

INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

UMI

A Bell & Howell Information Company
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
313/761-4700 800/521-0600

**"DREAMING A GOLDEN DREAM": THE FEMALE POETICS
OF EMILY DICKINSON**

by

Catherine Costa

**A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy, The City University of New York.**

1995

UMI Number: 9530862

UMI Microform 9530862

Copyright 1995, by UMI Company. All rights reserved.

This microform edition is protected against unauthorized
copying under Title 17, United States Code.

UMI

300 North Zeeb Road
Ann Arbor, MI 48103

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in English in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

April 25, 1995 Gerhard Joseph
Date Chair of Examining Committee

25 April 1995 Joyce W. Wether /
Date Executive Officer

Prof. Gerhard Joseph

Prof. Evelyn Barish

Prof. Mary Ann Caws

Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

ABSTRACT**“DREAMING A GOLDEN DREAM”: THE FEMALE POETICS OF
EMILY DICKINSON****by****Catherine Costa****Adviser: Professor Gerhard Joseph,**

The notion of a female poetics emerges from women's own experience of literature and women's ways of knowing and focuses on how and what the female writer creates. Dickinson is an excellent choice for a study of female poetics because she has been seen by several critics, including Adrienne Rich and Suzanne Juhasz as the foremother of American poetry, while others use her as a paradigm for their discussions of female poetry.

Poetics refers to the general principles of literature. For Dickinson's canon, this includes her idiosyncratic stylistics, themes and images, as well as her modes of composition, including the materiality of the holographs, choice of audience, and cultural field.

This study begins with an overview of several elements of her poetics and attempts to analyze them in the light of female poetic theory. The major part of the study traces certain elements of Dickinson's female poetics,

particularly style and themes, in relation to two neglected members of her cultural field--Helen Hunt Jackson and George Eliot. Helen Hunt Jackson, a poet nurtured in the same Amherst milieu as Dickinson, is the only female poet with whom Dickinson had an on-going relationship. George Eliot is her self-proclaimed foremother with whom Dickinson shared many affinities concerning her female poetics. Jackson and Eliot represent the boundaries of Dickinson's cultural field. She tests her mettle, on the one hand, against the grain of Helen Hunt Jackson's position as the eponymous female poet of her time. Jackson's poetry represents the fairly genteel, derivative feminine poetry that was being published in 19th-century America. George Eliot, on the other hand, represents for Dickinson a strong model of female poetics, for she went beyond the gender restrictions of her time. Through seeing Dickinson's complex relationship with these two writers, one can develop a fuller understanding of how she defined herself as a female poet.

THIS WORK IS DEDICATED TO

John M. Ledford, whose "inciting voice" helped me through this dissertation, and who had the courage to marry me while I was writing it.

Gerhard Joseph, my adviser, a model for me as a theorist and stylist, whose careful reading and insightful comments shaped this into a much better study.

Evelyn Barish, who as a professor and critic of American literature has been an inspiration, and whose careful reading and insights have helped this study.

Mary Ann Caws, whose kind and insightful comments have spurred me on.

My brother Tom Costa, who has been so generous in sharing his computer knowledge and his office facilities for the practical part of this study.

My mother Elvera Costa whose words and understanding have kept me going.

Kate Connelly and Lisa Hamilton, whose computer assistance has been invaluable in getting this study written.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

“DREAMING A GOLDEN DREAM”: THE FEMALE POETICS OF EMILY DICKINSON

CHAPTER ONE: “ALL MEN SAY WHAT TO ME”: A READING OF DICKINSON’S FEMALE POETICS.....	8
CHAPTER TWO: “A SHAPE TO FILL A ‘LACK’”: FEMALE MODES OF COMPOSITION IN DICKINSON’S POETRY	19
CHAPTER THREE: CLOSET POETS AND UNCAGED BIRDS: THE LITERARY RELATIONSHIP OF EMILY DICKINSON AND HELEN HUNT JACKSON	48
LITERARY REPUTATIONS/MISCONCEPTIONS.....	49
THE HIGGINSON CONNECTION.....	64
THE EPISTOLARY RELATIONSHIP	69
CHAPTER FOUR: “ON HER OWN PREMISES”: DICKINSON’S REVISION OF JACKSON.....	73
WOMEN’S LIVES/WOMEN’S DEATHS.....	90
SHARED IMAGES: BEES, SPINNERS, NOON.....	111
<u>MERCY PHILBRICK’S CHOICE</u>	130
CHAPTER FIVE: “MY GEORGE ELIOT”: “DEUTERA” DICKINSON/“MUTTER” ELIOT	141
THE SELF-PROCLAIMED FOREMOTHER.....	143
THEIR LIVES/THEIR VOICES	149
THE MOTHER TONGUE	160
WOMEN’S ROLE’S/ WOMEN’S LIVES	194
CHAPTER SIX: THE LORE/LURE OF THE LOST TWINS: THE FACE OF THE ANDROGYNE IN THE WORK OF DICKINSON AND ELIOT	204
ANDROGYNY	204
THE ROLE OF RENUNCIATION	209
SHARED SYMBOLISM	222
MARTYRS AND SAINTS	241
CLAIRVOYANT EYES/”I”S: SIGHT/INSIGHT IN THE ARTIST’S VISION.....	247
CONCLUSION.....	263
WORKS CITED.....	264

**“DREAMING A GOLDEN DREAM”:
THE FEMALE POETICS OF EMILY DICKINSON**

INTRODUCTION

Where do you think I’ve strayed, and from what new errand returned? I have come from
“*to* and *fro* and walking up and down” the same place that Satan hailed from, when God asked
him where he’d been, but not to illustrate further I tell you I had been dreaming, dreaming a
golden dream with eyes all the while open. . .

(Letter 36)

Poem 669

No Romance sold unto
Could so enthrall a Man
As the perusal of
His individual One--
‘Tis Fiction’s--to dilute to Plausibility
Our Novel--When ‘tis small enough
To Credit--’Tisn’t true!

I am writing this introduction after having re-read the book which reminds me of why we are readers and critics of literature, Rachel Brownstein's Becoming a Heroine. For me the reading of Dickinson is in many ways like Brownstein's idea of reading a novel, with a heroine or heroines, whose sketchy almost surreal worlds allow me to insert myself readily. I feel I wish to testify, almost as if I were at one of those Amherst Revivalist meetings that Dickinson scorned, giving yet another version of "My Emily Dickinson," (to borrow Susan Howe's term) or at least the one that led me so far to this study.

I began to read Dickinson in high school, a Catholic girls' school. Who better than the sisters to teach the female poet who, though Protestant, sounded more Catholic than we were, who had read her 'a Kempis, and who sought a secluded life of renunciation? At least that was how she appeared -- in the poems chosen by our English teachers and the ones anthologized in our approved texts. However, as I began to read more on my own, I was thoroughly confused. Questions proliferated. Was Dickinson religiously orthodox in these poems? Why were her tenors and vehicles so slippery that in poems equating lovers and Christ, I was never sure whether sacred or profane love was being privileged, or whether it even mattered -- to her? And what of the humor and irony that seemed so very evident now that I really looked? As Christopher Benfey said in his study, using Dickinson's words as all her critics seem compelled to do: the Mystery deepens "the nearer her you get"(16).

At my private college for women in New York, I never remember reading Dickinson. Even the canonical American Renaissance, at that time, excluded her.

The time for reading Dickinson was certainly throughout the late 70s when a confluence of forces made her star rise and the graduate schools included her as the lone

American female star in their constellation. I remember being assigned the Sewall biography in a seminar in graduate school. At our next meeting you could almost hear the simultaneous “click” (the one Ms, was popularizing in those days) as we voiced the same response: who could have invented a stranger, more ironic tale than that of Dickinson’s “logus-interruptus” publishing history? Could this possibly have happened if she had been a man? It was after all the tale of what Sewall termed the “War Between the Houses” that now supplanted the rather tired and sexist “cracked poetess” myth of the recluse spinster Emily. The outlines of Sewall’s “war” included stories of sex and money which, I believe, engendered texts, both bowdlerized and incomplete, that might never have occurred if Dickinson were not a woman. Mary Ann Caws in her insightful essay, “The Conception of Engendering/The Erotics of Editing,” includes Dickinson in her list of women whose texts were misunderstood, belittled or tampered with, although she mentions only the role of her first editor, Thomas Higginson. I believe this “war” among Lavinia, Mabel Loomis Todd and Susan Dickinson and all the Dickinson books they engendered (and didn’t) has one casualty -- the poet herself. This war and its effects seemed to pronounce the poet dead or at least sleeping in her Snow-White impersonation for almost a century until interest in her was awakened by the Johnson three-volume variorum text of 1955.

Perhaps this tale could have been transmogrified by Dickinson’s “warbling teller” into something ironic and double-edged, and of course, a “type” of events to come, for the other tampered texts of those other women poets (Sylvia Plath comes to mind) who died “intextate” and were thus unavailable for comment when their books were published.

But the tale of this literary hiatus was, unhappily, more prosaic than that. The feud was fueled first by the aftermath of the open secret of Dickinson’s brother Austin’s affair with Mabel Loomis Todd, who became the first editor of Dickinson’s poems along with Higginson. There were other players, for example, Austin’s wife Sue, who for whatever reasons

did not act quickly enough and lost her chance to be Dickinson's first editor, and who, I believe would have been a much better one, if her editing work with the "Alabaster" poem is any indication.¹ As Dickinson's "other" sister and beloved friend, she received more poems enclosed in letters than any other correspondent. These poems and letters stayed with her and were the basis for further volumes by her daughter, Martha Dickinson Bianchi. Lavinia's role as the keeper of the over forty fascicles and additional "scraps" was also a key one. At first she waited for Sue to do an edition, then switched allegiance to Mabel Loomis Todd, who eventually produced the first slim volume with Higginson as co-editor. However, a lawsuit over land Austin left Mabel in his will caused a split between Loomis Todd and Lavinia, leaving the manuscripts as the spoils of war, unused and unedited in two separate camps -- eventually producing editions from Sue's daughter, Martha Dickinson Bianchi, and Mabel Todd's daughter, Millicent Todd Bingham. To add to the drama, even today, as a result of this war, one library does not house all the Dickinson holdings, for the separate families' bequests eventually went to different libraries, including Yale, Harvard, Amherst College, and the Jones Library in Amherst. As can be imagined this gave Dickinson a rather skewed literary history, since no one until Thomas H. Johnson had access to all of the over 1700 poems. With his three-volume edition in 1955, it seemed that we had Dickinson's poems in somewhat the approximate way she wrote them.

Of course, as any Dickinson scholar knows, Johnson's edition disregarded the way she herself "published" the forty fascicles that she organized and tied up with string. To redress this problem and to present the holographs themselves with their idiosyncratic

¹ Other critics would agree with this assessment. See in particular Martha Nell Smith's Rowing in Eden in which there is a full description of Sue's role in the editing of that poem and her overall strong critical voice in Dickinson's poetic development.

punctuation, spacing and other ideographs, Ralph W.B. Franklin published a fascicle edition in 1986. Yet there are scholars who believe that even with these authentic manuscripts, the Dickinson canon has not been fully presented. For example, in an attempt to redefine the Dickinson canon as she “published” it, Martha Nell Smith and her co-editor, Ellen Louis Hart are at work on the poems, letters, and those peculiar Dickinson artifacts they term “letter-poems” that comprise all the Dickinson holographs sent to Susan Dickinson.² This “Book of Sue,” as they are calling it, is the largest collection of Dickinson’s writings “published” in her lifetime (sent to one recipient).

For the scholar, Dickinson’s earlier publishing history has obfuscated the real poet and has proved exciting, if only because a revisionist history seems to return us to the primal scene of their creation. With the added zest of the feminist movement in literature and the inclusionary opening up of the canon, Dickinson scholarship has proliferated recently. She has begun to be seen, as Helen Mc Neil so aptly termed it, as “the type of the great female poet.” In this study I will attempt to show how I see her fulfilling this role, particularly as her female poetics may be traced through her affinities with two 19th-century women writers, Helen Hunt Jackson, her friend and a publishing poet, and George Eliot, her self-proclaimed foremother.

Recently, I attended a conference that had nothing to do with Dickinson,³ I suppose in order to put some space between the poet and myself before the final revision of this

² This term “publishing” is used in contradistinction to Dickinson’s own term “printing,” which indicated the wide dissemination of material in book form. Thus, a case can (and has been) made that Dickinson did not shy away from publishing her work because she indeed had sustained literary correspondences with a number of people.

³ *The Community College Humanities Association Conference* in November, 1994 in Providence.

study. I went to a reading by keynote speaker, Galway Kinnell; however, my respite from Dickinson was short-lived, for Kinnell recited the following poem which captures succinctly the sentiments I have just expressed in my rather long-winded academic way. I wish to adopt Kinnell as my muse.

The Deconstruction of Emily Dickinson⁴

The lecture had ended when I came in,
 and the professor was answering questions.
 I do not know what he had been doing with her
 poetry, but now he was speaking of her
 as a victim of reluctant male publishers.
 I said the ignorant meddling of the Springfield Daily Republican
 and the hidebound response of literary men,
 and the gulf between the poetic wishfulness
 then admired and her own harsh knowledge,
 had let her see that her poems
 would not be understood in her time;
 and therefore, passionate to publish,
 she vowed not to publish. I said
 I would recite a version of her vow,
 Publication--is the Auction

⁴ This appears in Kinnell's recent book Imperfect Thirst.

Of the Mind of Man--

but before I could, the professor broke in.

"Yes," he said, "'the Auction'--'auction,' from augere, auctum, to augment, to author"

"Let's hear the Poem!" "The poem!" several women,
who at such a moment are more outspoken than men, shouted,
but I kept still and he kept going.

.....

Dickinson's own words lure us with their prophecy, daring each generation to revisit, recreate and unearth her difference through the lens of their prevailing theories and cultures:

Poem 883

The Poets light but Lamps --

Themselves -- go out --

The Wicks they stimulate --

If vital Light

Inhere as do the Suns --

Each Age a Lens

Disseminating their

Circumference --

CHAPTER ONE

“ALL MEN SAY WHAT TO ME”: A READING OF DICKINSON’S FEMALE POETICS

Poem 113

Our share of night to bear--

Our share of morning--

Our blank in bliss to fill

Our blank in scorning--

Here a star, and there a star,

Some lose their way!

Here a mist, and there a mist,

Afterwards--Day!

From the brief outlines of the literary tale told in the Introduction, it is apparent that the Dickinson scholar today has her share of blanks to fill in when attempting to reinterpret the poetry. If we are to clear the mist, it is imperative to continue revisioning the poetry and the life.

The term re-vision has been used simultaneously by critics as diverse as Harold Bloom and Adrienne Rich. I wish to use the term, with certain emendations, in the way Rich used it: "Re-vision [is] the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction" ("When We Dead Awaken" 18). Annette Kolodny has used Rich's term and elaborated upon it, calling for such re-vision to "learn how to read . . . a significant body of writing by American women in its own unique and informing contexts of meaning and symbol" ("A Map for Rereading" 259). To revision Dickinson in this way is vital to the understanding of her as our first great American female poet.

Dickinson's poetry, however bowdlerized, has been in print since the first slim volume in 1890. However, Dickinson's full canon of over 1700 poems, replete with all her idiosyncratic poetic devices, including dashes, half-rhymes, dislocation and capitals, and alternative lines or readings had no standard edition until the three-volume Johnson variorum edition of 1955. Criticism has proliferated on Dickinson since that edition, but it has been especially cogent and compelling since recent critics have begun to see in her the type of the great female poet, as Helen Mc Neil has stated it: "It is, in fact, easy not to know Emily Dickinson because the type she manifests--the great woman poet--is still in the root sense not known by our culture" (3). Other critics have gone further in encomiums, viewing Dickinson as the greatest female poet writing in English.

In this study I propose to focus on Dickinson as a type of the female poet, and to suggest several ways in which her poetics may be described. While some recent criticism has, to be sure, used the developing theory of female poetics to begin such a discussion of Dickinson, these studies have in no way exhausted the field. I intend to add to this on-going discovery, both in continuing the dialogue already begun on such issues and also by proposing new categories for describing her poetics, including her affinities with George Eliot, Dickinson's foremother,

and her friend, Helen Hunt Jackson, whom Emerson pronounced the American continent's best female poet.

By poetics I do not mean the narrow definition of the term that refers to the particular stylistics of poetry. Instead I refer to its more inclusive meaning -- the general principles of literature. For Dickinson's canon, this includes her idiosyncratic elements of style, her themes and images, as well as the how, what and why of her writing: modes of composition, including the materiality of the holographs, choice of audience, and, most importantly, her female cultural field. All these elements will be scrutinized for their embodiment of a gendered poetics, one which will be clarified through theories of female composition.

This study begins with an overview of Dickinson's stylistics, modes of composition and choice of audience, all of which will be evaluated in the light of female poetic theory. The major part of the study will trace certain elements of Dickinson's female poetics, namely style and themes, in relation to two neglected members of her cultural field, Helen Hunt Jackson and George Eliot. Helen Hunt Jackson, a poet nurtured in the same milieu as Dickinson, is the only female poet with whom Dickinson had an on-going literary relationship. George Eliot is the foremother with whom Dickinson seemed to share strong affinities in the development of female poetics. Jackson and Eliot represent the boundaries of Dickinson's cultural field through which her female poetics may be more clearly understood. Dickinson tests her mettle, on the one hand, against the grain of Helen Hunt Jackson's position as the eponymous female poet of her time, who represented the fairly genteel, feminine poetry being published in 19th-century America. George Eliot, on the other hand, represents a strong model of female poetics for all 19th-century women writers since she went beyond the gender restrictions of her time. Dickinson herself proclaims Eliot as a strong foremother. By charting Dickinson's complex relationship

with these two writers, one can develop a fuller understanding of how she defined herself as a female poet.

The notion of a female poetics emerges from women's own experience of literature and women's ways of knowing, and focuses on how and what the female writer creates. Dickinson seems an excellent starting point for locating such a poetics in the American canon because she has been seen by several critics, including Adrienne Rich, and Suzanne Juhasz, as the foremother of American poetry, while other studies use her as a measure and point of departure for discussions of female poetry, e.g. Gilbert and Gubar in Shakespeare's Sisters and Harold Bloom in A Map of Misreading. Why is Dickinson viewed as the type of the great female poet writing in English? Lately several critics have remarked on the traits which place her in the ranks of the great poets: her vast and subtle intellect, her original mind and poetics, her inventiveness and play, her mastery of craft, and her relation to her culture, her strong personae, and the sheer volume of her poetry.

In taking this catalogue as a point of departure for my study, I wish to explore those areas which may be considered as part of a growing tradition of female poetics. The most important pioneer critics for this study on the hermeneutics of female writing are Elaine Showalter and Susan Gilbert and Sandra Gubar. Showalter in her early work, A Literature of Their Own, sees women writers as a subculture, calls for the study of women writers as women, and delineates their struggle without a literary history, whereby each generation has to rediscover the past. In her 1979 essay, "Toward a Feminist Poetics" Showalter defines a highly influential concept of gynocriticism:

A female framework is required for the analysis of women's writings and new models should be developed based on the study of female experience rather than on male models and theories. Without the framework of female

culture, a critic can misinterpret as well as ventriloquize the notions of male literary history, the periodization of which is completely inappropriate to women's literature (40).

While Showalter writes generally about the need for a theory of female literature, Gilbert and Gubar in No Man's Land propose a psychological theory of gendered writing through a female version of the Oedipal model. Yet in their The Madwoman in the Attic and, more specifically in Shakespeare's Sisters, they focus on the genre of poetry, showing how writing poetry has traditionally been an even more difficult and subversive act for women than writing fiction. Their argument leads one to conclude that Dickinson, the lone canonical female poet of the American Renaissance, was indeed aware of her tenuous position in her chosen genre. In fact, again and again, in her letters and poems, there is an analysis of this double-bind of the female poet's anxiety of authorship. One of her poems states this directly:

They shut me up in Prose--
As when a little Girl
They put me in the Closet--
Because they liked me "still"

(Poem 613)

If, however, such anxiety of authorship describes the plight of the female lyric poet, it can also be the very thing necessary to her greatness. Karl Keller in The Only Kangaroo Among the Beauty makes a good case for such a reading of Dickinson. His position is that her status as an outsider in the great tradition saved her since she could thereby revel in her "kangaroo" antics, creating a poetry that played and teased and violated all sorts of expectations.

The misinterpretation, ventriloquizing and exclusion of Dickinson from the male lyric tradition began with her first male critic, Thomas Higginson. Such a critical history has done a great disservice to Dickinson's peculiar poetics, and has, in fact, created a miasma of myth from which even feminist critics could not escape. This type of the great American female poet has been obscured by criticism which has concentrated, for the most part, on male models, theories and experience as a basis for evaluation. And it has been charted, on the other extreme, with biographical readings of the poetry which use as a touchstone the sense that the poet's personal peculiarities (seen as shortcomings) have created her strange poetics.

There are several questions still the focus of on-going debate in recent feminist criticism that a study of this type should ask. To begin with, Nancy K. Miller poses the nettling question in The Poetics of Gender: "Does gender have a poetics?" (xi). And in another essay she reminds us of the "irreducibly complicated relationship women have historically had to the language of the dominant culture" ("Emphasis Added" 28). Such caveats signal the need for the feminist scholar to tread lightly in a description of female poetics, always aware of the problems inherent in saying this is female, this is not. Toril Moi's important essay takes its critical impetus from Showalter's three categories of gynocritics and focuses as her title suggests on "Feminist, Female, Feminine." Her analysis of the three, which differentiates the biological "female" from the societal conditioned "feminine" and the political "feminist" proves quite helpful in exploring Dickinson's poetics.

Such distinctions ought to allow a more systematic and realistic study of Dickinson's poetics since she is after all a 19th-century writer not a late 20th-century feminist. I will allude to the three distinctions when necessary in the discussions of themes and specific poems. When I discuss Dickinson's overall thrust of a female engendered poetics, I suggest that it stems from her sense of herself as a female writer in 19th-century America. I will not be using

the term feminist to describe Dickinson's work; however, I will refer to feminist criticism that has been used to understand parts of her poetics. Finally, in discussing her reaction to a highly conditioned sense of the female poet of her time and place, in the chapters on Helen Hunt Jackson, I will use the term feminine. All of this will, of course, be made even more complex by the French psychoanalytic feminists who use the term "writing the feminine," which to them can stem from the female impulse in either gender.

There is a continuing Anglo-American vs. French literary debate over whether there is an essential female character in woman's language. Essentialism assumes, implicitly or overtly, that there is an "essence" of female subjectivity often identified with female bodily experience of all women. The French and francophile feminist critics often dismiss a pure focus on women writing and instead seek out the concept of femininity (to complicate matters, in French *écriture féminine* means both female and feminine) which they locate in both male and female writers. They often dismiss critics like Showalter, for instance, as sentimental and romantic, because of her need to focus on writers simply because they are women. My intent will be to recognize that Dickinson has, like all human beings, both male and female impulses and interests. Yet, I will focus on those elements of her poetics that I have determined through critical theory more likely to be considered female. This may leave my method open to some criticism because at times it may seem to be essentialist or may posit broadly defined dichotomies between the sexes. That is not my intention. However, while Dickinson was certainly aware of the complexity of gender, she often played in broad terms with the rigidly sex-role stereotyped expectations of her society. Such stances will be charted as Dickinson saw them from her vantage point in mid 19th-century America.

While aware of the far-reaching parameters of much existing theory on female writing, feminist critics must continue the much needed work of focusing on women writers'

themes, forms and stylistics. I therefore share Shari Benstock's determination in light of sometimes conflicting feminist theory: "I will resist here the effort to come to grips with these perplexing issues in feminist literary criticism" (Feminist Issues in Literary Scholarship 27). I do not believe the exploration of major women writers should wait for a definitive body of theory on women's writing. We must continue our design of a female poetics while many of these issues are still being debated. In fact, I believe there can never be a definitive, finished theory which places women's literature in certain defined space. True female literary criticism should allow space for difference and should not fall into the trap of a codified, rigid discourse. However, there are certain patterns, forms and themes which are more likely the province of women writers and which this study attempts to describe in relation to Dickinson.

Therefore, in this study's eclecticism with respect to theorists, I take my cue from Annette Kolodny's suggestion for feminist criticism:

The feminist critic . . . is free to employ or refine whatever schools or methods suit her present purposes and her readings thereby benefit from the sheer audacity of her infinite critical variety. Moreover, because feminist criticism essentially adds a vital new perspective to all that has gone before, rather than taking anything away, it enjoys at least the possibility of enhancing and enlarging our appreciation of what is comprised by any specific literary text. (159)

I choose to be eclectic in my choice of theorists for several reasons. While critics may differ in overall theory, that does not preclude one from synthesizing elements of their theories for a study of Dickinson's female poetics. The use of several critics, however disparate, is necessary to discuss the many-sided and often contradictory impulses in the poet herself.

While this may present a critical problem for some, it is a legitimate critical position, one which has precedence in theorists like Annette Kolodny and Shari Benstock, as I have noted. In addition, the creative artist should take precedence over theorists; thus, there is no need to ignore soundly appropriate ideas of one critic when discussing a poet of Dickinson's standing simply because one has included another theorist whose general bias is antithetical to the other. With the desire that this study might "enhance and enlarge" our appreciation, I propose an understanding of Dickinson's female poetics as derived from such critics as Josephine Donovan, Carol Gilligan, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Elaine Showalter, Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, Mary Jacobus, Jane Marcus, Nancy K. Miller, Shari Benstock, and others. This study will not only include a feminist body of theory, but will provide an understanding of Dickinson's poetics through theories of American literature and traditional theories of poetic composition.

Within Dickinson studies, there are three types of recent criticism that I believe make room for my proposed work. The first group includes feminist studies which do not present a systematic look at her poetics, as I intend to do, but instead highlight one specific poetic stance. These include essays such as Karl Keller's "Sleeping with Emily Dickinson" incorporated into his The Only Kangaroo Among the Beauty, the essay by Adrienne Rich, "Vesuvius at Home" and Gilbert and Gubar's "A Woman -- White" from Madwoman in the Attic. Full-length studies include Suzanne Juhasz's The Undiscovered Continent: Emily Dickinson and the Space of the Mind, which presents the thesis that gender informed Dickinson's decision to choose the world of the mind over either the male public world or the female domestic one, while Juhasz's earlier work, Naked and Fiery Forms, places Dickinson with those female writers who emphasized the confessional in their work. Vivian Pollak in The Anxiety of Gender sees gender as Dickinson's "generative obsession" and posits a suppressed homosexual rage in her poetry, with a persona who oscillates between anger at a patriarchal system and her desire to be legitimized by it.

Wendy Barker's Lunacy of Light, while not primarily feminist, focuses on what she sees as Dickinson's trope of hiddenness, her "slant" reaction to the negative view of the 19th-century woman poet.

A second type of recent feminist criticism on Dickinson attempts to delineate a female literary matriarchy or to place her in traditional literary history. Such works include Karl Keller's The Only Kangaroo Among the Beauty, the only overlap of emphasis with mine perhaps being his discussion of Dickinson's relation to Emerson, which I treat only briefly for reasons other than Keller's. Another is Wendy Martin's An American Triptych, which identifies a tradition of female American poets beginning in the 18th century with Ann Bradstreet and including Dickinson and Adrienne Rich. Paula Bennett's A Loaded Gun sees affinities between Dickinson and Sylvia Plath. On Dickinson's resemblance with the British, Joanna Feit Diehl in Dickinson and the Romantic Imagination explores how Dickinson's gender creates a divergence from the Romanticism of Keats, Wordsworth and Shelley. A number of studies present a comprehensive treatment of Dickinson and her relation to the Brontës and Barrett Browning. For that reason and others, I do not intend to include Dickinson's relationship with them in my study, choosing instead to relate Dickinson to George Eliot, a subject about which very little has been written. The recent book on Dickinson's relation to feminist theory, Mary Loeffelholz Emily Dickinson and the Boundaries of Feminist Theory, is a fine study which will be alluded to throughout the dissertation. This is an excellent initial foray into how feminist theory relates to Dickinson. Loeffelholz clarifies the often turgid and conflicting feminist-psychological literary theory and relates it to Emily Dickinson's poetic themes. Yet my study does not in any way duplicate hers, since hers is a much more theoretical study and does not describe Emily Dickinson's poetics in relation to her female cultural field, namely George Eliot and Helen Hunt Jackson.

Inevitably a study of Emily Dickinson's gendered poetics must contend with the questions surrounding any exploration of women's difference. To that end this dissertation will be more inquisitory and dialogic than comprehensive and definitive.

CHAPTER TWO

“A SHAPE TO FILL A ‘LACK’”:

FEMALE MODES OF COMPOSITION IN DICKINSON’S POETRY

Poem 503

“Better--than Music! For I--who heard it--
 I was used--to the Birds--before--
 This--was different--’Twas Translation--
 Of all tunes I knew--and more--”

If we recall Helen Mc Neil’s assessment of Emily Dickinson, that as the type of the great female poet she is not really known in our culture, it is apparent that there should be a kind of translation to define such difference. The *1st International Emily Dickinson Conference* in Washington D.C.(1992) chose translation as its theme. The conference developers’ choice rendered translation a new meaning for Dickinson studies, in that it stressed the ability to understand the Dickinson idiom in all its ramifications as quite similar to translation from one language to another. Taking my cue from the theme of this conferences, I wish to translate Dickinson’s form and content into its female language. This is not to say that there can ever be fixed, binary oppositions between male and female language. Yet, I wish to chart certain themes and forms in Dickinson’s writing which are more likely to be female forms, according to theorists in the field of female composition. It is my intent in this chapter to present an overview of certain elements of Dickinson’s female poetics in the light of theories of female writing. The

remainder of the dissertation will chart such elements through her affinities with Helen Hunt Jackson and George Eliot.

