the “imaginary” might be accordingly threatened to efface.

If simulation manifests a discourse that the “real” and the “imaginary” are ambiguous, then the simulacra seem to serve as the agency of the ambiguity in which meanings are no longer trustworthy. For meanings lose reliability and credits, a certain degree of deceptiveness can be discernible in simulacra. Since simulacra are pregnant with the deceptive nature of the signifier, it is plausible to examine the

image of dreams which is construed as ideals in terms of simulacra and simulation. A similar deceptiveness of ideals is also discovered from the ambiguity explored in both denotations of “a vain hope” (“Dream,” *OED*) and “fantasy” (“Dream,” *EDL*).

Here, with Baudrillard’s theoretical focus on the supremacy of simulacra and the ambiguity in meaning, the connection between Emily Dickinson and this postmodernist thinker seems to be thus clear. Both of them actually share certain similarities in their concern about the prevalence of signs and intensively invite their readers to interrogate the equivocality of meaning. While Baudrillard in his ideas of simulacra and simulation exhibits the concern about the domination of signs over human society,³ Emily Dickinson actually in her poems also similarly presents a vast number of signs that are collected around everyday life. In some way her poems also allow readers to observe and consider the power of these signs over an individual. The poem “We dream – it is good we are dreaming –” (J 531), for example, indeed not only displays a range of signs, such as “Age,” “Name,” and “a phrase in Egyptian,” and so forth, but also with these signs in fact clearly provokes questions, e.g., as to

³ It is widely known that Baudrillard considers a sign-dominated society. Douglass Kellner and William Pawlett both recognise such a concern in the writings of this postmodernist thinker. Kellner notes that Baudrillard’s theory is of “how simulacra came to dominate social life” (78). Pawlett in his chapter “Simulation and the End of the Social,” in his book *Jean Baudrillard: Against Banality* also summarises that for Baudrillard “there are signs that enable the accumulation of meaning and knowledge and there are ‘pure’ signs that enchant and seduce, signs that reverse, destabilise and annihilate meaning” (71).

how signs, in substitution of what is desired, can actualise one's dream. Importantly, the question of the actualisation of one's dream in the logic of signs, as seen here, seems just to give way to a deep Baudrillardian inspection. Not only is the issue of sign-substitution clearly involved, but, at the point, the consideration of the prevalence of some semiotic materials is also allowed for.⁴ In this regard, a Baudrillardian consideration that aims at the problem of hyper-reality seems able to offer a promising lens of viewing the questions of signs in Dickinson's texts.

IV. Chapter Organization

The thesis explores with a postmodernist perspective the subject of dreams in three main aspects: the notion of dreams defined as ideals and deception, social relationships within human society, and the utopian/dystopian dreamscape. The following length of anatomy will be divided into four chapters. A reading of the notion of dreams construed as ideals and deception opens the next chapter, in which three dream poems of Emily Dickinson will be intensely examined: "We dream – it is good we are dreaming –," "Dreams are the subtle Dower," and "Doom is the House

⁴ Here, apart from the symbolic, I tend to take "the semiotic" as the main term throughout my discussion of Baudrillard's ideas. My tendency for identifying "the semiotic" derives not only from the fact that sign is actually the focus Baudrillard mostly draws in his *Simulacra and Simulation*, but also from my consonance with Gary Genosko, who notes in his review of Baudrillard's writing that "the symbolic has passed into the semiotic" (xx).

without Door.” With these dream poems examined, I explore an important concern about the pursuit of ideals in Dickinson’s dreams imagery. Dream in the sense is nothing but just an equivalent of fantasy which only practises and actualises desire. As dreams are associated with the idea of “ideals,” an awareness of pursuing ideals is also read. In this aspect, dream and fantasy of desiring for the ideal are examined as models of simulacra which involve the question of presence and absence.

Furthermore, since the question of presence and absence is explored, certainly the deceptiveness of dreams and fantasies revealed as “a vain hope,” “an illusion,” and “a delusion” can be best evidenced in the perspective on simulation and simulacra. Most importantly, a particular consideration of the conflicting relationship between e.g., the real and the non-real, the deceiving and the deceived, etc., is also read. Since the obvious menace of simulation and simulacra reveals the possible collapse of the truth, the conflicts between binary oppositions are definitely concerned in the arena of simulacra.

Succeeding the examination of the dream-ideal imagery, in the consideration of simulacra in which the dichotomy of reason and madness is explored, a deeper concern about human society precedes the coming Chapter Three. In this chapter, another three poems are mainly discussed: “I started Early – Took my Dog –,” “Much Madness is divinest Sense –,” and “Civilization – spurns – the Leopard.” With these

poems concerning social relationship within human society, the poet's concerns over the pursuit of ideals are located in the social aspect in which a critique of human society is developed in the poems. In this respect, the problems concerning the relationship of the self with human society will be mainly discovered, especially for the construction of human society is driven by not only the desire of pursuing the ideal but the sign (simulacra) that may fulfil the desire. A most essential concern about the construction of human society lies in the sign-constructed social order in human society, in that social order always dominates not only social relations but also the entirety of society. Yet, intriguingly, in the era of simulation, social order seems to be often called into question. The authority of social order seems to be threatened by the ambiguity of simulacra. Social orders appear to be under re-examination, since simulacra obscure the presence and absence of the signified. Simulacra present the pure play of signs. Perhaps, examined under this pure play of signs, social orders might ultimately be perceived as the sheer accumulation of simulacra, another model of precedence of the real without reality.

Following the observation of social order and signs, the position of the self of an individual in this simulacra-constructed society seems to be worthy of examination. A sophisticated anatomy of social relationship of the self within human society is therefore intriguingly performed in several aspects: the problem of an

encounter with the Other, the conflicts between the self and the Other, and, most crucially, the universal existential problem of an individual. The encounter with the Other is not merely an inevitable phenomenon for an individual in society. In fact, it always establishes the tensions among individuals who conflict with each other for different desires of their own.

Since, in society, the inevitable encounter with the Other determines the incessant conflicts of desire among individuals, the problem of the conflicts between the self and the Other requires equal consideration. The problem of the conflicts entails the intensive contrast between the encoding and decoding of individuals. The intensity between encoding and decoding sacrifices an individual for any supposed authority of signs of the ideal, and devours them for the good of society. The intactness of individuality is therefore called into question, in terms of the construction of society where simulacra accumulate. In the respect, the existential problem of human beings in general follows. It becomes pivotal to consider the existential situations of individuals, in the face of the accumulation of simulacra which ultimately culminates in the utopian/dystopian dreamscape.

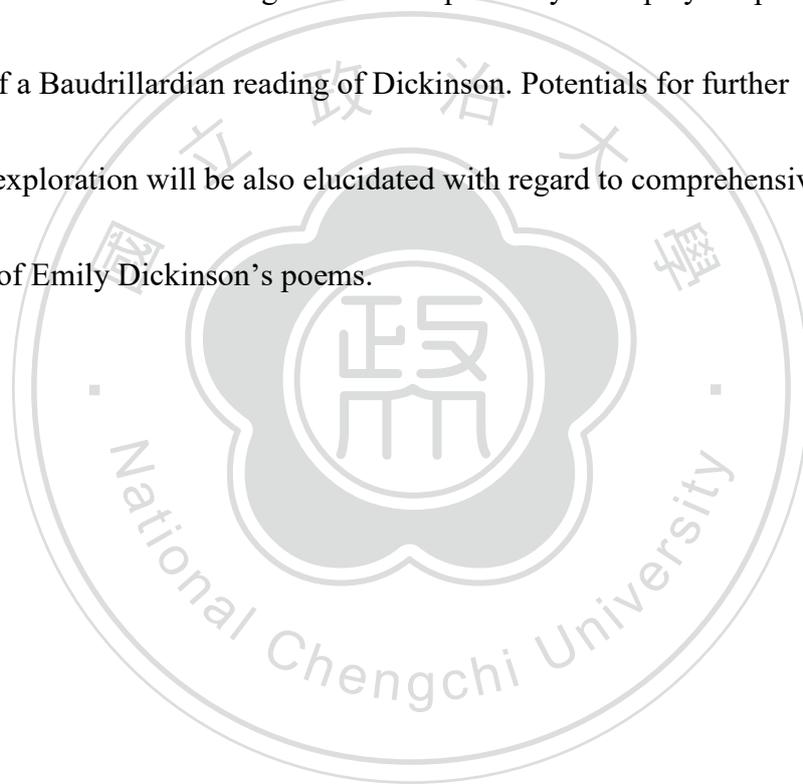
Yet, it is still called into question that the dreamscape is utopian. Since simulacra obscure the ambiguity between the real and the imaginary, the dreamscape might be constructed mistakenly as the dystopian one. Chapter Four, extending the

discussion of the existential problem of human beings in general, proceeds to investigate the discourse of utopia/dystopia, in which the three poems of Emily Dickinson are explored: “‘Heaven’ has different Signs – to me –,” “There’s a certain Slant of light,” and “Within that little Hive.” With a sophisticated examination of Dickinson’s poems, a consideration of utopian/dystopian manifestation is focused. Since the construction of the dreamscape is determined by the dream/fantasy of the ideals in the accumulation of simulacra which features the ambiguity between true and false, the dreamscape therefore entails a quality of vagueness. It also serves as a manifestation of the hyperreal in which the supremacy of the so-called “paradise/heaven” is challenged by simulacra and simulation. Both ideas “paradise” and “heaven,” posited in the utopian/dystopian dreamscape, might be construed as the pure names in the scope of dreams in which vain hopes or idle fantasies dominate.

Through the consideration of the utopian/dystopian dreamscape, then follows a question of meaning, which seems to manifest itself as another hint of vagueness and equivocality in Dickinson’s consideration of a “certain Slant of light.” In the utopian/dystopian aspect of simulation and simulacra, it is always questioned whether meaning is always absolute and determined with any signs of fixation within the mazy dreamscape. However, meaning seems always (dis)placed in a spectrum of multiplicity and diversity, and a certain degree of fluidity comes to dominate. In this

manner, here comes again a similar question of simulacra and simulation. The ultimate can be, in the utopian/dystopian dreamscape, the lack of distinction and confusion between the real and the imaginary, as Dickinson writes, “As made Reality a Dream / And Dreams, Reality –.”

The last chapter, Chapter Five, concludes the anatomy of Dickinson’s poems with an overall review of the findings of each chapter. I try to display the possible significances of a Baudrillardian reading of Dickinson. Potentials for further extension and exploration will be also elucidated with regard to comprehensive understanding of Emily Dickinson’s poems.



Chapter Two

Dream with Simulacra

I. Introduction

Like her other poems of different subjects, Emily Dickinson's dream poems have always been impressing her loyal readers with an overwhelming multiplicity of possible interpretations. Among others, the most attractive and interesting can be the poem J 531 "We dream – it is good we are dreaming –" (McCabe 279). As Brian McCabe suggests, the poem interestingly proposes a certain optimistic perspective that the act of dreaming is seen theorized as playful and healthy (279). Consistent with the positive aspect of dream and dreaming, McCabe defines the concluding line "It's pruder – to dream –" as suggesting a certain comparative goodness of the decision "to dream" and, in some ways, idealizing the imagery of dream as a certain form of shelter from the waking world (279).

McCabe's interpretation here may suffice for any Dickinson reader to tell the poet's sensitive awareness of the dream-reality contrast. However, with a careful thinking about the interpretive diversity of the poem, the poem in fact can challenge the analytic optimism of the shelter association with considerably more interpretive problems ignited by the word "pruder."

Concerning its associated meanings, the word “prudent(er)” seems to import a great semantical duality, leading to a more extreme ambiguity of comprehension. As the *Emily Dickinson Lexicon* tells, this dubious word, while indicating a conceptual association with wisdom, also involves a prime sense of caution (“prudent” *EDL*). The wisdom-caution duality seen from the denotations of the word, in this sense, complicates the concluding line “It’s pruder – to dream –” with a certain interpretive complexity. On one hand, a reader may recognise the decision “to dream” as a “pruder” and wiser means of avoiding the waking world. A “pruder” decision “to dream,” on the other hand, can however implicate a certain subtle and nuanced situation of caution that, apart from resting on to be awake, a decision-maker has “to dream” even more carefully.

In this regard, awkwardly but interestingly, the concluding line seems to assert a less simple-minded but more complicated perspective on dream and dreaming. If “to dream” indicates a circumstance which might involve a more cautious state of mind, then to some extent, dream can hardly be seen as a shelter. An ominous aspect of dream is thus presented as that which is saturated with threat and fear. A question also precedes as to whether dream and dreaming suggest goodness or not. In this respect, the perspective of the poet on dream and dreaming might perceivably become an elusive problem for the whole edifice of the poem.

The elusiveness of the poem, therefore, may require readers to re-define the signification of dream and dreaming. It raises critical questions such as on what ground and in what manner dream and dreaming insinuate an undecidability between positivity and negativity. The undecidability of dream and dreaming seems also to make vague and call into question the distinctive edge between dream and reality. To elucidate these preliminary questions about dream and dreaming, it seems particularly helpful to associate Jean Baudrillard's concept of simulacra and simulation, which shares a thoughtful insight into the complexity of the simulacrum and its notorious play on differentiation of the imaginary and the alleged "reality." With the work of Baudrillard's concept of such matter, I intend to define Emily Dickinson's dream as fantasy about pursuing the ideal, mainly focusing on the problem of signs which precede what is desired and the problem of hyper-reality signs formulate. I would also like to reveal in this chapter that the exemplary dream poems of Emily Dickinson, pregnant with the philosophical investigation of the simulacrum of ideals, not only shed a profound light on the distinctive uncertainty of the dream image but also give incredible insight into its sheer deceptiveness in a nuanced sense.

