

## Exploring mortality: Insights from two female poets through Bassnett's comparative literature

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### ABSTRACT

The concept of mortality has mystified humanity for civilizations, resulting in many arts in which mortality is the central exploration. Often, discussions of mortality are intertwined with religiosity, as faith offers understandings of death and salvation. Hence, this study (1) examines the themes of mortality in two poems entitled "Immortality" by Clare Harner, published in 1934, and "I'm Free" written by Anne Lindgren Davison in 1974, and (2) uncovers the association between the poets' religious beliefs and their attitudes toward death in their poems. Guided by Bassnett's (1993) comparative literature, this study applied a descriptive-qualitative approach, drawing on Wellek and Warren's (1956) intrinsic and extrinsic elements in literature. Findings reveal that Harner's "Immortality" is rich with Gypsy religious influence, whereas Davison's "I'm Free" is strongly affected by the values of Abrahamic religions. The poets' different uses of intrinsic elements reflect their distinct religious beliefs. Although both poems use a singular first-person point of view and focus on consolation and upliftment, Harner utilizes natural imagery, while Davison uses religious imagery. These illustrate how the poets' religious backgrounds influence their exploration of mortality, providing poetic insights into death and the beyond.

**Keywords:** Comparative literature, funerary poem, intrinsic and extrinsic elements, mortality, religious beliefs

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## INTRODUCTION

Mortality, as an inevitable part of human experience and existence, has always been a subject of deep concern to the human mind since the beginning of history. What causes it, how to prevent it from happening too soon, what happens to the human body afterward, and other scientific questions about death have been examined in various fields of research. However, mortality is not merely a problem that can be solved by scientific research. As stated by Bauman (1992), although death is the most certain aspect of human life, it remains mysterious and inexplicable. There are multiple questions about it, such as what happens to the human soul after death and whether or not there is an afterlife for the departed soul, that science has yet to answer. For those reasons, people seek alternative explanations through theological and philosophical beliefs, which are believed to address questions beyond the reach of scientific logic.

While atheists perspective holds that there is no existence after death (Chakraborty & Mukhopadhyay, 2021), Abrahamic religions such as Christianity, Islam, and Judaism insist that death is not the end of one's journey (Alma'itah & Haq, 2022; Crosby, 2018). Instead, they define it as the continuation of life or the beginning of eternal life in the afterlife. The Dharmic perspective of death and the afterlife is, in a way, different. Although they also believe in the existence of paradise (called Nirvana) as the ultimate destination of one's journey, they have no room for hell. The difference lies in the conception of reincarnation or re-embodiment of the soul (Santucci in Moreman 2017) as the rebirth of a soul in the form of a new body. The disciples of the Dharmic religion suggest that to discover Nirvana, enduring souls must go through the cycle of death and spend a variable amount of time in another realm

for rebirth (Cohen, 2002). The reincarnation cycle will end for the people who are already eliminating their worldly desires and are ready to go to Nirvana, the highest state that someone can attain.

Each religion carries its own beliefs and philosophical thoughts about mortality. Even though atheists reject the sense of continuity in mortality by perceiving death as “the end” (Carroll, 2016), it is important to note that both Abrahamic and Dharmic religions try to emphasize to their followers and believers that the afterlife exists, portrayed by the existence of heaven (as a symbol of eternal happiness and victory) and hell (as the symbol of true misery and sorrow) in Abrahamic and/or Nirvana in Dharma religions. Such explanations might satisfy most people’s curiosity concerning mortality. However, the lack of empirical evidence has left some people sceptical, as the concept of death remains abstract and uncertain.