The first area for a discussion of Dickinson's poetics must be a focus on exactly what comprises her canon. For this study her canon will include not only her poems, but also the letters for several reasons. The primary one is that Dickinson's letters are often as carefully wrought as the poems themselves, and many of the letters are written as poems addressed to someone or include poems in them. Dickinson's poetry and letters are clearly intertwined; often it is vital to know what letter the poem was enclosed in and to whom it was addressed. In fact, Dickinson has been said to have "published" her poems by sending them to various members of her audience, the friends and family with whom she corresponded. Susan Dickinson received the most of any of her recipients. To Dickinson Susan was "every woman in the world" and was to soar to Dickinson's estimate by appreciating and criticizing some of her most important and esoteric work. The letters therefore should be valued as Dickinson valued them, as part of her literary canon. However, another reason for including the letters as a part of her canon is that letters are more likely to be seen as part of female artistic production. This is not to say that male writers have not used this form well, but to suggest that such an approach legitimizes the more hidden forms of writing, like diaries and letters, which are more likely to be female. Josephine Donovan in "Toward a Women's Poetics" cites Lawrence Lipking to the effect that for gynocritics "the outline of a women's poetics is traced in poems and novels and plays, in essays and pamphlets and letters and diaries, and even in records of conversation" (99).

In order to assess Dickinson's female centered canon, it is necessary to outline its parameters. After her death in 1886 nearly 1800 poems were discovered in her bureau at the Homestead. About half of these had been bound by Dickinson with string into forty booklets or "fascicles," as her sister Lavinia later termed them. These consisted of fair copies written in ink

on eight-by-five inch double sheets of paper. Dickinson scholars can view the holographs with special permission at the libraries at Harvard and Amherst, as I have viewed them, and, of course, since 1986 have had access to the forty fascicles in Ralph W. Franklin's facsimile edition, The Fascicle Poems of Emily Dickinson. This includes both the fascicles and the unbound fascicle sheets or sets, but neither the rest of her manuscripts nor the fair copies of poems and letter/poems. This study of the holographs reproduces and describes the forty fascicles for the first time exactly as she wrote them, along with the sets that were not sewn into fascicles. For the purposes of understanding Dickinson's creative achievement in revisioning a new language with its emphasis on the spatial, its idiosyncratic punctuation, capitalization, even spelling and a dislocated grammar and syntax, Franklin's work is very valuable, because as he himself states: "[her holographs] resist translation into print" (Intro xi). Franklin's work further suggests that Dickinson's making of the fascicles fulfilled her need for publication, in that they showed "her desire to leave an organized legacy for the world" (Intro. xii).

Some of the scraps Dickinson left were particularly interesting because of their materiality. These "scraps," so named by her first editor Mabel Loomis Todd, included about 900 worksheets and rough drafts of letters and poems. These scraps were written on anything that came to hand, apparently, including pieces of colored paper pinned together, the insides of brown paper bags, used envelopes, recipes, shopping lists, the margins of newspapers, and one of the more famous on a wrapper for "Chocolat Meunier." In addition, some poems had additional visual effects created by Dickinson: one had a stamp picturing a railroad with the names George Sand and her novel Mauprat; others had caricatures (some from Dickens' novels). Others were visually arranged to be synchronous with the size and shape of the medium, in that their lines took on the shape of the scrap on which they were written. I was able both to see and photograph many of these at a special exhibition put on by the Amherst College Library in July of 1993 for

the *Emily Dickinson International Society Business Meeting*. Awareness of the materiality of her canon must be the crux of any discussion of Dickinson for the future scholar.

Such modes of composition outlined above might be understood as indicative of women's patterns of development, which are alternatives to more hierarchical and established forms. There are certain styles and patterns that theorists of women's art have identified as more likely to be female. Josephine Donovan in "Toward a Women's Poetics" suggests that the development of women writers is in line with traditional woman's domestic sphere, whose labor is non-progressive, repetitive and static (101). According to Kathryn Allen Rabuzzi, to whom Donovan is indebted for some of her ideas, the notion of Aristotelian development is at odds with woman's essential biology which is repetitive or cyclical(163-67). Such theorists and others are positing a fundamental interruptibility in women's artistic patterns. For example, Jane Marcus in her provocative essay, "Still Practice, A/Wrested Alphabet" defines a female "poetics of commitment," as an alternative to male patterns. She calls it the art of Penelope, who is the mythological model for an art of "repetition and dailiness." For Penelope art is a daily weaving; it is women's work keeping a culture alive, important because it teaches "other women the patient craft of one's cultural heritage" (84). For the purpose of my overview of Dickinson's poetics, such theories suggest that Dickinson's seemingly non-unified canon of over 1800 poems may be seen as indicative of female patterns of composition.

Other recent theories of women's art give us still another approach to understanding Dickinson's female centered poetics. Josephine Donovan in "Towards a Women's Poetics" states that women in the home have traditionally created objects for use or "material valued for itself, for its immediate physical and qualitative worth, and not for its abstract qualitative monetary . . . value" (102).

Dickinson's epistolary production showed her as so attuned to her "audience" that in "publishing" her poems she often chose to send poems to her recipients for their benefit as well as her own. These gift-poems might be sent for thank yous or solace. When Higginson's wife died, Dickinson comforted him by sending a poem whose theme was a strong belief in an afterlife. To her nephew Ned she sent childlike poems, which were critical of the coldness of organized religion or of the Bible, for example "The Bible is an Antique Volume--/Written by Faded Men" (Poem 1545). Once, when Mabel Loomis Todd gave Dickinson a drawing of Indian pipes, she sent in return her now famous poem on the hummingbird, enclosed with this note: "Dear friend, I cannot make an Indian pipe but please accept a Humming Bird" (Letter 740).

This presentation of poems to friends and family in letters was Dickinson's form of publication, one rooted in women's ways of creativity, much like the gardens and quilts which Alice Walker sees as women's art forms in her essay "In Search of Our Mother's Gardens." In fact, many of Dickinson's poems themselves focused on conventional female activities of her time, e.g., horticulture, sewing, death and dying. Yet they are anything but conventional in approach, often subverting this comfortable domesticity, indicative of Dickinson's need to develop an alternative to idealized notions of women's roles. Such a reliance on female themes to expand the traditionally female poetic sensibility will be discussed in the Chapter on Dickinson and Helen Hunt Jackson.

Elaine Showalter in "Piecing and Writing" describes women's time as interrupted and squeezed in between traditional activities like mothering and household chores. She links women's time with one of women's traditional art forms, the quilt, which is done in pieces in tidbits of time, and is patterned on theme and repetition. In her essay, she makes a case for a reading of Harriet Beecher Stowe's organization of Uncle Tom's Cabin as patterned quilt.

Similarly, I believe the quilt, a traditional pattern for women's art, can be seen as one pattern for Dickinson's poetry. Barton Levi St. Armand has suggested a similar visual metaphor, the scrapbook, as a more appropriate model for Dickinson's poetry in his invaluable Emily Dickinson and Her Culture. St. Armand's idea is based on her taking bits and pieces from her culture, the ars moriendi (art of dying) movement, sentimental love religion, and others. St. Armand calls for future scholars to be open to visual as well as verbal structures in Dickinson's canon.

I believe that the quilt design seems an appropriate metaphor for the shape of Dickinson's canon. This metaphor seems to have been suggested by Dickinson's choice of sewing up many of her poems into the fascicle books, as if she were using the poems of each fascicle as one would prepare scraps for a quilt. Perhaps, the quilt, which creates a pattern through discrete and different scraps of cloth, suggests a way to define the fascicles -- a unity made out of discrete and often contradictory poems. It may be that critical focus on their patterns has been too text conscious, and should be more open to color or tone and design rather than thematic thrust.

While the sewing metaphor for her poetry is one many critics have mentioned, particularly the trope for the poet-self of a spider sewing at night, I wish to ground such views in female composition theory. Sewing was a lifelong trope for Dickinson, for as late as 1883 in Letter 1570 she encloses the poem "Forever honored be the Tree" with this remark: "I cannot tint in Carbon nor embroider in Brass, but send you a homespun rustic picture I certainly saw Saturday in the awful storm. Please excuse my needlework--." Sewing, particularly in the 19th century, was almost exclusively the province of women, so Dickinson's choice of metaphor for the poet is most certainly gender-based.

Nancy K. Miller in "Arachnologies: The Woman, The Text, and the Critic" has used Arachne, the spider-artist, as a paradigm for a woman writer or weaver of texts. In her essay she proposes "to read Arachne's story: both as a figuration of woman's relation of production to the dominant culture, and as a possible parable (or critical modeling) of a feminist poetics"(272). Dickinson most certainly should be included in this model of woman spider-artists. Her poems using that metaphor will be contrasted with those of Helen Hunt Jackson in the next two chapters.

My critical method throughout this study, therefore, will often allude to the fascicles and the letters, as well as the poems. Such a method privileges concepts of female composition. In order to understand this method as grounded in female poetic theory, it is necessary to present a brief overview of Dickinson's publishing history.

Four years after Dickinson's death in 1890, the first slim edition of her poetry was published in an edition by Thomas Wentworth Higginson and Mabel Loomis Todd, her brother Austin's longtime mistress. The edition underwent "surgery" (to borrow Dickinson's earlier term for Higginson's criticism). Diction, rhyme, punctuation, spelling, spacing, the full materiality of the original text, including whether it was part of a letter or fascicle, was effaced for varied reasons, including that of making the poetry more palatable to the public who had been nurtured on the genteel women's poetry of the day. Many of the subsequent editions bowdlerized the poems heavily: changing meter, omitting stanzas, regularizing spelling, syntax, capitalization, words and punctuation (elimination of dashes in particular). It was not until 1955 that Thomas H. Johnson published the three-volume Harvard Variorum text, which attempted to present all of Dickinson's poems as closely as possible to her own manuscripts. However, this edition also was subject to additions and deletions that altered the poems as Dickinson wrote them. In order to

rectify this, Ralph W. B. Franklin published his fascicle edition, The Manuscript Poems of Emily Dickinson in 1986, presenting facsimiles of the original fascicles (this edition only includes the poems Dickinson herself bound). Many scholars are still not satisfied that we are seeing Dickinson's canon as she created it.

Such scholars are revising Johnson and Franklin by going back to Dickinson's large epistolary canon, particularly the poems enclosed in letters and the letter/poems. Such critics are represented, on the one hand, by William Schurr and his co-editors, Emily Schurr and Anna Dunlap, who purport to have "discovered" over 300 new poems of Dickinson in their book New Poems of Emily Dickinson. On the other hand, Martha Nell Smith and Ellen Louise Hart are at work on an edition that recognizes the literary integrity of these letter/poems in their own right and will present an edition of the "Book of Sue" (all Dickinson's letters/poems sent to her sister-in-law Sue that they see as the foremost self-publication of Dickinson's canon).

In her earlier book Rowing in Eden: Re-Reading Emily Dickinson, Nell Smith makes an excellent case for the erasure and cuts most probably made by Dickinson's brother Austin and others prior to Dickinson's first publication of 1890. The major part of such bowdlerization related to Austin's wife, Sue. Smith contends this stemmed from Austin's and others' homophobia, a reaction to the strong, passionate bond between the two women evidenced in the letters and poems sent to Sue. Such a theory is well-founded since there is evidence in the letters and poems that Dickinson envisioned Sue in a very intense erotic way. Some critics disagree with this view. Basing their views on Carroll-Smith Rosenberg's article on female friendships in the 19th century, many contend that effusive close relationships between women in the 19th century did not necessarily indicate homoerotic love. However, there is strong indication that Dickinson felt at the least ambivalent about the nature of her relationship with her sister-in-law. It seems clear that this was not just a close female friendship, at least on Dickinson's part.

The ramifications of this history of text tampering and the attempts to reclaim Dickinson's original work for a study of Dickinson's female poetics should be fairly clear. Schurr and Smith work from the premise that the definitive Johnson edition of Dickinson's works and the more recent fascicle edition by Franklin need to be revised and/or supplemented. Yet their divergence lies clearly in a movement, on the one hand, by Schurr to second guess Dickinson (and of course Johnson and Franklin) by taking out of the letters "poems" that were not so indicated by Dickinson in the usual ways, lines and spacing. Smith and Hart, on the other hand, believe that Dickinson should be given more credit and autonomy; they clearly hope to recreate, as accurately as possible, Dickinson's poems and letter/poems so that her peculiar hybrid form may be examined as she wrote it. She, and others in this recent school of thought, with which I am in agreement, believe Dickinson has had an on-going history of text tampering. They contend that we should be reviewing the letters/poems and holographs, which include both the fascicles and the scraps, to get back to the poetry as Dickinson wrote it and to whom she addressed certain poems. In this study wherever possible, my critical method will be to privilege the canon as Dickinson wrote it; thus I will work from the Franklin fascicles and recognize the poems as letter-poems or as enclosed in letters. Finally, while this in no way purports to be a study of the fascicles, there will be some attempt to recognize certain fascicle poems' context when relevant. Dickinson's creation of the fascicles and her "publication" through letters indicate a mode of composition that can be viewed as the way a woman of her time would be most likely to publish, since it is indicative of the isolated and private roles of women in 19th century America.

The stylistic traits of Dickinson's poems can also be viewed from the point of view of female poetic theory. One quite noticeable trait is the sense of multiplicity, coupled with the feeling of lack of boundaries. Such traits of the poetry may be understood in the light of the

theories of Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous. Before going into the specifics of their theories, I will analyze those stylistic elements that indicate Dickinson's lack of fixed boundaries: an abundance of variant lines and poems, an avoidance of closure through dashes, ellipsis, and "unfinished" last lines.

The first area relates to the variant lines and variant poems. The recent study by Sharon Cameron of the fascicles, Choosing Not Choosing, takes a number of the fascicles and presents in minute detail a reading of the poems and the variant lines and versions, contending that Dickinson's poesis was a deliberate "not choosing" which enabled her to create a movement of constant inquiry and possibility in the hermeneutic circle. I find this thesis an exciting and substantial one, which preserves the poet's clear sense of purpose as against the critical view of her as inept or careless of definitive finished poems. Such a pejorative assessment of Dickinson's editorial prowess is represented most egregiously by John Crowe Ransom who wrote, as Rich quotes him in "Vesuvius at Home," that "[Dickinson] hadn't advanced to that later stage of operations where manuscripts are prepared for the printer" (59).

In essence, Cameron's thesis presents, at least to this reader, a movement away from the accepted model of definitive texts and fixed language, in addition to creating a way of defining female poetry as fluidly conversational with both addressees and all readers. One could say that a lack of fixed final decisions on variant lines and poems indicates that Dickinson was leaving decisions up to the "prevailing lens" of each generation.

Another often noted element of Dickinson's poetry relates to avoidance of closure, whether through use of dashes, other elliptical stylistics, and "unfinished" last lines, i.e. lines that send the poem back in on itself, like a serpent swallowing its own tail (another way of expressing

this is to say that her endings often transcend logic).⁵ Such stylistic idiosyncrasies, which will be highlighted when appropriate in this study, might be seen as a gender based model. Gilbert and Gubar's No Man's Land describes a similar choice of non-hierarchical models and techniques in the writer Dorothy Richardson, who proclaimed herself on a literary pilgrimage whose earmarks were non-linear, stream of consciousness techniques.⁶ To her "écriture feminine" was identified by a flowing, endless movement. In Richardson's attempts to reverse phallogentric logic, she wished to call attention to its arbitrary hierarchy and replace it with forms that were less privileged and non-male.

Dickinson's techniques are similar to Richardson's, yet go beyond them. One thinks immediately of the dashes, that testament to her impatience and to her need to forego other marks of punctuation which are perhaps more privileged and give a stronger sense of closure. Several critics have suggested possible reasons for Dickinson's dashes. Marianne Boruch in "Dickinson Descending" says that her dashes suggest a lack of any necessity to "tie up immensity with a bow" (871). Another view is Cristanne Miller's in "Dickinson's Language: Interpreting Truth Told Slant" who gives many sound reasons for Dickinson's use of the dash, in particular that in the 19th century the dash was much more common than today, and that the phrases enclosed within imitate the "stops and starts" of speech, isolate emphatic phrases or fragments creating a sense of impulsiveness and emotion or they may "usher in abrupt changes of subject or metaphor," and at

⁵ I am thinking, in particular, of the last lines of "My Life Had Stood a Loaded Gun."

⁶ The two greatest examples of the technique in English are most likely Joyce's Ulysses and Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury. This does not negate my argument since I am not an essentialist. Rather it suggests that both male and female writers have the ability to create this endless, flowing prose that some theorists identify with the female principle.

the end of a poem a final dash might suggest lack of closure (79). The dash, in any case, is simply another sign that Dickinson was not confined to traditional punctuation and that there were multiple reasons for this. The use of the dash became her stylistic stamp, indicating her overall need to create an overflowing, never stopping prose.

Thus, many of Dickinson's poems seem to move in an endless hermeneutic circle because there are so many significant permutations of meaning, dependent on the variant readings chosen by a particular reader or the way her ambiguous syntax and punctuation is read. Perhaps such a poetics is working out the poetics of difference, counterpointing itself against more traditional forms. One way of beginning a tentative discussion of such art is through the work of Hélène Cixous. In her controversial "The Laugh of the Medusa" she contends that through "multiplicity and play, feminine writing aims to uncover a 'feminine' that has been stifled and suppressed"(44). In Dickinson's poetry, as I have suggested above and will demonstrate later, there is certainly multiplicity and a good deal of playing and punning and often a child-like playful persona which would seem to bear out these views on Feminine writing. Perhaps hers is the voice of one who can be less serious and more experimental because her gender makes her an outsider in the traditional male poetic community.

Luce Irigaray also writes of multiplicity, fluidity and restlessness in female writing ("writing the feminine"). In "When Our Lips Speak Together" she depicts the feminine as "always one and the other at the same time" sharing and open, having unlimited boundlessness (72). She writes:

How can I speak you, who remain in a flux that never congeals or solidifies?
 How can this current pass into words? It is multiple. . . ; yet it is not
 decomposable . . . These streams don't flow into one, definitive sea; these rivers
 have no permanent banks; this body no fixed borders. This unceasing mobility,

this life. Which they might describe as our restlessness, whims, pretenses or lies. For all this seems so strange to those who claim 'solidity' as their foundation. Speak, nevertheless. Between us, 'hardness' is not the rule . . . Our density can do without the sharp edges of rigidity. We are not attracted to dead bodies (72-73).

What do other feminist readers of Dickinson say about her multiplicity? Suzanne Juhasz in "Reading Doubly: Dickinson, Gender, and Multiple Meaning" suggests that such multiplicity (which she terms "doubleness") is gender-based: "For in essence the ontological condition of what the anthropologists Shirley Ardener and Edwin Ardener call a 'muted group' within a dominant culture is one of doubleness, since reality is experienced both from the dominant patriarchal culture and from the muted female perspective" (85-86).

Julia Kristeva sees woman's writing as more likely than men's to be playful; such writing is "disruptive, punning, allusive or private," as Showalter stresses in "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" (61). Dickinson's poetry has been described that way by many critics. It is important to trace the disruptions, puns and allusions in Dickinson's poetry and show their relation to gender, if any, and to begin to scope their power and possibility rather than their strangeness and inaccessibility. Dickinson's play-acting personality, which leaves its stamp on her canon, was evident to her family who were quite aware of her ability to play, to dissemble, to exaggerate. In one of the documents discovered quite recently in the Evergreens Dickinson's nephew Ned attested to her penchant for exaggeration and playful untruths, remarking about a conversation she had with someone: "My aunt never told the truth for so long in her life." In addition, her niece Martha Dickinson Bianchi wrote:

. . . nothing could be more fatal to knowing Aunt Emily on her own terms than to take her literally when her mood was hyperbolic . . . It is this element of drollery in her, the elfin, mischievous strain, that is hardest for those who never knew her to reconcile with her solemn side . . . 'Whimsy', 'playing naive' for sheer glee of her game -- 'elfing it' we called the sport . . . having fun with her audience, to the confusion of matter of fact. (Emily Dickinson: Face to Face 63)

Dickinson's sense of play has been remarked upon often. When asked by Higginson for her definition of poetry, she wrote that if she felt as if the "top of my head were coming off," that's poetry -- a statement quoted often as indicative of the emotional effusion of the poet. But there is something more in her definition: the metaphoric losing of one's head that is both fearful and fascinating for Dickinson. Such an understanding of the nature of poetry is directly related to the speakers in many of Dickinson's poems who see the source of poetic power as both destructive and creative, Thanatos and Eros, perhaps much more so because she was a woman. Dickinson furthers this notion (as she terms it "the skirmish in the mind") by fashioning a new cogito of multiplicity -- abandoning the unity of the self in "I think therefore I am" to one with many projections of the self in the poetry; thus, whatever the "I" thinks at the moment creates a new "I" in the poetry, a sense of the multiplicity that many critics have seen as a sign of a female poetics. This leads directly to the creation of her poetic canon as a new epistemology comprised of whatever can be sustained for the moment of the lyric. Such moments stretch the boundaries of playing for Dickinson. In fact, poetry itself is, as I have suggested above, an "elfing" that is akin to play acting. Dickinson's plays or puns with the word "play" and often links it to the idea of a play or dream, other aspects of make-believe. For example, many of Dickinson's poems have such throw away lines as "It's only a dream" or "It's only drama." Often they are

interjected after a particularly difficult revelation or when she is on the brink of real knowledge. Additionally, she will be playful or silly, particularly at sublime or awful moments in a poem. For example, in "I Heard a Fly buzz when I died," that mundane fly seems to break up the pathos at the deathbed scene. However, this play-acting theme is most apparent in such poems as the one following, which outlines her technique of using drama or the play as a metaphor for poetry. Here is the pertinent part of Poem 531.

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--

In this poem she also links the dream and drama or poetry. Since much of her poetry has real affinities with the structure and grammar of dreams, dream analysis techniques prove helpful in searching out meaning. By linking playing, dreams, drama and poetry here, Dickinson begins to equate poetry with immortality ("drama is never dead").

Another of Dickinson's poems about poetry and play is the intriguing Poem 870. It is a short poem, representative of many of her stylistic traits discussed earlier.

Finding is the first Act
 The second, loss,
 Third, Expedition for
 The "Golden Fleece"
 Fourth, no Discovery--
 Fifth, no Crew--
 Finally, no Golden Fleece--
 Jason--Sham--too.

The poem presents a simple chronological pattern through its depiction of a five-act play, yet it playfully subverts the pattern as all are shown to be sham. The references are of course to the myth of Jason and the Golden Fleece. In one sense the poem may be seen as an elaborate pun on the word "play." Thus, if "play" or poetry is like a play, it's all make-believe or sham. Kristeva's notion of female language as more apt to be playful or punning is certainly apparent here. Perhaps too Dickinson, as a woman poet, is playing with the myths of the more patriarchal classical age. By suspending logic (we are after all expecting a story, a drama) Dickinson forces us to look again to find analogies to explain the puzzle of a play with no actor and no action. This poem is typical of much of Dickinson's poetry, in its oxymoronic yoking of opposites that play out irreconcilable conflict--the quest toward fulfillment, the pull toward creation (the Golden Fleece) and the drive toward destruction and entropy (the "sham" of the ending).

The positioning of the gerund "finding" as the primary word in the poem, with its indication of endless process, sets the tone here. One way of approaching the poem is to see it as

miming the dynamics of dream language.⁷ Freudian dream theory holds that dreams very often contain an inversion, that is, the conclusion may be dreamt at the beginning of the dream. This, I believe, presents a clue to the poem's own fractured sense of time, for the word "finding" indicates this first line of the poem is not a real beginning since it posits a prior loss. The first three acts of this play occur, yet the next acts indicate they have been sham or play.

Dickinson's structure further borrows from dream grammar in that the either/or structure of dreams is often masked as a both/and structure. Even the causation is hidden here as mere temporality, again similar to the language of dreams. In other words, the temporal words ("second," "third") might be seen in a dream (and this poem) as a substitute for causation, much as we experience different acts of our dream that merely seem to follow one another but through analysis might be seen as related through cause and effect. Thus, one could say that the absence of the object sought (in this case "the Golden Fleece") causes the subject, the quester ("Jason") to be sham, too.

Dickinson may be creating a new cogito here, not "I think therefore am," but "If the object of my thought does not exist, do I?" Yet with the initial semantic thrust of an endless searching (signified by the word "finding") perhaps for the very source of creativity itself, Dickinson's "I" will not stop playing at the quest, even though the flirtation might end in the disintegration of the "I."

Why is this quest stymied or blocked? Why does Jason appear a sham? Can these questions be answered in the light of a gendered poetics? I believe that the female speaker in the poem, while not overtly signified in the poem as "she," may very well be the source of this divergence from more traditional male quest poetry. Traditionally in the mythic formulations of

⁷ For much of this discussion I rely on Freud's On the Interpretation of Dreams

Greece and Rome, which our Anglo-American culture has inherited, women did not go on quests. They were either at home waiting like Penelope (weaving) or were the objects themselves of quests like Helen of Troy. Dickinson often subverts traditional notions of religion and myth with a gendered slant. In fact she seems to be trying to revision this myth by recreating it from a female perspective, perhaps to dissolve an order she finds insufficient to explain women's experience. Dickinson may be suggesting that one cannot believe in such myths of the male-quest for any number of reasons, including the fact that such myths do not speak directly to her as a woman.

One of her brief earlier poems (#377) may help us to understand some of the possible referents for Poem 870.

Belief once lost cannot be found intact again
 We start to learn that we believe
 But once--entirely--
 Belief it does not fit so well
 When altered frequently.

This poem is a straightforward thesis statement, quite similar to the theme of "Finding is the first act." Much of Dickinson's canon seems to be structured this way, that is, with many variants on a theme, including brief prose-like statements on the ideas that are reworked much more complexly in some of her best poems.

Poem 377 is a statement on loss, which helps us to understand the inability to truly believe in something again after the initial trust is lost, the theme of "Finding is the first act." To reinforce this from a gendered perspective, one could say that Dickinson was beginning to question many of the myths of her Western culture. What is a female poet to do when such faith in cultural artifacts is no longer fully intact? It appears that Dickinson may be rewriting such

elements of her culture from a more inclusive point of view, which includes the female. In “Finding” she seems to end with an expunging of the hero of the myth, without offering anything to take its place. This is a rejection of fathers in the conjurer/poet’s disappearing act (“Jason sham too”). Perhaps, it is the ultimate power play, to blot out a male centered myth, yet the curious word “sham,” leaves us wondering: Is this a disappearance or does “sham” imply a fake, an impostor? What do those alternatives signify? Knowing Dickinson, this is probably not an either/or situation but a presentation of two possibilities. Is it that she wants to expose the concept of such heroes as suspect, particularly for a female writer revisioning them?

In constructing Dickinson’s canon it is important, as I have suggested earlier, to determine whether certain poems have been privileged and unified in some way by their placement in the same fascicle. Such determination lends added resonance of meaning, as well as establishing Dickinson’s own placement. In this case in Set 5 described in Franklin, the set in which “Finding is the first act” resides, there is a poem that shares ideas with it, Poem 934 “That is solemn we have ended” in its suggestion that life is but “a Play.”

That is solemn we have ended

Be it but a Play

Or a glee among the Garret

Or a Holiday

Or a leaving Home, or later,

Parting with a World

We have understood for better

Still to be explained

This poem suggests that a solemn eschatological focus accrues to all of life's partings. Additionally, the meaning of the world beyond this and of our own earthly life is "still to be explained." Such musings, however, highlight the playing, holiday-like, gleeful part of our lives, which hold beyond the veil a solemnity of which we may not yet be aware. While this does not directly build on the concept of a new Jason in the earlier poem ("Finding is the first act") there is a sense that we are being played with in both poems through endings that convey doubt about the meaning of the world, a sense of mystery that can not easily be explained.

The stylistic elements just discussed, as well as others, create difficulty for the reader of Dickinson's poems. Perhaps a reason for such difficulty is also a key to understanding. Poems that inherently seem to resist interpretation may be traced to Dickinson's desire (or unavoidable necessity) to replicate the problematic encounter with language particularly implicit in a female poet's writing. It is no accident that so many of Dickinson's poems rely on the probing of the pact between the user of language and the world being interpreted, often with the speaker of such poems aligning herself with mother nature whose language is wordless and without syllable. Such a speaker has a reverence for nature and recognizes that a desire for a key to understanding nature might very well pervert nature's enigmatic essence. This knowledge necessitates a poetry which mimes the disjointed, difficult female role of accessibility to language that is Dickinson's hallmark. Such an understanding of the essential beauty of wordless knowledge is apparent in Poem 1400

What mystery pervades a well!

The water lives so far --

A neighbor from another world

Residing in a jar

Whose limit none have ever seen,
But just his lid of glass --
Like looking every time you please
In an abyss's face

The grass does not appear afraid,
I often wonder he
Can stand so close and look so bold
At what is awe to me.

Related somehow they may be,
The sedge stands near the sea --
When he is floors
And does no timidity betray

But nature is a stranger yet;
The ones that cite her most
Have never passed her haunted house,
Nor simplified her ghost.

To pity those that know her not
Is helped by the regret
That those who know her, know her less
The nearer her they get.

Poem 1400 presents a speaker who understands and accepts the mystery of nature, who, in fact, seems happy to find “mystery” and will not seek to subject nature to human will. The only insight is blindsight; this poet can not even assume the perspective of the “grass who does not appear afraid, / . . . to look so bold at what is awe.” Such a comment gives insight into Dickinson’s reading of Whitman, whose speaker can indeed become this grass or as he puts it the “handkerchief of God.” Dickinson’s speaker takes on the stance of one humble before such a mystery, a stance one might call anti-hubristic in that it is the antithesis of the boasting appropriator of nature. This speaker makes no claims of kinship and will not cite nature repeatedly nor have the temerity to “simplify her ghost.” The poem’s movement seems to imitate the movements of a pebble thrown in a well. By the end a sense of ever widening mystery reverberates just as there would be ever widening concentric circles when the stillness of a well is ruptured through a pebble’s disturbance.