II. Warning against Dream and Dreaming

As seen earlier, the interpretively difficult dream poem “We dream – it is good we are dreaming –” is more surprisingly penetrated by an apparent tone of warning in its entirety. The dominant sense of warning seems traceable in the very beginning of the poem, in which the first two stanzas address a sensitive awareness of, as Helen Vendler suggests, “the intent to kill” (263) and, too, of the dubious playfulness of “the ghastly game being played in dream” (261). Vendler explores the warning signs sparkled in this poem. The sensitive awareness observed here not only clarifies the critical attention of warning which targets the playful but dangerous game of killing in dream, but also crystallizes, to some extent, the perilous aspect of dreaming which in fact can derive from the playfulness of the game-like practice of killing.

Noticeably, an attitude of sarcasm and scepticism is seen in the first two stanzas:

We dream – it is good we are dreaming –

It would hurt us – were we awake –

But since it is playing – kill us,

And we are playing – shriek –

What harm? Men die – Externally –

It is a truth – of Blood –

But we – are dying in Drama –

And Drama – is never dead –

The playfulness, for instance, which arguably attaches to a game of fright, is interwoven with the obvious intent to hurt and kill. Just inasmuch as the poem describes “it is playing – kill us / And we are playing – shriek –,” this sense of playfulness serves to victimize whoever indulges in dream. With a sense of dramatic embodiment, an experience of death perceived here seems to be neutralized rather as a certain on-stage performance in which the dream-victimized “we,” though escaping from its doom determined “Externally” in reality by “a truth – of Blood –,” becomes compelled to perform in the plot-like situation of being “dying in Drama.” As regards the staged scheme of victimization, the benign sense of dreaming, which accords with the assertion that “it is good we are dreaming –,” attracts critical attention of great scepticism. The assertion of positive dreaming, with this respect, become regarded as but a conditional occurrence. The “It” which “would hurt us – were we awake –,” seems to refer more preferably to the fact itself that “we are dreaming –,” instead of reality.

Noticeably, the signal of warning is intensified when the poem proceeds to the last two stanzas which pattern a troop of words of notice such as “Cautious,” “Lest,” and, again, “prudenter”:

Cautious – We jar each other –
And either – open the eyes –
Lest the Phantasm – prove the Mistake –
And the livid Surprise

Cool us to Shafts of Granite –
With just an Age – and Name –
And perhaps a phrase in Egyptian –
It's pruder – to dream –

These words of notice here magnify the potential ominous outcome of the ghostly game. The “We,” which is victimised by the act of dreaming, must seek for a means of prevention and self-preservation. Of great significance, the mechanism of defence here, followed by the reminder “Lest the Phantasm – prove the Mistake,” seems helpfully to ignite a critical attention of certain apprehension, while the end-scene of the game is portrayed as climaxing with an eager search for any “Mistake” which concerns the dramatic tension of duality between the cautious “We” and the aggressive “Phantasm.”⁵ Just as the last two stanzas contrive to elaborate, the

⁵ Vendler’s association, it seems that, serves to help with a deeper vision about the presence of the “Phantasm.” Arguably, it seems discernible that the dramatic tension of duality may actually serve as just a pivotal aim of the warning signs, insofar as one may witness in between, as Vendler

“Phantasm” here seems not only embodied as the supreme executor of death which serves to terminate the game in dream, but also, more significantly, perceived as lurking as a fierce predator of preying upon the occurrence of a possible careless “Mistake.”

The analogy of the predator-prey rivalry, to some extent, seems to amplify the dramatized embodiment of death. The wrongly behaved “We” meet with an unexpected strike of “Surprise” so livid that the death-experience may be sinisterly visualized. Arguably, not only is the plot-like entrapping of being “dying in Drama” clarified in an emphatic sense, as foreshadowing a later cruel macabre potential in a dynamic hunt game. An overwhelming picture of death-sentence also seems therefore manifested. The “Mistake” confirmed by “the Phantasm,” as the poem resolves, determines an utmost consequence of fixation which compels to “Cool us to Shafts of Granite – / With just an Age – and Name – / And perhaps a phrase in Egyptian –.”

Arguably, the last scene of the poem impressively presents a final judgement. This judgment is also a consequence that derives from dreaming. It is a predicament that dreaming in fact brings massive signs of what is desired and dangerously fix anyone who dreams. “Age,” “Name,” “a phrase in Egyptian” in fact are something that a dreamer can dream of, in a way, indicating certain form of desire, prosperity, or

interestingly comes to inspire, a fierce rivalry of a deadly hunt between a predator and its desperately hounded prey (262).

success. Yet, to some extent, they are actually only signs. They are signs that not only precede what is desired but also, riskily, lead to a certain misery of dreamers.

III. Dreaming about the Ideal

The intense landscape of death-scenes explored above clarifies the menacing sense of dreaming which accentuates the intent to kill in a ghastly game of hunt. It is especially discerned that the “Phantasm” demonstrates a certain degree of aggression and aims its focus of attack at the mistakenly behaved “We.” However, the aggressive attack of the “Phantasm” driven by the disclosure of the “Mistake,” for some curious readers, cannot so much suffice to resolve the interpretive possibility of the poem. Rather, critical attention can lie in a further consideration of what the so-called dream may possibly signify. Furthermore, another point worthy of further exploration can also occur with an extensive question of what “Mistake” can significantly imply and associate. These questions can acquire great significance for more in-depth consideration of the dream subject.

With the advent of these newly inspired questions, perhaps McCabe has already reminded us of some access to what the dream may signify when he thematically locates the crucial facets of dream in Dickinson’s poems: “the indistinct, the distant, and often the unreachable in any earthly sense” (279). Indeed, if one

associates a dream which occurs in sleep, the three facets of the Dickinsonian dream pinpointed here, to some extent, seems to signal distinctively the properties of a sleeping dream in which mental images are manifested elusive and opaque. However, the association of a sleeping dream seems to paralyze readers with a riddle of how a sleeping dream displays a dangerous game of hunt played with the “Phantasm” searching “Mistake.” What remains unsolvable is the mystery of what “Mistake” would be made. In this sense, the association of the Dickinsonian dream with a sleeping dream does not suffice to be regarded as a promising answer to the questions concerning the menacing sense of dreaming.

Perhaps, a close look at the definition of the word “dream” can be a helpful stimulus for the conceptual consideration of the dream subject. Of greatest significance, there indeed stands an alternative cluster of the associated meanings of the word “dream.” While the word “dream” associates “a series of images ... generated by mental activity during sleep,” as the *Oxford English Dictionary* reminds, this word in fact also alternatively denotes noun-wise as “an ideal,” “a vain hope or idle fantasy” and verb-wise as “to imagine and envisage as if in a dream” (“Dream,” *OED*). Interestingly, the denotations of an ideal and a fantasy explored in the word “dream” here arguably emphasise the elusive nature of the Dickinsonian dream. An ideal and a fantasy, likewise, are often represented as being indistinct, distant, and

unreachable in an earthly sense. In this sense, it is clear that the so-called dream in Dickinson's poem can be actually associated as an ideal and a fantasy, or fantasy about desiring for the ideal.

IV. Mistaking Dream & Reality and the Deceptive Ambiguity in Simulacra

Indeed, the reading of the dream image of Dickinson as fantasy about desiring for the ideal clarifies the previously raised question about what the menacing dream and dreaming may signify. However, the subversive perspective on the hurtfulness of the ideal seems arguably to impel readers to investigate further the mystery of how dreaming the ideal manifests itself as being hurtful. It also provokes the previous suspicion of what possible "Mistake" would be involved for an ideal-fascinated dreamer.

Perhaps, a promising access to the further investigation lies in the distinctive presence of the "Phantasm," whose aggressiveness of hunt is found saturated in the playfulness of the game in dream. In fact, the depiction of the playful game in dream where the "Phantasm" lurks, to some extent, seemingly comes to remind readers of Jean Baudrillard's notable phrase "a play of illusions and phantasms" (12). He uses the phrase to describe the world of Disneyland exemplarily as "the perfect model of all the entangled orders of simulacra" (12). In this sense, the dream, which playfully

schemes the fierce hunt of the “Phantasm,” may actually articulate a certain similarity with what Baudrillard diagnoses as the matrix of the orders of simulacra. The lurking “Phantasm,” in this regard, may, to some extent, manipulate the fundamental nature of simulacra.

Interestingly, as regards this conceptual association with the phrase “a play of illusions and phantasms,” Baudrillard’s notion of simulacra and simulation sees the hurtful nature of fantasy about pursuing the ideal. Of greatest importance, in light of Baudrillard’s diagnosis, the ultimate threat actually lies in the simulacral truth that the imaginary-reality division is concealed. As Baudrillard emphatically reveals in the example of Disneyland,

Disneyland exists in order to hide that it is the “real” country, all of “real” America that is Disneyland ... Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, whereas all of Los Angeles and the America that surrounds it are no longer real ...

(12)

Here, the order of simulation “threatens the difference between the ‘true’ and the ‘false’, the ‘real’ and the ‘imaginary’” (Baudrillard 3). The edge between the imaginary and reality has been distorted and re-situated by being arbitrarily displaced with a newly imported real-unreal division. In this manner, with simulation, a certain

division between reality and fantasy in fact is remade and foster a certain reality to make one believe the realness of the “produced” reality. In this regard, the perception of reality, with the formulation of the concealing divide in between, is challenged and misconceived. The so-called reality in fact is just derive from nothing. Or, strikingly, it can just serve as a creation of the hyperreal, a state of reality that, with simulacra, becomes more real than the real.

Arguably, the sensitive attention to the problem of reality may actually unfold a pivotal aspect of the reality-concealing operation of the hyperreal. As Baudrillard explores, the ultimate pattern of concealing and believe-making altogether pertains to “the hyperreal order” (12) which signals “no longer a question of a false representation of reality . . . but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real” (12). It is clarified that, the believe-making strategy of the order of simulation for distorting the imaginary-real division in fact masks the utmost detachment of reality from its referent. The masking culminates in the null existence of reality.⁶ In this regard, the “reality,” has been rendered as only a sign of reality and has been superseded by the hyperreal.

⁶ Alternatively, John Lechte reads a significance of an imaginary. He identifies “an imaginary governed by the entirely autonomous simulacrum” which imports “a sign or an image without a referent or a real object, a sign that cannot be exchanged for reality” (104).

In this sense, this certain produced reality out of none can be deceptive and, with the distortion and the arbitrary division displacement, challenge the perception of reality in a bewildering manner. A dramatic state of the turmoil of the relation between the “real” and the “imaginary” can be seen in the difficulty in recognizing the camps of reality and the imaginary and ultimately culminates in an inescapable confusion in between.

The anatomy of hyper-reality certainly unfolds a simulacral picture that involves the deceptive mannerism of concealing and believe-making. Perhaps, another short piece of the dream poem “Dreams are the subtle Dower” (J 1376) has already reminded readers of this distinctive mannerism of deception:

Dreams are the subtle Dower

That make us rich an Hour –

Then fling us poor

Out of the purple Door

Into the Precinct raw

Possessed before –

Here, with the creative association with the “Dower,” the deceptive mannerism of dream-fantasy is visualized in a financial sense. The conflict of the twist between being rich and poor is instantly but dramatically encountered. This sudden distortion

in the state of possession, significantly, not only signifies the capriciousness of fantasy. It also confronts the victimized dreamer and unfolds the dreamer's certain inability of perceiving and recognizing reality. Arguably, the deception of this fantasy can be witnessed in the misunderstanding of reality perception. The dream-fantasy, somehow, encourages the dreamer to make believe in a certain positive "richness" of his/her certain "reality." Yet, in fact it conceals the emptiness of these dream-fantasies. The concealing of the emptiness in fantasy leads to a change to "poorness." It is recognized that a certain "reality" of wealth is fabricated and made believe, with the demonstration of the deceptive mannerism of dream.

Arguably, the second short piece of dream poem accentuates the duality between dream-fantasy and a dreamer. In this regard, the distinctive change in intensification of the poetic tones here, somehow, can ignite an extensive association of what ultimate consequence a dreamer can end in.

Another Dickinson dream-poem "Doom is the House without the Door –" (J 475) to some extent, explains the final end of a dreamer:

Doom is the House without the Door –

'Tis entered from the Sun –

And then the Ladder's thrown away,

Because Escape – is done –

'Tis varied by the Dream

Of what they do outside –

Where Squirrels play – and Berries die –

And Hemlocks – bow – to God –

An ultimate landscape of the destiny of a dreamer seems here deciphered with a dominating spatial metaphor “House without the Door.” Significantly, the spatial metaphor not only visualizes the inevitability of a dreamer’s “Doom,” but also signals the compulsory entrapping of a dreamer in his/her “Doom” “varied by the Dream.” An utmost encounter between the dreamer and his/her fantasy about what is desired seems thus interestingly described in an arguable sense. The dream of the ideal actually serves not only to terminate a dreamer in his/her death, but also, in a more authorized manner, to determine the inevitable fate of the dreamer whose whole edifice of life seems to be shaped as an inescapable prison.

As regards the deceptive mannerism of fantasy about what is desired, the dream-determined destiny of an ideal-fascinated dreamer however describes a lamentable situation. The inevitable prison-like fate is however unrecognizable for an ideal-fascinated dreamer. The perception of reality, in one’s dreaming, can be unboundedly challenged, and the simulacra-distorted division between reality and

dream is intertwined with the principles of concealing and believe-making.

V. Conclusion

With the destiny of an ideal-fascinated dreamer examined, the poems discussed in the chapter can just suffice, for readers, to uncover an ultimately comprehensive understanding of the deceptive mannerism of dream and dreaming. As explored in relation to Baudrillard's concept of simulacra and simulation, the deceptive mannerism of dream as fantasy about the ideal is derived from the logics of concealing and believe-making. This insight not only complicates the dream image in Dickinson's work as simulacra. It also accentuates the conceptual vagueness of the reality-ideal division. The omnipresent fabrication of the so-called "reality," with the work of the simulacral dream-fantasy, culminates in a bewildering landscape which invalidates an attempt to clarify reality from dream and an imaginary. Consequentially, the fact that comes to a dreamer, as seen in Dickinson's poems, is the state of being entrapped and being victimized as a plaything in his/her fascinating vision of what is ideally desired. A dreamer is left in a simulacral play of illusions and phantasms.