Given that the subject of mortality is fraught with ambiguity and controversy, some scholars attempt to scrutinize the portrayal of death in literature for further understanding by providing ways of approaching death and imagining it from different perspectives (Hakola & Kivistö, 2014). Through a medical perspective, Skelton (2003) did research on the topic of death and dying in several literary texts in order to understand how humans can cope better in the face of death and how people can be more eloquent in articulating their thoughts and feelings regarding death. His research revealed that some literary authors use their own experiences to give a vivid portrayal of death and dying, while others use their works as a medium to construct their readers' minds on the given theme, and still others use death as a tool to represent their ideas, for example, to describe the fall of a complex human society. He also mentioned that both health professionals and patients who read literary texts on death and dying find it difficult to connect, as there are cultural, time, and/or geographical gaps between them and the literary works.

Another study on death was done by Termizi et al. (2017) concerning the sociology of literature. They investigated how death is used as a literary device in several Malaysian contemporary poems. They positioned death as an essential literary device since it appeals to the reader's fascination. Death was portrayed in two ways in contemporary Malaysian poetry. First, it was present in the characters' psyches before death came to them in a supernatural form. Second, it was seen in the characters' psyches after death as a metaphysical form. Marimuthu (2018), on the other hand, analyzed the collection of Emily Dickinson's poems entitled *He Fumbles at Your Souls, I Heard a Fly Buzz - When I Died, A Clock Stopped, There Is a Languor of The Life, and Death Is Like the Insect* to understand the concepts of death and the images associated with it. Based on her investigation, Dickinson's perspective on death is heavily influenced by the loss of her best friend during the Civil War. She conveyed the tormenting process of dying and the pain suffered by the person facing death. Skelton (2018) looks briefly at various ways writers have approached the concept of death, ranging from expressions of personal grief to how attitudes to death are represented in culture are also picked up and used by writers from the culture concerned. He pointed out that not all writing about death is centered on death as a source of personal grief. He also mentioned that some writing about death is transparent and, in a sense, overtly simple, while other writing is less so and may even appear obscure. Meanwhile, the recent one is written by Farrant (2020). He emphasized the fundamental contingency of materialism by tracing how the postmillennial novel frames life as necessarily bound to death.

Preceding studies are fundamentally similar to this present study in the essence of the theme. Because abstract thoughts, such as good and evil, vice and virtue, life and death, health and illness, purity and impurity, inclusion and exclusion, as well as hot and cold, are inevitable in poetry (Lamarque, 2009; Valéry, 2007), death-themed objects and texts are deeply embedded in it (Staudt in Moreman, 2017). Those concepts get carried in a particular poetry category that responds to inherent psychological needs to manage fears of death, remind about the inevitability of mortality, commemorate the deceased, or console those left behind (Abrams 1981, 1999; Staudt in Moreman 2017). Under that concern, this study goes beyond funerary poems entitled “Immortality” by Clare Harner and “I’m Free” by Anne Lindgren Davison.

Since childhood, Claire Harner was immersed in a religious environment. She was born in Kansas in 1909 to a respected family that belonged to the First Methodist Episcopal Church. She showed early interests and talents in music and poetry with the support of her mother. She attended the College of Emporia, which is affiliated with the Presbyterian Church, before transferring to Kansas State University, where she developed her writing skills even more in extracurricular activities on top of her degree of Industrial Journalism. Her subsequent occupations after graduation included being a secretary, while she also wrote and submitted poetry to magazines. Two years after one of her brother's death,

Clare Harner's poem "Immortality" was published in The Gypsy magazine in December 1934 and later reprinted in the Kansas City Times in February 1935. She died in 1977, and her funeral notices showed that she was affiliated with the Second Church of Religious Science on Claremont Street (Norsworthy, 2025). Harner's poem is often misaddressed as one of Mary Elizabeth Frye's works. Despite Frye's argument that her authorship of the poem was confirmed by an American advice column, Dear Abby. Abigail van Buren, the pen name of the author of Dear Abby, repeatedly confessed that they could not confirm the poem's authorship (*Clare Harner - Poems by the Famous Poet - All Poetry*, n.d.).