Another area of Dickinson’s poetics in need of revisioning through female poetic theory is the allegation that her canon of almost 1800 lyrics is somehow lacking because it had neither long poem nor epic nor a linked sequence of short poems. Of course, with the recent movement to privilege Dickinson’s own poetic groupings, the fascicles, this critical view is beginning to lose some credibility. There have been a few studies of the fascicles recently. In addition, traditional evaluation felt her poems did not show evidence of a defined early, middle and late period. Clearly, it is not easy for a reader to point to a Dickinson poem and tell by its theme or style when it was written. Very often a belief or aspect of style formerly disavowed crops up in later poems, and as the fascicles show, the poet herself chose to place poems together in one fascicle that were written at different times. Perhaps this editorial and compositional decision

indicates her focus not on linear development or chronological movement but rather a more circular and less progress-bound poetics, one that attempts to separate itself from a more traditional hierarchical notion of poetic development. This negative view of the form of her canon might also be seen simply as expecting from a lyric poet what she is not concerned with, novels or epics or even sonnet sequences, which by necessity must move linearly and chronologically.

Kenneth Burke, in several of his books, has reminded us that we should not expect that the lyric poet must see things either wholly or steadily. Yet there are some patterns that can be seen in Dickinson's lyrics, particularly in stylistic development. For example, Dickinson progresses from the conventional end-stopped hymn quatrains with their full rhyming on to more inexact half or slant rhyme and an increasing use of enjambment in her later poems, indicating she is experimenting more and more with form in her later work.

The contention that her poetry lacks development is epitomized in Dickinson: The Modern Idiom by David Porter, who asserts that she is the only major American poet without a project and whose canon of odds and ends holds neither system nor order. There have been several critics who disagree, particularly Greg Johnson in Emily Dickinson: Perception and the Poet's Quest, who believes that Dickinson's project lies within the American Romantic impulse: "The poetry shows a steadily increasing sense of the poet's ability to deal with experiential loss and to guide the progress of her quest efficiently" (120). I suggest that progress might be something Dickinson eschewed, if it narrowly signified moving on from one more highly evolved stance (whether of form or content) to another. In fact, it appears that for her progress meant accepting that artistic process does not spiral upwardly, nor that one theme or stance is displaced by another such that one would say literally about a poem, as one would say about Picasso, "This is of the blue period." Both her complete canon and the fascicles particularly

suggest that Dickinson did not privilege traditional notions of artistic “progress.” For example, in Fascicle 10, there are poems that are artistically complex and quite simple, stances on themes that are antithetical, and in terms of actual time of composition there are poems from quite early in her poetic career and much later. Poem 230, “We--Bee and I -- live by the quaffing” is a fairly straightforward depiction of her poet/self’s kinship with the bee. Yet it shares the fascicle with one of her most interesting and complex poems, Poem 216, “Safe in their Alabaster Chambers.” Antithetical stances occur together in this fascicle. Consider that Poem 234 “You’re right --’the way *is* narrow’--” posits a heaven for that is the “Good Man’s --’*Dividend*.” However, another poem, Poem 236, “If *He dissolve*--then--there is *nothing--more*” expresses real doubt as to whether there is an afterlife, while Poem 185 suggests that science might have to substitute for faith.

Poem 185

“Faith” is a fine invention

When Gentlemen can *see*

But *Microscopes* are prudent

In an Emergency.

The poem I wish to use to end this overview of Dickinson’s female modes of composition is Poem #508. Written in that all important year for Dickinson, 1862, this poem establishes many of the themes, images, and poetic techniques I will be alluding to in the major part of this study on her affinities as a female writer with Helen Hunt Jackson and George Eliot.

I'm ceded--I've stopped being Theirs--

The name They dropped upon my face

With water, in the country church

Is finished using, now,

And They can put it with my Dolls

My childhood, and the string of spools,

I've finished threading--too--

Baptized, before, without the choice,

But this time, consciously, of Grace--

Unto supremest name--

Called to my Full--The Crescent dropped--

Existence's whole Arc, filled up,

With one small Diadem.

My second Rank--too small the first--

Crowned--Crowing--on my Father's breast--

A half unconscious Queen--

But this time--Adequate--Erect,

With Will to choose, or to reject,

And I choose, just a Crown--

This poem is one of the many that articulate the problematic relations between the female self and her society. It is a paradigm metapoem on this subject. In it the I” recognizes itself as subject and no longer as mere object in the world, controlled by others, particularly male others. In essence it mimes ontogeny. To relate it to Jacques Lacan’s description of the mirror stage in human development might be helpful, for, according to him, the child’s knowledge of the self as apart from the other will not be completed until she can actually speak and name herself. In this case there is a new naming through the trope of re-Baptism.

Dickinson’s choice of diction underscores that this re-naming is a particularly female process. This is a rejection of fathers and patriarchy, the name her father gave her and the Baptism that placed her with the established religious conventions of her New England Congregationalism. Poem 508 celebrates the finding of her voice; perhaps Dickinson is separating herself from that child whose voice was “shut up in prose” as she remarks in another poem. One of her letters reveals her affinity with other women writers who have had similar childhoods of repression that were gender-based. It remarks with wonder at these “queens” whose origins were so repressed. “That Mrs. Browning fainted, we need not read *Aurora Leigh* to know, when she lived with her English aunt: and George Sand ‘must make no noise in her grandmother’s bedroom.’ Poor children! Women, now, queens now!” (Letter 234).

In The Marriage of Emily Dickinson, William Shurr sees Poem 508 as “the most elaborate poem of transition to wife,” a state which for Dickinson is “great enough to be called a new form of being . . . celebrated by a second baptism.” While Shurr is right in that many of Dickinson’s poems are concerned with the wife as object in the world, I believe that in not mentioning wife, she did not intend this poem specifically be one of them.

Dickinson has decidedly different reasons for using religious terminology and experience than the typical clergyman of her time. A passage from her favorite Biblical chapter,

Revelation, might explain her reasons and describe her own mimesis: "Behold I make all things new . . . I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end: (21:5-6). Poem 508 is seminal in typifying this multi-levelled allusion. In it there seems to be the conscious declaration of an artist, a break with the Congregationalism of her community, and a personal break from those who choose to "name" her. Yet, while avowing an independence from religion, she co-opts its very language to describe her new state: her re-Baptism, her own sense of Grace, her choice of a crown--all keynote the use of a tradition for her own end. The dramatically defiant tone of "I'm ceded--I've stopped being Theirs" signals her break with childhood and family and religion. The opening words, "I'm ceded," with their heavy dentals create a strong speaker, who can autonomously give herself over to something else, "I'm ceded". The caesura after the first two words of the poem accentuates the sheer force of those words. The choice of words is not delicate, but abrupt and rude in connotation as she catalogues her disavowal of that life she had been dropped into from that first baptism: "The name they dropped upon my face/With water, in the country church/Is finished using, now." Even the structural strangeness of "finished using" rather than "being used" seems apt, because the connotations are that she was being used, she has been an object. In the same stanza the frivolity of that state is accentuated by its link with simple female childhood interests: dolls and spools and sewing.

The second and third stanzas contrast sharply with the first in tone and time. The first represents the earlier stages of life recollected with disdain, while the second and third stanza capture the moment of change. The position of "I choose" in the initial place in the last line stresses the prominence of the present, in direct counterpoint to the parallel first line in the past tense, "I'm ceded." This almost liminal poetics, this capturing of the moment of change, almost as a still life, is recreated quite often in her poetry. The speaker here knows her role: she is the minister, baptizing herself, but it is to make herself Queen, rising above the paltry other life,

suggested by half-measures, “crescents” instead of a whole arc of existence. That past life portrayed her voice only as a “crowing” (with its further suggestion of animal sounds and thus a lower order of life) when she was held by her father. Now her voice is full and powerful, with images for it that hold special significance for Dickinson throughout her canon: Grace, crown, queen, Diadem. All these images move from their original religious significance to a prime place in her notion of her poetics.

Such images are decidedly beyond mere religious connotation here, indicating a sloughing off of old skin, a taking on of a new role as woman and as poet. This “grace” is not an election from God, the naming is not from her own father, but instead she herself is electing, she herself has become Queen, and there is no King, religious or profane, anywhere to be found. This poem, written in 1862, her annus mirabilis when she wrote over 300 poems, exemplifies the incredible power she had recently seen unleashed in herself, the power to re-baptize or dedicate herself to her life’s work, poetry.⁸

From its first publication, Dickinson’s work was bowdlerized, while often her poetics, particularly her stylistics and modes of composition, were misunderstood and even denigrated. Through these two chapters I have hoped to show that these elements of her stylistics may be revisioned in the light of female poetic theory and understood as Dickinson’s vision of a female poetics. This, then, at least for this generation with their “disseminating lens” is the peculiar “slant” vision that is evident in her poetry. Perhaps it was Adrienne Rich in her now classic essay in Dickinson scholarship, “Vesuvius at Home,” that defined most evocatively that peculiar Dickinson dictum: “Tell all the Truth--but tell it slant--.” To be a woman genius in this 19th-

⁸ Gilbert and Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic* make an excellent case for this poem as Dickinson’s pronouncement of her dedication to poetry.

century New England society, Rich asserts, could cause insanity, yet Dickinson survived and triumphed by retranslating her “unorthodox, subversive, sometimes volcanic propensities into a dialect called metaphor” (“Vesuvius” 53). That metaphor, engendered by a gendered necessity, still draws us in and pushes us back, both puzzling and enchanting its present audience. Rich poses the question for future scholars to probe “how she came to be for-herself and how she identified with and was able to use women’s culture, a woman’s tradition; and what the presence of other women meant in her life” (54). The next chapters in this study will focus on a neglected area of Dickinson’s “woman’s tradition,” her relationships with the two writers who are vital to an understanding of Dickinson’s female poetics -- Helen Hunt Jackson and George Eliot.

CHAPTER THREE

CLOSET POETS AND UNCAGED BIRDS: THE LITERARY RELATIONSHIP OF EMILY DICKINSON AND HELEN HUNT JACKSON

They shut me up in Prose--
As when a little Girl
They put me in the Closet--
Because they liked me "still"--

(Poem 613)

"My friends are my Estate"

(Letter 345)

Showalter writes in "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" that "the first task of gynocentric criticism must be to plot the precise cultural locus of female literary identity and to describe the forces that intersect an individual writer's cultural field" (264). While Dickinson's larger cultural field in literary history is, of course, the other writers of the American Renaissance (which is still itself undergoing a revision) her self-designated cultural field was not. To chart that field, let us go to the initial scene of the Dickinson poem, once it was created, her audience. Dickinson's literary circle was small and her lifetime publication virtually non-existent, so that her particular cultural milieu consisted of a few of her friends and family. They were primarily but not exclusively her sister-in-law Susan, whom I consider her best

contemporary reader-critic and who is the recipient of the largest number of poems and letters; the Norcross cousins; Samuel Bowles, the editor of the Springfield Republican; the Roberts Brothers' publisher, Thomas Niles; Mrs. Niles; the poet and novelist Helen Hunt Jackson, and Thomas Higginson.

Literary Reputations/Misconceptions

Dickinson's relationship with her contemporary, Helen Hunt Jackson, is most intriguing because it raises questions both about Dickinson herself and the tradition of female writers against which she wrote. Yet very little has been written on their relationship. As far as can be determined, this critical neglect occurs either out of embarrassment that Dickinson valued and praised a poet who has been judged to hold so little merit today or the belief that this relationship has little relevance to Dickinson's artistic growth. I believe that such views disregard a whole area of fruitful study for Dickinson scholarship. However we evaluate Helen Hunt Jackson today, she was the only female poet with whom Dickinson corresponded about her work. A contemporary from Amherst who was widely published, she shared Higginson as a literary mentor with Dickinson, and was considered, according to Emerson, the best female poet of his time writing on the continent. What themes and techniques did the two writers share? How does Dickinson's poetry diverge from Jackson's? What did Dickinson really think of her, especially considering the curious silences and gaps in their correspondence? Why was Dickinson so reluctant to give Jackson any poems for publication when she asked for some for an edition of anonymous poems, the No-Name Series? Why did Dickinson rarely seek any criticism from Jackson? And, most intriguing, how did the fact that Dickinson must have known that Higginson preferred Jackson's poetry to her own affect the Jackson-Dickinson relationship?

Perhaps Dickinson's view of herself as a poet who, unlike Jackson, did not fit the mold of the acceptable female versifier lends a partial answer to many of these questions. There was no place of privilege on Dickinson's bedroom walls for pictures of Jackson as there was for George Eliot and Barrett Browning. Dickinson was aware of the high esteem both Higginson and Emerson had for Jackson's work. Yet, curiously, there is little desire on her part to seek criticism from her as she did from Susan Dickinson and Higginson. This may be attributed to some envy for the Amherst girlhood friend who, unlike her, had published and yet whom Dickinson felt was not the type of writer she could emulate. Yet through Jackson, Dickinson's "Success is counted Sweetest" was published in the The Masque of Poets, and was judged so highly that it was generally attributed to Emerson. It was Jackson more than Higginson, Susan Dickinson, Samuel Bowles or Thomas Niles who was determined to get Dickinson to publish, as her correspondence with Dickinson has shown. And, most importantly, Jackson was unequivocal in her praise and understanding of Dickinson's poetry. In 1876, the year of the publication of Jackson's novel purported to be about Dickinson, Mercy Philbrick's Choice, she wrote to her: "You are a great poet--and it is wrong to the day you live in that you will not sing aloud" (Letter 545). Ironically, only a year before her own death Jackson asked to be Dickinson's "literary legatee and executor" because she truly believed that "when you are what people term dead, you will be sorry you were so stingy" (Letter 545). Dickinson drew back from Jackson's presumption and never replied to that request. Perhaps, Dickinson did not quite feel that Jackson was an adequate evaluator or critic of her poetry. From their correspondence, it is also clear that Jackson was one of her few literary contemporaries who sensed the genius in her childhood friend. One can only wonder what might have occurred if Jackson had succeeded in breaking through Dickinson's reserve and publishing a small number of her poems during her lifetime.

While Dickinson may have been reticent about the quality of Jackson's poetry, Jackson herself sensed that her literary house may have been built on sand. Jackson's late self-assessment contains the recognition that her writing may have been too much attuned to the literary marketplace, what Dickinson termed the "auction of the mind." Ruth Odell in Helen Hunt Jackson makes a good case for this view: "When she began, however, to receive harsh and stinging criticism for her 'Saxe Holm' and 'No-Name' novels . . . she saw that her own work was not much better than that of the Fanny Ferns and the Minnie Myrtles she had derided. Her success had been too easy, too early, too rapid. She had sold her birthright" (227).

Susan Dickinson wrote Emily Dickinson's obituary which appeared in the Springfield Republican on May 18, 1886, the day before the funeral. In it she remarks on Helen Hunt Jackson's belief in Dickinson's poetry: "She withstood even the fascination of Mrs. Helen Jackson, who earnestly sought her cooperation in a novel of the No-Name Series, although one little poem somehow strayed into the volume of verse which appeared in the series" (Walsh, This Brief Tragedy 109-10). While Susan mentions a novel here, a cursory view of the Jackson/Dickinson correspondence suggests that Jackson was well aware that Dickinson was a poet first and foremost.

Literary history, even feminist literary history, has not been kind to Helen Hunt Jackson. In Gilbert and Gubar's The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women, the definitive text for female literary tradition, there is no Helen Hunt Jackson. Editorial decisions can fall prey to unaccountable exigencies, yet an even more specialized anthology, American Women Regionalists edited by Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse, also does not include Helen Hunt Jackson. The New York Public Library has only the novel Ramona and some of her poems republished under Harold Bloom's general editorship (1972), but for the most part Jackson's works have been out of print for close to a century. The bulk of her poetry, out of print for so

long and almost never anthologized, seems to have full critical neglect. Such neglect is evident in a recent biography that discusses her poetry in only one page.⁹

To speculate on this present lack of interest in Jackson might give us insight into the type of writer she was and shed light on Dickinson's relationship with her. One conclusion is fairly clear: the female writer who was embraced by Dickinson's mentor, Thomas Higginson, Emerson and her country while she was writing is now virtually dismissed, while the poet whom most view today as the greatest female American poet, if not the best woman poet writing in English, was misunderstood and saw only ten poems published in her lifetime. During the difficult time of her young widowhood, when she was raising two young sons, Jackson took a room in the boardinghouse where Thomas Wentworth Higginson was also residing. Their relationship, strictly mentor/mentee, began around 1866, and largely through his efforts she began to publish in magazines and newspapers. He called her "one of the most gifted poetesses in America" (Sewall 578). Higginson reported that Emerson would clip her poems out of the newspapers and magazines, take them about with him to read to friends. In his Preface to Parnassus, in which he included five of her poems, Emerson wrote: "The poems of a lady who contents herself with the initials H. H. . . . have rare merit of thought and expression, and will reward the reader for the careful attention which they require" (Sewall 579).

Dickinson and Jackson certainly seem a curious pair, with all sorts of literary theories to be sprung from their relationship. In reassessing the fates of these two female writers, one could argue that our subsequent revisionist literary history has allowed one to be heard because she managed to elude the 19th-century cultural forces that have condemned so many of its popular female writers to oblivion, writers who, while criticizing women's sphere, like Jackson, were

⁹ Evelyn I Banning, Helen Hunt Jackson.

also a product of that mass sentimental culture and were perhaps doomed by their privileging of polemics over craft and originality.

To understand this in a broader context, it might be helpful to recall Ann Douglas's The Feminization of American Culture. Douglas does not include Jackson in her representative sample of female writers and ministers, a curious omission since she fits the criteria of Douglas's thesis, which envisions an uneasy coalition of these two groups who try to stem the tide away from what they see as the increasing godlessness of their culture by incorporating religion and ethics into their works, making it palatable by a sentimentalization which she terms the "feminization" of American culture.¹⁰ This coalition of American clergyman and female writers between 1820 and 1875 was the leading spokesperson for this "feminized" culture. Douglas envisions such a coalition as the root of the cultural sprawl of our century's popular culture. Thus, the split between what might be termed "white bread" writing and literature so evident today can be seen as a result of their works.

While Helen Hunt Jackson seems to epitomize the type of female poet whom Emerson admired and encouraged, Dickinson's relationship to Emerson is not so clear cut. I am not referring to Emerson's knowledge of Dickinson, since he had none, but of how Dickinson viewed Emerson. Dickinson's pointed guise of inattention to Emerson and other male writers of the American Renaissance may have been more polemical than anything else. Emerson, in his prime role as literary theorist for the national literary identity, represents the patriarchal norm for the 19th-century American writer and it would appear for Dickinson as well. Dickinson's letters indicate she read and admired Emerson, having written of Representative Men that it is "the little

¹⁰ For a fuller review of her thesis, see "The Law of the Iron Madonna" by Catherine Costa (nee Esposito) in the Denver Quarterly.

granite book we can lean upon,” and of the poet himself that “he came from where dreams are born.” Yet such praise, characteristically, did not mean unqualified acceptance. There was indeed much difference in their attitudes toward Transcendentalism, religion, orthodoxy, and stylistics. I agree with Harold Bloom, who in a A Map of Misreading develops the thesis that irony pervades the relationship of American writers with Emerson as pre-cursor since Emerson’s dictum was that the emerging American writer should not be influenced by anyone else. Bloom further contends in his study that such anxiety of influence is doubly ironic for Dickinson because she is a woman poet.

Traditional Dickinson criticism, and indeed that of all the American Romantics, attributes various traits like self-reliance and skepticism about religion to Emersonian influence.¹¹ However, with American literary revisionism in full sway, including various revisions of the traditional Matthiessen-centered conception of the American Romantics, such views are changing. The earliest and most notable of these studies is Arac and Pease’s American Renaissance Reconsidered, which reviews the biases in the hypothesis of an almost exclusively male, white, heterosexual, democratic, mythic origin for American literature.

When Helen Hunt Jackson used one of Dickinson’s poems “Success is counted sweetest” for the No-Name Series, many readers immediately identified Poem 67 with Emerson not with Dickinson. Such clear identification is not to be overlooked, although the transcendental, epigrammatic quality they both shared, at least superficially, was only one mode of Dickinson’s poetic repertoire. I do wish to underscore the fact that Dickinson was reading Emerson and was aware of his theory and influence. She could not have missed the fact that her own friend Helen

¹¹ A cursory glance at such journals as The Explicator leads one to the spurious conclusion that Dickinson, unquestionably the better poet, spent her time examining and revising Emerson’s essays.

Hunt Jackson was praised by him as the best female poet in America. Likewise, she also had to be aware that he visited at the Evergreens during one of her beloved Sue's salon-like literary weekends.¹²

Emerson and his attitudes toward female poetry, filtered as they were through her relationship with Helen Hunt Jackson, may have been somewhat difficult for Dickinson, considering that Jackson was the only female writer in the United States with whom she had a relationship.¹³ In addition, Jackson might be seen as the prototype of the published female poet of her time. This typicality made her much more acceptable to Higginson, who was a critic of his time. Consequently, we can use Jackson to gauge the genesis of Dickinson's attitude toward her potential contemporary audience and also as the typical female American poet against whom Dickinson was reacting, both overtly and sub-consciously.

While Dickinson says she believes that Jackson was a strong poet, it is clear from her letters that she does not place her in the company of her British literary sisters: Barrett Browning, Eliot and Charlotte and Emily Brontë. Nor do we see her praising and emulating her style and themes as she does with these writers. In fact, as I will show, she uses the style and themes of Jackson's repertoire as one type to be played off, and Jackson's typical devices are almost unrecognizable after Dickinson has transformed them. I will attempt to show that the poetic advice Higginson gave Dickinson in his letters is represented by the kind of poetry

¹² There is mention of him and his work, directly or obliquely, in her letters and poems throughout her life beginning with the early 1850s when she received a copy of one of his books from Benjamin Newton, the man she referred to as her first preceptor.

¹³ While Emily Fowler Ford has been mentioned as one of the minor writers whom Dickinson knew, there was no literary relationship and almost no contact in Dickinson's adult life, epistolary or otherwise.

Jackson writes, advice which Dickinson pointedly chose to ignore. Finally, when Dickinson is asked by Jackson to allow her to be her executor Dickinson refuses, perhaps surmising that there might be more “surgery” by Jackson (like that of Higginson) on her poetry to enable it to conform to prevailing style. Yet there were some affinities between the two, if not in execution, at least in philosophy and background.

Helen Hunt was born in Amherst the same year as Dickinson, 1830, and died the year before her, 1885. They knew each other from their girlhood school days, although Hunt married and left New England. Many of her early works were written under the androgynous pseudonyms of “H.H”, “Saxe Holm,” “Marah” and “Rip Van Winkle.”¹⁴ Her choice of such pseudonyms lends credence to the belief that she understood the unspoken attitude of the public toward female writers, and may, like George Eliot, be using such pseudonyms early in her career to establish her reputation free of gendered restrictions and connotations. In approximately 1863, she began to publish her poetry, much of it collected in Verses by H.H. in 1870 and Sonnets and Lyrics in 1886. However, her work was appearing in newspapers and magazines earlier than this. These periodicals regularly came to the Dickinson household, so it is clear that Dickinson was reading them at this time. Jackson was not known primarily for her poetry, however, but for her fiction which included children’s stories, travel literature and fiction, all acceptable avenues of women’s literature. Her novels reflect her intense interest in causes, most specifically the treatment of the Native American and women’s rights. They reveal a writer, who unlike Dickinson, was more rooted in her contemporary political scene. They also indicate that she was quite similar to Higginson who was noted for his liberal attitudes in social causes. Some of her

¹⁴ Much of the background on Jackson comes from the invaluable chapter on her in Sewall’s Emily Dickinson (577-92).

works which indicate such interest are A Century of Dishonor (1881), which reflects the United States' injustice to the Native Americans; Ramona, a romance which remains her best known work (it was required reading in some United States public schools through the 1950s) and was inspired by her work in an investigation of the Mission Indians of Southern California. However, the novel which interests me the most is Mercy Philbrick's Choice (1876) which many see as a fictional study of Emily Dickinson.¹⁵ In addition, in her Saxe Holm's Stories (1874) she wrote a short story which many of her contemporary readers believed was based on Dickinson called "Esther Wynn's Love-Letters." It seems that because Jackson and Dickinson were friends and had similar backgrounds their lives and work became enmeshed in very curious and unexpected ways.

Before I outline their relationship, it is important to note that Helen Hunt Jackson and her works have been instrumental, however unwittingly, in helping to create some of the early misconceptions surrounding Dickinson. Her novel Mercy Philbrick's Choice in particular holds this dubious honor and will be dealt with fully at the end of this chapter. The remarks of Susan Dickinson in her eulogy of Dickinson on Mercy Philbrick's Choice suggest that two days after her death the myth was beginning to solidify, in particular that Jackson's novel was based loosely on Dickinson's life.

There are other elements of ingrained misconceptions about Dickinson which have Jackson as their nexus. Sewall recounts a literary brouhaha in the local Massachusetts press in the summer of 1878 as to whether Dickinson had collaborated with Jackson on the Saxe Holm Stories. A contributor to the Springfield Republican wrote that the stories were "morbid to the last degree" and too "weird and improbable" to have been written by Jackson whom he saw as "a

¹⁵ This evaluation of the novel was made in The Concise Oxford Companion to American Literature edited by James D. Hart.

woman of everyday life.” His deduction as to the traits of the writer was that of a quiet solitary who was “exquisitely sensitive to the feelings produced by birds and flowers . . . a person long shut out from the world and living in a world of her own. . . . We cannot refrain, also, from picturing her robed in white, like Draxy Miller, whether it be a mourning for a friend, a religious notion, like that of Hawthorne’s Hilda, or perchance, the result of some decree of fate . . .” (Sewall 223). Notice the introduction of the white dress and the use of flowers. It is important to remember that such signifiers, along with others, were already a part of the mythic expectations for many poetesses of the time, a thesis argued fully in The Nightingale’s Burden. Lately, it has become increasingly clear that Dickinson’s white dress was not her exclusive wardrobe, and in a recent conference one of the presenters described a fairly commonplace reason for Dickinson’s wearing white; she suffered from skin rashes and had a pharmacist’s prescription for wearing clothing without dyes.¹⁶

Within a week after this review, the name of Dickinson was presented as the writer of the Saxe Holm stories, followed by an editorial disclaimer (probably written by her good friend, the editor Samuel Bowles) appearing in the Springfield Republican: “. . . we happen to know that no person by the name of Dickinson is in any way responsible for the Saxe Holm stories” (Sewall 221). However, while the authorship was no longer in question, the seeds of the Dickinson myth had already been planted.

Her brother Austin also used the comparison between Jackson and his sister as an originating point for a discussion of Dickinson’s genius. This appears in the Todd-Bingham Archives, with the notes in brackets written by Mabel Loomis Todd in preparing them for

¹⁶ At the *1st International Dickinson Conference* in Washington, D.C. in Oct. 1992 two presenters described how they had discovered this prescription in the records of an Amherst pharmacist.

publication. It is a good comparison and does not succumb to the cliched mythic presentation of Dickinson.

It is a little remarkable that two girls -- of the genius of Helen Hunt Jackson and Emily Dickinson should have been within three or four years of each other in the same quiet New England village one the daughter of a minister and professor in the College -- the other daughter of a lawyer and treasurer of the College -- both attracting general attention in their childhood the one more by her wild romping rebellious Spirit and ways --the other by her intellectual brilliancy -- the one as she grew up meeting the world fearlessly--and triumphantly -- adding increasing fame with every year -- moving through the country like a Queen -- the other after 18 or 20, gradually withdrawing herself from society till she saw very few except members of her own family-- and was known only through memory or tradition --and her letters to those who especially interested her. In her school days. . . at Amherst Academy and at South Hadley -- she was not of the best scholars--but the brightest of any social group. Her compositions were unlike anything ever heard--and always produced a sensation-- both with the scholars and Teachers--her imagination sparkled--and she gave it free rein.

She was full of courage --but always had a peculiar personal sensitiveness. She saw things directly and just as they were. She abhorred sham and cheapness. As she saw more and more of society--in Boston where she visited often-- in Washington where she spent some time with her father when he was a member of Congress--and in other places {The following is crossed out:} she could not resist the feeling that it was {terribly} painfully hollow. It

was to her so thin and unsatisfying in the face of the Great realities of Life although no one surpassed her in wit or brilliancy. {The text resumes:} notwithstanding the fact that she was everywhere sought for her brightness-- originality & wit-- (Sewall 223-24).

Sewall presents these two accounts, the literary misconceptions in the local papers and Austin's comments, to suggest that Austin was answering some of the elements of the myth, for example, that Dickinson was much too morbid and sensitive by countering with her frankness and disaffection with the tawdriness of the quotidian. I have presented this in so much detail because I wish to suggest that from the earliest known discussions of Jackson and Dickinson there was a desire, unconscious or not, to set up the two as polar opposites and to solidify expectations for the two that did them both harm. What if Jackson's stories were more sensitive and improbable than her other works, did that make them less valuable or less likely to be a genuine aspect of her literary imagination? Why must so many negative and clearly wrong assumptions accrue to a poet who may have been writing less market-acceptable work as Dickinson had been? The obvious corollary is that the literary marketplace at the time was a very restricted club. This must not have escaped Dickinson who was reading the periodicals and newspapers of her time.