Chapter Three

Dreaming in Society

I. Introduction

With such a postmodernist aspect of Dickinson's poetics discovered, it is certain that these Dickinson lyrics serve to invite her readers to meditate hard on some difficult human situations. The postmodern landscape of hyper-reality the poems delineate, in particular, not merely imparts to us a critical understanding that dreams we desire can be just simulacral fantasies, neither imaginary nor falsely generated.⁷ More significantly, it also in the sense serves to inspire, educate, and enlighten us to apprehend in Dickinson's poems that these simulacral fantasies exert a certain power of confinement, whereby one is reduced to pursue a sheer semiotic emptiness, with no content or real-imaginary differentiation survived in a seeming realness and authenticity.

However, concerning the overwhelming—at times, traumatising—complexity

⁷ Though critics such as William Pawlett tend to understand simulacra as illusions which is formulated through an endless circuit of pure images ("Simulation" 71), it is still important to note that Baudrillard's simulacra is actually a more paradoxical concept which in fact precedes the divisions of the true/false, and the real/imaginary. For Baudrillard, "the simulacrum is true" (*Simulacra and Simulation* 1). The claim of the trueness of the simulacrum critically suggests that one may wrongly understand the simulacrum if, while examining it, a focus on the true/false or real/imaginary oppositions is still employed.

implicit in her exquisitely constructed lines, we seem hardly to claim that such an analytic pattern is sufficient to exhibit a totalising perspective for understanding Dickinson's poetry. As Robert Weisbuch contends, "Dickinson's poems are not about a subject matter but enact a way of seeing everything at once" (198). Not alone is the all-inclusiveness here regarded as characterising much of Dickinson's poetry, which in a sense accentuates and celebrates the interpretive diversity of her every single piece of work. The implied inaptness here that one may insularly interpret Dickinson in sole consideration of one subject, in fact, to some extent, also proceeds to advocate a sense of critical broadness that issues in her poetry shall be more extensively associated with a wider range of many different pieces, despite their subject-wise irrelevance at the outset.⁸ It is made clear that in Dickinson nothing is able to be plainly examined. There are always intense confluences where various perspectives come to join and encourage an abundance of inspections on her oeuvre as a whole.

In this regard, a worthwhile aspect that deserves further attention, for instance, can lie in the particular social aspect with which these simulacral dream-fantasies is arguably involved. For Baudrillard, the omnipresent penetration of simulacra is

⁸ Robert Weisbuch in fact here embraces the uncertainty of Emily Dickinson's poetry which generations of critical essays however have long aimed to resolve. He encourages three "dogmatic orders" of reading Emily Dickinson as an interpretive access to this, as he names, "undogmatic poet": "Don't point; don't pry; don't settle for one truth" (197). See Robert Weisbuch's article "Prisming Dickinson; or, Gathering Paradise by Letting Go," collected in *The Emily Dickinson Handbook*, pp. 197-223.

socially influential; it is our social life that Baudrillard pays much attention to and, mostly in his works, considers an imperative field which facilitates the fundamental operation of the machinery of simulacra. In his other important work *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, Baudrillard makes clear such an understanding of simulacra by expounding that simulacra themselves “involve social relations and a social power” (“Order” 52). As is obviously suggested, the “social relations and a social power”—both qualities serve to sketch out the imperative understanding that the simulacrum is recognised as socially embroiled. It is clearly indicated that, the simulacrum, rather than an ultimate sign-structure with no referent, can more crucially point to a kind of social phenomenon which, inter alia, entails a considerable degree of control over a relational structure.

Concerning such a socially related perspective on Baudrillard’s simulacra, one key point that is especially worthy of a further look lies in what he identifies as “a social power.” In a sense, it consecutively directs our focus on the simulacrum to a more detailed picture of its social ascendancy which orbits around its formulated orders.⁹ William Pawlett explains the orders of simulacra with a more complete sense

⁹ In “The Order of Simulacra,” included in his another characteristic works *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, Baudrillard maps out the genealogy of the three orders of simulacra: the counterfeit, production, and simulation. Each order points to the successive variation of the law of value since the Renaissance. Though they separately parallel different periods of time, we must uphold a view that the three orders are joined by one another rather than being set apart independently in a linear progress of time. For

of socialness: “[t]he orders of simulacra are devices of social control, power structures which produce specific social relations based on binary disjunction” (“Simulacra,” *The Baudrillard Dictionary* 197). Certainly, in reiterating Baudrillard’s focus on a social power of simulacra, Pawlett’s explanation here poses clarity on the function of the simulacrum that, as a social controlling method, centres on the subjection of social relations to its operational model. However, more significantly, he comes to supplement Baudrillard’s original words conceptually with its emphatic acuity on binary oppositions. It is seen that the simulacrum not just embodies a peculiar “order” which disciplines our interactions with others; in a social milieu, it also more dynamically manipulates such an order with the join of binary oppositions.

With such a profundity of simulacra clarified, a promising connection is that Dickinson’s fantasies can be associated with their social entailment aroused by Baudrillard’s view on simulacra. Not only can the analysis of the alleged fantasies be aligned with the trajectory of the influences of simulacra in social life. A search for the ascendancy of Dickinson’s simulacral fantasies necessarily requires a propitious inspection of the social aspect of her works. It is important to elucidate whether and how the fantasies in Dickinson—since they are theoretically regarded as practicing the traits of simulacra—can formulate a certain “social power” that controls our

more details, see Baudrillard. “The Order of Simulacra.” *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, 50-86; William Pawlett. “Simulation and the End of the Social.” *Jean Baudrillard: Against Banality*, 71.

“social relations” with others under a power structure, especially in terms of binary oppositions.

To expound the questions, the social aspect of Emily Dickinson’s writing can be rather significant. It surely serves as a rather auspicious access which ushers in careful consideration of the nuances of simulacral fantasies in her poetry, in terms of their social qualities. Undoubtedly, the socialness of her works has always been an academically attractive subject. Numerous critical essays, despite their differences in critical focus, share a great interpretive zeal for revealing the poet and her poetry as the most socially devoted. Kenneth Stocks and Audrey Curtis, for instance, consider the poet social by not only regarding her as “a realist poet of the human social order” (Stocks 86) but also identifying her independent spirit and mind from her deliberate decision on ignoring some social rules (Curtis 784-5). Some critics, such as Caroline Ann Morris, Helen Vendler, Sharon Leiter, to name a few, pose a more text-analytical standpoint which views her most famed poem on madness (J435) as her personal social criticism against the undiscerning majority (Morris 558; Vendler 273; Leiter 143). Further, there is even a philosophical focus held by Christopher Benfey, who unfolds the very socialness of the poet from her writing on the expressiveness of others with “a preoccupation with gesture and physiognomy,” and “an awareness of the human body as, in a sense, a landscape” (2). Benfey’s focus here on the poet’s

social side circles mostly around an idea of “nearness” whereby the poet is seen to develop among her lines a careful view of relationality among people in general (64).

It is clear that these critical perspectives contrive to build up a rich landscape of manifold and various social insights of Dickinson—in particular concerning the problem of others and society.

Of these readings, our further attention shall be given to Kenneth Stocks’s study, which compellingly interrogates the issue of social order. His monograph *Emily Dickinson and the Modern Consciousness: A Poet of Our Time* not only defines Dickinson as a modernist “realist poet of the human social order,” which apparently sheds light on a direct concern for the reality of a certain social order. More compellingly, it also associates the poet’s insightful responses to the confronting crisis of such a social reality.¹⁰ For Stocks, Dickinson’s literary oeuvre often articulates an attempting quest for liberty and emancipation from predicaments of the reality of the abyss situation (88). In this sense in light of Stocks, it is the human social order that significantly becomes a pivotal arena where the poet intends to mediate the difficulties derived from this reality. Emily Dickinson’s poetry, with “an acute, lyrically expressed, sense of loss of human value and potential” revealed, often

¹⁰ Stocks’s consideration of reality is clarified not as referring to an ultimate transcendental one, but instead the immediate one “of any accepted social custom, form or practice which obscures or violates the human” (66). For more details, see his another chapter “Reality as Abyss,” pp. 66-73.

portrays the human social order as a negative role which reduces the real human values to a certain meaningless of what the critic later identifies as “mere instrumentality in the service of things” (Stocks 93). Here, Stocks’s term “instrumentality” not only crystallises the subtle victimization of an individual by the reification in a social reality. Impressively, it also illuminates the poet’s prescient sensitivity to the social order whose predicament still admittedly remains in our post-modern age.

With Stocks’s reading, it becomes perceptible that Dickinson’s poetics reveals a sentimental attitude towards a reality that reifies an individual as a sheer instrument in his/her exposition to a material-founded social domain. Undeniably, following these critical readings, we are in particular exposed to the richness of social keenness that is sketched in Dickinson’s writing. However, these critical readings, to some extent, also seemingly suggest their argumentative narrowness. Critical readings, which particularly pinpoint the inclination of her social criticism, entraps her readers to understand the poet in a simplistic binary antagonism between minority and majority, individual and society, and the normal and the abnormal. Such a simplicity, occasionally, not only coincides with the “one-dimensional Dickinsons” that Robert

Weisbuch assails (198)¹¹ but, in a sense, limits the interpretive potential of her works as well in a somewhat narrow sphere of understanding. The philosophical strand in Christopher Benfey's view on a relation of "nearness," likewise, also displays narrowness. His view less convincingly accounts for the entirety of what can be involved in social relations in Dickinson's writing. One can even observe from Stocks's perspective the inadequate clarification of his vocabulary about the social. It remains a mystery what "social order" Stocks exactly refers to as a leading factor for the instrumentality of human beings. Critically, his emphatic phrase "mere instrumentality in the service of things," in a sense, also deserves more inspection. Not only should one examine how this phenomenon of the human-value reduction is formulated by the questionable "social order." It is also worthwhile to probe further in what degree and manner such a reductive phenomenon suffices to manifest itself as influential in our life.

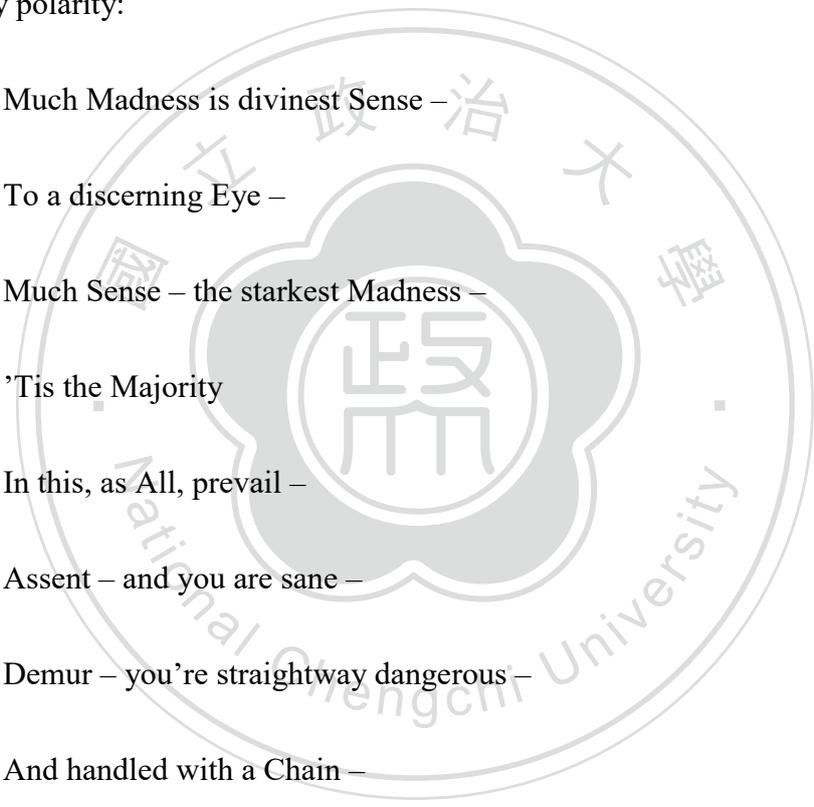
In fact, the social insights which Dickinson has written on are much more

¹¹ Weisbuch's emphasis on a plethora of interpretive potentials in Dickinson's poems, in a sense, welcomes a comparison with Robert McClure Smith's view on the mazy seductiveness of the poet's writing, which with ambiguity or duplicity interrogated also pinpoints an excess of interpretations of her poetry. Viewing her texts as "open-ended" (5), Smith similarly suggests an openness of texts' complexity that seduces and leaves a reader/interpreter a-mazed but forcibly active in text-production. Smith argues that "The text entices the reader, leading him or her on and in, playing on the reader's desire for meaning through a process that continually thwarts it, this culminating in a successful reader/text interaction that produces another text of the reader's own making, which is, in itself, a complete poetic expression and not a mere copy of the original" (10). For more details, see his *The Seductions of Emily Dickinson*.

nuanced, and the depiction of a “social order” in Dickinson’s writing is even diversely traceable in the Baudrillardian perspective. In particular, the freshly ignited inquiry on a social order surprisingly rhymes with our early concern about Dickinson’s writing on fantasies which entails the underlying modulation of simulacra of an order of social control. The study on Dickinson’s social order should be supplemented with a reading which collaborates with the concept of simulacra and discussions on fantasies in her texts. Thus, as distinct from the previous readings, I in this chapter will interrogate the Baudrillardian perspective on simulacra and simulation—which, as seen previously, helps shed light on the simulacral nature of fantasies—and investigate several other Dickinson poems as examples. I will crystallise how her writing not only depicts “social order” as constructed through simulacral fantasies but also casts into question its imbued intensity with binary oppositions. A consecutive point worthy of more exploration lies in the effectiveness of this simulacra-constructed social order in a milieu where our social relations are seriously regulated with our fantasies. In particular, I intend to suggest that part of Dickinson’s poetry distinctively manifests a subversive deepness which compels her readers to call into question the alleged authority of what society tends to normalise and nuancedly recognise its emptiness and simulacral manifestation.