Meanwhile, not much is known about the life of Anne Lindgren Davison, but she has shared the story behind her poem "I'm Free" in her website, which is dedicated solely for the poem. The original handwritten copy of the poem was written in 1974 when she was in her mid-thirties, but the website where she posted the digital copy of the poem was launched in 2021. She wrote the poem after a funeral which triggered her to reflect about her own mortality. She felt that she has achieved what she wanted in life and therefore, if she died, she would not want people to be sad over her death. Davison, like Harner, was subjected to plagiarism. Because of its popularity, her poem began circulating throughout the internet without her name listed as the author, or worse, it was listed under someone else's name. To address this issue, she copyrighted her poem in 1994 and later launched a website in 2021 to showcase her work and ensure proper attribution (Davison, 2021).

Based on publicly available research, no comparative study has yet been conducted on the poems "Immortality" and "I'm Free". However, some previous studies were done on each poem with differing research focus. A study by Syazwina et al. (2024) that incorrectly attributes the poem to Mary Elizabeth Frye analyzes the connotative meanings represented in the poems by certain words, demonstrating how the nature symbolisms married the interconnected ideas of death and life. *A Companion of American Poetry* (Martin & Meder, 2022) noted that "Immortality", which is also incorrectly attributed to Mary Elizabeth Frye, offers comfort to readers byway of imagining the deceased as having become one with nature instead of ceasing to exist. Meanwhile, a doctoral thesis by Cedrone (2023) noted that the spirituality, not religiosity, in Anne Lindgren Davison's poem "I'm Free" expresses ideas of gratitude towards life that was given by God. However, as the same God in the poem is the one who decided the time of the deceased, this could trouble the bereavement process of the grieving.

Even though both poems talk about the poets' own stance on mortality, mortality is a universal theme that resonates with readers because it's an inevitable part of human existence. Based on the general conception, death exists not as an antithesis but as a component of life. Therefore, understanding the differing perceptions of death ultimately will help a person to cope and understand such experiences better. Thus, navigating the reality of mortality becomes easier when one does not feel alienated with the concept of death. This can be achieved by several ways, including scrutinizing works featuring themes of mortality. Especially, when said works were inspired by the authors' real-life experiences, as true with "Immortality" and "I'm Free".

Therefore, this study (1) examines the themes of mortality in two poems by Clare Harner and Anne Lindgren Davison. Furthermore, since religious belief and the concept of mortality are intertwined, this study also (2) seeks to uncover the association between the poets' religious beliefs and their unique treatments of death reflected in their literary works. The delivery of the theme in funerary poems, influenced by the poet's non-linguistic background, such as religious belief and ethnicity, makes the genre richer and more observable. Poets have perspectives and act in a specific historical context. Therefore, the works generate new interpretations and discoveries in subsequent times and places, where different conventions and ideologies reign (Staudt in Moreman, 2017). In *Theory of Literature*, to Wellek and Warren (1956) emphasize that extrinsic aspects, including historical, sociocultural, psychological influences, and the author's biography, contribute to understanding a literary text. However, exclusive reliance on them risks misinterpretation and overlooks the work's internal structure. As there are complex systems of norms and meanings in literary works that are built by elements such as the speaker's voices, themes, and imageries, intrinsic elements of a poem are telling of a poet's intended meaning and atmosphere they wanted the readers to be immersed in (Wellek & Warren, 1956).

## METHOD

This study employed a descriptive-qualitative approach to generate, present, analyze, and interpret the data. The primary data sources consisted of two poems about mortality. The first poem analyzed is "Immortality" by Clare Harner, a 13-line work originally published in The Gypsy poetry

