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**THE MANIFESTATION OF  
THE UNCONSCIOUS IN  
THE POETICS OF EMILY  
DICKINSON**

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*Thiago Nolla de Freitas Batista*

Universidade de São Paulo, Course of  
Philosophy, Letters and Human Sciences  
São Paulo

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**Abstract:** The present work aims to discuss the manifestations of the Unconscious in part of the literary production of Emily Dickinson – more specifically, in the selected corpus of the compilation ‘A Branca voz da solidão’, translated by José Lira in 2000, but using only the original text in English. Based on the iconographic analyzes of the corpus in question and associating them with Dickinson’s stylistic tendencies, as well as with the works of Freud and Lacan, the idea is to explore the impulses of the human psyche and the remodeling of its own daily life as an inserted woman. in a patriarchal and traditionalist society, which condemned his passion for literature.

**Keywords:** Emily Dickinson, poetry, Unconscious, American poetry

Emily Dickinson was born in the city of Amherst, Massachusetts, in the year 1830. Despite not having many publications in her lifetime, she became one of the most renowned poets not only in the United States, but in history. Author of more than 1800 poems, usually built with short lines of three or four poetic syllables, Dickinson signed fragments while confined in her room. There, she assimilated the restricted world in which she lived and transformed an “incarcerated” daily life, so to speak, into a pantheon of creative impulses that analyzed both herself and others.

Through her fragments, Dickinson explored the impulses of the human psyche and the remodeling of her life as a woman, in a patriarchal society and in a family organization that prevented her from following her goals – her father did not accept that his daughters followed a literary career. For that reason, the poems he created remained hidden in his room or were exchanged with trusted people.

Influenced by the literary schools that preceded her, she was one of the pioneers of

1 *The Unconscious as Language: From Freud to Lacan*, Julio Cesar Lemes de Casto, 2009. Available at: < <https://periodicos.fclar.unesp.br/casa/article/view/1773>>.

the female perspective in modern poetry. The central theme of her writings involved a daily life centered on work as a governess, on her responsibilities as a housewife and, mainly, on death. The problem of the afterlife, guided by the loss of friends, family and lovers, was mixed with non-ordinary love incursions, using this feeling to explore more universal plots.

## THE MANIFESTATION OF THE UNCONSCIOUS IN THE POETICS OF EMILY DICKINSON

For Freud, the instance of the preconscious – characterized as an “intermediate instance between the Unconscious and Consciousness”<sup>1</sup>– serves as a barrier that prevents complete access to what one does not remember, and which is activated in certain situations.

In parallel, it is possible to understand this pre-consciousness as a consequence of the role that Dickinson plays, mandatorily, within a patriarchal society centered on gender segregation between men and women. Emily’s father, Edward Dickinson, was always opposed to his daughters pursuing a literary career and believed that both must follow in their mother’s footsteps and become the epitome of what it meant to be an Amherst woman in the 19th century: submissive to the wishes of her husband and an exemplary housewife.

Emily, however, did not accept these roles, especially with regard to literary creation. This way, he accessed the Unconscious and what he did not remember through poetry. Her writings served as a means of political and social reaffirmation, and allowed her to express her most intimate thoughts and, within the context in which she was inserted, subject to “controversy”.

In a way, it is possible to say that the Unconscious does not follow any rules,

but it is not defined as something chaotic. This instance, contrary to what it seems, is structured within its symbolic function: that is, as an immaterial representation of linguistic signs that are manifested on individuals and that are assimilated beyond Consciousness, within a “sliding of the signifier under the signified”, in which “each signifier can be associated with different meanings”<sup>2</sup>.

This way, if the Unconscious follows its own rules, Emily would also not rely on the grammatical and aesthetic bureaucracies of the English language and creative writing. The poet ignores formulaic aspects of punctuation, such as commas, exclamations and interrogations; these choices are visible, for example, in Poem I<sup>3</sup> and Poem VIII, in which the agglutinated ideas are separated by the constant presence of half-lines and illogism (in which the principles of cohesion and coherence require symbolic and metaphorical knowledge, that escapes the everyday functioning of the world and its respective images).

In the first stanza of Poem I, *Soul (Alma)*<sup>4</sup> transforms itself from an abstract and immaterial noun to a character that even has the power to decide. After all, she *chooses the Society itself (selects her own Society, v.1)*. After making the decision, she “turns her back” on what made her universal (*shuts the Door – to her divine Majority present no more, vv. 2-3*), as if the *divine majority* it represented no longer existed and it was now part of something more restricted and even more palpable.