II. The Simulacra-constructed Social Order and Social Relations

Emily Dickinson's poetry, albeit ambivalently, indeed sketches a profundity with which a kind of social order is emphatically reiterated. In one of her most famed poems "Much Madness is the divinest Sense" (J 435) one can, for example, easily discern a serious depiction of a certain social order which serves to determine the social relationality between an individual and a majority, under the umbrella of the madness-sanity polarity:



Much Madness is divinest Sense –
To a discerning Eye –
Much Sense – the starkest Madness –
'Tis the Majority
In this, as All, prevail –
Assent – and you are sane –
Demur – you're straightway dangerous –
And handled with a Chain –

In this poem, not obtusely can one detect the poem's overt aggression against such social connections. Noticeable among many critical readings is the poem's overall tone of harshness towards the arbitrariness which the social order features. Some readers may thus immediately give consent to Caroline Ann Morris's argument that

the poem is “a biting social criticism” (558).¹² In a critical sense, one may also enthusiastically agree with Audrey Curtis, who observes that the poem showcases Dickinson’s wilfulness to either ignore or defy many of the rules of etiquette—especially in the Victorian age (784). Sharon Leiter’s reading, which pinpoints how the repressed anger of the poem reciprocates society’s treatment of non-conformity, might equally satisfy one’s hermeneutic excitement for comprehending Dickinson (“Much Madness” 143). A consistency of similar critical foci on the Dickinson piece, for some readers, can even find expression in Helen Vendler’s analysis in which this particular attitude of rebelliousness is examined in an emotionally sensitive way.¹³ Built upon these readings, a brief concluding point is that aggressiveness against the social order indeed serves as a foremost dominant access to the significance of the poem.

¹² For Morris, this poem is rather critical, or, say, even a bit cynical. By announcing a deliberate inversion of the madness-sanity system, it indeed practices its sharp sarcasm against such existing criteria and tends to promote “sanity up to a higher standard,” a diviner value which requires better insights (Morris 558). Here, with Morris’s reading, not only can the poet’s disdain for and withdrawal from this rob-like, undiscerning majority be intensely read, as the poem writes that “’Tis the Majority / In this, as All, prevail –.” More significantly, the definitional parallelism that “Much Madness is divinest Sense – / . . . / Much Sense – the starkest Madness –” also serves to crystallise her obvious distrust for the established social norms which are measured out of a “discerning Eye.”

¹³ Visualising the social position of any defiant and demurring minds from the poet’s treatment of the consequence of “chain handling,” Vendler in fact reports a vivid but chill-blooded testament of the existing rules which entails the intensity of “the social exclusion and revenge”: “If you demur, eight words [in the poem] are necessary to see the dangerous You excluded, ‘handled,’ and chained” (“620” 273).

However, concerning the interpretive diversity that Dickinson's writing involves, such a way of understanding this Dickinson poem in fact wavers the significance of social order. Readers seem likely to be entrapped in a certain surge of antagonism within the poem. Critically, the social order in Dickinson can be more nuancedly examined. Read with Jean Baudrillard, the social order as such in the poem is more arguably seen as fabricated by simulacral fantasies which, through the operation of simulation, accumulate their semiotic referential of binary oppositions.

In his conception of simulacra and simulation, Jean Baudrillard fundamentally interrogates the fabrication of an order in the postmodernist social condition of the hyperreal. Not only for him is the order observed as socially practiced,¹⁴ but, in his *Simulacra and Simulation*, he also perceives that “*law and order themselves might be nothing but simulation*” (20). It is pinpointed that the models of control which serve to dominate our society are the produced effects of simulacra whose perfectness is accomplished along with their radiant fascination.¹⁵ One can see that, in Baudrillard's concern, what is generally referred to as an order is the assemblage of artificial

¹⁴ As William Pawlett supplements, “the orders only come about and are maintained *through social practice*” (“Simulation,” *Jean Baudrillard: Against Banality* 73).

¹⁵ In his *Simulacra and Simulation* Baudrillard indeed describes simulacra as “perfect . . . forever radiant with their own fascination” (5). Here, the phrase “fascination” is particularly noteworthy in that it actually embodies the overwhelming attractiveness of the effect of simulacra to distort one's perception of the so-called reality.

semiotic manufactures that are socially formulated by simulacra. Yet, critically, for Baudrillard, the artificiality¹⁶ of the so-called order is in fact a rather complex one intertwined with certain desires of our culture. As he argues, “our culture dreams, behind this defunct power that it tries to annex, of an order that would have had nothing to do with it” (*Simulacra and Simulation* 10). Here clearly, it is our culture that dreams and engages in demanding the particular fabrication (or simulation) of a certain order. It is the culture with which we live intimately that longs for, anticipates, fantasises, and even produces as well as simulates a particular order which, albeit exhibited fundamentally irrelevant to its power, is devised to exert it. On this point, not only can the fundamental truth of power and order be more understood, but one can even further detect that what is allegedly an order is just part of what our culture dreams of and fantasises, something generated in the form of simulation based on emptiness.

Concerning the empty artificiality of social order, Baudrillard further points to the complete formulation of a sign-system saturated with all semiotic substitutes in the logic of simulation. As Baudrillard points out,

the era of simulation is inaugurated by a liquidation of all

¹⁶ Jean Baudrillard argues in *Simulacra and Simulation* that “[t]he real is produced from miniaturized cells, matrices, and memory banks, models of control—and it can be reproduced an indefinite number of times from these” (2).

referentials—worse: with their artificial resurrection in the systems of signs, a material more malleable than meaning, in that it lends itself to all systems of equivalences, to all binary oppositions, to all combinatory algebra. (*Simulacra and Simulation 2*)

Here seriously unravelled is the exchange of the referential whose annihilation has announced not only the clearance of what is traceably referred to but also its thorough taken-over by all which is recognised as “semiurgical materials”¹⁷ It is of much importance to note that the semiotic revival of the referential, or the referent, to use other critics’ language, is in fact radically understood as the practice of codification which serves to re-inject the presence of signs into all systematic structures. As here exemplarily suggested, matrixes that include all binary oppositions can seemingly be recognised as epitomising the fact. It is in this sense that we are even privileged to further conceive that Baudrillard’s view on an order not only focuses on its simulation which is socially practiced, but, further, diagnoses in the fabrication of such order the absorption of the semiotic which annexes the circuitry of binary oppositions.

In light of Baudrillard’s conception here, this Dickinson poem can be never as simple as generally perceived. The social order sketched in the poem is not only likewise fundamentally codified with some binary oppositions which are built upon

¹⁷ This term is specified in William Pawlett’s summary of Baudrillard’s perspective on simulacra. See “Simulation and the End of the Social,” *Jean Baudrillard: Against Banality*, p. 71.

no referents but their semiotically resurrected corpses. Significantly, it also manifests itself as the product of simulation that is necessitated, fabricated, fantasised, and administrated by certain desires seen in a culture of a social group. The debating conflicts embedded in the particular order, or, say, the method of social control, in this sense, are more arguably the radical embodiment of such collective desires in which fantasies are nurtured and accumulated at the level of signs for the purpose of regulating social relations among people.

As we are thus familiar with the poem, registered in the social order here are clearly the intensity of binary contradictions between some opposing concepts such as “Assent” and “Demur,” “Sense” (or sanity) and “Madness,” “Majority” and minority, the included and the excluded, the approved and the ostracised, the “Discerning” and the undiscerning, and so forth. With the inserted emergence of the “You,” which clearly serves as an exemplary subject to the effectiveness of the order, it is seen that the drama of “Assent” and “Demur” registers the deep desire of “The Majority” which necessitates such an order as a means of disciplining and regulating how an individual behaves in the social relations. Indicated with the sense of the word “prevail” in the middle of the poem, the specific desire for the need of social control are in particular critically emphasised as not only noticeable but also predominant. An individual, as consecutively portrayed in the poem, is clearly impelled to oscillate

between the assent-demur dilemma which traumatically allows the narrowness of the binary decision-making. He/she opts either, in conformity with the majority, to be someone publicly regarded as one of the sane minds with words affirming that “. . . and you are sane –,” or, conversely, to be the dangerous whose disputing voice thus precipitates the handling “with a Chain.” The decision-limited predicament, impressively here, not only renders predictable and dramatically visible both the severe friction and the subtle irreconcilability between certain binary groups, such as the “sane” sensible and the “dangerous” mad, as well as the approved and the ostracised. In a critical sense, it proceeds to epitomise a certain submissiveness to the effective mechanism of social categorisation which adheres to the given social ideals, labels, positions or names that are forged, defined, acknowledged, and even celebrated by a vast majority.

The absoluteness of the given social ideals is clearly manifested. It critically evidences the linguistic arbitrariness of the definitions of these ideals which fascinates a majority for the facilitation of the determination of one’s social position. The introductory parallelism of “Madness” and “Sense” in the poem, whether or not it serves the purpose of inversion, arguably elaborates the delicate malleability of meaning. This way, a set of standards is detected as conditionally shaped along with

the binary concepts to determine, indicate, and label what one can socially be.¹⁸ In this regard, as opposed to the enforcement of social exclusion, the image of “Chain” is more preferably seen as social recognition imposed from the given understanding of the ideals which serve to define and manacle those who demur against the public. Doomed to be shaped is a social reality of a network of how one another are therefore related together.

III. The Social Order that “Baptizes” Us

The linguistic and semiotic power of the social order conceived of in Dickinson’s writing is revealed as somewhat unescapably overwhelming and irresistible. In a sense, it seemingly serves to ignite within us a certain surge of senses of incompetence and helplessness in the face of its effectiveness. The awareness of desperation, in particular, somehow verily reminds us of a similar rush of sentiments that is equally voiced and recorded in her another poem “I started Early – Took my Dog –” (J 520). As the poem describes,

I started Early – Took my Dog –

And visited the Sea –

¹⁸ The poem suggests one of the gestures of definition poems, which Jed Deppman calls “Dialectical” (“Amherst’s” 125). The Dialectical gesture is epitomised through paralleling two opposing terms for comparison and contrast. For details, see Jed Deppman. “Amherst’s Other Lexicographer.” *Try to Think with Emily Dickinson*, pp. 109-49.

The Mermaids in the Basement

Came out to look at me –

And Frigates – in the Upper Floor

Extended Hempen Hands –

Presuming Me to be a Mouse –

Aground – upon the Sands –

But no Man moved Me – till the Tide

Went past my simple Shoe –

And past my Apron – and my Belt

And past my Boddice – too –

And made as He would eat me up –

As wholly as a Dew

Opon a Dandelion's Sleeve –

And then – I started – too –

And He – He followed – close behind –

I felt His Silver Heel

Opon my Ancle – Then My Shoes

Would overflow with Pearl –

Until We met the Solid Town –

No One He seemed to know –

And bowing – with a Mighty look –

At me – The Sea withdrew –

The poem is commented as elaborately delineating the dramatic intensity of fright, and, perhaps, surrender perceived in one's unavoidable encounter with the "Sea."

Many critics tend to hereby interpret the "Sea" as a representation of death pregnant with some destructive and overwhelming force in its furtive and a bit ghostly pursuit.

The perilousness of the "Sea" is not just specified by the staggered emergence of the "Mermaids in the Basement," which insinuates a certain extent of fatal seductiveness,

and of the "Frigates – in the Upper Floor," whose masterly extending "Hempen

Hands" come to threat a seashore visitor (Stocks 86; Weisbuch 203-204). The

eventual disappearance of the companionship of the "Dog" in a sense also testifies to

the menacing impulse of the "Sea." Yet, for some, the "Sea" can be at times also even

detected as an overpowering device for enacting one's metamorphic process which

promises “pearly bliss” (Weisbuch 204).¹⁹ Whether blissful as rebirth or evil as death the approaching “Sea” can be, the “Sea” remains an imperative clue of locating and magnifying the submissiveness of an individual who is anyhow not able to claim a sense of subjectivity or to take any active control for his/her own transformation.

The social order functions similar to the “Sea” in the poem in terms of its transformative power. However, in a further consideration of Baudrillard’s concept of simulation, the way of how the social order enacts the power of metamorphosis is more critically nuanced. The poem as an exemplary depiction of the overflow of the transformative drives shall deserve more exploration for its further significance. I suggest that, while overwhelmingly imposing its transformative effect, the social order serves the functional and executive ascendancy of coding, decoding, and recoding a pathetic individual into the certain eccentric existence of an identity new but alienated to its original form. The poem, in this manner, serves to visualise the coding/decoding/recoding process in the metaphorical sense that one is baptised to be qualified for the solid (but problematically eerie) familiarity of some social domain, in terms of certain mannerism, customs, positions, and so forth.

Notably, for Baudrillard, power that law and order characteristically flaunt is

¹⁹ In his analysis of the poem, Robert Weisbuch identifies the “Sea” as transformative, comparing the poem with Shakespeare’s *Tempest* in terms of the literary topos of the cathartic scenario in both works. See Weisbuch p. 205.

more complexly understood as “a simulation of power” (22), which describes the absurdly dismantling end of the authenticity and autonomy of the established order in the confrontation with simulation. In Baudrillard’s view, the established order in essence has no ability to control, counteract, or exterminate the infinite occurrences and recurrences of simulation which demonstrate a mixture of real events with the artificial signs (20-21). With such an inability, Baudrillard states that,

power itself has long for a long time produced nothing but the signs of its resemblance. And at the same time, another figure of power comes into play: that of a collective demand for signs of power—a holy union that is reconstructed around its disappearance. (23)

Here, a focal point is made clear. Not only does the allegedly authentic order actually embody the logic of the artificial production of the signs of power.²⁰ More significantly, the semiotic procession of its power is also intensified in the infinitude of the circulation of self-demanding signifiers of the collective desire, the one which points to a public demand of societal anticipation for the sign—the simulacra—of power.