magazine in December 1934, retrieved from <https://allpoetry.com/Clare-Harner>. The second poem, "I'm Free" by Anne Lindgren Davison, was written on June 22, 1974, and later published electronically in 2021; it consists of 20 lines and was obtained from <https://imfreepoem.org/>. In this study, the researchers served as the primary instrument for collecting and analyzing the data by utilizing comparative literature framework proposed by Bassnett (1993). Grounded in this framework, the study focused on three intrinsic elements of the poems: the speakers, themes, and imagery. The analysis aimed not only to identify the representation of mortality within the poems but also to investigate the connection between these elements and the poets' religious views, drawing on Wellek and Warren's (1956) theoretical division of intrinsic and extrinsic elements in literature.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Funerary poems, as the symbolic trope of *memento mori*, are replete with allusions that convey the poet's perspective on mortality or death. This is based on the consideration that everybody will eventually die. Aside from this concern, this section discusses the themes of mortality in Clare Harner's "Immortality" and Anne Lindgren Davison's "I'm Free" through comparative literature framework. By analyzing intrinsic elements such as speakers, themes, and imageries, it is revealed that the poems offer differing abstract concepts of mortality, with religious beliefs influencing said views. Harner's poem conveys a sense of consolation and transcendence using more concrete imagery to depict death as a transformation into nature. In contrast, Davison depicts death as part of a spiritual journey of a divine plan, not quite and end of a life lived fully. While they differ, both poems highlight the significance of how intrinsic elements shaped interpretations of the themes, in this case is mortality, and how poetry can express emotions and complex themes profoundly.

### Results

#### *Thematic Representations of Mortality in Harner's "Immortality" and Davison's "I'm Free"*

The concept of immortality generally refers to the idea that the soul survives death (Oaklander, 2001; Shand, 2004; Ukwamedua, 2023), whereas mortality, as the polar opposite, refers to the state of being mortal (destined to die) (*Definition of Mortality - NCI Dictionary of Cancer Terms - NCI*, 2011). Mortality is closely related to prolonged grief, emotional pain, and sorrow due to difficulty moving on with life. Nonetheless, instead of wailing because of longing and sadness, Harner's poem seems to comfort the readers who are grieving the loss of a loved one (in bereavement). Through her poem, she emphasized that the departed individual is actually at peace and free of pain and suffering, and there is nothing to be concerned about. Harner shaped the sense of consolation by using the imperative mood, as shown in the very first stanza of her poem.

(1) *Do not stand by my grave and weep,*

*I am not there, I do not sleep.*

[. . .]

(Harner 1934, lines 1-2)

Language is part of a practical situation that tends to legitimate others. Because of that, diction is essential as it embodies specific signals created by the author/poet. In excerpt 1, Harner uses first-person imagery to stir readers' emotions and feelings. She positioned herself as someone who defies grief, as personal emotional reactions that follow a loss (Worden, 2009), over his/her death by saying to not stand at his/her grave and weep, which means "to be strong and whole-souled". The line "*I am not there, I do not sleep*" contains a sense of consolation, implying that mortality is not the end for the remains. Death marks the separation of the soul from the physical form of the body (McTavish, 2016; Oderberg, 2019). Since Plato in Campbell (2022), argues that the soul, as a particular extension of the body, is immortal. The soul will always remain close to loved ones.

(2) *Do not stand by my grave and weep,*

*I am not there, I did not die.*

[. . .]

(Harner 1934, lines 12-13)

Since the 'funeral' is a metaphor for the loss, in excerpt 2, the imperative mode "*Do not stand by my grave and weep*" is repeatedly used by Harner to give commands, make requests, or express a sense of urgency or obligation to not drown in sorrow. She conveys to the reader the importance of not prolonging the grief of loss while strengthening the bonds between those who mourn. Meanwhile, the second line, "*I am not there, I did not die,*" emphasizes a sense of "living while dying" by stressing that mortality is not the end of all. The decision to use a singular first-person omniscient point of view (e.g., I, me, and my) makes the poem sound more personal to the reader, as if the deceased is the one reading it. In a nutshell, the appearance of the first-person point of view is essential to gain intimacy, minimize distance, trigger empathy, and achieve emotional catharsis. Beyond temporal and spiritual realms, readers/listeners were brought into the deep surface of thought that mortality is a kind of transformation since he/she continues to exist in another form.