The third stanza marks Dickinson’s journey through the spiritual world and the materialization of a practically non-existent logic within the scope he seeks to explore. In it, the author abandons the use of the third person and claims the point of view for herself, marked by the expression *I have known*

2 Ibid.

3 The chosen poems can be found in the *Selected Corpus section*.

4 All translations were made freely by the author of this article, as a way of helping to understand the analyses.

(*I’ve known her*). From here, the narrative impersonality of the first two stanzas gives way to a more intimate portrait, characteristic of the poet. The *Soul*, again, is plunged into a process of expansion and contraction – more specifically, a decreasing gradation in which the *broad nation (ample nation)* reduces to *Uma (One)*. It is as if the universalized meaning already mentioned above became the property of only one individual, *closing the valves of his attention (closing the valves of her attention, v. 11)*, solidifying itself like a *Rock (Stone)* and leaving open what can be expected after such a mysterious and important choice, edified by the way the poem was constructed.

The poem in question brings subtle brushstrokes of contradiction that escape the stylistic obviousness and refer, in essence, to the immateriality of the *Soul* and the rigid and inescapable solidity of the *Rock* – two distinct elements. It is notable how paradoxical constructions are constant in Dickinson’s poetic production and return in Poem VIII, in which the author returns to scrutinize the oppositions.

In the first stanza, she comments that she has been *hungry all year –/ My Day Has Come – for dinner – (vv. 1-2)*, indicating that the insatiable desire to eat, which she had been experiencing for so long, got confused within her chronology to which I was used and that, eventually, the *day* became confused with the night and came to *dinner*; however, it is possible to understand the verses as the moment of glory that the poet felt when she finally realized that she could enjoy food pleasures after years without feeling them. It is not surprising that, shortly afterwards, he says that *trembling he placed the Table nearby – (v. 3)*, as if he could not control himself or hold back to eat, *touching the Curious Wine (v. 4)*.

The “strange” presentation, so to speak, is

soon explored in more depth in the following two stanzas: Dickinson, through a narrative that does not follow any apparent prototypical order, deals, again, with the abstraction of the *possibilities* and automatic impulses of the Unconscious – in which, in a way, *dinner* and *wine* are nothing more than unfulfilled desires. After all, the second stanza opens with the lines *This is what I had seen at the Tables –/ When I turned, famished, to the House* (vv. 5-6). The prominence of food and drink exists in the mind of the poetic self and demonstrates the appetite for *Wealth*. Here, the narrator observes a banquet, symbol of the fortunate, from a distant perspective.

In the third stanza of the same poem, Dickinson reveals his lack of knowledge about the *ample Bread* (v. 9) and how this non-perception affected his own understanding of the world (here, considering the expression *ample Bread* as a metaphor for something beyond what was known to him, beyond the *Crumb* he mentions in the next verse in the “*An era so different from Crumb*”). Thus, the poet promotes a return to material reality and a distance from daydreams, a movement that can be related to the Freudian concept of *repression*: repression, understood as a defense mechanism, is intrinsically associated with memory<sup>5</sup>, or, as in the poem in question, to non-memory. Dickinson’s analyzes start from a denial and non-existence of what was common to his life in Amherst, confined to the house that belonged to his father, the pinnacle of the patriarchal and male iconography that governed society at the time. Therefore, it is natural that Dickinson “hid” thoughts and desires that would not be well received by the father figure, which is why he locked himself in his own room to write his texts, refusing to show them to other people (with the exception of certain confidants), and by the nearly two thousand poems being rediscovered a century

<sup>5</sup> Freud and the Unconscious, Luiz Alfredo Garcia-Roza, 1994 (p. 88 – 92).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 90.

later.

Despite being configured as a defense mechanism, repression is flawed and predicts the existence of loopholes, roughly speaking, in which the “avoidance of memory”<sup>6</sup> emerges from the Unconscious and becomes part of the Consciousness and, in Dickinson’s case, of the expression of the world through an artistic literary bias. In a way, the poet feels ashamed for wanting a literary career, forcing herself to return to the social roles assigned to her since birth; however, this same avoidance emerges when the complete perception of the world is denied to her and she seeks to understand what she was refused to teach. It is this conflict between the compatibility of what she aspires to and the incompatibility of what could be that materializes in the thematic and structural construction of her poems.

