

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Death is the greatest mystery in human life. It is a certainty, yet no one knows when it will come. Thus, it is natural that most people are afraid of death. Death is a fascinating topic and it has been the object of many literary works, including poetry; this is what makes me decide to choose it as my topic.

I choose poetry because it is relatively short compared to prose and drama, yet poems are full of meanings and ideas. They also connect more closely to our senses, emotion and imagination. Poetry is also concerned with all kinds of human experiences, including death.

In poetry, death can be seen not only as a frightening experience but also as a beautiful occasion. For these reasons, I chose two American poets, Robert Frost and Emily Dickinson, who view death from different perspectives. Dickinson writes during the Romantic period while Frost writes during the

Modern period. Their poems are truly worth reading, especially the ones related to death, and their contributions and achievements to the world of literature are great. With her poems, Emily Dickinson contributed a great deal to the world of literature in “her revolutionary way with words.” “Her isolation in that ‘room of her own’ gave her more than just time to right and reflect” (Lombardi). During her lifetime, she lived in seclusion and composed more than seventeen hundred excellent poems, over five hundred of which deal with death. It is thus safe to argue that death occupied a central place in her poetry. In the poems that I select, Dickinson romanticizes death; she makes death look “better” or less scary.

Unlike Dickinson, who romanticizes death, Robert Frost is more realistic when dealing with the topic of death. Frost portrays death as something that is fearful, as most people normally feel. Frost witnessed death when he buried his children and his wife early in his life. Frost’s son, Elliot, died of cholera, while his daughter, Marjorie, died of fever after giving birth to her first child, leaving an infant daughter. His wife, Elinor Miriam White Frost, died at the age of sixty-five from a heart attack; and his thirty-eight-year-old son, Carol, committed suicide. His experience with so many deaths definitely affected his way of talking about death in his poems.

From many of their poems, I selected six poems that talk about death. They are “In a Disused Graveyard,” “Spoils Of The Dead,” and “Out, Out” by Robert Frost and “Because I could not stop for Death,” “The last Night that She Lived,” and “Those fair—fictitious People—” by Emily Dickinson.

I believe that the best way to reveal their views of death is through the analysis of theme through poetic diction because the words and phrases they chose are the keys to show their point of view of death. "Diction is the distinctive tone or tenor of an author's writings. It is also understood as the selection of certain words or phrases that become peculiar to a writer" ("Diction"). Poetic diction is complex since there are usually multiple layers of meaning to consider. Theme is "the base topic or focus that acts as a foundation for the entire literary piece. The theme links all aspects of the literary work with one another and is basically the main subject" ("Theme").

Statement of the Problem

The statement of the problems in this thesis is as follows:

1. What are the themes of three poems by Robert Frost and three poems by Emily Dickinson?
2. How does the diction of the poems help to reveal the themes?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study in this thesis is as follows:

1. To show the themes of three poems by Robert Frost and three poems by Emily Dickinson.
2. To show how the diction helps to reveal the themes.

Method of Research

I conduct a library research for my thesis. After I read these poems, I analyze the theme of the poems through the diction. Then, I search for a number of references from books and Internet websites to help me with my analysis. In the end, I draw a conclusion from my analysis.

Organization of the Thesis

I divide my thesis into three parts. Preceded by the Abstract, and the Table of Contents, Chapter One is Introduction, which consists of the Background of the Study, the Statement of the Problem, the Purpose of the Study, the Method of Research, and the Organization of the Thesis. Chapter Two is Theme Analysis of Three of Robert Frost's Poems. Chapter Three is Theme Analysis of Three of Emily Dickinson's Poems. Chapter Four is the Conclusion. The thesis ends with Bibliography and Appendices, which contain the poems I analyze by Robert Frost and Emily Dickinson and the Biographies of both Robert Frost and Emily Dickinson.