Ivancovich and Wong (2008) proposed that although bereavement cannot be controlled, people can make choices during the grieving process, such as confronting the reality and emotions of the loss or using religion to relieve pain and anguish. By perceiving mortality as life's final transition, Davison's poem appears to be more religiously oriented than Harner's. Rather than being seen as a catastrophe, she suggests that mortality is part of God's plan, and there is nothing to grieve about. The following lines manifest Davison's belief in a divine plan or destiny.

(3) *Don't grieve for me for now I'm free,*

*I'm following the path God laid for me  
I took his hand when I heard him call,  
[ . . . ]*

(Davison, 2021, line 1-3)

(4) *[ . . . ]*

*God wanted me now, He set me free.*

(Davison, 2021, line 20)

Through the line "*I'm following the path God laid for me*" in excerpt 3, Davison places mortality as a fate from God. The lines "*I took his hand when I heard him call*", in excerpt 3, and "*God wanted me now, . . .*", in excerpt 4, appear as a form of resignation and acceptance. The repetition of the word "free" in "*I'm free*" and "*He set me free*" establishes that the speaker is in joy since she is free from suffering and ready to go for the next journey. Mortality is then viewed as a natural part of life's journey with faith and an understanding of God's grand plan.

As a form of artistic expression, poetry emerges from the spontaneous overflow of the poet's powerful feelings (Johnson-Laird & Oatley, 2022), is recalled through inner mechanisms (Hatzimoysis, 2003; Liu et al., 2015), and comes in the form of a profound rendering of emotions (Li, 2022). The literary process involves not only an authorial subject that generates the artistic text but also the reader as another subject who has to perceive the text (Vodička, 1982). Since poetry is full of symbols, denotation and connotation meanings are important in helping readers understand life.

Given that funerals are frequently viewed as a celebration of a rite of passage for both the deceased and the living (Gire, 2014), Davison tends to present reasons in order to convince why the deceased's family should not grieve for the one who died. Those reasons given then enhance the poem's optimistic tone, allowing it to console its audience. Look into the following lines.

(5) *[ . . . ]*

*My life's been full, I've savored much,  
Good friends, good times, my loved one's touch  
[ . . . ]*

(Davison, 2021, lines 15-16)

Speaking on behalf of the deceased and in order to alleviate the pain of loss, Davison insists that she was quite content to leave the world since her life was fully lived with good friends, good times, and a good life partner. She uses the words "full" and "savored" to express her gratitude, acceptance, joy, and satisfaction. The line "*My life's been full*" contains the speaker's belief that she has lived a complete and satisfying life, whereas "*I've savored much*" suggests that the speaker has spent time appreciating and enjoying her life with her loved ones. Davison then continues to comfort the readers through the following lines.

(6) *Be not burdened with times of sorrow,*

*I wish for you the sunshine of tomorrow*  
[ . . . ]

(Davison, 2021, lines 13-14)

(7) *If my time seemed all too brief,*

*Don't lengthen it now with undue grief*  
*Lift up your heart, rejoice with me,*  
[ . . . ]

(Davison, 2021, lines 17-19)

In excerpt 6, the lines "*Be not burdened with time of sorrow | I wish for you for the sunshine tomorrow*" (excerpt 6) and "*If my time seemed all too brief | Don't lengthen it now with undue grief*" (excerpt 7) reinforce the prohibition of dwelling in grief. The lines "*Lift up your heart*" and "*rejoice with me*," reflect on the joyfulness and fleeting nature of life. Beyond this circumstance, the speaker wants the readers to reconcile with the situation and let her go gracefully since her journey is already complete. There is no eternal life in the world, and nothing lasts forever. Thus, perhaps those who leave or are left behind will not face the burden and sorrow.

### ***Religious Beliefs and Their Influence on Poetic Interpretations of Mortality***

The poems "Immortality" and "I'm Free" do not only offer profound insight into the human experience of mortality. They also provide comfort and solace to those dealing with grief through both poems' perspectives of death and the afterlife. These perspectives can differ across cultures and beliefs of each person and society, which can play significant role in shaping people's attitudes toward death and how they cope with it.