Dickinson’s poetic style not only works for her reaffirmation in society as a social and active subject, but also serves as a political instrument for her to understand, within the idiosyncrasies seen in the poems, what is happening around her – using various linguistic resources to to denounce, to herself, constant ills that permeated Amherst (which, as we know, was the closest meaning to the world that the author had).

Besides, in the third stanza of Poem VIII, Dickinson devises a kind of empathetic placement that reveals his class consciousness as part of the political and economic elite of the city and that he was bothered by the disparities that occurred even within his own home. The cruel reality is transposed in *I did not know the bread and bread –/ I was very different from the Crumb* (vv. 9-10); the taste of wealth, in this sense, was never “tasted” by the poetic self – on the contrary: only the crumbs, leftovers of what was wasted and which, many times, were shared with the birds (*The Birds and I, normally shared / in the Dining Room*

– of *Nature* –, vv. 11-12). In a more symbolic setting, the poet again criticizes the social abyss between classes, in which the less well-off population sees itself to the detriment of unattainable dreams and moments of pleasure when crossing paths with any article that resonates in the least similar to those consumed by the bourgeoisie – something that is also clear at the beginning of the fourth stanza, where it is said: *Abundance hurt me – I was too young* – (vv. 13-14), demonstrating the romanticized contentment of the poor class with little or nothing. Political consciousness adopts an ambiguous tone when allied with Nature: Dickinson points out that he was *sick (ill)* and *strange (odd)* with the amount of wealth he observed, just as when a wild blackberry (*Berry*) was plucked from its bushes and taken to the *Road*, that is, to commerce, losing the characteristics that made it unique.

The structural complexity of Dickinson's poems also reveals a need to understand herself from the perspective of others, that is, from the projection she adopts when observing others. The duality put into play comes from the process of repression, which, in a continuous movement, emerges in the Consciousness and opens space for the poet to reveal her true feelings, as if the social disparity she manages to see were an extension of the same disparity she faces within from home. Dickinson is plucked from the bushes in a similar way to the blackberry, which, in turn, is plucked in a similar way to the lower classes. Such an epiphanic dive is in total communion with the stylistic movement of his poems, in which the half-stripes, for example, represent instantaneous lapses in the logical process, “breaking” into several pieces to later be reorganized based on a mentality that need to express yourself.

The search for the poet's identity is external and internal. According to Castro (2009), “in the formations of the Unconscious, or

7 *The Unconscious as Language: From Freud to Lacan*, Julio Cesar Lemes de Castro, 2009.

compromise formations, there is a compromise between desire and censorship: a repressed signifier finds ways to come to the fore by associating itself in a ciphered way with other signifiers”<sup>7</sup>; in several of Dickinson's poems, her imprisonment is the driving force that allows her to project her yearnings for writing and that brings together the articulations of repression no longer to protect herself, but to get rid of the anxieties of not being able to. Despite such mandatory confinement, the process of creation and writing is marked by the significant use of figures of speech (which will be explored later) that permeate the subtexts of its verses.

Besides, according to Castro, the articulation of the Unconscious has complete disregard for logic and for the principles “that govern conscious thought, such as non-contradiction and the relationship of cause and effect”. For this reason, language is in constant dialogue with poetry itself – and this contradiction is essential for the construction of meaning in Poem VI: here, Dickinson paints a very prosopopeic image about two extremes, represented by *East* and *West*. (*West*).

The grandeur of the personification is soon revealed in the opening verse, *who is the East?* (*Who is the east?*). In a normative discourse, we would normally use the interrogative *what?* to ask about a cardinal point, but the poet decides to place it in a profound individualization that goes beyond the use of the capital letter, extending to the rest of the stanza. Immersing herself in a didactic and symbolic game of questions and answers, Dickinson adopts an appealing tone, both internally and externally, trying to discover the best way to explain to herself and to the interlocutor who the *East* is: *The Yellow Man / What can be Purple if you want / Who brings the Sun* (vv. 2-4).

Soon after, she asks the same question, this time about the *West*. The constant use of inversions is noted, not in the syntactic



construction of the sentence, but in the characterization of the two characters: the explanation of the *East (East)* and the *West (West)* starts from the idea that meaning can only be defined by negation. In other words, if the *East* is the *Yellow Man/Who can be Purple if he wants to*, he cannot be the *West*, who is the *Purple Man/Who can be Yellow if he wants to* (vv. 6-8). This definition is reaffirmed even by the fact that both colors are complementary (that is, opposite to each other).