²⁰ This understanding of the artificial production of signs is always centralised in Baudrillard’s view on society in the era of simulation. Significantly, this artificial production is recognised as the semiotic resurrection of anything called the real. As he puts it, “[t]he era of inaugurated by a liquidation of all referentials—worse: with their artificial resurrection in the systems of signs, a material more malleable than meaning, in that it lends itself to all systems of equivalences, to all binary oppositions, to all combinatory algebra” (2).

On this point, not only do the rationality and reliability of order tragically turn to waver, but its power becomes more exclusively effective to pure signs than anything else. The exclusive effectiveness towards the signs, in this manner, serves to dominate and even reduce, rather than maintaining, the seriousness and realness of the order. Ultimately, such a system of the less autonomous order only ends with being rendered in its presence a play of simulation, which in a sense functions merely with the interplay of signs and simulacra. With the respect to such semiotic reduction enacted by simulation, what is referred to as power can in fact turn out to be perceived as nothing but the effect of a flood of signs whose instability and fictiveness ends up with engaging its order to an orbit of dismantling and (re)constructing.

In this regard, it is not hard for us to understand that the transformative power that social order acts out can also involve a certain degree of an ability of semiotic demolition and in such a process of dislodgement in sign-level activate the dynamic of construction and reconstruction. Explicitly elucidated from the poem, this energisation of codifying transformation by the social order is somewhat intensely embodied in the progress of the “Sea” towards the present existence of its visitor. The “Sea,” instead of being positioned as the opposing counterpart against the “Solid Town,” a matrix complicated with communal and social networks, is more arguably portrayed as its collaborative executive for imposing sets of codes, social and cultural,

on its visitor who experiences his/her dismantlement submissively as if in the ceremony of baptism. The baptising vision is somewhat odd and eerie, but impressive as well as astonishing. It is surprisingly strengthened as the visitor notices that “But no Man moved Me – till the Tide / Went past my simple Shoe – / And past my Apron – and my Belt / And past my Boddice – too –.” The approaching awareness of being immersed in the “Tide,” the rise and fall of the flow, not only depicts the up-rising movement of baptism from the very bottom of the body himself/herself to the upper part but, significantly, illuminates the absoluteness of the “Sea” suggested by her loyal submissiveness (“no Man moved Me – till the Tide”). The smallness and incompetence of an individual, in particular, are not only unfolded by the self-awareness (or imagination) of the identity reduction to “a Mouse – / Aground – upon the Sands –.” They are also made clear by the self-comparison of identity with “a Dew / Opon a Dandelion’s Sleeve –” which is confronted with the desperate potential of being eaten up.

Interestingly, the devouring, to some extent, can hardly be simply understood as suggesting a certain degree of aggression to threat, destroy, or eliminate. More critically, with the pearly overflow of the shoes (“ . . . My Shoes / Would overflow with Pearl –”), it brings to the fore a rather clear picture of an end phase of the progression of renewal which in fact clarifies the transmuting effect and force of

certain social order. At the moment, the visitor is thus discernibly rendered a new existence with his/her identity not only reframed and recoded in the richness of blessings but also reformed through the absence²¹ of the “Dog,” the initial partner which seemingly suggests one’s constructive original character.²² The withdrawal of the “Sea” with a “Mighty look” and a bow, in the matter, instead of permitting a retreat or proving an escape, in fact makes the triumph of an exhaustive ceremony of inclusion which, through the ritual-like baptising mannerism, render an individual a qualified figure for his/her entry to the “Solid Town.”

In this manner, the “solidness,” or the familiarity, of the town can be rather problematic. It presents an uncannily strange view in which achieved is the resulting scenario that one is led to lose what is called original and fundamental in his/her nature. The familiarity of the shelter-like town is in fact nowhere familiar, for through the baptising ceremony executed by the “Sea” there is no one that seems knowable and recognisable (“No One He seemed to know –”). What is thought to construct as an individual, in a sense, is more arguably transferred, sacrificed, generalised, and

²¹ In this poem, the absence of the “Dog” can be notable in the progressive movement from the first line “I started Early – Took my Dog –” to the concluding line of the fourth stanza “And then – I started – too –.” Here, clearly, the movement announces not only the fact of the “Dog” being absent but also an irreversible change (or growth) of the identity of the visitor who now seemingly disputes the necessity of such companionship.

²² I agree with Robert Weisbuch’s reading that Dickinson’s “Dog” in the poem is “a symbol of stable, common-sense identity, which is more exactly what the sea threatens” (204). Yet, I suggest that the “Dog” can be a clue of showing what initially defines this seashore visitor.

homogenised for the exchange of the “Pearl” which in a sense indicated a label of qualification for the social domain of the particular “Town.” Reading this way, it is quite clearly and surprising to us that, examined in relation to the poem, the social order does less make one simple transformed into a new form of themselves than actually detach them from what they originally are. One is reformed with those sign-produced effects as an uncannily familiar but unfamiliar subject which is only devised for the participation in some social domain.

IV. The Abatement of Individuality

The de- or re-familiarisation and homogenisation of an individual by the social order, in a way, reminds us of a pathetic landscape of alienation. In such a landscape, one becomes not only split from his/her own original identity but also foreign to a form which is (re)framed for an aptness in a certain social domain. Concerning the manner of totalisation, what defines individuality and uniqueness is discernibly demolished, reduced, and abated. The responsive sentiment towards the abatement of one’s inborn characters and the sense of otherness are both illustrated in Dickinson’s writing. As her poem “Civilization – spurns – the Leopard!” (J 492) exemplarily records,

Civilization – spurns – the Leopard!

Was the Leopard – bold?

Deserts – never rebuked her Satin –

Ethiop – her Gold –

Tawny – her Customs –

She was Conscious –

Spotted – her Dun Gown –

This was the Leopard's nature – Signor –

Need – a keeper – frown?

Pity – the Pard – that left her Asia –

Memories – of Palm –

Cannot be stifled – with Narcotic –

Nor suppressed – with Balm –

Here, as embodied in the dramatic encounter between the afflicted “Leopard” and the demanding “Civilization,” it is the intensity of repudiation, along with socially cultivated despise and contempt, that serves to waver, dismantle, and even make tamely docile one’s intrinsic distinctiveness. Critics such as Helen Vendler and Lisa Marie Jones share a view that evaluates such sensitivity of the poem from the pitiful, pathetic position of the “Leopard.” They focus on the poet’s sentimental identification

with this homesick, out-of-place, and socially rejected creature (Vendler 95; Jones 513).²³ Wendy Barker, in a consistency of such critical attention, notices further in this wild-born, spotted “Leopard” the poet’s admiration of the untamed, undefined, and unsorted primitiveness which testifies to “a valorizing of that which is not fixed by social or religious decree” (86). These critical readings, whether pointing to a celebratory claim of self-worth or a mirror of personal situations, tend to unfold the fact that some personal characters are rejected by the whole edifice of the social domain. Critics here foreground not only the traumatization of the “Leopard” but also the involvement of the poet’s explicit sensitivity towards this social reality.

Yet, when considered and read in careful collaboration with Jean Baudrillard, the reduction of one’s own values can be more nuancedly depicted. Indeed, Baudrillard’s conception of “a liquidation of all referentials” serves as an effective access to a more sophisticated account of the way how one’s individuality is abated. It also helpfully re-examines the poem which epitomises the abatement. Not only can readers hereby be certain that the so-called “individuality” is abated and liquidated to

²³ In her discussion of Dickinson’s “Leopard,” Lisa Marie Jones reveals that “The Leopard’s role in Dickinson’s poetry is one of identification and distance” (513). Jones recognises in the poem “Civilization – spurns – the Leopard!” Dickinson’s self-recognition with and projection onto the creature in terms of their shared predicament of being rejected by society. Helen Vendler, in a consistency of the critical standpoint, further discloses in the same poem that recorded is a dialectical intensity between the masterly keeper and the submissive Leopard which sometimes knows self-defence of her intrinsic characters. See Helen Vendler. “276,” *Dickinson: Selected Poems and Commentaries*, pp. 95-97.

be nothing but an effect of ambivalent terms which serve no relevance to any referents but their semiotic resurrection as labels, names, codes, and any indicating signifiers. A subordinate understanding of “a strategy of deterrence” of signs (Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* 7) can also serve to pinpoint the retreat and irretrievability of what recalls and defines one’s intrinsic distinctiveness and authenticity, which in effect eventually precipitates an excess of his/her sense of nostalgia for authenticity.²⁴

For Baudrillard, signs in fact serve to deter reality; in a sense, their procession works on paralyzing, withdraw, and expulse any concepts what allude to authenticity and realness. As he reveals,

It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real, that is to say of an operation of deterring every real process via its operational double, a programmatic, metastable, perfectly descriptive machine that offers all the signs of the real and short-circuits all its vicissitudes (2).

Here, as clearly exposed, deterrence functions along with the exhaustive interference of signs in where reality is processed, generated, identified, defined, and given meanings to. And, with such a semiotic interference, it operates as a mechanism

²⁴ Baudrillard in *Simulacra and Simulation* contends that “When the real is no longer what it was, nostalgia assumes tis full meaning. There is a plethora of myths of origin and of signs of reality—a plethora of truth, of secondary objectivity, and authenticity” (6-7). I therefore suggest that the rash of what serves to describe or claim reality is, verily, the ultimate effect and consequence of signs’ strategy of deterrence which occurs as a compensation when reality becomes irretrievable.

which tries to hinder what serves to articulate the “real” from the ordinary and normal operation of some associated meaning. In this manner, authenticity becomes fundamentally a dubious and mysterious concept which is only achievable and traceable in the sense of nostalgia that feeds one’s retrospective thinking for reality and any referents to what is originally real.

In this Dickinson “Leopard” poem, there is indeed an echo of the insight on the semiotic reduction and the precipitated withdrawal of what alludes to the fundamental and the real. The intrinsic nature of one’s distinctiveness, as examined in the poem, is not only seen explicitly as reduced, dislodged, and fragmented to several semiotic particles. More critically, it is also revealed as retrievable only nostalgically in the field of recollection where the fractions are pieced together. As exemplarily elucidated, the boldness of the “Leopard” in “Civilization” is in fact intertwiningly defined by the fragmentation of its inborn nature which exhibits its composition upon several signifiers, such as “Satin,” “Gold,” “Customs,” “Gown,” “Tawny,” “Spotted.” Even the notes that indicate the geographical references such as “Deserts,” “Asia,” “Ethiop,” and “Memories – of Palm –” also serve informative clues of shaping its individuality and uniqueness which are not only termed as bold but also signalled as exotic.

Yet, it is also discernibly for the semiotic texture of the fractions that the

eccentric, exotic individuality of the “Leopard” intensifies the sense of feeling out-of-place and self-alienation. These fractions of character are purely the products of signs not only because they serve the function of labelling a certain thing, but also because they are only traceable in a nostalgic sense that memories, images, signifiers, and signs are given way to their fabrication and prevalence. In this manner, the shift between both stanzas in the poem serves more arguably as a retrospective tendency to absorb oneself in one’s glorious origin (which can be just simulacral or illusion). In this sense, the distraction from the distorted presence of the self clarifies the trajectory of the transformation from the full identity “Leopard” to its castrated form “Pard.” It is visible that the homesickness is never a suffering of the “Leopard” but of the castrated “Pard,” who can be at times strongly reminiscent of its intact but now split identity in its displacement into a rejecting social structure. The “Pard” clearly suffers not only from the aftermath of the rejection of the “Civilization” but also the eventuality of alienation which nostalgically points to an irretrievability of a certain past when an intactness of its nature could be claimed.

The identity crisis of the “Leopard/Pard”, in a sense, clearly epitomises the hardship of one individual whose individuality in a social domain is also spurned, reduced, and made depart from who he/she is. With this respect, it is discerned that there is always distance between what may genuinely represent an individual’s

distinctiveness and these remembrance, the fabricated signs. It is also hardly deniable or ignorable that there is always alienation between the complete body of identity and signs that serve to retain the split, spoiled, ruined, and even demolished identity.

V. Conclusion

The final predicament of the perpetual distance between one's individuality (along with his/her identity) and some semiotically resurrected materials not only conclusively serves to determine an impressive sketch of how an abated individual ends up being developed in a social domain. It also arguably brings us to witness an exquisite landscape of how (simulacral) fantasies are proceeding in their penetration to everywhere in our social life and irresistibly affecting a network that concerns all of us as a whole. Such an inescapability can be best articulated in Jean Baudrillard's account of simulacra in *Simulacra and Simulation*: “[e]verywhere we live in a universe strangely similar to the original—things are doubled by their own scenario” (11). Read with Baudrillard, Dickinson's writing surprisingly depicts a similar in terms of the insights on our social life that are abundantly implicit in some of her works. Along with our examination of her works as examples, Dickinson's social insights can never be simply estimated as displaying and claiming certain sentiments of irreconcilable antagonism. Nor can they be seen as her personal defence against the

undiscerning public or the spurning society as a whole. Instead, there are more nuancedly cultivated views on the issues of language, identity, and the semiotic, etc., which in her works are not only called into question but also wavered, mocked, distorted, played, noticed cautious, and rendered discreditable in a somehow consistency of the Baudrillardian conception.

Interestingly and significantly, the poetic creations of this eccentric but memorable author, as critics such as Robert Weisbuch and Robert McClure Smith celebrate, indeed prove their flexible openness for showing the excellent richness of interpretive potentials. As Weisbuch puts it, this impressive textual openness of Dickinson in fact comes importantly to suggest a decentred, de-canonised way of interpreting her works which circles around “a letting-go, a releasing of interpretive habits and idiot-questioner demands” (197). It is also a way that the critic tends to regard as echoing Dickinson’s intention and means “To gather Paradise –,” as he refers to one of her poems “I dwell in Possibility” (J657). Yet, the conception of what is referred to as “Paradise” for Dickinson, in light of her works, can be genuinely complex. It is in particular worthy of a note, when read with Jean Baudrillard, how and with what significance the so-called Dickinsonian paradise, or other related concepts, can be examined under the critic’s very remindful comment of “a universe strangely similar to the original,” which is distorted and, again, flooded with some

semiotic structures such as fantasies, signs, signifiers, and so forth. Questions as such are clearly set as ushering in our consecutive discussions in the following chapter.