Whatever the subliminal undercurrents set in motion at the time, Jackson certainly enjoyed a fine literary reputation during her lifetime. Emerson described Helen Hunt Jackson as the best woman-poet on the continent. While Helen Hunt Jackson was eventually known more for her prose than her poetry, during her lifetime, particularly in the 1870s, her poetry was in its ascendancy, published in many magazines and newspapers. The fact that she published and Dickinson did not might be approached by examining the reasons why Jackson published. After

she lost her husband, in order to support herself Jackson began publishing, which was acceptable only because of her destitute widowed circumstances. The cult of the woman in 19th-century America kept her out of the marketplace, including the literary marketplace. It was generally acceptable for women to publish for two main reasons: to support themselves and to take up a great social or political cause. This began in the early days of the new country, with such writers as Mercy Otis Warren, who wrote a History of the United States and many highly derivative Shakespearean-like plays on the great heroes of the new republic. Warren, whose works are available at the Library of Congress, and some of which only exist in their original cheaply printed chapbook form, published for both these reasons: the establishing of an independent country, her great cause, and the raising of money for the new republic. Such an attitude proscribing certain behavior for female writers continued into the 19th century, with Harriet Beecher Stowe and others.

Jackson was no exception. She began to write soon after she was widowed because she needed the income, and in her later years took up the cause of the Native American which became her *raison d'être* for her novels and non-fiction. Dickinson may very well have been influenced by this unspoken code for women writers, for she neither needed the money nor did she take up any obvious causes, like many of the other female writers of her time. However there may have been a slight shift toward a cause in Dickinson which may have led her to change her view of publication. This is attested to by the recent scholarship of Karen Dandurand who has unearthed four more poems published presumably by Dickinson in her lifetime, all in Brooklyn, New York. Three poems were published in 1864 in a Brooklyn newspaper put out by a United States agency that raised money for hospitals for soldiers in the Civil War, the United States

Sanitary Commission. Dandurand's belief is that these may well have been sent by Dickinson herself because she felt she was helping a cause, an acceptable reason to publish.¹⁷

In fact, the acceptable reasons for women to publish in 19th-century America are underscored in Jackson's novel Mercy Philbrick's Choice purported to be based on Dickinson herself. In the novel Mercy begins to publish her poems quietly in order to help support her mother, but she does not let her mother know, aware as she is of overstepping traditional boundaries for women.

As I have suggested earlier in this study, I believe that both Dickinson's fascicles and letter-poems may be viewed as legitimate forms of "publication." However, the question remains as to why Dickinson did not publish in the traditional sense as Helen Hunt Jackson did. Some critics find Dickinson's decision not to publish as a failure of nerve, a type of literary neurasthenia, which will forever mark her as weak (and in the traditionally pejorative sense of the word "female"). In the scramble to disassociate Dickinson's will from this choice of non-publication, certain critics have served up Higginson's head as a way of explaining away Dickinson's role. Their placing of Higginson in the role of arch-villain who forced her to give up hope of publishing seems to place Dickinson in the anomalous position of victim to his literary myopia. I think such a view precludes us from recognizing Dickinson's part in her decision not to publish, and more importantly implies that she was not in control of her own work. Dickinson's correspondence with Higginson, which began in 1862 and continued until her death, suggests an ambivalence about publishing on her part, fueled perhaps by the belief that such publication might truly be an "auction of the mind." When we think of the auctions going on in the United States at the time, the larger connotations of this word materialize. Perhaps Dickinson

¹⁷ This is discussed in "Poem 754: Workshop Discussion" in Dickinson: A Celebration for Readers (143).

was feeling that such publication would enslave her to her audience, that she was changing her voice to suit her public? It may be that she did not actively seek to publish because she sensed that her authentic voice might be muted, changed or dismissed in an age in which so much popular American female poetry was just not very good and tended to be quite derivative. Dickinson was quite aware of the type of female poetry Higginson encouraged and that the market would bear--that of her friend, Helen Hunt Jackson. Such an example may have strengthened her resolve not to publish, particularly when Jackson was pushing Dickinson to try her hand at publication, as evidenced in their letters.

Jackson and Dickinson were sharing one another's writing, and Dickinson was reading Jackson's published poems and fiction. We know that Dickinson read much of Jackson's work, from their inclusion in the lists at Harvard's Houghton Library which contain the library holdings from the Dickinson home, and from the fact that many of the magazines and newspapers that published Jackson's poems were regularly subscribed to by the Dickinson family. For her part, Jackson was privy to many of the poems that Higginson received from Dickinson, as well as some Dickinson sent her, but whether she saw more of Dickinson's poems is unclear. It is interesting to speculate on just how extensive a knowledge of Dickinson's poetry Jackson had, from a sentence in Jackson's letter to Dickinson that mentions her portfolios: "I hope you are well--and at work-- I wish I knew what your portfolios, by this time hold?" (Letters 869). Could Jackson have known, or perhaps seen, Dickinson's own self-published portfolios, the fascicle productions?

The overall difference in contrasting the poetry of the two is that with Helen Hunt Jackson her contemporary reader's expectations seem to be met, while with Dickinson there is a constant confounding of those expectations. No wonder both Higginson and Emerson saw in Jackson the apotheosis of women's poetry. She simply reflected the prevailing male view of the

female poet. Dickinson, as some critics have noted, particularly Karl Keller, has envisioned her audience as male, and rather than give them back their “mimetic desire” as René Girard might have said, she gives them instead as Keller has stated “the postures {that} were created by the men in her mind” so that her tone is quite deviant. If she had envisioned women as her prime audience “she would not have had to be as brisk, as nasty, as coy, as teasing, as sure” (“Notes on Sleeping with Dickinson” 69-70). Yet, we know so many of her poems were enclosed in letters or sent to female readers. However that fact does not negate Keller’s view, it merely complicates it, so that the tone of a Dickinson poem resonates: it is as if the first recipient is receiving a point of view distilled through the generic male reader.

The Higginson Connection

One of the most obvious of male readers for both poets was their mutual mentor -- Higginson. Higginson had an ambivalent view of Dickinson’s worth, as attested to in their correspondence. His early response to Dickinson’s poetry was that she was “spasmodic,” uncontrolled,” “explosive.” In her correspondence with Higginson Dickinson replies to his charges by referring to her particular “business,” as if it were a mission. Here is part of Letter 271.

Perhaps you smile at me. I could not stop for that --My Business is
Circumference -- An ignorance,not of Customs, but if caught with the Dawn --
or the Sunset see me -- Myself the only Kangaroo among the Beauty, Sir, if you
please, it afflicts me, and I thought that instruction would take it away.

There is much encoded in this letter. Circumference implies inclusion; perhaps she is suggesting that her type of poetry needed inclusion in the more traditional models of poetic form.

Her often-quoted image of the kangaroo, who is distinctive but not beautiful, recalls the measure by which Dickinson's poetry was being evaluated by Higginson, that of the prettified, often commonplace female verse of the popular magazines and newspapers of her time exemplified most clearly in Helen Hunt Jackson's poetry.

In this letter Dickinson writes tellingly of the volcano-like force that rules her life, apparently in response to his comment about order: "Are these more orderly?" Then she goes on to write: "I had no Monarch in my life, and cannot rule myself, and when I try to organize -- my little force explodes -- and leaves me bare and charred"(Letter 271). Her comments on her own creative process present a curious picture of one acceptant of her own nature, which takes over with an almost volcanic force. Overall her letters to Higginson take on the tone of the "lady doth protest too much" which her canon testifies to -- a poet who clearly wants this inner turmoil to place its stamp on her poetry in all its seeming spasmodic and unpolished ways.

However, it is her first letter to Higginson, with its alternately bold and reticent, playful and serious persona that tells more about her artistic stance than many of her other letters. Although she was thirty-two at the time and in her most productive year as a poet, having recently copied about 300 poems into her fascicles, she poses as a young girl just beginning to write, replete with a dog and a lexicon and a father who scolds her for reading books. I believe she is purposely creating the picture of herself as an artistic loner, similar to Melville's loners that have become part of our American myth. By mentioning to Higginson that her "Lexicon" is her only companion she seems to want to suggest that she is wiping the slate clean of any other writer's words, going back to a primal source (the dictionary), rather than mentioning any literary ancestry as a source for her poetry. In fact to underscore this pathfinder image, her letter remarks on no human companions to read and discuss her work with, for her dog is her only

companion, while her father is there as a reminder that she eschew books because as she termed it they “boggle” the mind.

Much has been made of Dickinson’s pointed reference to her father’s comment about books, as a sign of his disapproval of her literary vocation. Yet I would suggest that comment tells us much more about the literary aura Dickinson herself was assuming, that is, that *she* believes other writers’ books will boggle her mind, and her poetry.

In that first letter, she writes: “Are you too deeply occupied to say if my verse is alive? The mind is so near itself it cannot see distinctly.” In short, in the year when she wrote almost a poem a day, and unquestionably some of her best poetry, she posed as a neophyte: “I made no verse but one or two this winter.” It may be that the only role she thought men would react to was that of the scholar asking her better for advice, yet it shows Dickinson molding her own reception theory, as it were, because her subsequent literary reputation, founded on the posthumous first editions edited by Higginson was fueled by such posing. Yet her attempt to create an image of the lone pathfinder in literature was misconstrued, and instead the image of a sad, frightened woman suffering from agoraphobia was substituted.

Higginson was not very impressed with the poems she sent him. We can only surmise what he wrote back to her, since that correspondence is lost. However, the day after he received her first poems, he wrote to the Atlantic editor James T. Fields: “I foresee ‘Young Contributors’ will send me worse things than ever now. Two such specimens of verse as came yesterday and the day before -- fortunately not to be forwarded for Publication” (Sewall 544).

Higginson’s letter to his wife describing a visit he made to Dickinson later in their relationship further adds to the portrait of Dickinson that she helped perpetuate. He wrote his wife: “A step like a pattering child’s in entry and in glided a little plain woman with two smooth bands of reddish hair in a very plain and exquisitely clean white piques and blue worsted shawl.”

She handed him day lilies as her introduction and said: "I am frightened. I never see strangers and hardly know what I say." (Sewall 564). Here, however, the other side of Dickinson emerges, for he concludes with "But she talked soon and thenceforward continuously." We have here an irony which can not go unnoticed: Dickinson may have seemed shy and plain, hardly afraid to speak, but she was not.

Dickinson's carrying of day lilies may also have been a pose, almost caricaturing the traditional female poets of her day, whose delicate, ultra-feminine packaging was de rigeur in the mid-19th-century literary marketplace. Such "poetesses" took on pseudonyms that were often derived from flora and fauna, e.g. Fanny Fern, and their books and their poems' titles and female characters often had floral names. In fact, Dickinson's prop of day lilies was a direct reference to these other writers' proclivities. Very often their fictional heroines appear with flowers in their hands or among gardens, as in Harriet Beecher Stowe's A Minister's Wooing, whose heroine, Mary Scudder, appears in an arbor of apple blossoms. There were probably many reasons for such Dickinsonian posing, yet, through her carefully orchestrated letter and interview with Higginson, she artfully constructed an image which had many ramifications. This initial molding of her reception, however unwitting, included her attempt to present the popular image of the poetess she felt Higginson would be most comfortable with, and the figural onset of her complexly ambivalent attitude towards the prevailing norms of female poetry of her time. She knew such poetry to be firmly entwined with the cult of domesticity, the carefully refined view of woman's role practiced by those "soft cherubic gentlewoman" who made up the majority of her contemporaries.¹⁸ In fact, such packaging was fated to touch Dickinson also, for her first

¹⁸ While Helen Hunt Jackson as a novelist writing about social causes was fairly outspoken and innovative in ideas, her poetry was conventional and genteely feminine, quite representative of the typical published 19th-century female poet.

volume by Higginson and Mabel Loomis Todd was similar to this genteel women's poetry, a slim white pristine volume, almost like a prayer-book.

Higginson's admonitions to Dickinson to be controlled, his later emendations of her poems for the first posthumous edition of her poetry indicate that in many ways he was more comfortable with the verse of Helen Hunt Jackson than with hers. His attitude toward Jackson was clearer and much more consistently positive. Jackson's poems had conventional poetic modes, e.g. the ballad and sonnet, with typical stanza patterns, rhyme schemes, diction and punctuation. Their themes and images were conventional, although Dickinson does use similar ones but for far different reasons. Perhaps Higginson's choice of Jackson as a paradigm female poet for his time has less to do with his obtuseness about poetry and more with his reflecting perfectly the prevailing critical mores of his New England milieu. A man of causes, he respected the ones he understood, like Jackson's interest in the Indians and women's plight.¹⁹ He also reflected and actually helped shape the expectations of most readers of the literary magazines where so much 19th-century female poetry was being published -- exemplified by a fairly genteel, somewhat sentimental tone and a subject matter that ranged from nature, to love, death and religion, yet did not probe too much nor veer too much from acceptable attitudes.

Higginson's interest in Jackson began on a note of benevolent paternalism when he met the recent widow as a fellow boarder in 1866. On February 20th, he wrote his sisters:

There is a new boarder here with two dainty rooms up stairs . . . Mrs.
(Major) Hunt, a young widow . . . She is in deep mourning for husband & child

¹⁹ Helen Hunt Jackson most likely knew too of his position as a champion of women's rights. This may have given him an increased stature for her and been part of the reason why she chose him as a mentor.

& I fancy has private depression She seems very bright & sociable & may prove an accession. (Sewall 578).²⁰

For Higginson she certainly was an accession, although ironically it was Dickinson whom literary history would note as his most remarkable accession. From this meeting at the boarding house, the Higginson-Jackson literary relationship began. Higginson helped Jackson to gain some of the success she eventually had, which she herself was the first to recognize. In 1873 she wrote to Charles Dudley Warner: "Colonel Higginson, as you perhaps know, is my mentor -- my teacher -- the one man to whom & to whose style, I chiefly owe what little I have done in literature. . ." (Sewall 578-79).

The Epistolary Relationship

An outline of the epistolary relationship of Dickinson and Jackson will clarify certain of their similarities and differences and allow for a firmer assessment of their literary relationship. Dickinson's on-record critical appreciation of Jackson's poetry placed her after the great English female writers she admired, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and George Eliot. Alluding to her own triumvirate of female poetic power in 1871, she wrote to Higginson that "Mrs. Hunt's Poems are stronger than any written by Women since Mrs. Browning, with the exception of Mrs. Lewes." We have another brief bit of literary criticism written to Higginson in 1879, after he had sent her his own Short Studies of American Authors which included Helen Hunt Jackson as the representative woman, alongside Hawthorne, Thoreau, Poe, Howells, Henry James. Of Jackson she wrote "{she} soars to your estimate lawfully as a Bird. . . ." It is revealing that she brings in

²⁰ Most of the information on the Jackson-Higginson relationship comes from Ch.24, "Helen Hunt Jackson," in Sewall's biography of Dickinson.

his estimate as the arbiter of praise here for Jackson. It could not have failed to occur to her that the critic she sought out to gain entrée into the literary world much preferred Jackson. Yet the fact that Dickinson read and praised Jackson and put her in the revered company of the two women whose portraits graced her bedroom walls is important for Dickinson criticism and is a view that has been alternately neglected or denigrated by critics. I believe that their relationship needs to be explored more fully, particularly for its value to Dickinson.

Jackson's letter to Dickinson after their first meeting already begins to create an aura around Dickinson that seems later to be reflected in the novel purported to be loosely based on Dickinson's life, Mercy Philbrick's Choice. She wrote to her after their meeting in Amherst:

I feel as if I had been very impertinent that day in speaking to you as I did--accusing you of living away from the sunlight,--and told you that you looked ill, which is a mortal piece of ill-being but truly you seemed so white and mothlike. Your hand felt like such a wisp in mine that you frightened me. I felt a great ox talking to a white moth and begging it to come and eat grass with me to see if it could not turn itself into beef! How stupid --. (Sewall 542)

The report we have of Jackson's impression of Dickinson is from a letter to their mutual friend Higginson: "She was so sweetly noble, I would regret to estrange her . . ." (Sewall 591). It is interesting that already Dickinson seems to have a premonition of the future course of their correspondence.

When Jackson was in Amherst during a visit, she apparently saw Dickinson, but did not know of her writing poetry, until Higginson told her. In 1890 he told Millicent Todd Bingham: "Helen Hunt did not know of her poems till I showed them to her (about 1866) and was very little in Amherst after that. But she remembered her at school" (Sewall 580). Both Emily and

Helen had gone to Amherst Academy at the same time; however, young Helen left at the age of eleven for boarding schools. Soon after, Helen's parents both succumbed to tuberculosis.

It is interesting that Jackson seems to imitate the very persona Dickinson attempted to establish in her early correspondence with Higginson, described earlier. That persona focused on her self-effacement, referring to her small size and delicate nature. It is further enhanced by Dickinson through so many of her poems that work on the topos of smallness, used perhaps only to coopt it as a symbol of greatness.

In October 1876 Jackson again called on Dickinson. She made at least three visits in their adult years. Apparently, she was pressing Dickinson to give her some poems for the No-Name publication of A Masque of Poets. A letter followed: "You say you find great pleasure in reading my verses. Let somebody, somewhere whom you do not know have the same pleasure in reading yours." (Letter 476). The last visit of Jackson with Dickinson occurred in 1878. Since the anthology was still not printed and Dickinson had still not given Jackson poems for it, she pleaded for the right to use one or more of those that she already had. The poem, "Success is Counted Sweetest" was eventually put in the anthology; whether Jackson received permission or not is unclear. In December of 1878, Jackson wrote to inquire whether Dickinson was pleased with her inclusion in the finally published anthology. Jackson received poems from Dickinson within the letters throughout their correspondence. Since Dickinson outlived her friend, the last letter she wrote about Jackson was one of condolence to her second husband, William Jackson in 1885. It may serve as an epitaph to her contemporary writer.

Helen of Troy will die, but Helen of Colorado, never. "Dear friend, can you walk" were the last words I wrote her-- "Dear friend, I can fly" -- her immortal reply (Letter 889)

In this yoking of Jackson with Helen of Troy, Dickinson may be both praising her friend and possibly slightly undercutting Jackson's position. Helen of Troy was, after all, an object of a quest not a quester and the "muse" of her country and its poet. Yet the image of Helen flying is quite positive, certainly indicative of an elevated position.

CHAPTER FOUR

"ON HER OWN PREMISES": DICKINSON'S REVISION OF JACKSON

The Bees--became as Butterflies--

The Butterflies--as Swans--

For very Lunacy of Light

I had not power to tell--

Dickinson

"I Am in Danger--Sir--"

"Half-cracked" to Higginson, living,
afterward famous in garbled versions,
your hoard of dazzling scraps a battlefield,
now your old snood

mothballed at Harvard
and you in your variorum monument
equivocal to the end--
who are you?

gardening the day-lily,
wiping the wine-glass stems,
your thought pulsed on behind

a forehead battered paper-thin,

you, woman, masculine

in single mindedness,

for whom the word was more

than a symptom--

a condition of being.

Till the air buzzing with spoiled language

sang in your ears

of Perjury

and in your half-cracked way you chose

silence for entertainment,

chose to have it out at last

on your own premises.

Adrienne Rich

"Who are you?" is the question behind many affinity studies of Emily Dickinson, particularly since her literary history has been so "garbled." It is important to redefine who Dickinson is against the grain of female poets of her time and place. Thus, Dickinson's "own premises" include the female writers, like Helen Hunt Jackson, who served as her literary field against which she needed to test her mettle. For both Dickinson and Jackson their "condition of being" was a "single-minded" focus on shared themes and images. Dickinson seems to have used this "condition of being" to cut her literary teeth. In forging her female centered poetics,

Dickinson seems to have subverted the more feminine and traditional themes and images of Helen Hunt Jackson.²¹ Dickinson's emerging vision of a female poetics used Jackson's poetry as a foil.

The following poem by Helen Hunt Jackson appeared in Poems published by Robert Brothers in 1873. It very well may have appeared in newspapers or periodicals of the time much before that and have been read by Dickinson. In fact, Jackson's poems were regularly appearing in the Atlantic and Scribner's, both of which were subscribed to by the Dickinson family. The Atlantic Monthly came to the Dickinson home from November 1857 to December 1886 and Scribner's from November 1870 to October 1881.²² I believe it was a typical poem by Jackson, which is evident in the fact that it also appeared in a posthumous collection entitled Sonnets and Lyrics (1886) and has been frequently anthologized in older surveys and collections of American literature.

October's Bright Blue Weather

O suns and skies and clouds of June,

And flowers of June together,

Ye cannot rival for one hour

October's bright blue weather,

²¹ I am using the term "feminine" as I discussed in Chapter Two of this study to refer to Toril Moi's distinction, i.e. a socialized female stance.

²² The Harvard Houghton Library has compiled a typewritten list entitled "Handlist of Books Found in the Home of Emily Dickinson at Amherst, Massachusetts, Spring, 1950." The list cites Scribner's and the Atlantic Monthly.

When loud the bumble-bee makes haste,
 Belated, thriftless vagrant,
And golden-rod is dying fast,
 And lanes with grapes are fragrant;

When gentians roll their fringes tight
 To save them for the morning,
And chestnuts fall from satin burrs
 Without a sound of warning;

When on the ground red apples lie
 In piles like jewels shining,
And redder still on old stone walls
 Are leaves of woodbine twining;

When all the lovely wayside things
 Their white-winged seeds are sowing,
And in the fields, still green and fair,
 Late aftermaths are growing;

When springs run low, and on the brooks,
 In idle golden freighting,
Bright leaves sink noiseless in the hush

Of woods, for winter waiting;

When comrades seek sweet country haunts,

By twos and twos together,

And count like misers hour by hour,

October's bright blue weather.

O suns and skies and flowers of June,

Count all your boasts together,

Love loveth best of all the year

October's bright blue weather.

Dickinson took on this traditional theme for female poets of late summer poems, the loss of summer's natural bounty, and the desire of lovers to enjoy this time all the more because it is fleeting and turned it into something more than a cliché. The typical attitudes of a poet like Helen Hunt Jackson are representative of so much of the poetry Dickinson was seeing published by women in the newspapers and magazines of her time. Such poetry is exemplified by this one in its idealization of pastoral life and privileging of scenery and love, while simultaneously trivializing them through excess or triteness. Often such poetry included a pronounced interest in death, particularly to show religious motifs and repentance or sentiment. Helen Hunt Jackson's interest in death was compounded by the many people close to her who died prematurely, including her mother and father, who both succumbed to tuberculosis when she was a young girl, and her first husband and their two young sons.

Just a quick reading of one of Dickinson's autumn poems will indicate how far she veered from the traditional views of such poetry. It is as if she responded to such poems by saying, well, if autumn typifies dying, let me see how far I can go beyond the boundaries of established taste, particularly for women poets of my time.

Poem 656

The name -- of it --is "Autumn"--

The hue -- of it -- is Blood --

An Artery -- upon the Hill --

A Vein -- along the Road --

Great Globules -- in the Alleys--

And Oh, the Shower of Stain --

When Winds -- upset the Basin --

And spill the Scarlet Rain --

It sprinkles Bonnets -- far below --

It gathers ruddy Pools --

Then -- eddies like a Rose-- away --

Upon Vermilion Wheels --

This poem indicates a relentless wallowing in images of death and dismemberment and spilled blood, linked with autumn's dying. Unlike Jackson's scenery of "October's Bright Blue Weather" with its genteel images of autumn's death, "the red apples [lying] in piles like jewels

shining” or the “bright leaves [that] sink noiseless in the hush of woods for winter waiting,” Dickinson creates a gothic vehicle for the tenor of leaves spilling from trees in the deep scarlet of blood. This is a bloodletting, with the image of an overflowing basin of blood serving as its image. It’s almost as if Dickinson wishes to use her words like “leeches” to draw out images of blood and horror. This poem is a strong counterpoint to Jackson’s poem. It is the multiplicity, the endless boundaryless heaping up of images that is indicative of feminine writing as theorized by the French psychoanalytic feminists I discussed in an earlier chapter. As in Poem 470 (“I am alive I guess”) by Dickinson, which likened her female body to landscape, the tree image again appears, in this case as the leaves on the tree. The yearly dying of the leaves indicates a clear lineage back to the ancient symbol of the tree as a traditional vehicle for martyrdom, both in pre-Christian and Christian myth. Gods underwent death and rebirth through hanging on a tree; in addition, while most passages of the New Testament discuss Christ as hanging on a cross, both Acts 5:30 and 1 Peter 2:24 say that Jesus hung on a tree not a cross. Dickinson’s poem gains added resonance through her use of such ancient and Christian mythology.

The next poem I wish to consider was written by Dickinson about 1859. It is on first glance closer in theme than Poem 656 to Jackson’s “October’s Bright Blue Weather.”

Poem 130

These are the Days when Birds come back--

A very few -- a Bird or two --

To take a backward look.

These are the days when skies resume

The old -- old sophistries of June --

A blue and gold mistake.

Oh fraud that cannot cheat the Bee --
 Almost thy plausibility
 Induces my belief.

Till ranks of seeds their witness bear --
 And softly thro' the altered air
 Hurries a timid leaf.

Oh Sacrament of summer days,
 Oh Last Communion in the Haze --
 Permit a child to join.

Thy sacred emblems to partake --
 The consecrated bread to take
 And thine immortal wine!

This poem has as its initial animus the theme of Jackson's poem, yet it goes beyond it. The autumnal guise of a June day "cannot cheat the Bee," and the explicit uniting of the mysteries of Redemption which equates life following death with the rites of autumn, a symbol which Dickinson gleaned from among other sources her own New England Congregationalism and Professor Hitchcock's sermons and writings. Dickinson adroitly takes on the lover's desire for love in late Summer and equates it not only with an earthly lover but with Jesus and the "sacrament of summer days." What results is a richer poem than Jackson's, one far more complex and less bound to expected conventions.

The next poem entitled "August" by Helen Hunt Jackson, a variation on the motifs of "October's Bright Weather," focuses on nature's "subterfuge." This was first published in *Poems* in 1870 and may well have been seen by Dickinson in either Scribner's or the Atlantic Monthly.

August

Silence again. The glorious symphony
 Hath need of pause and interval of peace.
 Some subtle signal bids all sweet sounds cease,
 Save hum of insects' aimless industry,
 Pathetic summer seeks by blazonry
 Of color to conceal her swift decrease,
 Weak subterfuge! Each mocking day doth fleece
 A blossom, and lay bare her poverty.
 Poor middle-aged summer! Vain this show!
 Whole fields of golden-rod cannot offset
 One meadow with a single violet;
 And well the singing thrush and lily know,
 Spite of all artifice which her regret
 Can deck in splendid guise, their time to go!

This poem with its stately grace is one of Jackson's better poems. It is a sonnet on the theme of nature's show of subterfuge at the end of summer, one which does not fool the narrator who links herself with the knowing thrush and lily. Such identification is similar to Dickinson's adoption of the narrator/self in the poetry as a bird or flower (often Daisy). There is a note of

sadness as the narrator describes the end of summer phenomena. It is typical for Jackson to keep within the established bounds of lyric poetry, here the sonnet form, and to use the traditional imagery for a female lyric poet of her time. When we recall that Higginson preferred Jackson's poetry to Dickinson's, calling Dickinson's "spasmodic" and later on in the posthumous edition he co-edited regularizing diction and metre, it is apparent that the advice he gave Dickinson was all too evident in Jackson's poetry. There is none of Dickinson's experimental verve in Jackson's canon.

The poem by Dickinson which seems to be an elaboration of these themes and motifs is Poem 1068, which according to Johnson's dating was apparently written in 1866. One can never be sure of a writer's original intention, even if there are corroborating documents; however, it is well known that Dickinson's inspiration often came from her reading, as she often picked up a kernel from one writer or another or, more frequently, the Bible. Since Jackson's poems were being published singly in magazines and newspapers from the mid-1860s on in the magazines Dickinson was reading, it is quite conceivable that she read this poem somewhere and decided to use it as a starting point for one of her own. In fact Jackson's words "pathetic summer" could very well have been the kernel that Dickinson grasped when reading this poem, since she gives such prominence in the poem's initial lines, to the word "pathetic" that signals the cricket's mass, which is so similar to Jackson's insect song. Whether that is the case or not is not as important as the fact that Dickinson poetic method seemed to be to coopt very commonplace themes and motifs from the popular female poets of her day. Poem 1068 is one of which she was justly proud, sending it in a letter to Thomas Higginson in 1866. Seventeen years later she also sent it to Thomas Niles, editor of Roberts Brothers (and also Jackson's publisher) and called it "My Cricket." I wonder if the adjective "my" was a subtle indication to Niles, who had been publishing Jackson's work, that Dickinson too had a poem "about" crickets. Yet saying that

Dickinson's poem is about crickets is as accurate as saying that Uncle Tom's Cabin is about a cabin.

Poem 1068

Further in Summer than the Birds

Pathetic from the Grass

A minor Nation celebrates

Its unobtrusive Mass.

No Ordinance be seen

So gradual the Grace

A pensive custom it becomes

Enlarging loneliness.

Antiquiest felt at Noon

When August burning low

Arise this Spectral Canticle

Repose to typify.

Remit as yet no Grace

No Furrow on the Glow

Yet a Druidic Difference

Enhances Nature Now.

It is important to note that there are a number of other similarities between the two poems. Both speakers are keen observers of nature, indicating this is the time of insects, particularly crickets singing their late summer dirge. Dickinson foregrounds the crickets so that they become a minor nation, anthropomorphizing them so that they can be a grand enough symbol for the weight they will bear in the poem's enlarged meaning. Both poets have similar diction, particularly the "pathetic" show of these harbingers of death, signaling ephemeral nature. Both indicate the "subtle" intricacies of these natural rites, and simultaneously indicate their own abilities as poet/ narrators to register such subtleties. While Jackson's crickets are creating a "symphony," (a much more conventional image), Dickinson's are celebrating a "mass" (a more daring, almost heretical image) in the first stanza, creating a clear presage of the imagery to come, which supersedes Jackson's in its yoking of the spiritual and the natural. It is typically Dickinsonian to ascribe religious significance to nature's rites, while Jackson's poem exists on the one level and does not suggest a deeper significance. In fact, Jackson's poem errs on the side of safe boundaries, for there is nothing of Dickinson's unorthodox religious suggestions in her poem.