The emergence of the Unconscious follows its own rhythm and configuration; it is possible to understand the images pulsed by the Unconscious as an expansion of dream manifestations – and it is necessary to understand that the quality of dream thoughts follows the same rules as conscious thoughts<sup>8</sup>. The understanding of the latter, however, is recognized in an immediate flow, while that of the former foreshadows a greater reflection and time of reflection – since “the oneiric content is expressed in pictographic characters, in hieroglyphs”. In this regard, the dream goes hand in hand with the manifestation of the Unconscious and both converge in poetic language (the maximum expression of what unites the three concepts: the *metaphor*).

*Metaphors* find very fertile ground in Poem II, in which each element already mentioned about the Unconscious is used ad *nauseam*. The stanzas merge into an interesting construction that transforms the *House*, the first personified word, into a representation both mundane and divine. The mundane metaphor can consider the *House* as the symbolic manifestation of the transitory journey of human life on Earth, revolt in mysteries and that does not follow a clear linearity – as well as the images that are created in the Unconscious; the divine metaphor, in turn, is associated with the personified mention of *Him*, in the concluding verse (a significant choice, since it

contrasts with the opening verse), referring to the Christian divinity who accompanied his life and countless of his poems.

The first four verses do not characterize the *House* in the traditional way. – on the contrary: they again use negations to create a very different image, in which *no Wagon reached – no Corpse, brought down – no street vendor – approached* (vv. 2-4).

In the next stanza, the gloomy atmosphere continues to increase and arouse curiosity on the part of the reader – after all, as we perceive between vv. 5-8, there is a *Chimney (Chimney)* that never spurted smoke and windows brushed by both *Dawn (Sunrise)* and *Sunset (Sunset)*, but which never revealed any sign of human life, marked by the *Empty Pane (Empty Pane)*. It is this description based on personifications and on “non-being” (that is, on the aforementioned negation) that culminates in the reflection of the remarkable presence of the Unconscious in Dickinson’s literary production: after all, “instead of referring directly to a meaning, each signifier refers to others, in an endless process”<sup>9</sup>, and the use of abstract figures foreshadows a need to materialize what has never been – and what repression can only show through these same stylistic concretions and juxtapositions.

To speak of metaphors in poetic productions is to fall into redundancy – but what calls our attention is the way in which Dickinson uses this figurative resource to adorn his texts. The poet unravels the linguistic elements that would be condemned at the time the poems were made and rearranges them as she pleases (which is why the half-stripes are so important). The dramatization of the usual punctuation is left aside so that the juxtaposition of the images departs from a principle called *lapse*, in which “the message we are trying to transmit is abruptly interrupted by another message, coming from

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

the Unconscious, which acts as an Other who dwells<sup>10</sup>.

This appears, for example, in Poem III, where she returns to explore the imagery construction of *Casa (House)*. One can see Dickinson's inclination to build a dialogical line between the abstract concepts he intends to explore with something material and commonplace, perhaps allying himself with the experiences and living in Amherst. Here, the House in question mentions the subjectivity of *Possibility*. The poet, right from the start, uses the first person singular (*I*) as a point of view, saying that she *dives into Possibility – a House more beautiful than Prose* – (vv. 1-2), indicating that the multiplicity of the idea in question is somehow more enjoyable than the written or spoken language itself (somewhat ironic, considering its *status*). After all, as she rightly points out, *Possibility* has a *greater number of Windows – Superior – for Doors* – (vv. 3-4), that is, a greater amplitude than the plastered solidity of *Prose*.

As an expression of his Unconscious, it is noted that Dickinson does not start from an etymological or normative explanation of what *Possibility* means, but rather from metaphors and comparisons to what he has a lot of contact with – literature. In the second stanza, *Possibility* is elevated to a level of infinity, combined with concepts such as *Chambers as the Cedros (Chambers as the Cedars*, referring to the immensity of a cluster of cedars), the *Impregnable of the Eye (Impregnable of Eye)*, alluding to that which cannot be seen with the naked eye, the *Eternal Ceiling (Everlasting Roof)*, about the possibilities that *Possibility itself* establishes, among others.