Chapter Four

Dreaming in a Utopian/Dystopian Dreamscape

I. Introduction

Certainly, with such a postmodernist light of reading Dickinson's dreams and fantasies, it is seen that signs actually function as the most essential and powerful medium throughout the entire social domain for its peculiar manner of actualising what is desired and what is pursued. Scarcely can their effectiveness be even gauged as of limited significance as their decisive property of shaping one's perception of a society is taken into account. It is equally certain that, with the peculiar artificiality and malleability of signs, a meticulous landscape of what people envisage as the best and the most desirable is surely formulated in a discernible way. And, further, as paramount in every respect, the landscape also comes to dominate the designation of what perceptively and conceptually constructs a society. Such a landscape, occupied so intimately by a plethora of signs of dream and fantasy, seems to some extent triumphant in displaying a form of "dream"-scape. This particular dreamscape, by its very name, serves to denote an overabundance of the semiotic as well as an everlasting inescapability between what is real and non-real. The conceptual exposure and awareness of uncertainty in the realness dilemma, critically, gives a sudden hint

to readers to a point where Jean Baudrillard in the bulk of his philosophy hints on exactly the arrival of a hyper-reality in human social environment.

However, concerning the equivocality of simulacra and signs as well as the dubiety of the collective desire of a social majority, there are still a few questions that seemingly deserve further consideration: Does the overwhelmingly prevailing dreamscape, which in essence is driven and composed by the collective desire (and fantasy) for the ideal, provide already an auspicious path that sufficiently brings the dreaming others closely to what is expected. Does the dreamscape become clear and less questionable in terms of a solidity of its positivity? It stays an enigma, too, if this seemingly positive formulation of dreams in a vast, excessive scale can genuinely suggest a certain form of goodness in a persuasive way, as the expression “for the public (common) good” would promise. Since the idea of “pursuit” denotes a clear hint of optimism that one brilliantly expectant future is implied as attainable via the gesture (or sheer assumption) of wish-fulfilment, the concept of goodness to some extent seems also worthy of attention. A point that should be delved into lies in the doubting of whether the pursuit of the ideal can promise as much positivity as the term literally is supposed to wish on. Since, in particular, the pursuing of what is desired also involves a severe scale of “deprivation,” a further suspicion of doubt here can be even thus given to not alone the only question of whose “good,” but the

question of whether and how a dream-motivated society demonstrates itself as an auspiciously developing structure that not only prospers in itself but also thrives in the way as a majority likes and dreams of it.

Critically, in a more provoking way, the questioning of the authoritative texture of the concept “good(ness)” seems also to hint at a less distanced relatedness to the paradoxical complexity between the utopian and the dystopian. It is rather plausible and radically analytical to ponder: In consideration of the optimistic pursuing of the ideal, does the thereby sign-fathered dreamscape also essentially and characteristically stand for any utopian visualisation of desire, where a form of idealism is dominantly served? The question of whether and how the dreamscape, or the constellation of fantasies, is utopian or not indeed touches upon a significance that, in addition to dream’s problematic nature, the idea of utopia can be equally ambivalent in its essence. The very idea, as a nearly highest output of perfection, is even controversially self-contradictory in its referentiality of idealism, which in a critical way leads to a paradigm shift marking, by contrast, the idea of “dystopia”.²⁵

²⁵ The word “utopia,” which is widely known for its Greek denotation as “no place,” does carry the serious weight of perplexity in its paradoxical relatedness to another term “eutopia,” which however means in Greek “a good place.” The “good-place-no-place” inter-referential structure between the words here indeed contradicts and makes suspicious the solidarity of the idea of goodness originally in the word “utopia”, seemingly insinuating the unpractical existence of a place which qualifies a label as “good.” The thorough unpracticableness of goodness in the word utopia seems to facilitate the imaginariness of a utopia and further an association with a dystopia, which is already an antonym

Not surprising as it is, the paradoxicalness in the polarity between the utopian and the dystopian still deserves critical attention from any readers in the postmodernist age, and for reading Dickinson, who has been greatly valued as a precursor of postmodernism (Deppman 7-8), it is even true that the problem (or doubting) of the utopian and/or the dystopian indeed occupies particular significance in a great many of her poems. The in-betweenness and the openness played within the tension of both conceptual camps are clearly among the subjects that the poet often concerns, aims for, and even sides with in her elusively deployed language of poetry.

Thus with this literary indulgence, the issue of dreamscape seems given a vantage point of view relating to the attitude of Dickinson's. It is a question whether the poet considers in her poems the vagueness of what defines the utopian/dystopian in constellation with the idealistic dreamscape led by a majority for what is generally pictured as a good society. How does she write of, with regard to the public dream(ing) of some societal condition, her meditation on the zealous enthusiasm of a social majority, and lead a critique of it? Can her literary treatment of the utopian/dystopian weigh or undermine the mass omnipresence of dreams, thereby

of utopia that reports the denial of goodness. The *Oxford English Dictionary* also reports (or implicitly displays) the fundamental ambivalence of the term utopia. While the term means a place of perfection, it meanwhile also suggests an impossibility of realisation of this perfection. It is a fantasy in essence, which hints at its nature of dream. Goodness in the term is less clear and dangerously become vague with its inverted form "dystopia."

proposing a horizon that interrogates the peculiar dreamscape?

Yet, in Dickinson, a suspicion of utopianism, or of “dystopianism,” is nevertheless textually an opaqueness, which in ways may hinder an intent of analysis from tracing through at the very outset. In fact, rarely does she deploy a term that exactly articulates the idea of utopia or of dystopia. The absence, or silencing, of the direct wording, in a way, seems also to import an extra question of whether the dreamscape is able to be posited in the “light” of the binary oppositions, especially when with the intervention of the semiotic the boundary of dichotomies has barely sustained in a solid and firm form. As famously judged and questioned in the poem “There’s a certain Slant of light” (J 258), the designation of meaning(s) in any vehicles, linguistic or cultural, is always a problematic task which, with its less valid functionality, is eventually doomed to waver in the dim glow of difference.²⁶ The meaning of the quest for determining a property of the dreamscape, under such a context, seems equally left in an evident state of flux, which radically not only indicates an overwhelming deferral in a flood of signifiers, but, perhaps, also a processing (inter)mingling that dangerously blurs any fixation of the borderlines

²⁶ In her poem “There’s a certain Slant of light” (J258), Emily Dickinson describes “internal difference” as an adobe of the “Meanings.” The plurality of meaning here suggests not only a possible excess, which is famously noticed by Sharon Cameron in her chapter “Excess,” collected in her book *Choosing Not Choosing*. Further, it also insinuates a considerable intensity of ambivalence, which in fact serves as a hindrance to fixation, rejecting intentions of sealing meanings into any singularity.

among referents.

However, Dickinson's poetry is never disappointing; it still devotes a vast body of works to the issue of the utopian/dystopian in a very curious way, providing a rather different horizon for readers to delve into what is (or has been) dreamt and set in pursuit. In lieu of articulating an exact term of "utopia" and "dystopia," many of her poems instead twistingly institute an emphasis on the presences of "paradise" and "heaven," which are the neighbouring words that embody and associate certain utopian thoughts especially in the very doctrine of Christianity. The institution of "paradise" and "heaven" is surely one of Dickinson's gestures that she deploys so often in a majority of her poems, and this literary enrolment indeed empowers many of her poems to question not merely the issues concerning religion but also a wide range of other issues. The conflicts between society and individual, for instance, is one of the primary issues that are often called into question. As her poem "'Heaven' has different Signs – to me –" (J 575) unfolds, there are indeed discords—perhaps even irreconcilable ones in particular—standing firmly between others and self, commonness and peculiarity, and even the known and the unknown. The conflicting differences, as exemplarily listed here, in a sense can never just be seen as placing emphasis on what is debatable in a religious context. More significantly, they also shed in-depth light on tensions and dynamics in what remains to centralise a form of

society accommodating a social majority. As critics widely note, it is the building of “an earthly paradise” (or the publicly shared desire for it) that is largely reported through the poet’s words on paradise and thereby called into doubt in a severe manner.²⁷ If the subject of “paradise” and “heaven” registers the poet’s concern and even reflection about the actualisation of what is pursued, e.g., the constructing of an earthly paradise, then to some extent, her paradise poems may seem sufficiently qualified as a certain worthwhile access to examinations and critiques not only concerning the problem of the utopian/dystopian but, importantly, ushering in the investigation of the issue of dreamscape.

Thus, this chapter will proceed with a clear contention that the questions raised earlier should be elucidated so as to shed light on a wider textual significance of Emily Dickinson’s poetry. In this chapter, several Dickinson poems on paradise and heaven will be examined intensively as an entry to a critical vision which does not just unveil the enigma of what conceptualises goodness from the contrasting

²⁷ Magdalena Zapadowska, for example, in her article “Citizens of Paradise: Dickinson and Emmanuel Levinas’s Phenomenology of the Home” suggests that “the Paradise she [Emily Dickinson] wants to gather—and one that will yield to interiorization—is not Heaven but the earthly Garden of Eden, the gorgeous plenitude of the world which exalts, nourishes, and invigorates the I, and which feeds the poetry” (87). This understanding of Dickinson’s paradise clearly unfolds that what means to the poet as a paradise is hardly a highest Oneness which is as largely celebrated as in the Calvinist orthodoxy, but actually a more personal kind which is seemingly attainable in a rather individual scale and centralises multiplicity. It is pinpointed that the poet’s focus on what makes a paradise lies in not so much the metaphysical as rather the secular and the worldly.

views between many social others and the poet herself, in terms of the dreamscape consisting of simulacral fantasies. Of most importance, a particular Dickinsonian panorama of whether the semiotic dreamscape is a show of utopian/dystopian dreaming will be also accordingly divulged in a rather in-depth, careful way.

Concerning the paradoxical complexity between the utopian/dystopian, as well as the equivocal nature of simulacra and signs in obliterating any oppositions, it is argued that Emily Dickinson's poetry in fact unfolds a relatively hyper-real dimension of the dreamscape, which not only effaces any sharp boundaries between the utopian and the dystopian, but also severely defers and deters any intentions of clarification from any binary differentiation. The doubt that abides in Dickinson's paradise and heaven poems does in a way record such an intensity of deferring and deterrence.

II. A Fairer Paradise in Doubt: Utopian or Dystopian?

The imagery of "paradise" in Dickinson's poetry, as familiar to many readers, is at all times an important motif to note; it is not only dominantly discernible but also often intractably associated with its synonym of "heaven". As many Dickinson poems display, the two distinctive terms are indeed intimately related and collocated, and few critical readings can even genuinely interrogate either of the concepts solely apart from the other. Critics such as Brian F. McCabe, Magdalena Zapadowska, and Barton

Levi St. Armand, to name a few, read intensively the magnitude of the poet's concern about the paradisiac. They mostly investigate her literary utilisation of both words "paradise" and "heaven" preferably as a whole, or at least without any differentiation especially made in between.²⁸ In an close inter-referentiality between the two conceptual equivalents, these previous critical voices seem even to further posit the poet's account of "paradise/heaven" in a rather positive light, where the alluringly delightful, encouraging nature of paradise/heaven is in particular witnessed.²⁹ Indeed, in much of Dickinson's writing, the prevalence of "paradise/heaven" is often typically conceived of as a token of elation and rapture, suggesting considerable benefits that can be possibly derived from its appearing beneficence.

However, just as in many other poems of hers, there is still an air of suspicion

²⁸ Magdalena Zapadowska equals paradise to heaven in her unfolding of Dickinson's quest for being "the Citizen of paradise" and a guaranteed happiness in heaven (88). Barton Levi St. Armand also similarly implies the synonymy in his chapter title "Paradise deferred: Dickinson, Phelps, and the Image of Heaven" and as well in his reading of her poem "I went to Heaven –" (J 374), or "What is – 'Paradise' –" (J 215). Even Brian F. McCabe, who differently discusses the subject of heaven in his collected section "Heaven" in *All Things Dickinson*, also rarely pinpoints the divergences between the use of the two terms.

²⁹ A good consistency of reading Dickinson's paradise/heaven as positive can be detected from the critical point that centralises the home-like allegory. Apart from the dwelling of joy and ecstasy (Zapadowska 86-88), the paradise/heaven in Dickinson's writing also alternatively postulates a certain domestic, private domain which combats and supersedes any other socially dominant dogmas in order to claim her personal individuality (St. Armand 129, 131, 136). This individual dimension of paradise/heaven in ways echoes Brian F. McCabe's reading, which showcases her departure from the orthodox (439). Further, in the reading of Robert Weisbuch, the meaning of paradise(/heaven) is also anchored at the possibilities that poetry can especially offer. See Weisbuch, p. 197.

that can be detected as prevailing deeply in much of her alleged “glorification” of paradise/heaven. A point of dubiety, at the moment, lies perceptibly in the curious distinction that stands critically between “paradise” and “heaven.” Of much importance, no matter how semantically close they are, the two synonymous ideas, for Dickinson, are in fact still a pair of distinctive notions that not only possess certain discrepancies but also critically practise some serious otherness against each other. In a consistency of her famous definitional gestures, Dickinson’s delicate consideration of “paradise” and “heaven” surely in a way negotiates between the two neighbouring terms and offers readers with much critical space for crystallising the fine distinction in between.³⁰

Consider, for example, the early mentioned Dickinson poem “‘Heaven’ has different Signs – to me –” (J 575):

“Heaven” has different Signs – to me –

Sometimes, I think that Noon

Is but a symbol of the Place –

And when again, at Dawn,

³⁰ Just not unlike any of her definition poems, Dickinson never ceases to define concepts with a wide array of gestures deployed for this purpose. Given the relatedness between “paradise” and “heaven,” the poem “‘Heaven’ has different Signs – to me –” (J 575), for example, belongs to the category in the sense that it can be recognised as a “differential” poem dealing with “fine distinction between neighboring concepts” (Jed Deppman, “Amherst’s Other Lexicographer” 126).