Before I begin a detailed analysis of Poem 1068, I'd like to refer to a letter Dickinson wrote to Lavinia on the death of their aunt: "So many broken-hearted people have got to hear the birds sing, and see all the little flowers grow, just the same as if the sun hadn't stopped shining forever." This suggests the parameters of Dickinson's view of nature. Her poems, and this letter, indicate a darkening of the American Romantic notion of the union of humanity with nature, one which is suggested only slightly by Helen Hunt Jackson's lines: "And well the singing thrush and lily know,/ Spite of all artifice which her regret/ Can deck in splendid guise, their time to go!".

In many of her other poems, however, Dickinson has depicted a beneficent association between nature and humanity. For example, in "Some Keep the Sabbath going to Church," she eschews organized religion's houses of worship for her own apple orchard, setting up a witty link between those churches and her own backyard as a substitute for religion. I mention this to stress the fact that Dickinson certainly does not have a unity of theme; instead she plays with all the possibilities of a theme.

Poem 1068 is remarkable and starkly beautiful, perhaps more ecumenical in its religious imagery than any of her poems, for there are Protestant, Catholic and even Druidic references. In Lunacy of Light: Emily Dickinson and the Experience of Metaphor, Wendy Barker devotes considerable space to the poem and makes excellent points about the many possible meanings for Dickinson's word choice, like "antiquet" (one possibility is anti-quest)(131). I find Barker's allusion to the anti-quest to be in agreement with my own that Dickinson saw herself on a quest. However, I see this quest as one where she was reworking many male-centered myths into female myth. Barker's general assessment is that this nation of crickets is a metaphor for Dickinson, herself, who like them is hidden, underground. She states: "Standing firmly her ground that dwelling in . . . poetry was in fact possible, this poet confronted head on a dominant cultural metaphoric pattern of assumptions that had enormous implications for women's lives"(132). There is no question that much of Dickinson's poetry has as one of its possible readings her view of her art and its impact on society. However, given the pattern for sleight of hand and disguise in Dickinson's life and work, it is important for us as readers to take our cue from her and not to be too programmatic with the poetry, letting each poem speak for itself.

Dickinson's stress on the pregnant moment and her attempt to view seasonal change (here celebrated in a ritualistic "Mass" by a nation of crickets) as emblematic of immortality coalesce in this poem. In one of her letters, addressed to Samuel Bowles right after her father's

death, she gives us an insight into her view of immortality (or what she referred to as the “Flood subject.”)

You compel us each to remember that when water ceases to rise--it has commenced falling. This is the law of the Flood. The last day that I saw you was the newest and oldest of my life. Resurrection can come but once--first to the same house. Thank you for leading us by it. (Letter 415)

This enigmatic letter suggests that somehow Bowles’s consolation visit after the death of her father had given her “intimations of immortality” renewing her belief in the endless flux of existence. This belief, sorely tested in Dickinson’s mind by the death, postulates that the end of one experience signals another’s beginning, lending credence to her own feelings of re-birth, the “newest” and “oldest” of the letter. This is a tenet that Christianity has taken as a metaphor for its own belief in Christ’s Godhead and humanity’s spiritual rebirth.

It appears that here the speaker is looking to the rising and falling of the season, (like the rising and falling of another natural image, water) the death of summer and birth of autumn, to renew belief in immortality. However, such belief does not seem to be solidified in this poem.

The first line appears to refer to another of her late summer poems, “These are the days when birds come back,” setting this even further along in summer. The crickets’ murmuring in the grass mesmerizes the speaker as if she were listening to an unintelligible Mass. As the poem progresses, time moves on to its ultimate point (“Noon”) within the framework of dying August, (the month metonymized as a candle) while the speaker probes the summer death song of the crickets for meaning. This is a self-conscious poem, perhaps a meta-poem, adumbrating how artists create another meaning for the objects they focus on.

“Further,” “noon,” “as yet,” and “now” indicate time advancing, while the speaker is circling in on the crickets. A series of audial, visual, and tactile images culminate in a synesthetic blurring of the objects scrutinized. In the first stanza, they are heard “pathetic from the grass”: in the second, they are seen, and finally the experience is so close it is felt, “antiquiest felt at noon.” In the final stanza, the moment is arrested, and the speaker explains the difference between the moment the spectacle began, both the cricket’s mass and her own poem, and the “now” (whose prominence is stressed by its position at the end of the poem).

But what is the significance of the crickets’ actions? Does the use of religious symbolism add an afterglow to this natural spectacle, much like the effect of radium on objects it has touched? To suggest some possibilities, it is necessary to look more closely at the religious diction. I mentioned earlier that this poem seems to have been more ecumenical in imagery than any of her other poems. The speaker evokes every religious tradition she could to *force* a connection between the natural and the supernatural, much as the American Romantics like Emerson were inclined to do. There are the specifically Roman Catholic terms, Mass and Canticle; the Protestant terms, Grace and ordinance; and the pre-Judeo-Christian, Druidic. The Mass refers to a ritual commemoration of Christ’s redemptive sacrifice, whose death and resurrection insured man’s immortality, by regaining his right to heaven, lost by Adam and Eve’s original sin. Canticle is a song of praise, most commonly recalling the union or covenant between Christ and the individual. Grace is the spirit which enters into the individual who has been part of the saving Ordinance.

These metaphors depict the cricket’s chirping as a ritual commemorative song of the death of summer. Yet, notably absent is the stress on rebirth (the birth of autumn is only obliquely referred to with “as yet no furrow on the glow”) which would inevitably follow if the Mass metaphor were to be carried to the full. The Canticle, which traditionally unites man and

Christ, if brought to its ultimate metaphoric point, would set up an affinity between the eternal flux of seasonal change and man's immortality through his union with Christ.

However, the metaphors begin to subvert the original intent. The first indication of the disparity between tenor and vehicle is the speaker's estrangement from the situation. The "I" is a spectator. The very choice of the word "unobtrusive" suggests the void between speaker and nature. The crickets are not thrusting themselves forward for attention, but the speaker begins to respond, choosing to describe the experience in Christian and human terms. The crickets are a "minor nation." They perform a custom.

In the first stanza the linking of man, nature and Christianity has been alluded to, yet the adjectives which express the speaker's feelings belie this unity. The mass only excites sorrow; it is "pathetic." The canticle itself, which in "arising" and typifying "repose" seems to suggest death and rebirth, is merely "spectral" or a ghost of the real thing. Therefore, the narrator's loneliness is "enlarged." The crickets' song heralds the end of summer, and while it suggests that the birth of another season is imminent, its ultimate Message is death. It is not an emblem of man's immortality.

In moving beyond the Christian imagery, the final two stanzas come to terms with this discovery. The speaker holds the moment, Time ("noon") stands still. The highest point summer, rendered as synecdoche ("noon") is simultaneously in its moment of death ("August burning low"). (This is another natural type of Dickinson's "Law of the Flood" -- that which ceases to rise has commenced falling). This sense of time reigned in at its ultimate point and containing the past within it is reinforced by "Antiquiest." Its antecedents are purposely ambiguous, but perhaps all three possible referents: the crickets' song, summer and the feeling of loneliness will never be older. And yet the moment is pregnant with the future ("as yet no furrow on the glow"). Finally, the significance of the moment in which past, present and future cohere is understood. It

is not Christian, but pagan --Druidic. The sacrifice of summer heralded by the cricket's song is not commemorative of Christian sacrifice with its notion of immortality. But rather, it is a more elemental sacrifice like that of pagan priests whose reverence was for the totem itself not what it signifies. Nature is that totem and it has its own rites in which humanity neither participates nor finds religious significance. As the product of a female artist the ramifications of this poem increase the gulf between the poet/speaker and the comforts of the traditional religions alluded to. For an artist already seeing herself in the role of an outsider, this estrangement from and scrutiny of religion gains even greater significance. This outsider role and the deep probing of religious meaning for an understanding of the quotidian are not subjects that Helen Hunt Jackson and other poets like her would have taken on.

One of Dickinson's later poems, which is not as successful, is significant for its relevance to her female poetics. As a referent for Poem 1068, it suggests that what is typified in those natural rites described in Poem 1068 are simply emblems of the "Typic Mother" herself. In Poem 1115 presented below and in Poem 1400, "What mystery pervades a well!" discussed earlier on the mystery of Nature alludes to a reverence for nature that accepts her inscrutable ways.

The murmuring of Bees, has ceased
 But murmuring of some
 Posterior, prophetic,
 The lower metres of the Year
 When Nature's laugh is done
 The Revelations of the Book
 Whose Genesis was June.

Appropriate Creatures to her change
 The Typic Mother sends
 As accents fades to interval
 With separating Friends
 Till what we speculate, has been
 And thoughts we will not show
 More intimate with us become
 Than Persons, that we know.

Women's Lives/Women's Deaths

Another of Jackson's themes, anger at the burdens of female domesticity, seems also to have engaged Dickinson, yet again with a difference. Such poems by Jackson poignantly evoke women suffering, particularly women who are dealing with the everyday burdens of family and husband who see her only as wife or mother and ignore her deeper needs. To the poet who understood the confining space of the domestic for women (Dickinson wrote in a letter: "God save me from what they term households.") such a theme in Jackson must have struck a responsive chord. There is one poem about a housewife who has died that is quite similar to some of Dickinson's. The Jackson poem is "Found Frozen."

She died, as many travelers have died,
 O'ertaken on an Alpine road by night:
 Numbed and bewildered by the falling snow,
 Striving, in spite of falling pulse, and limbs
 Which faltered and grew feeble at each step,

To toil up the icy steep, and bear
 Patient and faithful to the last, the load
 Which, in the sunny morn, seemed light!

And yet

'Twas in the place she called her home, she died;
 And they who loved her with the all of love
 Their wintry natures had to give, stood by
 And wept some tears, and wrote above her grave
 Some common record which they thought was true;
 But I, who loved her first, and last, and best, -- I knew.

The poem creates a rather sentimental picture of a woman dying under her burden, at first appearing to be a death brought on by an Alpine storm, but in the didactic second stanza, seen as one at the hands of the members of her own household, who had neglectful "wintry natures." In setting up the metaphor of the traveler succumbing to exposure and snow on an "Alpine road," Jackson suggests the cold indifference this woman meets on her daily road, most likely as mother and wife to her family. The speaker of the poem can read minds here, and wishes to show up the phony sentiment and displays of emotion that the family gives to the poor housewife who was unappreciated and unloved in her lifetime. In fact, like Dickinson's endings, Jackson's ending here has a curious lack of closure which presents questions, most obviously who is this narrator who "loved her first, and last, and best,--" God? a lover?

What has Dickinson done with similar themes? For one thing, the word "all" so sarcastically used here by Jackson to show up the deceit of those who purported to love her

character ("And they who loved her with the all of love") is used by Dickinson quite often but not merely to comment on earthly love. "All" in the Dickinson canon becomes a loaded word, with religious connotation. In many of her poems the linking of human love and endeavor with supernatural love and reward is clear (She writes in one letter "All is the price of all"). Also, the moment of death so often presented in her poetry is not merely a still life probed for its comments on the situation of the dead person as it is here in Jackson.

For Dickinson, the moment of death becomes an occasion to probe not the meaning of a particular death or its material and ultimate causes but the meaning of death itself, eliminating all sentimental grief and gaining dignity for death. Death for Dickinson becomes a formidable aspect of the poem, often an actor eroticized as a lover and shown both as a dangerous and welcome visitor. For example, in the famous and often anthologized, "Because I could not stop for death" the poet/narrator describes a carriage ride with death personified as the suitor who has come for their eschatological assignation. In other poems, with less narrative interest and a more obvious thematic presentation, death is "the subtle suitor" (Poem 1445). For a poet who believed that marriage or unity with the male was often death-giving for the female, it was a simple reversal to probe her female narrator's seeking death or at the least encountering it personified as a male lover, an adumbration of the power in the world which at least for her time and place was almost always male. Like Helen Hunt Jackson, Dickinson often portrayed women's spirits as being given the death blow by either family responsibilities or the encounter with patriarchy in all its forms. The Dickinson work that seems to share similarities with Jackson's poem on the housewife who has died a product of her cold and indifferent environment is Poem 187. In Dickinson's poem the housewife is frozen at death (with "soldered" mouth and "adamantine" fingers) and subtly linked to Christ himself in her representative suffering, allowed at last through death to be "indolent" in a humorously macabre touch because she is frozen in time. It is

a moving poem and it shares imagery and theme with Jackson's, yet it could never be attributed to Jackson because it has so many of Dickinson's idiosyncrasies.

Poem 187

How many times these low feet staggered --

Only the soldered mouth can tell --

Try -- can you stir the awful rivet--

Try -- can you lift the hasps of steel!

Stroke the cool forehead -- hot so often --

Lift -- if you care -- the listless hair --

Handle the adamantine fingers

Never a thimble -- more -- shall wear --

Buzz the dull flies -- on the chamber window --

Brave -- shines the sun through the freckled pane

Fearless -- the cobweb swings from the ceiling --

Indolent Housewife -- in Daisies -- lain!

The irony of the word "indolent" in its prominent position in the ultimate line seems to provide a retroactive glow for the whole poem, indicating that the poem's speaker recognizes the burdens of the anything-but-indolent-housewife. There is a subtle interweaving of the Christ figure whose feet also staggered, who also felt the rivets during *his* crucifixion. Additionally, the poem plays off the images from religious tracts and writings of early American Protestantism,

something that Helen Hunt Jackson and other typical poets of her time would never have done. The use of such images is evident in the suggestion of a blacksmith-God who uses “rivet” and “steel” to forge a soul which formerly “hot” is now “cool.” Through all of this, I believe, Dickinson’s poem manages to go far beyond the commonplace ideas, imagery, and tone that Jackson’s poem contains.

Helen Hunt Jackson and Dickinson share images, for example, the dead female body, as I have just shown in the two poems discussed above. However, Dickinson’s poetry on the dead female body, unlike Jackson’s, re-imagines the female body by linking it to appropriate natural symbols. Such poems may be clarified through the concept of “writing from the body” in the theories of Cixous and Irigaray who suggest that such writing presents a characteristically female mode. Often, in Dickinson’s poetry the female body is either literally or figuratively dead, as in the poem by Helen Hunt Jackson that I discussed earlier. Yet, Dickinson’s poetry creates more salubrious views of the female body by merging the body with symbols of freedom and song, like the bird, or linking it with mother earth, as in Poem 470. In his three-volume edition Johnson states that this poem was written in 1862, the important year in which Dickinson wrote over 300 poems and began her correspondence with Higginson in hopes of establishing her literary mark. The year is generally recognized as one in which she found her voice. I mention this to suggest its added significance for the poem. In the Franklin fascicle edition, this poem is in Fascicle 26, part of a group of 21 poems. I have used that version of the poem. (In that edition stanza 4 line 3 is rendered as Dickinson wrote it: “And ‘Was it conscious--when/ it stepped/ In Immortality’ making it a five line stanza. The same occurs in stanza 6 with line 3 being rendered by Dickinson as two lines: “Which Door is mine and not--/mistake--/ And try another Key--”)

Poem 470

I am alive -- I guess --

The Branches on my Hand

Are full of Morning Glory --

And at my finger's end --

The Carmine -- tingles warm --

And if I hold a Glass

Across my Mouth -- it blurs it --

Physician's -- proof of Breath --

I am alive -- because

I am not in a Room --

The Parlor -- Commonly -- it is --

So Visitors may come --

And lean -- and view it sidewise --

And add "How cold -- it grew" --

And "Was it conscious -- when

--it stepped

In Immortality?"

I am alive -- because --

I do not own a House --

Entitled to myself -- precise --

And fitting no one else --

And marked my Girlhood's name --

So visitors may know

Which Door is mine -- and not

--mistake --

And try another Key --

How good -- to be alive!

How infinite -- to be

Alive -- two-fold -- The Birth I had --

And this -- besides, in -- Thee!

In the image of the tree branches and morning glories the body is becoming, there is the suggestion of a return to a more generic female form, in the speaker's fusion with mother earth, in its female adumbrations of trees and flowers. Whenever Dickinson writes about flowers, it is important to recall their use in the symbology of so many of the female poets of her time who used flowers for the titles of their books and poems and as signs of their characters' innocence and beauty. Such excesses became for Dickinson a foil against which she presented floral and fauna imagery for quite different purposes, not for genteel and decorative reasons. In this poem it

might be helpful to remember that classical mythology offers numerous tales of women becoming trees. Some versions of such myths saw them as wishing trees which presented gifts to the daughters who went to them. The opening image of this poem suggests a gift of life wished for by the speaker who is simultaneously both tree image and observer. The tree is a special symbol for a female poetics in its unity with Mother Earth. Its gender further resounds because the tree is on cyclical time like the female's reproductive system, bears fruit and flowers, and is a home for birds, which is the most prevalent symbol Dickinson uses for the poet. The image of tree gains in importance because it is also a prominent image in the poem just before this in Fascicle 26.

Yet, of course, like so many of Dickinson's poems, the opening of this poem is paradoxical because it is precisely at the point of death that the speaker is able to describe what living means for a woman. Thus, the female body is death-linked, just when the speaker of the poem probes for signs of life. The lack of existence belies such "proof" just as the female body is often viewed by society as lacking substantiality and having no real place or home. The last stanza of the poem ironically counterpoints this lack for women: the speaker believes she is alive precisely because she has no grave (or house) marked with her girlhood name. Perhaps the very doubt here in the poem not only underscores the obvious dilemma of whether she is alive or not, but also whether as *girl* she has ever been truly alive. If the lack of a house (or marked grave) indicates she is alive as a female, the opposite reverberates: as a living woman it is just not expected that she have a house with her name on it. The reference to house suggests at least two possibilities. The first is that women didn't traditionally set up households alone, while the other is that a body representing a living woman is defined by the father or husband whose name she carries, since the house in traditional Judeo-Christian thought is the body in which the soul resides. The suggestion here is that the female body is seen as non-existent or "house"-less by

society; in other words, women are virtually invisible. The final stanza suggests that the speaker is being born again, yet this poem has none of the reverberations of Dickinson's poems of dedication to poetry where she is born again, or baptized again, with a name of her own choosing, a name suggesting fullness. Instead whether this is an earthly husband or she is bride of Christ (at death), this birth is like death.

In Fascicle 26, "You'll know Her--by Her Foot--" is placed by Dickinson just before this poem. While I do not intend in this study to develop a full contextual reading for all 21 of the poems in Fascicle 26, I do wish to present this poem and indicate possible reasons for the propinquity of the two poems.

Poem 634

You'll know Her--by Her Foot--
 The smallest Gamboge Hand
 With Fingers--where the Toes should be--
 Would more affront the Sand--
 Than this Quaint Creature's Boot--
 Adjusted by a Stem--
 Without a Button--I could vouch--
 Unto a Velvet Limb--

You'll know Her--by Her Vest--
 Tight fitting--Orange--Brown--
 Inside a Jacket duller--
 She wore when she was born--

Her Cap is small--and snug--
Constructed for the Winds--
She'd pass for Barehead--short way off--
But as She Closer stands--

So finer 'tis than Wool--
You cannot feel the Seam--
Nor is it Clapsed unto of Band--
Nor held upon--of Brim--

You'll know Her--by Her Voice--
At first--a doubtful Tone--
A sweet endeavor--but as March
To April--hurries on--

She squanders on your Ear
Such Arguments of Pearl--
You beg the Robin in your Brain
To keep the other--still--

This poem presents a simile for the body of the female poet. The female body here takes on the physical characteristics of a bird (here a robin), which in many of Dickinson's poems symbolizes the female poet. This poem is no exception, for Dickinson tells us at the end that she

is describing the body of the poet. By the completion of the act of writing this poem, the poet/speaker has wedded the two parts of the bird, its brain and its body, just as she wishes to link her female body with the role of the female poet: Thus the poet/bird “squanders on your Ear/ Such Arguments of Pearl--You beg the Robin in your Brain/To keep the other--still--.” That “other,” the guiding spirit of the poem/bird song is the “brain” behind it or its engendering spirit. There is no question that this bird suggests the female human body in its references to the female pronoun, fingers, and caps, and velvet boots. As in many of Dickinson’s poems, the concept of smallness, often a female trait, is transformed into something large and powerful. Thus from the smallest “Gamboge Hand” of the first image in the poem, the reader is moved to hearing such loud songs that she begs to still that poetic voice which sends us “arguments of pearl.” (“Pearl” in Dickinson’s canon is a symbol for poetry). Even the use of the arcane word “gamboge” to describe the bird’s “hand” links the bird and the artist; according to the OED, “gamboge” refers to a bright, yellow tint used in painting; the elements of the dye originally came from trees in Cambodia. Dickinson often used references to the art of painting to describe the making of poetry, e.g. in her famous poem “I would not paint a picture--.”

What is the significance of the two poems coming one after another in this fascicle? They are linked by their focus on the female body; in one that body is personified as a robin, and as free perhaps from earth-bound constriction as the proverbial bird. In the other, a woman, physically dead and laid out for burial, signifies a profound homelessness on earth, and a lack of recognition which renders the female as figuratively dead. Natural images of the bird and the tree are presented to describe the female body. Both poems try to envision better “houses” for the female body, “houses” like birds or trees, which indicate less confinement and greater significance for Dickinson.

Perhaps a deeper understanding of Dickinson's complex symbology for the bird can be understood by a letter/poem she sent to Jackson to cheer her during her convalescence in 1884 (L 1600). The correspondence between Dickinson and Jackson gives us insight into Dickinson's use of traditional devices, themes, and images used by her contemporary female poets. This particular letter, while ostensibly spurring Jackson on to physical recovery, is unmistakably calling on her to take up her literary work again. Dickinson writes: "I shall watch your passage from Crutch to Cane with jealous affection. From there to your Wings is but a stride--as was said of the convalescing Bird,

And then he lifted up his Throat
And squandered such a Note--
A Universe that overheard
Is stricken by it yet--"

This brief letter/poem, like Poem 470, indicates a bird who has "squandered" his note on a universe overhearing its song. It is a curious word, suggesting the wasting of powers, an extravagance of spending. The next words of the letter indicate that Dickinson was not only thinking of Jackson in writing those words. She continues: "I, too, took summer in a Chair, though from 'Nervous prostration,' not fracture, but take my Nerve by the Bridle now, and am again abroad. . . ." The fears that she as poet had perhaps used up or "squandered" her powers must have been haunting her. Perhaps, too, she was regretting the fact that the world was not overhearing her poetry, as it was with the published poet Jackson. In fact, this letter is a reply to Jackson's earlier letter asking Dickinson to allow her to be her literary executor. Jackson had then pleaded: "Surely, after what you are what is called 'dead' you will be willing that the poor ghosts you have left behind, should be cheered and pleased by your verses, will you not--?"

(Sewall 588). Sewall remarks that Dickinson never replied to that request, yet as I have suggested it seems that Dickinson in her rather oblique way was replying to it when she enclosed that poem.

Jackson has poems which also focus on the bird image, yet such poems are unlike Dickinson's since they do not present the bird as a symbol for the female poet. Instead such poems in Jackson's canon become a guide for the poet, who is identified with the traditional male pronoun, as in the following poem, "The Way to Sing."²³

The birds must know. Who wisely sings
 Will sing as they;
 The common air has generous wings
 Songs make their way.
 No messenger to run before,
 Devising plan;
 No mention of the place or hour
 To any man;
 No waiting till some sound betrays
 A listening ear;
 No different voice, no new delays,
 If steps draw near.

 "What bird is that? Its song is good."
 And eager eyes

²³ This poem is reprinted in Harold Bloom's 1972 edition of her poems, Poems by Helen Hunt Jackson.

Go peering through the dusky wood,
In glad surprise.
Then late at night, when by his fire
The traveller sits,
Watching the flame grow brighter, higher,
The sweet song flits

By snatches through his weary brain
To help him rest;
When next he goes that road again,
An empty nest
On leafless bough will make him sigh,
“Ah me! Last spring
Just here I heard, in passing by,
That rare bird sing!”

But while he sighs, remembering
How sweet the song,
The little bird on tireless wing,
Is borne along
In other air, and other men
With weary feet,
On other roads, the simple strain
Are finding sweet.

The birds must know. Who wisely sings
 Will sing as they;
 The common air has generous wings,
 Songs make their way.

There is little in this poem of Dickinson's specific need to define the female poet. Instead, the bird's song becomes a natural symbol for the "listening ear" of the poet, who will remember the song of the bird, a hopeful song, even when winter leaves "empty nests." The poet will learn from the bird, becoming wise like him almost intuitively, by recalling "snatches [of the bird's song] through his weary brain." In Jackson's poem, the poet and the bird are male, and the body of the bird is almost ignored. By "writing from the body" Dickinson has made her bird female, by focusing on her body and her dress, creating a clear symbol for the female poet.

Another of Jackson's themes that appears in her poem discussed earlier, "Found Frozen," is that of a tragic view of home. In that poem a family's lack of love subverts the notion of home. In Jackson's poem home is no longer a place of warmth and comfort, but a "wintry" place which kills, a place to fear. Dickinson takes up that theme of the fear of home in the poem, "I Years Had Been From Home." In this poem, the narrator returns to what she thought was her own door and recognizes nothing. While in the next chapter I am going to discuss this poem at length for its affinities with some of George Eliot's themes, I will reproduce it here to clarify my point that Dickinson elaborates and enhances commonplace themes that Jackson and other contemporary female poets were using.

I Years Had Been From Home
 And now before the Door
 I dared not enter, lest a Face--
 I never saw before

Stare stolid into mine
And ask my Business there --
“My Business but a Life I left
Was such remaining there?”

I leaned upon the Awe --
I lingered with Before --
The Second like an Ocean rolled
And broke against my ear --

I laughed a crumbling Laugh
That I could fear a Door
Who Consternation compassed
And never winced before.

I fitted to the Latch
My Hand, with trembling care
Lest back the awful Door should spring
And leave me in the Floor--

Then moved my Fingers off
As cautiously as Glass
And held my ears, and like a Thief
Fled gasping from the House --

One of the comments most often made by critics and college students alike is that Dickinson is obsessed with death. Students will often remark that her morbidity creates difficulties in reading. As I have shown with Helen Hunt Jackson, such a focus on death is not peculiar to Dickinson. In fact, as Cynthia Griffin Wolff and Barton Levi St. Armand in their respective studies have shown, the cultural exigencies of Dickinson's time and place had much to do with this focus on death, and most particularly for women. Death was an everyday part of life for most women, particularly during the years of the Civil War, where more Americans died than in any other war. Women were used to one another dying in childbirth and from related diseases, and also saw their children die in enormous numbers in the age before vaccinations and miracle drugs. Additionally women's roles included assisting at death beds. Such a constant encounter with death directly unmediated by our modern hospitals and funeral customs created an atmosphere, particularly for women, of dealing with death matter-of-factly if not methodically. Dickinson was no exception; in fact, her home on Pleasant Street, where she grew up, was adjacent to the Amherst burial ground, where she was witness to many funeral processions.

The example I wish to share as typical of women's response to death in the New England culture that nurtured both Dickinson and Jackson is that of an ordinary woman of Dickinson's own town of Amherst, whose death in the 1840s exhibited all the characteristics of that milieu's attitude toward death. Deborah Vinal Fiske, most likely known to the Dickinson family, was only thirty-eight years old when she succumbed to the tuberculosis that she had fought for ten years. Ignoring the sentimental advice of family and friends that she travel to a warm climate, Deborah

Fiske's attitude seems similar to Dickinson's speaker in "Because I could not stop for death" who accepts death and "puts away her life and leisure" for his "civility." Fiske wrote her cousin, "I would not for all the world be anywhere but just at home with all my family about me, situated precisely as I am, for I have every comfort and convenience that anyone could desire and as to friends, they are so kind it absolutely makes me cry to receive so many favors" (139). Enconced in a comfortable chair with shawls and blankets, she almost held court, giving her death a respect and courtesy less likely to occur in our era. She even summoned her daughter, 13-year old Helen, for children too were to be made familiar with death. Her conversation with her friend who was also dying from consumption reveals an attitude which was similar to that of both Dickinson and Jackson. Deborah told that friend, Harriet Fowler, quite matter-of-factly: "Perhaps you will follow me next winter. I shall be the first to welcome you"(140). These words recall so many of Dickinson's poems about welcoming or being welcomed by loved ones in the other world. On Fiske's last night, with special people keeping vigil, according to the words of one of those at her deathbed, she faced death with "as much judgment and composure as if she had been in perfect health and setting out upon a long journey" (Rothman 141).

Dickinson's attitude toward death is nowhere more apparent than in a poem presumably written late in her life.

Poem 1558

Of Death I try to think like this--
 The well in which they lay us
 Is but the likeness of the brook
 That menaced not to slat us
 But to invite by that dismay

Which is the zest of sweetness
 To the same flower hesperean
 Decoying but to greet us--

I do remember when a child
 With bolder Playmates straying
 To where a Brook that seemed a Sea--
 Withheld us by its roaring
 From just a Purple Flower beyond
 Until constrained to clutch it
 If Doom itself were the result
 The boldest leaped and clutched it--

This poem goes beyond those of Jackson, and so many other of Dickinson's contemporary female poets. In "Of death I try to think like this," the speaker uses her mind, on the surface quite rationally, to explain how she would like to think about death. It is as if she were writing a legal brief, adopting a language of sureness and *quid pro quo*, one which she was used to in her family where both her father and brother were prominent lawyers. However, there is a hidden (female?) voice which serves as counterpoint to this very determined, denotative language of the reasoned legalistic, patriarchal speaker. It is almost as if Dickinson is mustering a Jungian collective unconscious memory to bolster her fears of the unknown. She plays with smoke and mirrors here, creating a tour de force of mirror-like surfaces (sea, lake, brook) which in true Dickinsonian sleight-of hand grasps enigmatically at possibilities.