The third stanza, finally, is the one that most summarizes how the poet characterizes *Possibility* – through opposing thoughts and images, either in phrasal organization or in antithetical construction. In vv. 9-10,

the stream of consciousness stands out in comparison to the prototypical order of *Subject + Predicate + Complement: From visitors – the most beautiful – To Occupation – This* – are configured as two verses in hyperbole, which touch the synthesis. The sudden inversion deliberately “harms” the immediate understanding of what Dickinson means, but we know that there is a purpose behind it: by not sticking to norms of poetic construction, she uses thought and all its “failures” as guides, represented by the constant and interruptive use of semi-stripes. As there is no order to be followed in the mental realm of conjectures, why must she follow it?

Finally, vv. 11-12 turn to the prototypical ordering of the sentence and, instead of the hyperbate, make use of the aforementioned antithesis: to finish characterizing the universal infinity of *Possibility*, Dickinson compares it to a pair of *narrow Hands that win wide propagation (The spreading wide) to welcome Paradise (gather Paradise)*.

Here, we see the junction of metaphors and lapses, reflected by the search for concreteness to abstract elements – in which the intangibility of *Possibility* is garnished by the evocation of a *House* with a *greater number of Windows* and *Doors*. The Unconscious, in this composition, is present in the interpolation of the innumerable mental subjects who gain voice: these gaps are filled by the deliberate break of periods by the aforementioned half-stripes. Dickinson deals with the fact that she remained quiet for too long and, when triggered by what poetic production would provide her, she had to find a way to deal with the multiple “it emerged profusely and she did so through discontinuities. In other words, “the subject feels as if he has been run over by another subject that he does not know, but that imposes itself on his speech, producing changes of names and forgetting

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10 Ibid.

whose meaning escapes him”<sup>11</sup>. At the same time, it is these cohesive perplexities that find meaning in themselves.

According to Garcia-Roza (1994, p. 174), “to say that a representation is Unconscious or that it is in the Unconscious does not mean anything other than that it is subject to a syntax different from that which characterizes consciousness”. In other words, the Unconscious has its own way of being articulated that escapes the everyday conventions of language and material production – and this applies to Dickinson’s work, mainly due to opposition. In Poem VII, Emily builds one of her most significant poems, in which the explanation of terms such as *Reason (Sense)* and *Madness (Madness)* are inverted in favor of an artistic defense and the reorganization of the normative world as we know it.

The poetic construction is, nothing less, an imagistic explanation of what Freud and Lacan, for example, would come to explore decades later about the Unconscious: unlike what was imagined, the Unconscious is not a reserved, inaccessible and barbaric place when compared to the Conscious., but a differently operated instance. At first, there is the superficial opposition of *Reason* and *Madness* that opens the excerpt in question and that may cause some strangeness on the part of readers when, in fact, they are complementary terms such as the *Conscious* and the *Unconscious*. One does not exist without the other – which Dickinson makes very clear through didacticism and accurate choice of words. And, while precisely defining these instances is difficult work, she makes it more fluid with purposeful breaks in punctuation and a reformulation of linguistic and aesthetic precepts that follows the organizational transgression of the Unconscious.

In addition to the aforementioned didacticism, the poet makes an indirect

criticism of this duality that has always been present in any individual. Dickinson, living in an extremely patriarchal society and under a ceiling that did not allow women to pursue a literary career, but demanded that they aim only at marriage and building a family, was seen as crazy, fleeing the premeditated “reasonableness” of the roles of 19th century genre. For this reason, she comments that *In This, like All, prevails* (v.5), stating that the clear distinction between *Reason* and *Madness* must exist and cannot be altered – maintaining the indisputable *status of what must be protected and what must be condemned. Agree – and you are sane –/ Disagree – you are immediately dangerous –/ And dealt with a Chain* - (vv. 6-8); in other words, going against the *status quo* is like a double-edged sword, in which the bravery of using one’s own voice can premeditate a metaphorical banishment from social life and result in a label of threat to peace and public order. In correlation, this same courage to break the rigidity of norms and rules can be applied to the functioning of the Unconscious, which, until today, is described as being “the place of the will in a raw state and impermeable to any intelligibility” (GARZIA-ROSA, 1994, p.170). Now, the mistake of characterizing the Unconscious as chaotic and disturbing is similar to the mistake of analyzing the aesthetic and narrative construction of Dickinson’s poems (and of his own person), due to the dense denial of customs.