In Harner's poem, the theme of consolation or comfort is delivered through the Gypsies' (i.e., the Roman people or the Romani (Dumitrescu, 2010)) concept of death and afterlife. Not to mention that the poem was first published in The Gypsy magazine. The Gypsies insist that the spirit of the deceased lives on and that the grave is merely a place for them to grieve and show respect for their deceased family. The Gypsies idea is summarized in these lines:

(8) [ . . . ]

*I am not there, I do not sleep.*

(Harner 1934, line 2)

(9) [ . . . ]

*I am not there, I did not die.*

(Harner 1934, line 13)

Religion and spirituality are significant in determining attitudes toward death (Dezutter et al., 2008). Gypsies believed that after death, their loved one was caught between the worlds of the living and the dead (Williams, 2003). Because they regard death as a brief sleep (Dumitrescu, 2010), they contend that the soul will continue to exist somewhere, on another level, even after its separation from the body. Perhaps due to Harner's religious perspective, she then inserts two lines: "*I am not there, I do*

*not sleep*" and "*I am not there, I did not die*," into her poem by describing death as the incarnation of immortality.

Aside from that, Gypsies also believe that spirits from the realm of the dead have power over the living (Dumitrescu, 2010). Their concern about mortality is almost entirely about what relationship the deceased will have with those who remain among the living (Trigg in Dumitrescu 2010). That is why, after the funeral of their relative, some Gypsies usually keep the tokens, such as a floral decoration on a wagon, horseshoes, a floral lorry, a floral chair, and so on, in their homes to stay connected to the deceased. They also frequently visit their family graves and talk to them as if they were still alive and able to hear as well as communicate with them (Kalvoda, 1991; McQuillan, 2011; Lane et al., 2023).

The task of the comparatist is a dialectical one characterized by constant awareness of a problem. Compared to Harner's poem, religious tones within Davison's poem are more recognizable. She explicitly states in "I'm Free" that mortality is God's call that must be retrieved regardless of unfinished worldly affairs.

(10) [...]

*I'm following the path God laid for me  
I took his hand when I heard him call,  
I turned my back and left it all  
[...]*

(Davison, 2021, lines 2-4)

The conception of death and dying as something rigid and indisputable is strictly associated with the Abrahamic belief. Since human beings are mortal, Davison states that death is a part of one's destiny, as evidenced by the phrase "the path God laid for me," which is consistent with the Abrahamic religion's concept of death. Although known by various names, all Abrahamic religions claim to be monotheistic by worshipping a single God (Gish, 2012; Crosby, 2018; Gnuse, 2023). By the belief that God creates, rules, reveals, loves, judges, punishes, and forgives, Abrahamic believe that humans cannot control fate and that only God has control over the destiny of life and death.

(11) *I could not stay another day,*

*To laugh, to love, to work or play  
Tasks left undone must stay that way,  
I've found that peace at the close of day  
If my parting has left a void,  
Then fill it with remembered joy  
A friendship shared, a laugh, a kiss,  
Ah yes, these things I too will miss  
Be not burdened with times of sorrow,  
I wish for you the sunshine of tomorrow*

(Davison, 2021, lines 5-14)

Death is the condition when someone finally leaves everything in the world and heads to the afterlife. In excerpt 11, by recalling fond memories, such as *days to laugh, love, work, and play*, as well as *remembered joy, friendship shared, laugh, and kiss* that will be missed, she is also aware that the departure of the deceased might leave a void within the family, friends, and his own heart. Nevertheless, God's promise of eternal life after death makes the deceased believe they will be reunited eternally. Therefore, the lines "*Be not burdened with times of sorrow | I wish for you the sunshine of tomorrow*" are used to reassure the living, urging them to embrace life with joy rather than regret. Different concept of mortality demonstrated in Harner and Davison's poetry validates the initial hypothesis that the authors' religious background influences the construction of the poem. Thus, poetry has undoubtedly been the most effective way for poets to express their emotions since human justification for religious belief has traditionally come from both logical thinking and faith.