The tone of the speaker's voice seems to call into question the very poem itself, announcing the strong caveat-- of "death I *try* to think like this." However, with the prominence of the dycitic ("this") at the end of the end-stopped line, there is the tremendous reigning in of that which had better be left unsaid, even unthought. In fact, it appears that poems such as this in Dickinson's canon indicate the profound control of the poetics which stems from her awareness of all possibilities and the toll such understanding, or even her recreation of them in the poetry, can take. In Letter 492, she wrote: "Had we the first intimation of the Definition of Life, the calmest of us would be Lunatics." Yet, she also wrote metaphorically of her desire to live (or think) on the edge: "The shore is safer, but I love to buffet the sea" (Letter 39).

The poem reflects the "stade du miroir" of Lacan -- the finding of the self by a regression to the time of primal separation and mirroring in early childhood that lies behind this visit with playmates to a brook. Additionally, it alludes to the primal myth of the original seekers of human knowledge. The speaker views the likenesses in changing images as she finally sees herself reflected in the "other" -- the boldest playmate, who is set up to buffet the sea. (In Lacanian terms this consists of the young child seeing herself as mirrored in the mother before there is a sense of separate identity.) The subject is defined by others and through objects--all, however, mirrorings through obvious images.

The "I do remember" attempts to work on the process of recollection which is not quite individual but more of a plunge into a Jungian unconscious. The words seem to prod and strain for proof, with the concomitant reminder that forgetting is also a shield, just as the river Lethe was a symbol of forgetfulness. Finally, there is a keen awareness of the fictions embedded in fictions, with the metamorphoses of one image into another (well to brook to sea) akin to those in dreams where from one phase to another objects blend and transform themselves from one face to another.

As in Poem 820 on Jason and the Golden Fleece, discussed earlier in this study, a quest is apparent, that of the "I" seeking to know what is beyond death. Yet the speaker is inventing the answer for herself--a fiction with a basis in the reality of a childhood reminiscence. Everything is not as it appears: the grave is a well which is really a brook; the brook seems a sea, yet all, significantly, are water, the source of life.

The poem seems a metonym for Dickinson's psychologizing poetry, for in it she creates a medium through which what the speaker tries to think becomes a reality. The poem is the quintessence of Dickinson's orphic role, captivating us to "suspend disbelief" through her carefully crafted poetic lines. Each precise syntactic line with its air of logical clarity lends credence to a shaky belief. Most of the lines hinge on qualifiers--conjunctions, relative pronouns, prepositions--yet the oxymoronic thrust of their halting movements creates a frustration in the reader which perversely causes her to surge ahead to the end, just as the roaring brook dared the child in the poem to act. These qualifiers are the grammar of legal "proof," perhaps what Dickinson deemed a more masculine language, yet it is counterpointed with doubt. The redundancy structures create entropy, yet the high quotient of surprise in the beginnings and endings of lines maximizes information and counterpoints this regression with progression. The oxymoronic nature of existence which Dickinson writes about over and over ("Dismay/Which is the Zest of Sweetness") is mimed in the poetics. In fact, to adopt René Girard's concept of the mimetics of desire to shed further light on the movement: the "I" is desiring the objects because the other playmates are. Hidden within the remarkably strong structure is the "I" who tries to think, is the least bold, and is content to watch the boldest grasp for the ultimate answer. Dickinson creates a double-voiced speaker, with elements of doubt and surety, strength and weakness. As a result, death yields two possibilities: doom and the suggestion by the allusion to the Hesperides that it might be an edenic garden containing Hera's golden apple. The use of the

adjective “hesperean” alludes to a clearly female mythological icon. The Garden of the Hesperides is home to Mother Hera’s life-giving apple tree. The significance of this to the poem is in Dickinson’s heavy reliance on the female symbology of mythology. Its final lines suggest an afterlife akin to this Hesperian garden ruled by a goddess who is offering her golden apple as a lure into the other world. Dickinson’s last lines say only that he/she? “clutched it.” Characteristically indeterminate, she does not tell whether the clutching resulted in knowledge or oblivion. Such lack of closure is underscored by her use of the dash as the final hieroglyph of the poem, leaving the reader hanging and giving nothing as its ultimate answer: “The boldest leaped and clutched it--“

Shared Images: Bees, Spinners, Noon

Jackson and Dickinson also share images in their poetry. In “Vanity of Vanities” Jackson uses the image of the bee as an emblem for contemplating life’s brevity. The more conventional poet, Jackson uses a variation of a traditional form called the “Ubi sunt” which translates as “where are. . . ?” This poetic form was prevalent in the poetry of the Middle Ages on the transitoriness of life and beauty. It seems that the use of her refrain stems from the typical refrain of such early poetry, which survives in our modern consciousness in Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s translation of a Francois Villon poem, “Ballade des dames du temps jadis” whose refrain Rossetti translates as “But where are the snows of yester-year?” While Jackson’s poem is loosely based on the “Ubi sunt,” its refrain (for want of a better word) does not remain the same throughout. Dickinson almost never imitated established poetic forms that were used by others. She took on a form which did not have a hierarchical value in poetic form, the simple rhythms of the hymns in the poetic forms used in Watts hymnals. These hymnals were used extensively in the churches in 19th-century New England; the stanzaic form was usually in beats of 8s and 6s.

Yet Dickinson's variations and changes in stylistics, as I have discussed earlier, were quite innovative. This is the poem by Helen Hunt Jackson.

Bee to the blossom, moth to the flame;
Each to his passion; what's in a name?

Red clover's sweetest, well the bee knows;
No bee can suck it; lonely it blows.

Deep lies its honey hidden to keep?
What use in honey hidden to keep?

Robbed in the autumn, starving for bread;
Who stops to pity a honey-bee dead?

Star-flames are brightest, blazing the skies:
Only a hands-breadth the moth-wing flies.

Fooled with a candle, scorched with a breath;
Poor little miller, a tawdry death!

Life is a honey, life is a flame:
Each to his passion; what's in a name?

Swinging and circling, face to the sun,

Brief little planet, how it doth run!

Bee-time and moth-time, add the amount;

White heat and honey, who keeps the count?

Gone some fine evening, a spark out-tost!

The world no darker for one star lost!

Bee to the blossom, moth to the flame:

Each to his passion; what's in a name?

The theme of life's transitory nature, typified in the symbols of the bee and moth, present a wishful plaintive tone. Yet at points the poem's sentimental didacticism falls very flat, for example, in this couplet: "Swinging and circling, face to the sun,/ Brief little planet, how it doth run." Part of the problem with poetry such as this is that its imagery is not overdetermined enough (to borrow a term from traditional psychology). Bathos results, as we try to see moth and bee in the extended roles their author intended and see only moth and bee. In comparing the technique of the two poets, we are inclined to answer that refrain, "What's in a name?" with "everything!" because in a different poet, the use of such imagery works so much better.

Dickinson, a diligent reader of popular poetry, was not disinclined to use such imagery. However, she uses bee imagery to forge a strong organic identity with her narrator in many poems. At times the bee is the yearning lover, at other times a member of the divine Trinity, usually God the Father. He is quite often a male persona for her poetry, an image of creativity

and sexuality which is highly charged for Dickinson. The female poet likes to align herself with this bee in all its maleness, perhaps in an attempt to take from him the power and sexuality that society and nature has identified with him.

We -- Bee and I -- live by the quaffing --

'Tisn't *all Hock* -- with us --

Life has its *Ale*--

Unlike the refined almost asexual nature of Jackson's bee, for Dickinson the bee is a symbol of male sexuality and brings a vibrant sensuality to this next poem (Poem 211) extolling the edenic pleasures of earthly love. He and his sexual prowess may be something Dickinson wished to adopt for its shock value as well as for an androgynous desire to unite the male and female impulses within her. None of these impulses seem to be apparent in her contemporary female poets like Jackson. Two significant events surround this poem which add resonance to the bee imagery and its relation to Dickinson's sexuality. The first is the fact that Dickinson sent this poem to Susan Dickinson, whom many see as an object of Dickinson's erotic love. The second equally interesting event is that Higginson, as described in Sewall and in the Johnson edition of the poetry, was reluctant to publish this poem because of its overt sexuality. One can see that the image of the bee for Dickinson, while ostensibly similar in intent to Jackson's, has a quite different significance. For Dickinson, as for many of the male members of the American Renaissance, Emerson and Whitman in particular, the bee, an agent of fecundity in the natural world, is a perfect symbol for the poet. In this next poem, the narrator is unaccustomed to love and savoring every moment of his edenic entry into its mysteries, in no hurry to consummate his union with the flower in her chamber. This scene might just as well relate to the entrance of the poet into an edenic union with language, as the poet was to enact every time she wrote a poem.

For Dickinson the act of creating a poem was often described as a ravishment through words. She is singularly different, by the way, from the female poets like Barrett Browning and even novelists like Mary Shelley, who use the act of giving birth as symbols for the creation of a written work. For her the more sexually charged moment of conception is the primal scene of creativity.

Poem 211

Come slowly -- eden!
 Lips unused to Thee --
 Bashful -- sip thy Jessamines --
 As the fainting Bee --

Reaching late his flower,
 Round her chamber hums --
 Counts his nectars --
 Enters -- and is lost in Balms

The following poem by Jackson shares one of Dickinson's prime symbols -- that of the writer as a spinner. In Dickinson the spinner is often a spider or a woman sewing/sowing as I have suggested earlier. The element of blindness is a motif that appears also for the poet/speaker/spinner, which is intensified by her lifelong affliction with eye disease and bouts of virtual blindness. This element may very well be Dickinson's own gendered revision of blind poet-seers of classical mythology like Tiresias whose own story suggests both male and female traits. Here Jackson's poet/speaker is being aligned with such a blind spinner, a traditional image for poetry.

Spinning

Like a blind spinner in the sun,
I tread my days;
I know that all the threads will run
Appointed ways:
I know each day will bring its task,
And, being blind, no more I ask.

I do not know the use or name
Of that I spin;
I only know that some one came,
And laid within
My hand the thread and said, "Since you
Are blind, but one thing you can do."

Sometimes the threads so rough and fast
And tangled fly,
I know wild storms are sweeping past,
And fear that I
Shall fall; but dare not try to find
A safer place, since I am blind.

I know not why, but I am Sure
That tint and place,
In some great fabric to endure
Past time and race
My threads will have; so from the first,
Though blind, I never felt accurst.

I think, perhaps, this trust has sprung
From one short word
Said over me when I was young, --
So young , I heard
It, knowing not that God's name signed
my brow, and sealed me his, though blind.

But whether this be seal or sign
Within, without,
It matters not. The bond divine
I never doubt.
I know he set me here, and still,
And glad, and blind, I wait His will;

But listen, listen, day by day,
To hear their tread
Who bear the finished web away,

And cut the thread,
 And bring God's message in the sun,
 "Thou poor blind spinner, work is done."

The poem is very traditional within the theme of the blind poet/seer since it proclaims a very circumscribed role for this blind spinner who does "not know the use or name/Of that I spin." She is merely a vehicle, linking her artistic endeavors with God's will, in fact quite submissively and piously accepting God's will with the words, "I know he set me here, and still,/And glad, and blind, I wait His will." Jackson's theological vocabulary is securely New England Protestant as indicated by such terms as "sign" and "seal."

She suggests that the spinner may be creating a spider's web, for in the last stanza the blind spinner is listening for the tread of those "who bear the finished web away." The image of blindness and the spider spinning its web is centralized in Dickinson's poem; the spider image reverberates with accrued meaning in Dickinson's poetry, particularly in "A spider spun at night," and the blindness imagery while not as clear as in other poems, like "The day I got my eye put out," is apparent in the fact that the spider is "without a light."

Poem 1138

A Spider sewed at Night
 Without a Light
 Upon an Arc of White.

If Ruff it was of Dame
 Or Shroud of Gnome
 Himself himself inform.

Of Immortality

His Strategy

Was Physiognomy.

Dickinson's spinner/spider is not submissive like Jackson's speaker; the spider does not gain power from a "god" since she has no guiding "Light" with all its theological connotations. This poet-spider is another adumbration of Dickinson's female poetics: it is rendered as both male and female, or sexually indeterminate." Its strategy for immortality is its "physiognomy" just as the poet's "face" appears to us through the writing facing us on the page.

In The Madwoman in the Attic Gilbert and Gubar make a strong case for this poem as a metaphor for the poet's way of writing. They suggest that, as a *woman* poet writing, Dickinson was more likely than a male poet to feel silenced and marginalized. They see her defining her own poetics through the spider symbol as hidden ("at night") and having hermetic imagery ("himself himself inform") as a result of this forced disguise of real intent. They offer biographical details to show this connection with her own artistic practices-- writing at night, weaving a web of words that are deliberately impervious to full meaning, Dickinson's penchant for wearing white from about 1862 on.

I believe Gilbert and Gubar are correct in their assumptions, but I would like to elaborate on the images presented here for other reasons, particularly to show how Dickinson took themes and images used by Jackson (and other female poets of the time) and transformed them into elaborate pieces of her female poetics. This poem was sent, like the bulk of her poetry, to her beloved sister-in-law, Sue Gilbert Dickinson about 1869. It most probably was composed about the same time, a full seven years after her most important year as a poet, 1862, time

enough for her to feel comfortable and confident about defining her own mimesis. While the spider was a fine symbol for the American Romantic poets, particularly Whitman, in that it was a natural symbol for the creative impulse, it further suggests in Dickinson a type of the androgynous or male-female poetic spirit. This bi-sexual poetic identity was both "Dame" and "Gnome" which suggests the higher and lower categories of names for the poet-self, as well as male and female, the word "gnome" being more likely male. It is appropriate that Sue was the recipient for this poem, at least the first recipient, particularly in that Dickinson felt most comfortable in describing to Sue her "cross-gendered art" which may very well reflect her own love relations with Sue. There is the added significance that she seems to have few guides ("Without a Light") for the type of poetry she was writing, which went beyond the traditional purview of her female contemporaries poets like Helen Hunt Jackson, whom Emerson saw as the best female poet writing in America at the time.

I have commented on Poem 1138 not only to establish Dickinson's metaphor of the spider as a poetic trope for the poet-self, but primarily to discuss a lesser known poem on a similar theme. This poem written the following year, 1870, is Poem #1167, "Alone and in a Circumstance."

Poem 1167

Alone and in a Circumstance

Reluctant to be told

A spider on my reticence

Assiduously crawled

And so much more at Home than I

Immediately grew

I felt myself a visitor
And hurriedly withdrew

Revisiting my late abode
With articles of claim
I found it quietly assumed
As a Gymnasium
Where Tax asleep and Title off
The inmates of the Air
Perpetual presumption took
As each were special Heir --
If any strike me on the street
I can return the Blow --
If any take my property
According to the Law
The Statute is my Learned friend
But what redress can be
For an offense nor here nor there
So not in Equity --
The Larceny of time and mind
The marrow of the Day
By spider, or forbid it Lord
That I should specify.

The poem is noteworthy first for its material form as Johnson describes it:

{on the} front half of the half-sheet of notepaper on which the poem is written there is an unused three-cent postage stamp of the issue of 1869. Beneath one side of the stamp are two small strips clipped from Harper's Magazine for May 1870. One bears the name "George Sand" and the other "Mauprat" -- the title of the novel by George Sand published in 1836. This poem was written after the stamp and strips were pasted onto the sheet, for the lines accommodate themselves to the occupied space. Such deliberateness would suggest that the poem is autobiographical; that 'in a circumstance reluctant to be told' ED had been guided to Mauprat and has found the book a 'larceny of time and mind' [*italics mine*]. (Vol. II, 816)

Having seen the original holograph of the poem with the cartooned stamp on the front of it at the Amherst College Library, I fully agree with the description and the fact that the poem was composed organically, seeming to emanate out from the centered cartoon. However, it is important to state that the stamp is on its side and that the two cuttings from Harper's protrude from the left side much like the trousered legs of a male figure. It is an almost comical image, which can suggest a figure dethroned or toppled. One may never fully recover Dickinson's intention here, and furthermore, should not fall into the intentional fallacy when discussing her locus of composition, but it is surely (to borrow Johnson's terms) "autobiographical" when a female poet writing about female art and using her central metaphor for her marginalized art, the spider, places in the center of her poem such an obviously loaded cartoon. (The larger implications of Johnson's words, that perhaps the rest of Dickinson's art is not "deliberate" and thus would not suggest biographical parallels is certainly condescending, as well as strange, in

that one could argue that it is most likely the suppressed biographical events that often are discovered in the least obviously autobiographical writing.) While I don't want to overload the poem's meaning from the cut outs on the holograph, I do wish to begin my discussion of the poem with that image of this strange cartoon suggesting a male image fallen or toppled (the male poet, perhaps, or the hero of the novel Mauprat?). The added significance, of course, is that Dickinson's European literary sister, George Sand, who took on a male pseudonym as well as male signifiers (clothing, habits) may have been seen by Dickinson to, at the least, have begun the toppling of a formerly almost all male province, by taking on so many male signifiers for both herself and her art. George Sand did in fact write fiction, and whether or not Dickinson saw the "light" in her, I cannot agree less with Johnson's assertion that Dickinson had found reading Mauprat a larceny of the mind. In fact, the novel itself proved salubrious (especially to Dickinson) precisely because it seemed to subvert notions of a female's profitable use of her reading time. To this reader and many others, Dickinson's pronouncements on certain books and authors that contemporary prevailing notions of censorship and gentility might have found fault with are always suspect, particularly since so many of them are found in letters to Higginson. Her attitude here is reminiscent of her comments to Higginson that she did not read Whitman because she was told he was not acceptable. This may have been a comment which, like many others, simply served to disguise her more subversive nature, or a playacting which was Dickinson's way of rendering to Caesar things that were his, by giving back to a critic like Higginson what he wanted to hear, at least from a female poet.

I will begin my analysis by reiterating how important the images of spider and play are as metaphors for Dickinson's poetry. The concept of the word "play" is suggested by the aerial acrobatics of the spiders in the gymnasium at sport or play. The poet-speaker opens her first quatrain with a seeming "reluctance to be told" about the circumstances in which she was caught.

The suggestions abound from the mundane to the literal: Is she naked, literally with her pants down (legs exposed, like the little legs of the stamp), exposed metaphorically as a poet-poseur attempting to transmute her sex (like George Sand?) and read (or write) whatever she wishes without reticence as a man would? Is she reading a novel that the American culture of her time would see as unsuitable for a young woman, a literary code that became known through William Dean Howell's criticism later in the century as the "Law of the Iron Madonna"?

In the next quatrain she recognizes that this alter-ego spider she conjures up out of thin air (her "heir"?) is "much more at home than I" with the object of her ambivalence. Such repression leads to larger problems, for as she immediately gives way to this stronger force, the spider multiplies into a whole "gymnasium" of spiders. In one sense repression of this "perpetual presumption" of the "inmates of the air" leads the speaker's "house" (often Dickinson's metaphor for the body) to be taken over as if each "were special Heir." The rhyming of "Air/Heir" underscores the conjunction of the apparent ephemeral nature of this claim (its literal/figurative "groundlessness").

The poem began with two quatrains that set the before-scene in this drama; now it abruptly shifts into a different stanza pattern with different diction, the legal terminology that represents so clearly her biographical position as the daughter and sister of male lawyers, as well as her position as a female poet forging a new language. When Dickinson uses the language of law we should be increasingly on guard, for, while this language seems to take over the lengthy ending coda of the poem, it is toppled through excess. (Dickinson warned in one of her letters: "Too much of proof affronts belief"). This female "heir" to legal language makes this language just so much "air" as she begins identifying with the spider-poet's gamboling in the gymnasium of her mind. None of the legal ways to evict these spiders will work, the poem suggests, neither property laws nor statutes: in short, there is no equity for her claim that "larceny" has been

committed, for there was no larceny. The offense was neither "here nor there" (invisible, unimportant, non-existent?) and the offender, as she slyly suggests at the end of the poem, may very well be the poet herself who she recognizes might be forbidden by her "lord" (God, men in general?) from presuming to take on a role that is not the province of women, and "wasting" the marrow of the day either in writing or reading works that are "worthless," and, I might add, showing so little regard for the language of the law, or the language of patriarchy.

This poem can be seen as an example of Dickinson's use of the traditional motifs of other female poets, as well as an attempt to employ the language she is heir to, including forms that may have been antithetical to her female forms, e.g., the language of law. Against such legal terminology, she seems to test her mettle, counterpointing it with her own newly forged more female-oriented language.

Dickinson's constant use of noon as a time of ripeness, an eternal still moment before change, is seen in many of her poems. Here is a typical use of noon by Jackson which, while not necessarily a direct source for Dickinson, indicates the place of noon in the traditional iconography of Dickinson's female poetic peers. Jackson refers to "delusive noon" here and begins to develop the theme quite traditionally. There is an attempt to arrest the moment. However, this is seen as impossible, "O Noon, if thou couldst stay!" whereas in many of Dickinson's poems using the image of noon there is an arresting of the time of noon and a full probing of significance, which moves beyond the traditional. The Poem is "Noon."

O sweet delusive Noon,
Which the morning climbs to find;
O moment sped too soon,
And morning left behind;

While pale gray hours descend
Fast on the farther slope,
Where a darkness marks the end
Of that day's work and hope.

O Noon, if thou couldst stay!
Were there but spell to arrest
The magic moment, -- to slay
Night on the fair sky's breast,

Or make the morning haste,
Or the chilly evening tarry'
And the liquid light they waste
Give thee, O Noon, to carry!

O cruel, stinted drop,
In sapphire chalice so deep
That if million suns should stop
Its walls there light could keep!

Noon for Dickinson is often identified with the man of noon, the lover whose bright burning sun-like intensity wreaks havoc on the Daisy image of the poet-narrator. In a letter to Susan Gilbert written in 1852 before she married Austin, Dickinson describes her strong ambivalence about the role of the wife. In particular she describes the husband as the "man of

noon" who has power over his wife through the pull of sexuality. While this letter has been discussed often, it is necessary to quote it in order to fully describe the accrued meaning the concept of noon holds in her canon. Dickinson writes to Susan, who herself will be succumbing to her brother Austin, her man of noon.

How dull our lives must seem to the bride and the plighted maiden,
 whose days are fed with gold . . . but to the *wife*, Susie . . . our lives perhaps seem
 dearer than all others in the world; you have seen flowers at morning, satisfied
 with the dew, and these same sweet flowers at noon with their heads bowed in
 anguish before the mighty sun; think you these thirsty blossoms will *now* need
 nought but -- *dew*? No, they will cry for sunlight, and pine for the burning noon,
 though it scorches them, scathes them; they have got through with peace -- they
 know that the man of noon is *mightier* than the morning and their life is
 henceforth to him. Oh Susie . . . it does so rend me . . . the thought of it when it
 comes, that I tremble lest at sometime I, too, am yielded up. (Letter 93)

A summary of the literary affinities between Jackson and Dickinson clarifies their similar nature poetry as well as a shared interest in challenging the traditional roles for women, particularly in their anti-domesticity themes. Jackson's poetry was genteel, derivative, and sentimental, while Dickinson strove to be unique among the more feminine and decorative poets of her time, regaling in her position as "the only kangaroo among the beauty" and taken to task by Higginson for being "spasmodic," "uncontrolled." Jackson, on the other hand, is a trenchant crusader for causes that show how women's narrowed lives undermine their spiritual and intellectual life. Even her most famous novel Ramona on the American Indian focused primarily on the effects of societal prejudice and neglect on Indian women. Such overt and practical

didacticism is one obvious explanation for her acceptance by Higginson so wholeheartedly as his mentee, for he too was a believer and promoter of typical 19th-century causes. Dickinson's poetry reflects the ideas that Jackson crusades for, that of the masses of women starving literally and for lack of societal recognition. However, Dickinson, never a crusader, transforms this aspect of her contemporary women's issues and embeds them much less literally in the strange heroine/speakers of her poems. In contrast to Jackson's forthright attack on inequality, Dickinson subtly undercuts the notions of domesticity and substitutes instead a poetry of strong belief in women's art and women's presence.

PLEASE NOTE

**Page(s) missing in number only; text follows.
Filmed as received.**

page 129

University Microfilms International

Mercy Philbrick's Choice

Jackson's novel *Mercy Philbrick's Choice* (1876)²⁴ was viewed by many critics of the 19th century as loosely based on Dickinson's life. The novel was a popular success. In her obituary for her sister-in-law, Susan Dickinson gives credence to this belief, while simultaneously discounting it: "Her [Dickinson's] pages would ill have fitted even so attractive a story as '*Mercy Philbrick's Choice*,' unwilling though a part of the literary public were to believe that she had no part in it. 'Her wagon was hitched to a star,'- and who could ride or write with such a voyager?" (*This Brief Tragedy* 111). The novel was the first publication of the No-Name Series put out by Roberts Brothers under Thomas Niles. The No-Name Series was a long term project which kept authorship a secret, perhaps to spur readership by creating speculation about who the "great unknowns" were. The second volume was *A Masque of Poets* in which one of Dickinson's poems "Success is Counted Sweetest," which Jackson seems to have finally gotten permission from Dickinson to include, was placed. There is no mention in the letters of whether or not Dickinson read *Mercy Philbrick's Choice*. The Harvard Houghton Library list of all the books in the Dickinson home makes no mention of this novel, although it does include almost everything else written by Jackson including different volumes of poetry and the *Saxe Holm Stories* (both first and second series). However, if Susan Dickinson had read the novel and known that it was widely believed to be about her sister-in-law, it is almost certain that Dickinson would have known about it and might have read it, since they shared so many of one another's books and discussed their mutual reading.

²⁴ A further indication of the critical disregard for Jackson lately is the fact that the only copy of the novel obtainable, at least in New York City, is at the main branch of the New York Public Library at 42nd St. It is a crumbling 1877 reprint of the 1876 original.

This novel is intriguing because of the claims by certain readers (and Sue's curious half-denial) that it was close to the facts of Dickinson's life. Rather than ignore the novel, as so many modern critics have done, I think an examination of it will prove helpful in conveying the subtleties of the Jackson-Dickinson personal and literary relationship and might prove to be a clear source for the emerging myths surrounding Dickinson.

The novel presents some of the contemporary notions of the female poet that Dickinson was aware of, and might indicate the societal assumptions about women poets she was playing off in her own life and work. It has been established by several critics, including Sewall and Gilbert and Gubar, that Dickinson was a woman who loved posing, often using societal expectations for women and women poets as a starting point. In Madwoman in the Attic, Gilbert and Gubar argue that Dickinson's work is a "yarn of Pearl" and that through "an extraordinarily complex series of maneuvers, aided by costumes that came inevitably to hand, the inventive poet enacted and eventually resolved both her anxieties about her art and her anger at female subordination"(583). Their work, however, makes no mention at all of Jackson. Nor does it trace fully the origins of myths that might have been of particularly American origin. It is through Jackson's novel that we contemporary readers can get some insight into the 19th-century New England expectations for the female poet, which I contend are one source for "costumes that inevitably came to mind" for Dickinson.

Postponing for a moment that intriguing possibility, I would like to examine the novel in detail for its merit as a novel. Jackson's plot is similar to that of many of the female novelists of her day. This ur-plot has been identified by Nina Baym in Women's Fiction as that of a young girl, endowed with physical and spiritual beauty and little familial or financial support, but who still triumphs in a kind of Horatio Alger-like rise in the world, often earning the acclaim of family and community. For most of these stories the heroine holds interest for the reader because

she struggles and triumphs; there is often little action and no in-depth characterization, perhaps to allow the empathetic female reader (who is the primary audience for such fiction) to easily substitute herself for the heroine. These stories almost universally end in marriage for the heroine; with this Jackson's novel (to its credit) parts company, although it adheres to the rest of the formula. Mercy, rather than find her fulfillment in the man with whom she falls in love, discovers by the end of the novel that her lover is nowhere near her equal, so she renounces him. She has instead found an object worthy of her love in the Parson who offers her spiritual consolation and literary criticism, yet their love, while purer and more spiritual, is doomed by his death. The theme of renunciation, which Dickinson used in her poetry, is clear here; however, it is a renunciation of love based on honor and focused on an afterlife, for Mercy at the end of the novel visits the minister's grave (where her true love is) with a sense that the man who never heard her speak of love on earth will feel her love in the afterlife. Jackson's concept of renunciation has little of the complexity that Dickinson's poetry evinces on this theme.²⁵

Through the disavowal of marriage as the ending for her poet/protagonist, Jackson creates a structural movement that is similar in design to many of Dickinson's poems which are both disrupted sequences of traditional women's stories and disruptions of traditional poetic form. For example, a typical poem might focus on the renunciation of earthly marriage or the belief that heterosexual relationships are fraught with problems, and that women's place is not where the 19th century wished it to be. Similarly, the movement of Jackson's novel is an alternative, more positive pattern for woman -- that of woman rising, while man falls, with success calibrated in relation to her work not her man.

²⁵ Her poems of renunciation will be discussed in Chapter 5.

The novel strongly announces one of its themes from the moment we read its epigraph taken from George Eliot's Daniel Deronda: "Is the Gentleman anonymous? Is he a Great Unknown?" Such an opening leads to the conclusion that, like George Eliot, Jackson is creating a protagonist who is great but practically invisible. This protagonist is similar to the narrators of Dickinson's poems who tend to be small, and unknown (like the poet herself) but are paradoxically great because of such lack of recognition. If such a theme in Jackson's novel can be traced through, it might show her own insight into a poet like Dickinson and would certainly indicate that she had her friend at least partially in mind when she wrote this story.

Dickinson, as Jackson well knew, was writing a great deal of poetry, with little recognition except for her small circle of epistolary correspondents. In addition, Jackson's novel presents an imaginative portrait of the 19th-century female poet in America, and what expectations her society formed about her. One of the reasons so little has been written about this novel's implications for Dickinson scholarship is that Jackson focuses on a difficult love affair, and so many critics today tread warily in areas where the old sexist/unrequited lover stories of Dickinson might crop up. However, at first glance it seems that Jackson's novel focuses on the theme of unrequited love; however, a more intense scrutiny reveals that, while there is a love interest, the focus is on the strength of the heroine as great in her own right.