Garzia-Rosa goes further and states that:

“[...] Freud emphatically declares that there is nothing arbitrary about psychic events, they are all determined. The difference is that there is no single determination. The syntax of the Unconscious is not the same as that of the pre-conscious-conscious system, but that does not mean that it does not have any syntax” (p. 170-1).

This way, the aforementioned chaos is

<sup>11</sup> *Freud and the Unconscious*, Luiz Alfredo Garcia-Roza, 1994 (p. 88 – 92).



premeditated and is reaffirmed by the imagery and technical choices that Dickinson makes in the construction of his narratives. In Poem IV, the poet dives into metalanguage to refer to herself in an apparently profuse use of half-stripes – which soon proves to be structured.

The first stanza (vv. 1-4) demonstrates the poet's care in constructing the *extreme clause* (the most *extreme clause*), using a superlative form outside the grammatical norm to represent your caution. As she herself says, she *read the phrase – constantly - / I reviewed it with my eyes, / To see that I was not mistaken*: as well as her entire artistic process, Dickinson carefully orders each word and each verse to reach a certain objective that, here, seems ambiguous. There is, on the one hand, his need to construct a text that reveals his afflictions as a poet; on the other hand, the meaning expands to other poems, explaining the unusual use of pauses, rhymes and syntactic constructions.

The first personification appears in the second stanza, with the word *Date* (*Date*). In addition to constantly reading the sentence he wrote, Dickinson is also attentive to the *date, and form, of shame* (v. 5) – a choice that reveals his inner concerns, as *shame* (*shame*) probably alludes to your craft. Apprehensive about sharing what she writes with the world, the poet decides to characterize her texts as shameful, as if they were nothing more than an extension of her thoughts and personality. The thesis presented is confirmed with v. 7, in which the use of the quotation marks in “*God have mercy*” on the *Soul* (“*God have mercy*” on the *Soul*) is a way of understanding his work as a “sin”, as if he needed a divine endorsement to continue what he does (even if the consequences are disastrous).

Dickinson also deals with two meanings of the word *soul*: one, present with a capital letter, (v.7) and the other, with a small letter (v.9). The obvious distinction can also relate

12 *The Unconscious as Language: from Freud to Lacan*, Julio Cesar Lemes de Castro, 2009, p.5

to the Platonic concepts of *the sensible world* and the *world of ideas*, even though the term is an abstract noun by nature. The *Soul* would be found in the perfect idealization, in the archetypal construction that can only be emulated by human hands, and not created; the *soul*, mundane and ephemeral, is the concept that is brought to society, to individualistic coexistence, less elevated than the *Soul* present in the aforementioned Platonic ideology. For this reason, Dickinson says: *I made my soul familiar - / With its extremity -* (vv. 9-10), delineating the supposed infinity of the *soul* so that it is more palpable and comprehensible, trying not to culminate in a *new Agony* (v. 12)).

It is notable how the poet makes her craft a painful and arduous work, which often does not bear fruit and can cause various frustrations. Moreover, she comments that the *soul*, pierced by such anxieties, can only find tranquility next to *Death* (*Death*). As she says, *but she, and death, known - / They find tranquility, like friends* (vv. 13-14), entangling a mystical image of denouement and conclusion. In *Death*, everything passes; *Matter ends* (*Matter ends*) and the concepts that we once defended and followed in life no longer have value. *Death and Soul are companions and greet* each other without resentment, walking together towards an eternity in which nothing else matters but idealization and abstraction.

Castro also discusses the meaning of a signifier, which is “defined negatively, by what it is not, by its difference in relation to the other elements of the signifier chain”<sup>12</sup>. So, if it is non-being that defines this tangible element of linguistic constructions, the perception of such materiality is carried out through metaphorical and associative constructions that use aspects of different cosmos so that different images are constructed. Thus, “each signifier can be associated with different

meanings, there is a latent ambiguity throughout the discourse”<sup>13</sup>.

Like Poem IV, Poem V dives into metalinguistic impulses, in which Dickinson does not talk about the art of poetic making, but rather about the possibilities that literature and writing bring to those who dare to venture into them – dialoguing directly with the multiplicity discourse available to Castro. The opening of the text compares the *Book (Book)* to a *Frigate (Frigate)*, capable of taking us to *distant Lands (Lands away)*. The finding is not restricted to Dickinson’s time, but crosses generations and continues to be used as a motto to incite people to venture into literary narratives and into the multiple worlds that are created out of nothing and come to life through words.