Further, the influence of religious background of poets can be evident in the way they use imagery and symbolism to concretize the themes employed in their poetry. A detailed examination and comparison of the two poems shows that Harner's work employs a stronger degree of concretization than Davison's. Dupriez (1991) defines concretization as replacing an expression or idea with a concrete example. According to Lamarque (2009), specific linguistic features such as imagery are often employed to render abstract ideas more concrete within poetry. The poet achieves this by portraying or describing such ideas through sensory stimuli recognizable to human perception. Similarly, Abrams (1999) states that imagery enhances the concreteness of poetry by evoking emotional responses from readers.

Harner's poem shows concretization of the concept of mortality through portrayal of vivid natural imagery, as shown in the following lines.

(12) [...]

*I am the thousand winds that blow,  
I am the diamond glints in snow.  
I am the sunlight on ripened grain,  
I am the gentle, autumn rain.  
As you awake with morning's hush,  
I am the swift, up-flinging rush  
Of quiet birds in circling flight.  
I am the day transcending night.  
[...]*

(Harner 1934, lines 3-10)

As seen in excerpt 12, Harner's poem tends to use concrete sensuous images that the human senses can recognize when describing the feelings of being dead. By applying visual, tactile, and auditory imageries, she then anthropomorphizes the deceased by attributing him/her to nonhuman entities or inanimate objects, which is called the "imitation of nature", such as *the thousands of winds that blow* (line 3) that humans' touch can sense, *the diamond glints in the snow* (line 4), *the sunlight on ripened grain* (line 5), and also *the day transcending night* (line 10), which are visible through humans' eyes; *the swift, up-flinging rush of quiet birds in circling flight* (line 8-9) that humans can hear and see, as well as *the gentle autumn rain* (line 6) that can be sensed both by humans' sight, hearing, and touch. Harner uses these imageries in "Immortality" as an embodiment of absolute freedom from suffering and the trials of life. Hence, mortality is interpreted as a release and tremendous relief. Harner frequently tells her readers that mortality is actually the transfiguration of the deceased into nature. The emergence of the words "wind, snow, sunlight, and autumn" indicates that the deceased's soul will always be present in all the seasons and throughout the year. Thus, it can be said that the presence of nature in Harner's poem vividly depicts her perspective on death as a process of embodying rather than a farewell.

On the other hand, instead of using similar vivid imagery, Davison is trying to concretize the concept of death by relying on the idea that mortality manifests the spiritual journey. As a result, Davison's poem is filled with a more prominent religious tone, as shown by the presence of the entity 'God' and personal pronouns that resemble God's existence.

(13) [...]

*I'm following the path **God** laid for me  
I took **his** hand when I heard **him** call,*

(Davison, 2021, lines 2-3)

(14) [...]

*Lift up your heart, rejoice with me,  
**God** wanted me now, **He** set me free.*

(Davison, 2021, lines 19-20)

While both poems deal with the same theme, the approaches of each are distinct. Religious concepts of mortality replace Davison's poem's lack of sensuous imagery. Phrases such as *the path of*

*God, God's hand, God's call, and God set me free* serve as explicit notions instilled in readers'/audiences' minds as humans were created by God, owned by God, and will return to God when the time comes.

### Discussion

In the construction of funerary poems, the concept of mortality, the afterlife, and the feelings beyond mortality remain abstract. Because of that, concrete imagery is required to aid understanding of the notion since no one can define or depict such a phenomenon in an empirically acceptable manner. Poetry serves as a powerful medium to explore mortality as it allows poets to express complex emotions and ideas through symbolic language and imagery through the poetic devices employed, allowing readers to gain deeper understandings and feel more profound emotions. This is because poetry possesses a universal and a moral function that respond to our very souls' needs.