A mighty look runs round the World

And settles in the Hills –

An Awe if it should be like that

Upon the Ignorance steals –

The Orchard, when the Sun is on –

The Triumph of the Birds

When they together Victory make –

Some Carnivals of Clouds

The Rapture of a finished Day

Returning to the West –

All these – remind us of the place

That Men call “Paradise” –

Itself be fairer – we suppose –

But how Ourselves, shall be

Adorned, for a Superior Grace

Not yet, our eyes can see –

Obviously, this rather philosophical poem indeed dedicates itself to proving the radical otherness that fundamentally lies within the polarity between the concepts of “Paradise” and “Heaven.” Distinguishing within the particular enclosure of double quotations marks, the two concepts are both not only specified as two focal points under interrogation which are altogether exterior to other textual elements of the entire poems. In fact, they are also meanwhile levelled in a palpable intensity of comparison in which the conceptual gapping between the two is intensively discerned and examined. Certainly, a more personal, subjective hierarchical structure is in particular made as much noticeable in the contrasting parallelism between “Paradise” and “Heaven.” It is the uniqueness and singularity of “Heaven” that, in the introductory line of the poem, are significantly signified with the “Signs” of difference. It is also this peculiar specialness that sublimates the idea of “Heaven” to be rather conflictingly superior to its counterpart “Paradise,” which is yet limitedly only determined in a way of name-dropping from others or some passively provoked reminiscences. “Paradise,” in this manner, as opposed to “Heaven,” which is signified much differently, is relatively labelled as something that pertains only to an external realm of others (“Men”). The textual emergence of this “Paradise,” at the moment, seems particularly externalised as well to be a rather less lauded and celebrated

existence, and its everlasting otherness, in a way, seems even to articulate an outside indirectness that distances the self (“me,” “I,” and “we”) from the entirety of the exteriority of experience. The discord between the self and others, indeed, finds expression especially in the contrast between the “me” and “Men,” which practically serves as an arguable example. Here, as the poem shows at the moment, the discrepancy between “Heaven” and “Paradise” is never just a form of relationality involving the two contrasting differentials; instead, it essentially and even more extensively hints at the dynamics of how self and others contradict one from the other.

With the distinction that the poem hierarchically communicates between “Paradise” and “Heaven,” Emily Dickinson’s image of the paradisiac is indeed different to something heavenly, and, in the sense, should not be just read as an expression of sheer glorification of any ecstasies. In fact, the image of the paradisiac in Dickinson’s writing is rather a distorted kind which, with its peculiar externality and certain distantness, demonstrates little reliability and yet considerable dubiousness. The fundamental otherness of this discredited model of the paradisiac, in the sense, does not just question and diminish what conventionally defines a paradise. Of most significance, a climate of uncertainty that circulates in the property of this “Paradise” in this manner is also indicative of a much deeper vagueness that actually

wanes and endangers the attributes of the utopian.³¹

The utopian imagery that comes with the mention of what the poem labels as “Paradise,” for sure, is open to doubt. Albeit an intensive landscape of certain idyllic prosperity is displayed in the poem, a certain utopian state of a paradise is never tenaciously evidenced in such exquisite mapping of what seemingly constitutes the allure of the “Paradise.” In fact, with the sceptical tone of the last stanza of the poem, the glamorous impression of this “Paradise” is still seemingly left in severe doubt. The seeming perfection of this “Paradise,” in the sense, is also likewise examined as little trustworthy in terms of its utopian aspect. Even the delirium cultivated within this “Paradise” is rarely able to postulate the very property of what may indicate any utopian delights. As the poem clarifies, it is the doubt about functionality, or effectiveness, which serves to problematize the image of the utopian and thereby renders the entire constellation of “Paradise” conceptually as less utopian. While the “Paradise” registers its euphoria in a plethora of certain pastoral marvels, such as some “Carnivals of Clouds” after the “Triumph of the Birds,” or the “Rapture of a finishing Day,” the beneficence that can be traced in this richly marvellous “Paradise”

³¹ Instead of focusing on a utopia, I suggest that Dickinson’s gesture of questioning can be more relatively regarded as aimed at dealing with the concept of what can be (seen as) the utopian. To highlight her literary treatment of the utopian rather than a utopia is to draw attention to not just a certain structure as a completion, but a state or a trait that can be extensively applied and even collected from a wide range of subjects. A larger-scaled significance of many Dickinson poems should be thus expanded and noted beyond any limitations of their supposed subjects.

is seemingly not so much anything that may glorify or “adorn” any common minds in a divine sense, but instead just a sheer perception of fairness. As the poem critiques, the expression of this paradisiac fairness is in fact just a particular show of little authenticity which to some extent is only supposed or claimed in a comparative degree. It is at best a supposedly “fairer” thought of idealism which, as the expression “we suppose” can thus tell, only circulates in a certain generally recognised understanding of how the outside world is perceived.

Certainly, the perception of such fairness in the “Paradise” is never an access to any sublime experiences. For the uncertainty about whether an individual can be glorified or “adorned,” this fairer “Paradise” indeed claims little possibility of sublimation that may elevate one’s self. The sublimity of the “Paradise,” as indicated by the divine presence of “A mighty look” running “round the World” and settling “in the Hills,” in this sense, is thus a dubious concept, and perhaps can only be seriously taken as a fake, less authentic, or even radically simulated form of what is defined as “the sublime.” Even “An Awe,”³² which seemingly supersedes “Ignorance” and perhaps accordingly overwhelms any viewing individuals in the “Paradise,” may be also similarly problematic. As the poem conclusively argues, it is what is later

³² Interestingly, the “Awe” that is particularly pinpointed in the poem seems to indicate not so much an absolute singularity. The countable article “a” that precedes the word “Awe” in a way suggests the dynamic of the plentitude where in fact abounds a wide range of awes. The clue of this multiplicity can also be regarded as a Dickinsonian gesture that is deployed to question the centrality of Oneness.

signified as “a Superior Grace” that clearly plays an essential place for the divination of an individual mind. Yet, this particular “Grace” is noticed missing in this model of “Paradise.” It is the absence, or the optic unattainability, of this particular “Superior Grace” that is ascribed to the inferiority of this now problematic “Paradise.”

Concerning the inability to elevate, this dubious model of “Paradise,” in the sense, can scarcely guarantee its utopian qualities to anyone involved.

Here with the failure of indicating any nature of the utopian, Dickinson’s literary “Paradise” indeed poses an array of questions that may subvert a positive view of referencing a traditionally benign paradise. However, it is seemingly also a mistake to define alternatively her focus on “Heaven” as a mere celebratory gesture of bestowing “a Superior Grace” onto the heavenly, or position the image of “Heaven” in a higher, superior rank as opposed to the paradisiac. It is even slightly odd to thereby confirm the dystopian nature of the paradisiac but heighten the possible utopian qualities of the heavenly for just simple-minded binary differentiation. In fact, though there are some critical voices such as Brian McCabe that are seemingly aimed at the poet’s particular emphasis on the superiority of what is conceptualized as “Heaven,” Emily Dickinson’s sceptical voice is still never exclusive of her consideration of what denotes the idea of “Heaven.” For Dickinson, at least in her poetic writing, “Heaven” can be just as much questionable and untrustworthy as

“Paradise” is now thought of. Rarely can one even at once determine whether the image of “Heaven” is utopian or superior among others.

Indeed, in terms of the question of being utopian or not, Dickinson’s “Heaven” is nearly undefinable, and, in the sense, even possesses a great degree of ambivalence for its distinct semiotic texture. Certainly, as the first stanza of the Heaven-Paradise poem defines, “Heaven” is in fact also a certain constellation which distinctively comprises many “different Signs.” Here, as readers can see, the “Signs” that differently signifies “Heaven” are by no means elements from the dogmas of any strong metaphysics such as Christianity or any other grand narratives. Instead, as exemplified by the images of “Noon” and “Dawn,” which clearly indicate some moments in a common day, the “Signs” in particular are certain humble trifles that are mostly gathered from the very ordinary facet of life. With the ordinariness of these everyday trivial elements, it is seen that the so-called “Heaven” is not necessarily anything celestial or spiritual, but conversely, something which is largely mapped out by common daily life-things traced in a certain unspecified but divine “Place”.³³ Most

³³ Here in the poem, there is rather an interesting comparison/difference that the poet embodies in the word “place” by means of capitalisation. While the image of “Heaven” is located collectively in the capitalised “Place” as the first stanza shows, the “Paradise” by contrast is however bestowed onto a non-capitalised “place” as the fourth stanza clarifies. The “Place-place” parallel seemingly suggests not just alone a simple difference in between but more critically a radical hint of degradation that “Heaven” is a “Place” now degraded to a certain “place” which is often mistakenly called “Paradise.”

importantly, it is particularly clear that the “Heaven” is actually the semiotic representation of what altogether composes everyday life.

However, it is just this sign-constructed nature that indeed makes the utopian quality of the “Heaven” controversial. Since it devises “different Signs” as its constructs, this particular “Heaven” in fact also offers a critical aspect of indeterminacy that severely influences one’s perception of what is the utopian and not-utopian in his/her surroundings. Arguably, it is the indeterminacy of signs that takes an imperative role in deepening the vagueness in the polarity among the utopian and the not-utopian, and even radically dystopian. As Jean Baudrillard has been always reminding his readers, it is the gesture of signs, or simulacra, which blurs the clear division between any binary extremities and tends to hinder any existing dichotomies from being differentiated. Thus, with its sign-based composition, the “Heaven” in Dickinson’s text also clearly exemplifies such escapism from any fine distinctions among utopian/not-utopian/dystopian, or even good/bad. For its semiotic texture, the distinction between good and bad seems also hardly located, and neither does the distinction between the utopian and dystopian. It is hard, in this manner, to differentiate whether or not “Noon” can be good and utopian. It is also a difficulty to recognise if “Dawn” suggests beneficence when it is just controversially part of certain various “Signs,” as the poem shows.

Intriguingly, there is even an enigma that can be further traced in terms of the idea of the dystopian. In the sense, compared with the utopian, the dystopian is equally not likely differentiable. Since good and the utopian are not able to be located as from the image of “Heaven,” then to some extent, the dystopian, which by definition stems from the opposite nature of the utopian as a certain dimension of bad, should be also a serious mystery. The alleged dystopian idea seems not likely (or not appropriately) able to be chained with the “Paradise.” Signs, for its equivocality, clearly subvert and even dismantle the fixation of the plane between good/bad, utopian/dystopian. In this regard, though “Paradise” does little beneficence for its lack of some “Superior Grace,” the question of how or whether this “Paradise” can be thus found dystopian seems also an unanswerable mystery. The delicate elusiveness between “Heaven” and “Paradise,” in the end, seems merely to leave a certain state of what Baudrillard constantly identifies as hyper-reality in which survives only a signifier-signifier structure among the referential, with no referents.

III.A Particular Slant on the “Light”: Signs of Meanings in Vagueness

In Dickinson’s meticulous reflections on both “Paradise” and “Heaven,” there indeed dominates the concern about the equivocality of signs, which actually questions the abundance/vagueness in meaning. Readers who tend to read in

consonance with Jean Baudrillard's notion of simulacra and simulation would hardly deny that there is always uncertainty in meaning when signs proceed massively.

Indeed, with the manner of simulation, signs are never just devices which only serve to dominate the way how certain life-experiences are perceived. Of most importance, they even allow meaning to perform a certain degree of multiplicity which, in the sense, culminates in a certain dilemma between abundance and vagueness. Emily Dickinson, as widely known for her keen sense of language, in fact devotes much of her writing to the awareness of the abundance/vagueness in meaning, and also pinpoints the fluidity of meaning especially in view of the (self-)simulating signs.

The indeterminacy of meaning is best explained, among others, by one of her most famous poems "There's a certain Slant of light," (J 320):

There's a certain Slant of light,

Winter Afternoons –

That oppresses, like the Heft

Of Cathedral Tunes –

Heavenly Hurt, it gives us –

We can find no scar,

But internal difference,

Where the Meanings, are –

None may teach it – Any –

'Tis the Seal Despair –

An imperial affliction

Sent us of the Air –

When it comes, the Landscape listens –

Shadows – hold their breath –

When It goes, 'tis like the Distance

On the look of Death –

As the first stanza indicates, it is the phrase “a certain Slant of light” that clearly exemplifies a certain degree of vagueness in meaning and even demonstrates some practice of semantic distortion. Clearly the phrase is an obvious semantic mystery, and its pivotal opaqueness lies in the exquisite double meaning of the word “certain”: “being exact with no doubt” and “referring to an indefinite thing.” With the connotative doubleness of the word “certain,” which oscillates between “exactness” and “indefiniteness,” the phrase “a certain Slant of light” in fact provokes a radical twofoldness of the meaning(s) it bears. Rather than being understood plainly as “an

unspecific streak of light,” this literal combination of “certain” and “Slant” in fact alternatively also hints at another crucial scale of paradox and contradiction when the word “certain” as “being exact” comes to duel against the “slant” as “being oblique.” It is seen that a sense of exactness and certainty that the word “certain” indicates apparently contradicts the obliquely distorted manner that the word “slant” actually deciphers. In this manner, the phrase “a certain Slant of light” is by no means as easy and simple as it literally shows. Of most importance, it clearly postulates a flexibility for which meaning is in fact perceptively diverse, multiple, and even vague in an elusive manner.