The poet distinguishes between prose and poetry: in vv. 3-4, Dickinson migrates from the maritime setting to a horse race, saying that there are no steeds like a page of prancing poetry (*Coursers like a Page of prancing Poetry*), within a loud “p” alliteration with *Page, prancing* and *Poetry*.

There is even the presence of a certain political content in the construction of the poem, in which Dickinson says that literature does not charge any *fee (Toll)* to be explored, by whatever the social class of its reader – in this case, the reflexive incursions are revealed by the acidity of the word *oppression (opress)*, which reflects, to a certain extent, the class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat – and tells how literary knowledge helps to face and question the position of a certain individual in the world. The conclusion, therefore, is ambivalent within the framework itself: *How frugal is the Chariot / Which carries the Human Soul* - (vv. 7-8) may mean that the *Chariot* which carries the *Human Soul* is literature, a simple way to lift the spirit; or that the *Chariot* of literature, being higher, cannot be compared with the

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p.5

simplicity of the *Chariot* of humans, which is simpler.

Dickinson’s poetics are infused and permeated by the constant battle between desire and censorship – where needs repressed by consciousness surface only when dealing with certain conditions. The political jokes that appear in Poem V, for example, can only be expressed when Dickinson deals with personifications and symbologies that are part of the restricted world to which she is confined; the universalization of themes such as the aforementioned class struggle or her role as a woman within nineteenth-century society takes shape and materializes in a different tangibility than we would expect, finding fertile territory from individual experiences and a macrocosmic understanding that it does not come in the form of a sociological or anthropological analysis, but in an architecture driven by comparisons, metaphors and “breaks” of continuity – which reflects the explosive mentality that the poet forced herself to hide in the confines of the Unconscious.

Individualization is the hallmark of Dickinson’s aesthetics and, even in the midst of identity markings, it does not follow a solidified parameter closed to further possibilities. In Poem IX, she does not use half-line markings to separate words and lines of thought, with the exception of the last verse. On the contrary, it creates a narrative without any punctuation marks that follows a line of opposition marked by the *Sun (Sun)* and the *shadow (shade)*. In the first two verses, the divergence appears through a clause that uses the condition: *If I had not seen the Sun, I could have borne the shadow (Had I not seen the Sun / I could have posted the shade*, vv. 1-2).

The poetic self, denoted by the first person, seems to be comfortable amidst the shadows, in his private and familiar space, a world he calls his own – “*Minha Selva*” (*My Jungle*). *Wilderness*), as it says in the concluding

verse. However, when the *sun* rises, it brings new light to this wild cosmos and builds a completely different landscape from the one the character was used to, which is why she can no longer bear the *shadows*. More than that, she ends the poem with a semi-stripe to indicate that the constructed imagery frame is not closed in on itself, but open to infinite possibilities brought by the *sunlight*.

It is also possible to understand the poem as the dichotomous relationship between the *familiar* and the *unknown*. The classic allegories of the *Sun* and the *shadow*, normally associated with wisdom and illusion (as seen in Plato's *Myth of the Cave*) are brought into the intimate portrait created by the poet, marked by the double use of the pronoun *I* (*I*). As it was already mentioned, the *familiar* itself resides in the *shadows*, whose secrets are known only to the poetic self. The *unknown* opens up with the *Sun*, whose rays open up opportunities and illuminate the landscape, leading the character to understand that there is a new world beyond the *shadows* and beyond what he accepts as absolute truth.

Dickinson's poems also use this same expression, repressed and allowed by the Unconscious, through timelessness. In the structural construction of the verses, there is a notable predilection for the present tense, which unfolds in the first or third person of speech, in which the use of now denotes a "suspension" of the usual chronology as we know it – that is, a line of continuity. We have, as some examples, *The Soul selects its own Society* (Poem I), *I dive into Possibility* (Poem III) and *There is no Frigate like a Book* (Poem V), in which the present time refers to something inconclusive, whose beginning does not reach its end – and nor does it intend to, considering the inflections promoted by the poet. Allied to the aforementioned "breaks", the temporal marks function, in the same way,

as an insurgence of the Unconscious: the semi-stripes dialogue with lapses of time, building discursive fragments between the signifiers, recovering the ambiguous way in which the demand for expressiveness clashes between the what you want to do and what you can do.