The opening chapters introduce two of the main characters, Mrs. White and her son Stephen. He is not very well liked in his New England town and is portrayed as a rather ambitionless aesthete, with an acquired veneer of love for good literature and beauty, which is at odds with his crass, philistine heart. His mother comes alive as a nasty, possessive invalid. They inhabit one half of a rambling old house belonging to the now deceased Jacob's brothers and are desperately seeking renters for the other half. (This, of course, brings to mind the Dickinson

Homestead which was separated into two dwellings, one rented out, in Emily's early years because of financial difficulties.)

As one would expect from Jackson, there are several feminist themes in the novel. One of these unifying themes revolves about inheritance, particularly women's legacies, in this case the widow of the deceased owner of the home, as well as the plight of both Mercy and her mother, who are both widowed and have apparently received no legacies from their husbands.

To continue with the narrative's events, a clergyman friend of Stephen's from a nearby village finds him two tenants, mother and daughter, Mrs. Carr and her young recently widowed daughter, Mercy Philbrick. Stephen's initial meetings show him as brusquely rude, for he sees them as poor and uninteresting. From the outset, the moralistic omniscient narrator remarks that he had to learn that he needed humanity. This is evidence of a typical device for such novels of social causes, which will show female involvement in the reformation of male characters. The polemical intention is announced early on in the novel, as was traditional for so many of the female poets and fiction writers of Dickinson's time. Mercy's poetic ambitions are also alluded to quite early, and by page 46 there is a sample of her poetry, predictably the semi-autobiographical, "The Outcast." Her desire to be a poet is her "secret one which only her clergyman friend Mr. Allen knows about." He writes to Stephen about her that she has "no strong sense of a personal God, yet her conscience is in many ways morbidly sensitive" (90). Curiously, the mere suggestion that only a clergyman knows of her desire to be a poet links Mercy's choice to that of religious election or having the strength of religion to her, very much like the personas in Dickinson's poems. She is variously described as nun-like, wearing all one color, black, and enjoying her very secluded life. (This reminds us of the sobriquet attached to Dickinson, the "nun of Amherst" and her wearing of white). At one point the narrator describes her temperament: "She did things, said things and felt things with the instantaneous intensity of

the poetic temperament; but she was quite capable of looking at them afterward, and weighing them with the cool and unbiased judgment of the most phlegmatic realist" (61).

Whether or not Jackson had Dickinson in mind when she wrote this, much of this can be seen as very similar to the way the emerging myths about Dickinson began to form. Jackson knew her friend to be rather eccentric through her reticence about social interaction and publication, her reclusive ways, and her wearing of white dresses almost exclusively in her later years. It may be that in this veiled biographical fiction, there is an inkling (of course distilled through the fiction writer's lens) of how Dickinson appeared to someone who knew her. It is also true that such a portrait was a kind of generic distillation of the subtle and not so subtle ways that Dickinson's contemporaries saw female poets, and will give us further insight into those elements that Dickinson incorporated into her own life and work, and used symbolically as a web of intrigue highlighting the ambivalent role of the woman poet in her society.

To continue with the narrative, Allen, without her knowledge, publishes two of Mercy's poems and gives her the money which she needs. (One might recall that Jackson herself took one of Dickinson's poems for inclusion in *A Masque of Poets*). Mercy is thus almost forced to publish, and is still reluctant out of a sense of gendered propriety not to tell her mother that she is auctioning her mind, as Dickinson herself might have felt.

Stephen begins to fall under Mercy's spell; however, his mother sees a rival and a possible loss of income if the relationship should flourish, so she is extremely rude to the young woman and her mother. As a result, Stephen and Mercy embark, on his insistence, on a secret though chaste relationship. (Such a depiction of the relationship between men and women was the norm for most female writers of the time, except for Dickinson, since sexuality was proscribed in such genteel writing.) Part of the Dickinson myth was that she had a secret love affair. On the scene comes another man, (perhaps based on Higginson or even the President of

Amherst College, Edward Hitchcock).²⁶ Parson Dorrance, a Congregationalist minister and lover of literature and science, conveniently recently widowed. The discussions on poetry between Mercy and Dorrance center around the English Romantics, particularly Wordsworth. (If there is any link with Dickinson it is of course in Wordsworth's interest in nature.) Dorrance becomes a great influence on her intellectually and artistically, and as a result Mercy reluctantly contrasts him with her lover Stephen, whose mind she begins to see as increasingly narrow and common. Yet Mercy is doomed by her honor, for she refuses to reject the man whom she has pledged herself to at first. After a good deal of time passes and her mother's death, Stephen half-heartedly asks her to marry him, but she refuses stating that he should have asked her earlier. She truly loves him, although she recognizes the Parson is the better man.

Mercy leaves the town and the remainder of the novel becomes mostly epistolary. There is a clumsy interjection of a situation regarding money that finally solidifies her knowledge that Stephen is basically a dishonest man unworthy of her love. He has found 3,000 dollars in gold in the fireplace of the house that belongs to the Widow Jacobs, but he insists that the money is rightly his. She is appalled by his action and a lively series of letters go back and forth between them. It is interesting to note that this theme of inheritance of money is shown to ignore female economic rights and is a preoccupation of many of Jackson's contemporary female novelists, including George Eliot. Mercy finds this disregard of the Old Widow's rightful inheritance the worst of all Stephen's transgressions, the one she cannot accept. Jackson has presented a novel of

²⁶ I assume, of course, that Jackson, if she is at all attempting to base the minister in her novel on any figure in Dickinson's life, was certainly aware of these two men; later biographical information on Dickinson led to Reverend Charles Wadsworth from Philadelphia as one of the candidates for Master and an influence on Dickinson. However, this was much later than the time of the novel, 1876, when he became a member of that trio of possible Master letter recipients, which included also Samuel Bowles and Judge Otis Lord, depending on the critic.

female loyalties through this sub-plot, as well as through the carefully constructed primal bond between mother and daughter.

For the denouement, Jackson's story has the Parson dying, rather conveniently, so there is no more need to choose for Mercy. She then returns to the town, unable to have any more to do with her former lover. Toward the end of her life, she is happily writing poems and feels a strong allegiance to the dead Parson, looking forward to her reunion with him in heaven. Of course, this theme is recognizable in Dickinson's poetry where her personas hope to reunite in heaven with their lovers.

Now what are we to make of this novel for Dickinson studies today? While it seems to be at least one of the starting points for the myth of the reclusive poet pining away for one lover and treated badly by another, it is also a celebration of the strength and the poetic ability of the female poet. The novel is interspersed with a number of Mercy's poems, as it celebrates a seemingly unimportant anonymous protagonist, whose real life, her life of the mind, was rich and dramatic. It also foregrounds themes of female bonding and solidarity, as did the female slave narratives like Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl by Harriet Jacobs.

This suggests several possibilities for interpretation. One might be that privileging female creativity is a shared concern of Dickinson and Jackson. This novel was written ten years before Dickinson's death at a time when she and Jackson were in an on-going epistolary relationship. Both have mutual friends, notably Higginson and Professor Hitchcock. More importantly, Jackson had access to Dickinson's poems, both through enclosures in letters sent directly to her and through the poems sent to Higginson, presumably he gave them to her or at the least let her read them. There is a strong indication that Jackson as one of Dickinson's coterie has some insight into the personality of the living poet, as well as her artistic preoccupations. She may have included these in her portrayal of Mercy. Considering the many similarities between

Mercy and Emily, there may have been some of the real Dickinson in the fictional poet. In fact, the lines quoted above concerning Mercy's poetic temperament sound quite similar to Susan Dickinson's own assessment in her obituary of Dickinson that appeared on May 18th in the Springfield Republican: "(She was) quick as the electric spark in her intuitions and analyses, she seized the kernel instantly, almost impatient of the fewest words by which she must make her revelation." In addition writes Susan, she "charmed with ... simplicity and homeliness as well as profundity" (Sewall 228).

What other significance does this novel have for Dickinson studies? Certainly, whether it refers to Dickinson overtly or not, it indicates a remarkably similar attitude toward the female poet in both Dickinson and Jackson. As I have shown, Jackson's portrayal of the fictional Mercy has some of the traits of the real poet Emily Dickinson. There is in the impetus for Mercy's writing a fusion of sexuality and hiddenness that is also part of Dickinson's inciting animus. At the same time, there is a reluctance to publish in the character of Mercy which indicates the strong 19th-century female aversion to publishing with which Dickinson is also afflicted. Of course, Mercy's financial situation leads her to publish, while Dickinson did not "need" to publish in that sense. But perhaps most curious is the fact that Mercy has a dead male lover, whom she is hoping to join, and who seems to be of more value to her because he is dead.

Dickinson uses such situations of renouncing worldly joy, including lovers, in her poetry. It may be that this theme of worldly renunciation which seems to be essential for the mythic representations of the female poet that this novel portrays are simply being played upon by Dickinson as one more topos to be coopted. Jackson's novel is a polemical one, very similar to others of that genre, notably Harriet Beecher Stowe's The Minister's Wooing (1959) and Oldtown Folks (1869) which preached a kind of saintliness through suffering for its female protagonists (and by implication its female readers). In The Feminization of American Culture

Ann Douglas shows such female saintliness as a neat antidote to the increasingly unappealing strong Calvinism. Such writers preached a sentimentalized religion, replete with a Sunday-school-in-the-sky kind of heaven which regenerates those, like Stephen, who seem to be unregenerate. In a curious reversal, however, Jackson splits the lovers into two, the good and the bad, and it is the good one, the Minister, who dies and is pined for.

Such a sentimental view of the loved one is far from the portrayal in Dickinson's poems. In her portrayal of the unattainable and dead lovers, there is the sense that she prefers lovers dead or distant, perhaps in a suppressed anger at the reality of women's lot. Her use of the theme of the dead inspiring male lover may also be seen as a reversal of the traditional male literary device of the female muse who is either dead (as in Poe and Keats) or quite unattainable in other ways. Such a reversal would add strength to her development of a gendered poetics, and would not nullify the other important strain in her poetry of her dual female muses, Susan and Lavinia, which I argue more fully in the next chapter. Mercy's life contains the theme of female renunciation since she gives up her lover Stephen and the minister whom she comes to love dies. In the pious fashion of so many other novels of the time, Jackson's Mercy, whose name signifies her attitude, shows her sense of mercy and righteousness throughout the novel. Such an expectation for women can be seen by its very presence in this novel as fairly commonplace. This concept of renunciation, so obvious in much of the women's work of the 19th century, may well serve for Dickinson as a notion to coopt in her poetry. Renunciation should not be seen simply as indicative of Dickinson's non-worldly temperament. Instead it may serve to underscore the highly complex attitude she evolved toward her vocation because of her gender. Thus in Dickinson's poems "renunciation may be a piercing virtue" but for not quite the same reasons that her society expected of women. In the next chapter on her relationship to George Eliot, Dickinson's peculiar version of renunciation will be explored.

CHAPTER FIVE

“MY GEORGE ELIOT”: “DEUTERA” DICKINSON / “MUTTER” ELIOT

England has had many learned women . . . and yet where are the poetesses? . . . I look everywhere for grandmothers and see none.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

if I'm lonely
 it must be the loneliness
 of waking first, of breathing
 dawn's first cold breath on the city
 of being the one awake
 in a house wrapped in sleep

Adrienne Rich

Ellen Moers wrote in Literary Women that “The real hidden scandal of Emily Dickinson's life is . . . her embarrassing ignorance of American literature”(56).²⁷ Yet such a statement can be misleading if not damaging to an understanding of Dickinson. Biography can be quite helpful in describing a female poetics, if there is a careful scrutiny which attempts to

²⁷ Although Emerson visited the Evergreens next door in Susan and Austin's home, Dickinson never showed any interest in meeting him. Melville, Hawthorne and Thoreau were writing and living in Massachusetts, yet she neither sought them out nor read much of their work.

reinterpret incidents that have formerly been seen without attention to theories of female behavior and development. Thus in "Still Practice, A/Wrested Alphabet" Jane Marcus reminds the critic to be egoless in attempting to "read" the body of the text of the suppressed and silenced and "explicating the signs of the subject, her body, her text"(80). With such a caveat in mind, a feminist critic should begin from the supposition that Dickinson's decisions came from an informed sense of how she meant to go about being a poet. Thus, I would like to reinterpret Moers' comment, not from the distortion that Dickinson was ignorant of good contemporary American literature, but instead to view this "ignorance" as a deliberate inattention; Dickinson thought differently, as a woman, and perhaps did not find the American Romantics' work as important to her as the great English female writers of the time, whom she admired and wrote about, Charlotte and Emily Brontë, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and George Eliot.²⁸ Ironically, it was Ellen Moers in Literary Women who first commented on her interest in women writers: "[Dickinson's] passion for women's literature stands out oddly against the background of the rest of her reading, which was surprisingly skimpy" (60).

While Helen Hunt Jackson was a contemporary writer whom Dickinson actually knew, Dickinson scholarship inevitably points to Charlotte and Emily Brontë, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and George Eliot, as the three female writers whom she admired and seemed to emulate as literary foremothers. Dickinson believed in their genius and said so quite often in her letters and poems. The Brontës and Barrett Browning have been dealt with in full length studies. In fact, the editor of Dickinson Scholarship: An Annotated Bibliography 1969-85 states that

²⁸ This assessment is in one sense begging the question through hindsight, for until Matthiessen's American Renaissance, the group of male transcendentalists had not been readily known as the literary giants of the 19th century. In fact, it was the women novelists like Lydia Sigourney Weaver and others who had far more literary popularity in their time.

"Most of these [comparative studies] tend to take on . . . British women--most often the Brontës and Elizabeth Barrett Browning" (xi). I do not wish to duplicate this comprehensive criticism.

Very little, on the other hand, has been written about Dickinson's affinities with George Eliot.²⁹ I admit to being very intrigued by Dickinson's interest in and affinities with one of the great 19th-century novelists, George Eliot, and while one is primarily a novelist and the other a poet, I believe an exploration of their affinities will help to further elucidate Dickinson's own poetics and place her in her self-chosen female cultural field. Dickinson's female poetics was fueled, on the one hand, through her subversion of themes and images used by typical feminine poets of her time, like Helen Hunt Jackson. On the other hand, Dickinson's poetics was even more strongly fueled by the influence of George Eliot, whose writing went much beyond traditional gender boundaries. A superficial analysis might suggest that the very public persona "George Eliot," the only woman included in the English Men of Letters Series, and the very private poet Emily Dickinson had little in common. However, such an assessment is certainly inaccurate.

The Self-Proclaimed Foremother

It is Dickinson herself who sets off this search for affinities, for she had a decided preoccupation with Eliot. It seems apparent that Dickinson saw in Eliot a literary foremother whom she admired and with whom, I believe, she had a dialogue in her poetry. In addition, she seems so to have internalized some of Eliot's characters that she saw parallels in her own family

²⁹ After I had written most of this part of my study, an article appeared in The Emily Dickinson Journal, entitled "'My George Eliot' and My Emily Dickinson" by Karen Richardson Gee, an account of Dickinson's response to Eliot, including direct references in the letters and poems to Eliot. I will include some of her insights in later comments in the chapter.

and friends, particularly characters from her two favorite Eliot novels, Middlemarch and The Mill on the Floss. For example, she wrote of one of her Norcross cousins as Mrs. Ladislaw in Middlemarch and of her Aunt Elizabeth Currier as Aunt Glegg from Mill. She seems to have recognized strong and clear affinities between Maggie Tulliver's world and her own. Martha Dickinson Bianchi writes that her aunt spoke often of the novel: "As for Aunt Glegg and Aunt Pullet, their shrewd sayings were household words with her, deliciously spicing all sorts of domestic situations from bonnet-crowns to morals. Through Emily the River Floss and those who dwelt beside it became of almost magical memory -- *unlike scenes and actors of any other novel* [italics mine] -- to the niece and nephew who grew up under her spell."³⁰ Dickinson's internalization of Eliot's milieu suggests that her poetry may also reflect that interest. Furthermore, since it is generally accepted that Eliot's The Mill on the Floss is a thinly veiled autobiographical novel, the kinship Dickinson felt with Maggie growing up is arguably with Eliot herself.

While critics have remarked on Dickinson's seeming lack of interest in her fellow American writers, from an aesthetic point of view one can see why she was more interested in her British contemporaries. At the time Dickinson was writing there were no American female poets or novelists of the reputation and ability of those British contemporaries she admired, the Brontës, Barrett Browning and Eliot. In turning to them, Dickinson was searching out female literary greatness, and in turning to Eliot, she was hoping to emulate her ability to transcend gender boundaries. This suggests that Dickinson did not feel a bond with those writers in America who were later, along with her, to be considered the major writers of the American Renaissance. Perhaps she sensed that this view of American individualism, as evidenced in the

³⁰ As quoted in St. Armand (302).

work of Emerson, Whitman, Hawthorne and Melville, was an ambivalent impetus, structured along the lines of gender politics. As an American women writer she may have concluded that a strong idiosyncratic *female* self was neither expected nor understood by the prevailing critical inquiry of her time. An avid reader of newspapers and periodicals, she was certainly aware of the female poets who were being published, whose genteel and derivative poetry mirrored societal expectations, including those of her own mentor, Higginson. Dickinson's awareness is clear both in her pride at not being able to "cool the tramp" in her own poetry and her pointed comment in one of her letters to Higginson: "All men say what to me." As a result, Dickinson took on a dialogue with the tenets of American Romanticism as they emerged on the literary scene and she alternately disregarded, disputed and misread them.³¹

Dickinson had a decided interest in women of the world who were comfortable and prominent in the public eye, women, in short, quite different from her. To present an analogy, Sue Gilbert, her sister-in-law, fit such a description, and much has been written about their intense relationship. While Susan was a friend/loved one/"other sister" and best reader of Dickinson's work, Eliot's attraction as a writer and thinker was equally strong. In many ways the Susan-Emily relationship was an attraction of opposites. At least at first, Dickinson's interest in Eliot began from a similar psychological vantage point. To read about the larger-than-life Eliot for the reclusive Dickinson must have been like a page from a novel "where dreams are born," (to borrow her words on Emerson) since Eliot lived unconventionally among most of the great intellects in England and was skeptical and bold in her views. Through the Sewall biography, we know that Dickinson, besides reading Eliot's novels and poetry, read two biographies, Mathilde

³¹ I am reminded of her remarks discussed in the Sewall biography about Whitman that he was not fit to be read. When Emerson came to the Evergreens for one of Susan's salons, Dickinson did not attend even though this was still at the point in her life when she was visiting next door.

Blind's George Eliot and John Walter Cross's George Eliot's Life Related in her Letters and Journals (1883) and kept abreast of articles on her life and work in the American newspapers and periodicals. While initially Dickinson may have seen Eliot as quite different from herself, she must gradually have seen their affinities. To Dickinson, who was privately dissecting the patriarchal Congregationalism of "brogans" and "blue umbrellas," Eliot, perched as she was on the intellectual pinnacle of the Higher Criticism, must have seemed to Dickinson a true compatriot. George Eliot's cross-dressed name itself must have enamored her to a poet whose ambivalent and androgynous personas were, like Eliot's female characters, probing the boundaries of gendered visions. Dickinson must also have seen similarities in their upbringing and family relationships. In fact, the Eliot legacy left an indelible mark on her poetry. There are vestiges, though characteristically hidden or "slant," of a dialogue Dickinson had with Eliot in her canon that can be uncovered as in a palimpsest.

There was a certain note of the ingenue in the way Dickinson proclaimed herself an admirer of Eliot. Her bedroom walls held pictures of her, while in her letters, she wrote hyperbolically about her novels and the woman herself, always hungry for knowledge about the interesting and controversial Eliot. Of the novels these comments are recorded: Daniel Deronda is a "wise and tender book" (Letter 974), Middlemarch was like "glory," and Eliot was "the Lane to the Indies Columbus was looking for" (Letter 456). About the person behind the public facade she was fascinated. When Higginson was in Europe in 1878, Dickinson wrote to him in hopes that he would meet with Eliot and "tell me about it" (Letter 553). In a letter in 1881 to Mrs. Holland she wrote of her desire to receive a photograph of George Eliot. There is a characteristically ambivalent attitude on her part for the photo (which might in its lack of beauty efface some of her reverence for Eliot): "I wince in perspective, lest it be no more sweet. God chooses repellent settings, dont he, for his best Gems?" (Letter 692). From November of 1862,

when she mentions reading The Mill on the Floss, there is in Dickinson the beginning of a lifelong interest in Eliot and her works.

Perhaps it is Dickinson's eulogy that is most telling about her attitude toward Eliot. In a letter to publisher Thomas Niles in the year Eliot died, Dickinson writes of the debt she owes her: "The life of Marian Evans had much I never knew -- a doom of fruit without the bloom, like the Niger fig:--

Her losses make our gains ashamed--

She bore life's empty pack

As gallantly as if the East

Were swinging at her back,

Life's empty pack is heaviest,

As every porter knows--

In vain to punish honey.

It only sweeter grows (Letter 418)

Perhaps the key to understanding this typically cryptic letter/poem is the fact that Eliot was one of the first women writers who tried to live as "men of letters" had lived. Dickinson recognized that Eliot was doomed not to flower, perhaps during a time of literary adolescence when she should have been learning by example from her literary foremothers, a condition which just did not exist for Eliot. The poem describes her as fruitful anyway, perhaps even better ("sweeter") because of this lack or punishment. There is clearly here a sense of Eliot having a difficult role to bear, precisely because the baggage she carried (the literary pack of sisters and mothers behind her) was empty. No woman writer before her led the way into her precariously anomalous position of trying to break through the established roles for women writers.

Dickinson recognized this foremother who had the heaviest burden because it held no legacy from previous women writers who had risen to Eliot's heights. The images Dickinson uses are definitely female images, the fig, like the female ovary, and honey that thrives on adversity, only to get sweeter or better. The full significance of the Niger fig for Dickinson is a puzzle. One critic, Karen Richardson Gere, makes an interesting discovery of the possible source for this in Eliot's work, Armigart. She writes that "the main character, an opera singer, has survived a serious illness, but the cost of the cure was her voice. Her doctor, thinking she should be grateful to be alive and still holding out hope that her voice will return, says

'Tis not such utter loss, The freshest bloom

Merely, has left the fruit: the fruit itself . . .

ARMGART: Is ruined, withered, is a thing to hide

Away from scorn or pity. (36)

The choice of the image of the fig as one to represent Eliot has many connotations. The fig from the earliest times was viewed as a female genital symbol. Additionally fig leaves and branches, as symbols of fecundity, were used both by the Greeks and Romans, in fertility rites. Finally, and of most significance, in the Haggadah, the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge eaten by Eve was not from the apple tree but the fig tree. The Judeo-Christian culture conflates the apple and fig tree in Genesis by including the fig leaf as a device to cover Adam and Eve's nakedness. Such complex symbology seems to depict Eliot as the leader of the "pack" of female writers. Dickinson's female symbology suggests great literary fecundity for Eliot, and singles her out as foremother or literary Eve.

Encoded in Dickinson's short eulogy, there is also the suggestion that Eliot's literary career did not have bloom or youth in the sense that for Dickinson and all her daughters she

would be their primal source. Perhaps, as one critic has suggested, this reference to Eliot's losses is reinforced by Dickinson's belief that Eliot never had a childhood. In this letter to the Norcross cousins Dickinson remarks: "... perhaps having no childhood, she lost her way to the early trust and no later came" (Letter 710).³² Dickinson was aware of the facts of Eliot's early life, that she was forced to grow up fast in a home where her mother was sickly and non-nurturing and eventually died when Eliot was still quite young.

Susan Gilbert's insightful essay on literary deuteronomy "Life's Empty Pack" uses Dickinson's poem to establish her thesis that women writers (punning with "daughters/deuteras") lack literary foremothers. Her point is well argued and well taken and has helped me in my own interpretation of this poem, yet my intent is to highlight the specific attitudes this poem suggests about Dickinson's view of Eliot.

Their Lives/Their Voices

Besides Dickinson's clear election of George Eliot as a writer whom she admired and emulated, there are also certain similarities in the lives of the public British writer and the much more private American one. Serving as a guiding spirit for this aspect of my study are the words of Janet Todd in Feminist Literary History: "Instead of reaching towards posthumous psychoanalysis of an author, as an old-fashioned psychological criticism might have done . . . [feminist psychological critics] insist that analysis should be of the relationship of writing to the imperatives of gender in culture"(70).

This way of viewing Eliot and Dickinson's lives, themes, and literary styles and their points of intersection, will of course be attentive to the acculturation of gender in their respective

³² This is Karen Richardson Gere's interesting contention in "'My George Eliot' and My Emily Dickinson" (33).

19th-century cultures. Carolyn G. Heilbrun in Writing a Woman's Life has postulated that female literary biography is of a different order than traditional biography, since it should be aware of the parameters of female psychology. Ann J. Lane has used such theory to write a biography of another 19th-century female American writer, Charlotte Perkins Gilman. Both of these critics base their method on an understanding of female psychology as it is being fully developed in the works of several pioneers in the field, including Carol Gilligan and others who have moved beyond Freudian psychology and/or revised it.

For Dickinson female psychology is very important because her biography has been saddled with myth, with the male-dominated myths among the most glaringly misleading. Dickinson herself seems to warn us off such myths as she writes in a letter: "All men say what to me." Her words suggest the difficulties she was encountering in being understood both personally and artistically. Her insights proved correct, unhappily, in many of the early attempts at biography, including the psycho biography by John Cody, After Great Pain. Myths about Dickinson spread, the elements of which we read even today: the white dress, the unrequited love affair that led her to poetry as compensation, the authoritarian father, the mother who, as John Cody puts it, did not create an adequate female role model for her child, the reclusive poet enthralled with death and suffering, the sobriquet "half cracked poetess of Amherst" given her by her mentor, Higginson. Just lately, a biographer has even gone so far as to state that Dickinson committed suicide (This Brief Tragedy by John Evangelist Walsh) partly because of her difficulty in accepting her brother Austin's affair with Mabel Loomis Todd, Dickinson's posthumous editor. Mossberg's When a Writer Is a Daughter has begun the much needed work of envisioning a female biography. While it is not within the scope of this study to give a thorough view of either Eliot's or Dickinson's life, any feminist discussion of the lives of female poets that purports to be a feminist study must take into account such critical method.

One of the major similarities in the two writers' lives is their attitude toward religion, which was closely allied with their decisions to become writers. It is commonly known that Dickinson did not choose to identify herself as a member of the Congregationalist Church of her family and the Amherst community. She refused to be involved in the religious revivals or American Evangelicalism that were a part of Mary Lyon's Amherst Academy which she attended, and she refused to profess her faith in the organized religion that her father especially seemed intent on promoting in his household.

Such a choice of non-belief or at least non-compliance with the tenets of her religion was repeatedly written about in her poetry, and was, for Dickinson, while a difficult decision, one which many critics have established as going hand in hand with her sense of vocation as a poet. (This is evident in particular in my own discussion of "I'm ceded" elsewhere in the study). As Sewall and Mossberg have shown in their biographies, this resulted in her further alienation from her father, whom Dickinson seemed to equate in both poetry and letters with the cold, stately God of Congregationalism. While it is obviously true that many writers in the 19th century underwent spiritual crises, I believe that because of her gender, Dickinson's crisis was more dramatically charged, since for women of the time conventional religion was a safe arena, a part of women's sphere. In this attitude she diverges from so many of the female writers of her times, who in Ann Douglas's The Feminization of American Culture are shown to be propagating orthodox religious ideas in their works in an increasingly God-less materialistic culture.

Only a cursory glance at Dickinson's poetry will show that her style and themes were grounded in the very literary Puritan culture which was still much a part of this mid-19th-century Amherst. Sewall's biography depicts her Puritan literary heritage, which from its earliest roots in America produced numerous diaries, journals and sermons. Such an intensely Puritan style, with its sparse compressiveness, along with the deep reliance on religious ideas and terminology,

found its apotheosis in her poetry. This milieu would serve as impetus for poetry which is Dickinson's own arch, sarcastic Higher Criticism. One poem pronounces a disdainful attitude toward both the elements of Christian mythology, by which Christ represents a kind of mediator between humanity and God, while it also examines the myths of America's origins through the John Alden and Priscilla story. By implication both myths are seen through the eyes of the female outsider, who wants her history as she wants her religion, directly accessible without any go-betweens. This is a female writer who can take on the language of the Bible and of Christ to revision such myths, as she blithely adopts the Biblical tone "verily" appropriating the rigidly denotative language of law and of history. Dickinson's tone is alternately arrogant and playful when criticizing established ideas.

Poem 357

God is a distant--stately Lover--

Woos, as He states us--by His Son--

Verily, a Vicarious Courtship--

"Miles," and "Priscilla," were such an One--

Burt, lest the Soul--like fair "Priscilla"--

Choose the Envoy--and spurn the Groom--

Vouches, with hyperbolic archness--

"Miles," and "John Alden" were Synonyme--

Dickinson's religious and Biblical allusiveness owes much to her community of Amherst. In Days and Hours of Emily Dickinson, Jay Leyda writes that Amherst had more

ministers per capita than any other town in the United States. Sewall reminds us that the Dickinson family had nineteen Bibles. Yet this religious influence was not one that made Dickinson a typical daughter of Amherst. During this time, in 1846, Amherst, like many other New England communities, underwent a series of religious revivals. For Dickinson as a young woman religious orthodoxy and participation in liturgy was much more of an expectation because of her gender. Yet, Dickinson, unlike almost all of her Amherst Academy classmates, would not participate, confiding in one of her friends Abiah Root: "I am one of the lingering bad ones." (Letter 98). Her words of self-indictment are also mixed with perverse pride in keeping aloof from these widespread Revivals.³³ In essence, she could not muster and sustain the leap of faith in Christianity. This became the keynote of her poetry, typified by her use of the religious ideas and language which came so naturally to her, but not for the rather sentimental and orthodox ends of other female poets writing at the time. It is clear throughout her life that her religious skepticism bothered her, but it was also the *raison d'être* of her poetry. Perhaps, one of the reasons she wrote was to chart the different possibilities of her beliefs, wherever they may lead. Her poems constantly attest to the skepticism based on lack of knowledge, for example,

Faith is a fine invention
For those of us who can see
But microscopes are prudent
In an emergency.