As religions extent beyond everyday facts and natural laws, poetry appeals to provide perspectives that resonate in our attempt to answer this deep demand (Santayana, 2011). By using creative language and literary devices, poets can express what is thought to be the inexpressible in a manner that is meaningful and relatable. Since poets' religious beliefs heavily influence the portrayal of death and the afterlife in literature, particularly in poetry, varying religious backgrounds contribute to diverse interpretations of these themes. Through the lens of comparative literature, this study demonstrates that Harner's "Immortality" is deeply influenced by Gypsy spirituality, while Davison's "I'm Free" reflects the values of Abrahamic traditions.

Harner's poem utilizes natural imagery since Gypsy beliefs are strictly associated with nature and the surroundings. This is contrasting to her upbringing that seemed closer to Abrahamic beliefs rather than Gypsy's. Abrahamic religions believe in afterlife, with varying details and sequence of events after the death itself (Jaffer, 2015). Hence, the concept of reincarnation into nature goes against their faith. Meanwhile, Davison sticks to Abrahamic religious imagery, such as viewing worldly life as God's path. However, as noted by Cedrone (2023), Davison does not particularly use specific religious imagery or symbolism that was notable enough to be linked into the realm of religiosity, and merely touched upon spirituality. The understanding of those differing ideas of death and the afterlife could not be imparted using scientific approaches only. As mortality is personal yet universal, exploring the concept of death through literary works is relatable and enlightening since it helps people interpret the vagueness of death and the afterlife poetically.

### CONCLUSION

Mortality is one of the most profound and core human experiences and thus, has been explored in various forms of human expressions of creativity, including literature such as poetry. This study highlights the importance of exploring literary works to understand the complexities of mortality because they provide relatable experiences to simplify and concretize the almost abstract concept to be more graspable. In funerary poems, the theme of death is depicted variably in reflection of the poet's sociocultural and religious background. This is apparent in Claire Harner's "Immortality" and Anne Lindgren Davison's "I'm Free", as each poem approaches mortality and grief from different perspectives. While both poems offer a message of consolation and hope for the bereaved, their perceptions of what happens after death contrast sharply. In Harner's poem, which aligns with her title, the concept of mortality is merely the end to a chapter, not the book. Death is a transformation a person undergoes to be one with the universe. On the other hand, Davison's poem views mortality as part of God's plan and a time for one's soul to be reunited with God. Therefore, death should be accepted and even rejoiced, as one's life has been fully lived and now is the time for divine reunion.

This study demonstrates that the concept of mortality is portrayed differently in Clare Harner's "Immortality" and Anne Lindgren Davison's "I'm Free" through distinct literary approaches. Harner's poem utilizes natural imagery and sensory details which allows the reader to experience the idea of mortality in a more tangible way. The use of the natural imagery also reflects the Gypsy belief in the interconnectedness of nature and spiritualism. In contrast, Davison's poem relies on imagery with nuances of Abrahamic religion, emphasizing death as part of divine plan. By comparing the two poems, it becomes evident that religious belief plays a crucial part in influencing how mortality is interpreted in poetic expression. The contrasting interpretations of mortality in both poems underscore the complexity of the concept in their efforts to present a tangible idea of death to appeal to human

understanding. Accordingly, the abstract concept of death and the afterlife is mostly explained through religious approaches to this day. These religious interpretations not only provide a framework for understanding death and the afterlife but also permeate the literary environment by offering a means to articulate these elusive ideas.

This study is limited by its scope, focusing on only two poems by two American female poets. Therefore, while can provide insights, this study lacks diverse perspectives and is not representative of all funerary poems or literary works with the theme of mortality. The limited attention given to the poets' backgrounds in this study could hinder a deeper understanding of their perspectives and literary influences. Therefore, this study underscores the need for future research to delve deeper into similar themes of literary works with less restricted poets' backgrounds and years. Future research can build upon this study by exploring the interplay between a poet's sociocultural and religious background and their depiction of mortality, further emphasizing the diversity of interpretations of death across cultures and faiths.

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