After all, according to Ribeiro (2020):

"[...] the unconscious no longer sustains itself in timelessness, in an eternalization that is only suspended when repression is unveiled by interpretation. The unconscious appears in the lapse of time, in the interval of discourse, between the signifiers, outside meaning and outside interpretation. The unconscious is only verified by being in a discourse, and the modulation of time stems from the effect of the signifying structure"<sup>14</sup>.

In short, Dickinson promotes a fusion between past and present through discursive timelessness and the use of primarily abstract elements to construct plots that both dialogue with his experience and to discuss universal themes - be it death, melancholy or coming of age, everything through poetry. Despite the constraints she suffered, the poet invested efforts in a considerable number of metalinguistic poems, which not only alluded to poetic making through unexpected imagery comparisons, but which also reaffirmed her strong predilection for saying what she thought differently than mere essays, philosophical or sociological statements about man. And the method found by Dickinson was, as seen in this work, rearranging the discursive elements, disassociating them into displaced fragments and reformulating them as constant drives of an Unconscious marked by the primordial duality between repression and desire.

## SELECTED CORPUS

i.

*The Soul selects her own Society*

<sup>14</sup> *Time and the Unconscious*, Guilherme Cunha Ribeiro. Available at: <http://www.institutopsicanalise-mg.com.br/index.php/almanaque24/64-tempo-inconsciente>

*Then – shuts the Door –  
To her divine Majority  
Present no more –*

*Unmoved – she notes the Chariots pausing  
At her low Gate –  
Unmoved – an Emperor be kneeling  
Upon her Mat –*

*I've known her – from a wide nation –  
Choose One –  
Then – close the Valves of her attention  
Like Stone –*

II.

*A House upon the Height –  
That Wagon never reached –  
No Dead, were ever carried down –  
No Peddler's Cart – Approached*

*Whose Chimney never smoked –  
Whose Windows – Night and Morn  
Caught Sunrise first – and Sunset – last –  
Then – held an Empty Pane –*

*Whose fate – Conjecture knew –  
No other neighbor – did –  
And what it was – we never lisped –  
Because He – never told –*

III.

*I dwell in Possibility –  
A fairer House than Prose –  
More numerous of Windows –  
Superior – for Doors –*

*Of Chambers as the Cedars –  
Impregnable of Eye –  
And for an Everlasting Roof  
The Gambrels of the Sky –*

*Of Visitors – the fairest –  
For Occupation – This –  
The spreading wide of narrow Hands*

To gather Paradise –

IV.

*I read my sentence – steadily –  
Reviewed it with my eyes,  
To see that I made no mistake  
In the most extreme clause –*

*The Date, and manner, of the shame –  
And then the Pious Form  
That "God have mercy" on the Soul  
The Jury voted Him –*

*I made my soul familiar –  
With her extremity –  
That at the last, it should not be  
The novel Agony –*

*But she, and Death, acquainted -  
Meet tranquility, as friends –  
Salute, and pass, without a Hint –  
And there, the Matter ends –*

v.

*There is no Frigate like a Book  
To take us Lands away  
Nor any Coursers like a Page  
Of prancing Poetry –  
This Travel may the poorest take  
Without oppression of Toll –  
How frugal is the Chariot  
That bears the Human Soul –*

VI

*Who is the East?  
The Yellow Man  
Who may be Purple if he can  
That carries in the Sun.*

*Who is the West?  
The Purple Man  
Who may be Yellow if he can  
That lets him out again*

VII.

*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 –*

VIII.

*I had been hungry, all the years –  
My Noon had Come – to dine –  
I trembling drew the Table near –  
And touched the Curious Wine –*

*'T was this on Tables I had seen –  
When turning, hungry, Home  
I looked in Windows, for the Wealth  
I could not hope – for Mine –*

*I did not know the ample Bread –  
'It was so unlike the Crumb  
The Birds and I, had often shared  
In Nature's – Dining Room –*

*The Plenty hurt me – 'it was so new –  
Myself felt ill – and odd –  
As Berry – of a Mountain Bush –  
Transplanted – to a Road –*

*Nor was I hungry – so I found  
That Hunger – was a way  
Of Persons outside Windows –  
The Entering – takes away –*

IX.

*Had I not seen the sun  
I could have borne the shade  
But Light a Newer Wilderness  
My Wilderness has made –*

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