As the poem later narrates in the second stanza, the air of vagueness becomes even extreme while the meaning of the “Meanings” is in fact nuancedly manifested with its significant plural form. Here, the plurality of “Meanings” in fact indicates not any state of fixation which may claim only the Oneness or a certain absoluteness, but a certain degree of multiplicity which harbours a good degree of diversity. Clearly, such diversity implied with the word “Meanings,” at the point, celebrates a prosper scale of individuality, which in a way is determined by the differences among the “we.” It is particularly an aftermath that results from this “internal difference,” which to some extent is occult and not a “scar” able to be found on any corporeal bodies, but yet perceptible only in a divine, “Heavenly” sense. As the poem importantly unfolds,

it is the “Slant of light” that genuinely determines this decent spectrum of individual differences. The “Slant of light,” as suggested, is rather celestially mighty; it seemingly not only possesses as a certain degree of overwhelming power but also performs it in the manner of oppression that sees no resistance. Indeed, rather than a gentler light, the texture of this “light” does embody a certain desperate power, whose invincible authority functions as an unquestionable, absolute “Seal,” and with such a tyranny, the “light” further its intensity to determinately afflict anyone submissive to it. Perhaps, in this regard, the so-called “scar” is never simply just a mark which proves the stroke of “light.” More critically, it even insinuates a rather radical deed of sacrifice as Jesus’s crucifixion that devotes to a higher absoluteness. In this sense, the designation of meaning at the point seems hardly blissful, but actually just to reflect absoluteness.

Perhaps this is why Helen Vendler in her reading of this poem tends to regard the “Slant of light” as not just only a presentation of truth, but also a harsher truth with extreme “Despair” (“320” 126-27). And also, perhaps it is usually a reason why the poem in the first time of reading appears to narrate with so insecure a tone, for the production (or bestowment) of meaning, as written inside, seems so miserable.

However, apart from the voices possibly attributed, this poem seems also to unfold a more critical aspect of reading that observes a display of signs meanwhile around

such an unblissful “Slant of light.”

Arguably, the poem for sure gives an intensive landscape of signs that prevail for directing certain meanings, and signs in the poem are indeed worth a note for an intensity of domination not only over meanings but over other signs. As its last stanza suggests, this poem mildly witness a particular sign-navigated state of reality and critically examines the fluidity and the artificial malleability of meanings, which is actually comprised by signs. Just as Jean Baudrillard has made it clear, meaning is definitely made inferior to signs/signifiers which in fact is more artificial and malleable (2). Indeed, through the poem, it is clear that the “Slant of light” is definitely a sign which not only all meanings but other signs such as “Landscape” and “Shadow” submit to. The absoluteness of the “Slant of light” in fact renders those other signs into signifiers of submission and directs them in the oscillating manner of coming and going. In the sense, with the drama of the “light” waving between the motions coming and going, it is unfolded that the submission that is conducted by some “signifiers” is even indeed not a consistency. All the deeds that suggest the submissiveness is only taken when the absolute authority arrives. The “Landscape” only listens when the “Slant of light” comes; and so do “Shadows.” Only do “Shadows” hold their breath. When there is a “Distance” made as if showing a view of “Death,” there seems also a certain silence brought to the fore and seemingly

rendering any overpowering highest invalid.

It is seemingly intriguingly that this coming-going intensity can also indicate somehow a further mode of intensity between when/what is valid and invalid. Such a valid-invalid tension lying between the absence and presence of the “Slant of light,” to some extent, is seemingly indicating just a rather reduced state of reality which is only based on signs. Everything is thus examined under not meanings itself but signs of meaning that gives valid-invalid credits to be motivated. However, to some extent, though the “Slant of light” poem in its last stanza tends to critique back and perhaps allows for more opportunities to seek for new way out of the sign-culture reality, there seems still hardly a lighted path that leads for an exodus. In the end there is still a sign-structure of vagueness, which serves the semiotic with invalid differentiation between binary oppositions, and which is hardly eliminated but surrounds any individuals. Weirdly as it is, this state of the sign-reality seems to some extent also attributed to an excess of desires which reversely feed not only fantasies and dream but more widely a certain dreamscape, more real than the real.

Just as another Dickinson poem “Within that little Hive” (J 1607) may at the moment lastly conclude, there is indeed little way out from a state where “Dream” and “Reality” are both rendered as signs and even become little differentiable from each other.

Within that little Hive

Such Hints of Honey lay

As made Reality a Dream

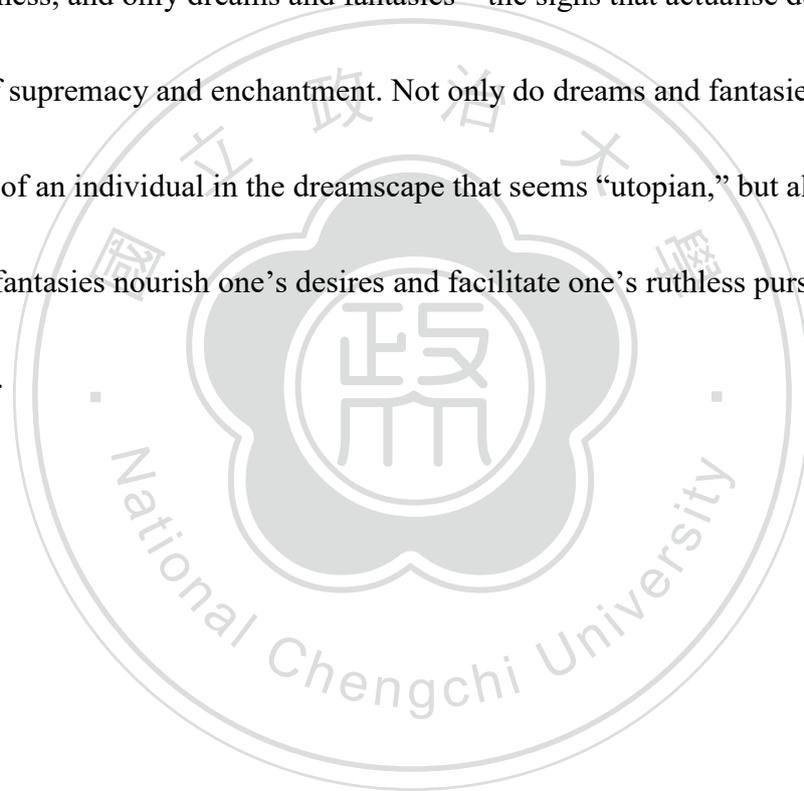
And Dreams, Reality –

Critically, with their desires and an attempt to actualise them, any dreaming others are seemingly led to such an enclosure of “that little Hive” where dreams and fantasies are now fertilised as preceding everything. As the poem indicates, it is not “Honey” itself that can really be harvested. Instead, it is the “Hints” of this supposed “Honey” that lures one’s desire and radicalises what is desired as something deliciously worthy of a pursuit. It is thus perceived that “the little Hive” is rather deceptive; it presents a particular dimension which makes dreams and fantasies so promising and tasty, and desire so likely to be fulfilled. It is noted that the sweetness of “Hive” in fact pretends a likeliness of the good, where one dreams for the emptiness and yet is distanced from the “more authentic” bliss of “Honey.”

IV. Conclusion

Indeed, through her poetry, Emily Dickinson keenly presents a particular facet of landscape in which dreams and fantasies dominate effectively. Within such a dreamscape, a sense of vagueness seems to overwhelmingly possess one’s perception

in the sense that any sharp boundaries between any binary oppositions hardly survive. Divisions between good and not-good, in the sense, also turn ambivalent. In this regard, what conventionally defines the border between the utopian and the dystopian, at the moment, is just an enigma, and left in severe doubt. Any intentions of clarification are seemingly just deferred and deterred in such an environment of opaqueness, and only dreams and fantasies—the signs that actualise desires—take the form of supremacy and enchantment. Not only do dreams and fantasies govern the desires of an individual in the dreamscape that seems “utopian,” but alluringly dream/fantasies nourish one’s desires and facilitate one’s ruthless pursuit of what is desired.





Chapter Five

Conclusion

Throughout intensive discussions on the issues of dream/fantasy and signs/simulacra, this thesis eventually unfolds a rather Baudrillardian landscape of reading and understanding dreams in several Emily Dickinson's poems. It strives to open up a certain critical aspect that dreams can actually be (re)conceptualised as empty fantasies which not only embody desires but also allow signs to actualise the desired.

It is seen that, the destiny of a dreamer who is dreaming about the so-called ideal is never to obtain or approach anything dreamt, but just to be fixed under massive signs of what is desired. The dangerousness of dream and dreaming, at the point, lies just in the manner that signs actually not only precede what is desired but, in the scale of hyper-reality, also further enclose one under a territory of the semiotic.

As Dickinson's poem "We dream – it is good we are dreaming –" (J 531) unravels, "an Age – and Name – / And perhaps a phrase in Egyptian –" are indeed signs that can powerfully indicate and embody one's desires, allowing him/her to fulfil certain dreams. However, in the manner of actualising desire, signs are also something risky and which one should be careful of; for, as the poem unfolds, those signs also serve to

“Cool us to Shafts of Granite –.” In this regard, it is clear that signs of what is desired is never delightful, but to some extent deceptive, leading to a certain predicament of whoever desires to dream. As another Dickinson poem J 475 tends to visualise, it is the “Doom” that encloses any others in a certain doorless “House” and makes them merely submit to the sign of authority, e.g., the sign of “God.”

Based on the unfolding of the essence of dream as pure fantasy about the ideal, where a Baudrillardian consideration of simulacra and simulation is thus brightened as a critical framework of interpretation, the thesis also sheds light on much more profundity in other Dickinson poems. In the thesis, a couple of her social poems also leave room for the intricacies of this observation of dream, as the potency of such simulacral fantasies over human society is further allowed for. Just as her poems narrate, it is in the plague of the fantasies of the ideal that human society is reduced to be a semiotic kingdom in which a phenomenon of resurrection in a system of signs is found inevitable. Language, norms, codes, social protocols, and even identity, as noted by Dickinson with the plights of her seashore visitor and (Leo)pard parallel, are all unfolded as a cluster of devices that serve to (re-)encode an individual as a form particularly appertaining to the orders of de-individualisation and homogeneity.

The episode of conformity and docility, as Dickinson’s poetry recognises it, is such a critical facet that none should just simplify it as demonstrating the practical

scale of similitude through the given binary orders determinant of, e.g., what is madness and sanity. Of most importance, it testifies to the emptiness which gives birth to the sign of orders based on certain dreaming and fantasies. It also indicates a void of desire concealed behind the ruthless pursuit of what is ideal in a social domain where the reliance on the social givens and on their power of social division is made absolute. The revelation of the conflicting drama between “Assent” and “Demur,” as the poet puts it in the poetry, is clearly one of the examples that account for such a violent show of absoluteness, and the consecutive tyranny of social labelling, which is later poeticised as a “Chain,” is discernibly a sign that signals the triumph of a majority, whose interest and desires in such a sign-determined matrix are highly prioritised and in particular given precedence over all the other matters.

Certainly, with her sensitivity to social order and social relations, Emily Dickinson indeed writes poems that sharply question the sweetness of the dream of similitude. Her poems such as “Much Madness is the divinest Sense –” (J 435) not only interrogate the arrival of a milieu where exists the circulation of some desires for homogeneity. In a way, as read together with the (Leo)pard poem (J 492), the poems also serve to disclose the fact that, for pursuing such a dream state, little can one elude from his or her end of being assimilated as part of the semiotic in society. It is the (near-)extinction of individuality bred by the social eagerness for homogenisation that

figures prominently in much of her writing. Arguably, harbouring suspicions against certain authority lurking in society, Dickinson's poetics eloquently puts emphasis on the predicament of the social individual, whose identity and distinctiveness are both seriously disregarded and devalued. With the castrated (Leo)pard closely read, her poems indeed leave her readers in an ultimate awareness of the turmoil of the individual over his or her "spurned" identity. As a result of the compulsion and its culminating deference, it is a desired society rather than an actual one that is surely brought into play, ironically becoming even preeminent for its semiotic enchantment. It is less uncertain that there seems in the end nowhere in actuality that can be found dislodged from the charm of the semiotic.

Lastly, the thesis locates the significance of dream in the ultimate constellation of what is therefore seen as "dreamscape," and investigate not only paradoxical ambiguity between the utopian/dystopian but also vagueness that always stands in meaning. Indeed, through her poetry such as "'Heaven' has different Signs – to me –" (J 575), it is seen that Dickinson's poems map out an impressive landscape where one can see dreams and fantasies supersedes any other things. Clearly, in this dreamscape, vagueness dominates one's perception, and any boundaries between any binary oppositions have already hardly survive; divisions between good and not-good, and the utopian and the dystopian, in the sense, are also hard to sharply tell. In this regard,

meaning is just left in severe doubt. As the poem “There’s certain Slant of light” (J 258) ultimately reminds, meaning remains in an environment of opaqueness and fluidity, and is designated or conducted by the authority which is given by signs such as the problematic “Slant of light.”

With this respect, only dreams and fantasies actualise desires semiotically and perform supreme and enchanting. It is signs that regulate how and what an individual can desire in the dreamscape that seems “utopian.” As the last poem “Within the little Hive” suggest, it is never “Honey” that entices one to the “Hive”; but instead, it is the “Hive” itself as “Hint of Honey” that indeed nourish one’s desires and makes one eager for what is desired.

Through the careful exploration of Emily Dickinson’s poetry, the thesis might display its possible academic contributions at least in three aspects: a study of Dickinson’s poetry in the subject of dreams, a postmodernist reading of Dickinson, and the deep concern about the utopian/dystopian construction of human society. As opposed to cultural examinations which consider the nineteenth-century dream theories, this thesis opens another way of reading Dickinson in which the subject of dreams can be associated with ideals. Moreover, the thesis also aims to demonstrate a possible reading of Dickinson with postmodernist thought, especially in terms of Baudrillard’s theory which anatomizes sophisticatedly the issues of simulacra and

dreams associated with ideals in Dickinson's poetry. Lastly, the thesis manifests with a Baudrillardian reading of Dickinson the deep considerations of the utopian/dystopian construction of human society in the era of simulation.



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