(Poem 185)

³³ Sewall devotes a great deal of space to this part of Dickinson's life, including such information that the whole Dickinson family, Sue included, were re-establishing their standing as professed Christians at this time.

Dickinson's pull away from Revivalism was quite similar to Eliot's move away from the British Evangelical Movement. Her divergence from orthodoxy was gender-based even in its movement toward religion's replacement: Mother Earth herself and the poetry that extolled its virtues. Dickinson explains in a letter what she was pulled toward: "the world allured me and in an unguarded moment I listened to her syren voice. From that moment I seemed to lose my interest in heavenly things by degrees" (Letter 11). One poem which defines the way she worshipped in her new religion is "Some Keep the Sabbath going to Church--" (Poem 324). Revivalism in Amherst was a counter position to Unitarianism, which adopted some of the beliefs of the Higher Critical Movement with which Eliot was involved. For example, in 1841 the Boston Unitarian minister Theodore Parker preached an acceptance of Christ as "an historical figure and that Christianity did not depend on the actual existence of Christ (Ahlstrom 1:43)³⁴ Parker's views may very well have been filtered through the German work, David Strauss's Life of Jesus. In Eliot's translation which appeared in 1846, this work reached the English speaking public, both in England and America. Through its dissemination in her own New England milieu, Dickinson was surely aware of its import. In fact, Dickinson criticizes the Bible itself, as Eliot was to do through her involvement with the Higher Criticism. One example of this is the poem, "The Bible is an antique Volume--" in which the Bible is viewed as just another historical document, a myth written simply by "faded Men." Under Dickinson's critical scrutiny, its stories are damned with faint praise, as she demotes them in her elliptical style from the hierarchy of God's word to myths replete with "troubadours" (David) and "brigadiers" (Satan). The very epithet "antique volume" underscores her sense that this is only a book, and one so old and dreadful that those "Boys that 'believe' are very lonesome--." In her revisionist role she

³⁴ As quoted in Terry Telfer's "A Religious Context for Dickinson's Poetry" (44).

announces that she will become a new Orpheus and give the tale a “warbling teller” so it will captivate and “not condemn.” Such an indictment of Biblical “truths” parallels that of Eliot’s toppled faded man, Casaubon in Middlemarch, whose ludicrous search for a key to all mythologies is debunked by an author whose own non-fictional translations had ushered in the Higher Criticism Movement in England.

In scrutinizing the Puritan legacies of her 19th-century community from her female-outsider perspective, Dickinson will often valorize her own symbols for the female poet by substituting them for divinity, for example, in this whimsically irreverent early poem (1858):

Poem 18

In the name of the Bee--
 And of the Butterfly--
 And of the Breeze--Amen!

Much religious myth has been coopted for her own ends, often her portrayal of the sacredness of language, as in this complex revision of the New Testament’s presentation of the spirit of God infused into Christ, “The Word Made Flesh.”

Poem 1651

A Word made Flesh is seldom
 And tremblingly partook
 Nor then perhaps reported
 But have I not mistook
 Each one of us has tasted

With ecstasies of stealth
 The very food debated--
 To our specific strength--

A word that breathes distinctly
 Has not the power to die
 Cohesive as the Spirit
 It may expire if He--
 "Made Flesh and dwelt among us"
 Could condescension be
 Like this consent of Language
 This loved Philology

The poet expresses her awe of a language so powerful that it becomes immortal through the same driving spirit as that which infuses "He" who "Made Flesh and dwelt among us." Her "loved Philology" is a gift which is a kind of ecstatic union with divinity, one perhaps that her phrase "ecstasies of stealth" suggests must be stolen, perhaps like Promethean fire, from the godhead. Not everyone can partake equally either, she recognizes, because we get "the very food debated to our specific strength."

Eliot herself experienced a similar break from the religious tradition which nurtured her. That religious disavowal, as with Dickinson, coincided with her choice of writing as a profession. It heralded the beginning of her life as George Eliot and her move toward the more worldly London. While Eliot had been writing anonymous criticism for London periodicals, her growth as a writer and thinker was solidified through her exposure to the German Higher

Criticism. Like Dickinson, her vocation as an artist seemed to emerge from her own conflict of faith. Eliot lived alone with her father after her mother died. Her early life was characterized by a fervent belief in English Evangelicalism. With her increasing skepticism, she at one point refused to go to Church with her father and would no longer follow his religion. He asked her to leave her home, and she had to live with her older brother for a time. Her Evangelical fervor was undermined by her own growing intellectualism. In October of 1855, Eliot's review of the works of the popular Evangelical preacher Dr. Cumming's appeared. A reading of this review would make any reader agree with Gordon Haight's assessment of it as "an annihilating account of the beliefs she had held so earnestly in girlhood" (186).

Yet there were some parts of Evangelicalism that followed Mary Anne Evans into her life as the novelist George Eliot, in particular, her belief in reform and the special moral qualities that female nature can bring to it. I am thinking here in particular of Dorothea's plans for reform in Middlemarch and her endless desire to help the disenfranchised and the poor, by improving their environment in all sorts of ways. More importantly, in The Mill in the Floss, Eliot created a thinly disguised autobiographical heroine who struggled with patriarchy in all its forms: her father, her brother, her narrow small town circle, and her religion. Maggie's situation often parallels Eliot's own life for, as a daughter, her patriarchal legacy includes being kept on an allowance, being coerced into keeping house for her widowed ailing father and then later having to depend on periodic installments of her slight inheritance from her brother, who was often careless of sending her money on time. Many of her letters attest to this rather sad aspect of the relationship. In addition, her brother and father as much as said she was a burden because she would not marry and forestall them from having to keep her. Haight's biography documents this very well. Maggie's situation in The Mill on the Floss reflects this, for, unlike her brother who must deal with the monetary debts of his father, it is the non-monetary debts that constrict her.

She is forever the inheritor of her father's assessment, which is of course a mirror of societal attitudes: the "little wench" who is too "cute" ("acute," of course, meaning bright) for a girl in this society.

Dickinson wrote about The Mill on the Floss in her letters and certainly must have identified with such a heroine who, like herself, was struggling as a woman to find her place in society. How aware, however, was Dickinson of these unorthodox religious attitudes that Eliot held before she read the first biography in 1883? And, by implication, how aware was she that Eliot was the literary foremother whose life in many respects was similar to her own? I think it is quite probable that Dickinson understood this kinship on some level through its infusion into the works, and it led her to seek out more and more of Eliot's life and works. Besides noting the direct references to religion and religious faith in Eliot's novels, poetry and non-fiction, Dickinson was probably reading about Eliot's attitudes in articles in newspapers and magazines to which the Dickinson family subscribed. One such article in The Springfield Republican (August 5, 1873) was "George Eliot's Religious Views":

For some years George Eliot has been striving to shape out and definitely adopt a religious faith. With orthodoxy, so called, she has not been able to concur, and the substitute offered by the little faction in which she lives does not satisfy her. A year or two ago she made known her perplexities to an eminent clergyman, then in England, and the two held many earnest conversations on the subject. Since his return to America a correspondence has been maintained between them, the burden of which is her desire for "more light."³⁵

³⁵ This appears in Jay Leyda's Days and Hours (II, 330)

We can assume that such on-going knowledge of Eliot's beliefs that proved similar to her own might have made Dickinson more clearly aware of her affinities with the great British writer and more aware than ever of the rightness of her own beliefs, bolstered as they were by a figure whom she (and the world) admired so much.

Another similarity in the lives of the two writers is their attitude toward publishing. Both Dickinson and Eliot showed great anxiety about publishing. For Dickinson this anxiety took the form of not publishing at all in the traditional sense, with the exception of a few poems (10) published anonymously in her lifetime. I don't believe it is necessary to restate the debate over why Dickinson did not publish, nor to restate my own views on this. It is enough to say that Dickinson, to borrow the words of Melville's *Bartleby*, *preferred not to*.

Eliot's anxiety was of a different kind. Her choice of a male pseudonym evolved not only because the choice of a male name might bring her entrée into a society that might look more favorably on novels from a male. The choice of name was also an effective blind so that no one could directly touch Mary Ann Evans with criticism of her writing. In fact for a while her publisher James Blackwood himself did not know who George Eliot was, believing "him" to be a reclusive protégé of Lewes. But Eliot's reticence and almost phobic fear of criticism was well documented in the respective correspondences of Lewes and Evans herself. According to Ruby Redinger, "By the time she was writing *Romola*, he [Lewes] had extended his role to include not only offering her the usual forms of encouragement and 'critical' approval, but also guarding her against seeing or hearing all outside criticism, the good as well as the bad" (58). Redinger then presents a letter to Sara Hennell in which Lewes expounds on her anxiety:

After the publication of Adam Bede Marian felt deeply the evil influences of talking and allowing others to talk to her about her writing. We resolved therefore to exclude everything as far as we could. No one speaks

about her books to her, but me: she sees no criticisms. The sum total of success is always ascertainable, and she is not asked to dwell on the details. Besides . . . there is a special reason in her case--it is that excessive diffidence which prevented her writing at all, for so many years, and would prevent her now, if I were not beside her to encourage her. A thousand eulogies would not give her the slightest confidence, but one objection would increase her doubts. (58)

While Eliot and Dickinson shared similar life experiences that had a profound effect on their female poetics, it is their themes and stylistic traits that present an even greater understanding of their shared affinities.

The Mother Tongue

Both Dickinson and Eliot seemed to be involved in a similar search for a mother tongue. Dickinson was often faulted for the strangeness of her style and form, yet I hope this study will help to establish that her difference was partly an attempt to forge a mother tongue in her poetry. Much recent feminist criticism has sought to focus on Dickinson as foremother creating a women's language. Perhaps Gilbert and Gubar sum it up best in their article "Sexual Linguistics": "Emily Dickinson is the foremother who articulates a fantasy about female linguistic power that empowers not only her verse but--magically--the voices of both her precursors and her successors" (85).

Jane Tompkins in "Me and My Shadow" quotes from Ursula Le Guin as to the quality of the "mother tongue":

The dialect of the father tongue that you and I learned best in college . . . only lectures. . . . Many believe this dialect--the expository and particularly scientific discourse--is the highest form of language, the true language, of which

all other uses of words are primitive vestiges It is the language of thought that seeks objectivity. . . . The essential gesture of the father tongue is not reasoning, but distancing--making a gap, a space between the subject or self and the object or other. . . . The father tongue is spoken from above. It goes one way. No answer is expected, or heard The mother tongue, spoken or written, expects an answer. It is conversation The mother tongue is language not as mere communication, but as relationship. It connects Its power is not in dividing but in binding. . . . We all know it by heart. John, have you got your umbrella? I think it's going to rain. Can you come play with me? (127)

One of the reasons Tompkins alludes to the mother tongue is to show how difficult it is for her as a trained scholar to write in it, because she has, like so many others, believed the mother tongue inferior and ignored it when writing criticism. To place this discussion of the mother tongue more firmly in Dickinson's American tradition, I wish to present the analogy of another great 19th-century American female writer, Margaret Fuller. Traditional critical evaluation of Fuller alleges that her conversation was much better than her written work, as a rather oblique way of denigrating her. Perhaps another way of evaluating Fuller is to say that she was more comfortable speaking because that mode was closer to the mother tongue, yet when she wrote she resorted to a father tongue at which she was not as adept. I would like to continue the analogy with Fuller in an attempt to recognize Dickinson's similar attitudes. The male members of that formerly exclusive club of the American Renaissance, particularly Emerson and Fuller's brother-in-law, Ellery Channing, felt uncomfortable with Fuller's earnestness and ego (Emerson dubbed her "mountainous me"). The conversations she held for women from 1839-1843, her interest in educating women the same way men were educated, all stemmed from her

desire to make women think for themselves, particularly extemporaneously in her salons. Her famous conversations were purposely not reliant on books; instead she wished to instill in her female coterie the ability to be critical thinkers of all the patriarchal learning they had inherited.³⁶ Thus, I would contend that she came to present a model of feminine talking and writing in an attempt to forge an alternative to other forms. This is not to say such modes are only the province of female writers, but to suggest that as a female Dickinson was more drawn to such modes.

Some of Dickinson's stylistic effects are attempts to recreate such elements of the mother tongue that LeGuin writes of (and Fuller exemplifies) in order to recreate language as conversation, perhaps female conversation. Dickinson's poetry often has immediacy and a way of including the reader, as well as other devices for miming speech, including stops and starts, repetition of phrase to denote hesitancy or to highlight certain words, the use of italics and quotation marks, dashes, and questions and exclamations, all of which approximate immediate conversation.

Poem 247 presents a number of these stylistic traits that Irigaray and Le Guin and others see as indications of female language.

Poem 247

What would I give to see his face?

I'd give--I'd give my life--of course--

But *that* is not enough!

Stop just a minute--let me think!

³⁶ Many of the ideas in this discussion are found in Chapter 8 of Ann Douglas's The Feminization of American Culture : "Margaret Fuller and the Disavowal of Fiction."

I'd give my biggest Bobolink!
 That makes *two--Him--and Life!*
 You know who "*June*" is--
 I'd give *her--*
 Roses a day from Zanzibar--
 And Lily tubes--like Wells--
 Bees--by the furlong--
 Straits of Blue
 Navies of Butterflies--sailed thro'--
 And dappled Cowslip Dells--

 That I have "shares" in Primrose "Banks"--
 Daffodil Dowries--spicy "Stocks"--
 Dominions--broad as Dew--
 Bags of Doubloons--adventurous Bees
 Brought me--from firmamental seas--
 And purple--from Peru--

 Now have I bought it--
 "Shylock"? Say!
 Sign me the Bond!
 "I vow to pay
 To Her--who pledges *this*
*One hour--*of her Sovereign's face"!

Ecstatic contract!

Niggard Grace!

My Kingdom's worth of Bliss!

While one might say that these stylistic elements of conversation could come from either a male or female poet, I suggest that Dickinson's theme coupled with the stylistics may very well qualify this as an example of conversation which she is identifying as female. Thus, it is no accident that there are two addresses in the poem, an implied lover and Shylock, for Dickinson is purposely recalling the great female speaker of Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice, Portia, whose speech to Shylock attempted to plead for another female-centered view of his contract. Shylock is an interlocutor who represents a more denotative language; like the quid pro quo language of law, for him there is no metaphoric valency for a pound of flesh. Dickinson, as sister and daughter to lawyers, often found her use of language as antithetical to theirs. Such attitudes are reflected in her poetry. Thus from a very real sense of her position in the family as different from the men in it, she often uses legal terminology in quite an arch and knowing manner to suggest her self-consciousness about using it, as well as her desire to subvert it a little.

Poem 247 is a paradigm poem on Dickinson's stylistic rendition of the conversational aspects of the mother tongue. The poem seems to be a primer on devices used to simulate speech and garner empathy from a reader. In order to do this the speaker repeatedly attempts to put words to thought (Dickinson in a letter remarked that "our words don't have thoughts everyday"). Such stylistic traits can be approached and clarified somewhat through the comments of Irigaray in "Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un" ("The Sex Which Is not One"). In her essay, using the very tone of language that she is dissecting as a female mode, Irigaray repeatedly says, "How can I say it another way?" "How can I say it?" underscoring her belief

that there is in women the fear of speaking correctly, of fearing that they do not have the words to make themselves heard as well as man have. At the ending crescendo of "when our lips speak together" Irigaray presents the moment of freedom for women from such restraints. As Poem 247 shows, Dickinson herself creates speakers who simulate such moments of hesitation and repetition to get it right, to make herself understood.³⁷

With LeGuin's and Irigaray's comments as a starting point and Fuller as one example, I believe that there should be a strong basis for a new critical evaluation of Dickinson's language. Her language has often been denigrated for its strangeness, its hermetic and personal tone and its dialogic and inquisitory form--all indicative of the mother tongue, though not exclusive to it. Poem 247, a tour de force poem that gives her "kingdom of bliss" in all its splendor, is one example of her pioneering efforts at creating one aspect of the mother tongue.

There are other elements that I wish to highlight concerning Dickinson's attempt to forge a mother tongue. A curious and particularly self-revelatory statement appeared among the "scraps" in Dickinson's work which might give an insight into her feelings for the memory of such language:

Two things I have lost with Childhood--the rapture of losing my shoe in
the Mud and going Home barefoot, wading for Cardinal flowers and the mothers
[sic] reproof, which was more for my sake than her weary own for she frowned
with a smile--now Mother and Cardinal flower are parts of a closed world--But
is that all I have lost--memory drapes her lips.³⁸

³⁷ A helpful discussion of this essay by Irigaray is in Domna C. Stanton's Difference on Trial which appears in Nancy K. Miller's The Poetics of Gender (157-83).

³⁸ Available at Harvard Houghton Library

The mud, the shoe, the blood red of the cardinal are all elements of memory for Dickinson, which suggest a fall from grace, replete with naked feet, which have been muddied by experience--and separation, a fall into language, perhaps, which feeds on memories, including the mother language and a pre-Oedipal unity with the mother, coupled with a sense of profound loss.

The pre-Oedipal has been much discussed recently, particularly in the works of Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva who focus on that nebulous place almost impossible to bring to life. Freud himself sees this prehistory of women as accounting for the dynamics between women and their fathers and husbands. Domna Stanton in "Difference on Trial: A Critique of the Maternal Metaphor in Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva" writes that for Cixous the pre-Oedipal phase "can serve as an originary point for the future feminine: 'As if there were, buried alive, between the breasts, under the clay curtains, in the chest, behind the fertile lungs, a woman in the cradle, hardly conceived, already formed, a living presence . . . daughter of woman, a female engendered without father . . . fruit of mother love, the kind that can be conceived naturally only in the regions of pre-oedipal culture' " (165).

The mother language of nature was something Dickinson tried to get back to and emulate through her poetry, for example in Poem 811:

We conjugate Her Skill
While She creates and federates
Without a syllable.

This poem recognizes the silent language of nature that uses no syllables like mere mortals, but that in the connotation of the word "federates" can become the original androgyne in merging female nature with male powers of ruling and ordering.

I believe Dickinson's desire to create a female language was similar to George Eliot's. In Mill on the Floss Eliot praises the "mother tongue of our imagination, that is laden with all the subtle inextricable associations the fleeting hours of our childhood left behind them" (38). Throughout her canon Eliot makes reference to the fact that no language can precisely "federate" (to borrow Dickinson's terms) female mind or experience and that her female characters sense their lack of full access to language and the concomitant power it brings. For example, Dorothea in Middlemarch rationalizes her decision to marry Casaubon, by suggesting what she really wishes to "marry" herself to--his language and learning--which she sees as entrée into a secret world, federated by men who are like Casaubon. The irony of her choice, of course, is so beautifully rendered by Eliot. Curiously, Dorothea is already tempering her desire to be in a man's world with a female-linked benevolence. She links her desire to do good in the world, i.e. her power to change it with acquiring such language:

I should learn to see the truth by the same light as great men have seen it. And then I should know what to do, when I got older. I should see how it was possible to lead a grand life here--now--in England. I don't feel sure about doing good in any way now; everything seems like going on a mission to a people whose language I don't know. (Ch. 3)

However, in a curiously metonymic way Dorothea believes that this language that she doesn't know is spoken by men, particularly men of learning like Casaubon. She takes on the marriage and begins to read Casaubon like a text that she too needs to use, like his own key to the mythologies, as her own key to unlocking the secrets of such male-dominated knowledge. In reading Casaubon like this ur-text, she puts her own hopes and aspirations between the lines, depicting Casaubon (and in reality her notion of language and culture) in rose-colored glasses.

Notice this passage from Eliot's omniscient narrator passing judgment on the courtship phase of the Dorothea-Casaubon relationship.

Dorothea's faith supplied all that Mr.Casaubon's words seemed to leave unsaid: what believer sees a disturbing omission or infelicity? The text, whether of prophet or of poet, expands for whatever we can put into it, and even his bad grammar is sublime. (Chapter 5)

Concomitant with this search for a new language, a common language as Adrienne Rich was to name it, is the avowal in both Dickinson and Eliot that as women writers they feel their tenuous position with regard to articulation of experience. This is not to say that only women writers feel this way, but to suggest that especially as women in the 19th century, they are more likely to feel this tenuous position. In fact, the very act of articulation will often misconstrue or misinterpret reality. Dickinson in one of her poems voices this belief that our feelings are so much more complex and ineffable than our words. She is writing about a certain feeling in April and she begins with "I cant tell you--but you feel it--" (Poem 65). We know that she is right because we have had such experiences where we just know something exists, although it can never be described adequately and precisely, no matter how great or inventive the writer. Dickinson represents these gaps and silences over and over in her poems, as many critics have shown. For example, she wisely backs down from even attempting to articulate the unutterable, using ellipsis or coy non-endings. Which critic has not felt the siren call of her last lines of "My life had stood-- a Loaded Gun--" with their inscrutable illogic: "Though I than He-- may longer live/ He longer must --than I--/ For I have but the power to kill,/ Without--the power to die--"? Another example occurs in a poem I discuss fully elsewhere, "Alone and in a circumstance," in which Dickinson's speaker just cuts herself off in mid-sentence at the end of the poem, rather than give an explanation. She offers silence rather than indict herself. In other

poems, the reader feels cheated or bereft by an ending without closure or simple statements that both tell everything and nothing, like several poems that end with a version of "This was a dream," the ultimate line in Poem 1670 "In Winter in my room." Perhaps it is her extremely elliptical style that best creates this approximation of silence, for in her abstemiousness with words, she may very well be attempting to emulate nature's voiceless voice.

Similarly, Eliot depicts the novelistic equivalent of Dickinson's supreme silences. When toward the end of Middlemarch, Dorothea's sister Celia asks how her union with Ladislaw came about, Dorothea replies: "If you knew how it came about, it would not seem wonderful to you." And when Celia importunes her again, "Can't you tell me?" Dorothea is emphatic: "No, dear, you would have to feel with me, else you would never know" (Ch. 84). This indicates that there are experiences that one can never know in any other way but intuitively and directly, without the bridge of words.

This seems a curious stance for two of the greatest writers of the 19th century. Yet, their quest to approximate such feeling-thought might be seen as peculiarly female in its source, if we recall some of the recent theories of female development presented by Nancy Chodorow and Carol Gilligan. Gilligan in In a Different Voice has articulated the symbiotic union of feeling and thought that she sees as a peculiarly woman-centered mode. This is not to say that such modes have not been used by males, but to suggest that they are more likely female-signified. Such thought-feeling has often been misinterpreted and denigrated as not hierarchical enough, yet, as Gilligan describes, Sandra Harding has shown that often there are alternative epistemologies to the traditional. There are women's ways of knowing that are more than the much maligned woman's intuition but that rely on an interplay between thought and feeling, or as Harding terms it, a relational and contextual "reciprocal knowing" (153). Dickinson and Eliot seem to have been describing such experience in their works.

The representation of mothers and motherhood in the works of George Eliot and Emily Dickinson may also suggest the matrilineal legacy of language. The theme of mothers and motherhood represents the difficult and complex relationship women writers have with language. It is portrayed in both writers in several ways: sometimes the mother-child relationship is absent; other times it is dysfunctional, and at still others, it is quite fulfilling, if only as an element of wish-fulfillment.

The role of the mother in relation to a search for a female language should not be overlooked. In Eliot's novels we are struck immediately by the recurrent theme of dysfunctional or non-existent mother-daughter relationships. Gwendolyn in Daniel Deronda sees her mother as gratuitous, at most, a rather ineffectual relation whom she rarely listens to or accepts. Dorothea in Middlemarch is orphaned as the novel begins, and her identification with her mother is vague at best. In Mill on the Floss, Maggie is shown to be at great odds with her mother throughout her formative years; she and her mother are constantly battling over Maggie's deviation from the norm of traditional femalehood. All of these characters have a non-existent or unsatisfying relationship with their mothers, and as a result seem always to be feeling alone in their lives with no earlier model to follow. There is little bond between them, including the bond of language.

In Middlemarch, the Eliot narrator presents insights into her philosophy as a woman artist dealing with relationships that reflect the earliest relationship with the mother. The following passage suggests that Eliot was concerned with the literal and figurative role of the mother in all our lives, and the role language plays in substituting for the lost or absent mother.

We are all of us born in moral stupidity, taking the world as an udder to feed our supreme selves: Dorothea had early begun to emerge from that stupidity, but yet it had been easier to her to imagine how she would devote herself to Mr.Casaubon, and become wise and strong in his strength and

wisdom, than to conceive with that distinctness which is no longer reflection but feeling --an idea wrought back to the directness of sense, like the solidity of objects --that he had an equivalent centre of self, whence the lights and shadows must always fall with a certain difference. (Ch. 21)

There is a tone here I can't quite place, an admixture of anger verging on distaste for those who (like Eliot and her characters?) were seeking mothers, metonymically represented as the udder. Does not the early relationship with the mother give to the child a "supreme sense of self" that gives him/her a strength that can conquer the vicissitudes of life? This passage presents a parable of human development, in fact one which is shown throughout Eliot's novels to be an essentially female model. In simplest terms, some developmental psychologists describe early development of the child as undifferentiated from the mother (the nurturer). The child sees her mother's breast as a part of herself; in essence, for the young child there is no recognition of a separate self (the world is an "udder" which the child experiences as part of herself.) When a child is hungry and cries, she receives nurturance from the mother, and sees her as an extension of self, there only to satisfy her demands. Normal human development will eventuate in the separation stage (Jacques Lacan calls it the mirror stage). In this stage, the child is fascinated by her own image in the mirror, and begins to see the self as separate from the mother and the world beyond. At this point, a separate ego is being nurtured. For the male child, such separation from the mother is easier since he is already different sexually, as psychologists from Freud on have described.

However, in the female paradigm of development, it is much more difficult for the female child to separate from the mother, since she is so alike because of her sex. Thus, this is reflected in the passage here with Dorothea; she has not made this leap and has displaced the

need for the mother on the whole world. She sees the world as the great “udder” still and her husband Casaubon as a vehicle for nurturing her, albeit intellectually. Ironically, in trying to lose her ego (i.e. merging with Casaubon, she does after all say at one point to the Milton-like Casaubon “I want to be your eyes”), Dorothea is actually an egoist, seeing the world in terms of herself only. In Eliot’s novels, it is often her female character’s movement toward a man (a merging) which is deadening for the character. For Eliot, there must be separation to gain autonomy and then the wisdom of learning others “have an equivalent center of self.” Another example occurs in the Brother and Sister Sonnets. In that sequence Eliot’s speaker envisions her idea of the sublime as a childlike heaven in which the little sister is basking in the light of her relationship with her brother. Again the identity is through the older male with the female merging with him.

Such a strategy in her writing, given Eliot’s own life, is fraught with anxiety and ambivalence, for, as strong as she was in her pursuit of her goals, Eliot was often pulled in her own life toward the very merging she describes as destructive in her characters. Her early relationships with her brother and father, John Chapman, Herbert Spencer, and even George Henry Lewes, depict a woman who needed the recognition of intellectual men to authenticate her own views. Some of her actions depict a woman who is as ardent in her passions as her character Dorothea. She lived for a time with John Chapman in the same house with his wife and mistress, and also at the time had agreed to edit The Westminster Review without any credit. Her relationship with Herbert Spencer was thwarted because he could not envision a woman like Evans as his lifelong companion. Eliot’s letters to Spencer, which were kept secret until 1985, reveal a woman who is writing letters very similar in tone and content to the Dickinson Master Letters. According to A.S. Byatt in her Introduction to George Eliot: Selected Essays and Poems, those letters reveal Eliot as alternately passionate and self-abasing,

beseeking his attention (xii). Other events in her life attest to this intense need for love and affection: less than a year after the death of Lewes, the mainstay of over three decades, George Eliot married the young Cross. She writes an embarrassingly painful letter to him, "The sun it shines so cold, so cold, when there are no eyes to look love on me" (*Letters* 6: 211-12). (This is quite similar to the Daisy image of the woman in Dickinson's Master letters, who like her flower-namesake, the Daisy, or day's eye, needs to follow the sun, just as a woman must follow the more powerful man).

While in her novels Eliot seems to turn a distanced critical eye on her female characters, particularly in their desire to merge with whatever represents the "udder" or mother figure in their worlds, in her poetry it appears that such distance is missing. In a rather late poem in the Eliot canon entitled "Self and Life" there is an almost symbiotic commingling of the child and the mother. The speakers, "Self" and "Life," seem to reenact the drama of early female bonding and then abrupt separation from the mother in such traumatic terms that it leads one to conclude that perhaps Eliot's own memories of her mother's faulty nurturance for her were at work here, as well as the somewhat suppressed anger at the plight of women who were literally without role models ("mothers") literary or otherwise. "Life" is the speaker in the second stanza:

I was thy warmth upon thy mother's knee
 When light and love within her eyes were one;
 We laughed together by the laurel-tree,
 Culling warm daisies 'neath the sloping sun;

 We heard the chickens' lazy croon,
 Where the trellised woodbines grew,

And all the summer afternoon
 Mystic gladness o'er thee threw.
 Was it person? Was it thing?
 Was it touch or whispering?
 It was bliss and it was I:
 Bliss was what thou knew'st me by.

Life is portrayed as bliss in this worry-free early bonding with the mother. However, the third stanza breaks up this idyllic union between mother and child, the mother, the earliest representative of what Emerson termed the "Not-me" or "Life" as Eliot chooses to define it.

Soon I knew thee more by Fear
 And sense of what was not,
 Haunting all I held most dear;
 Ardour, cheated with alloy,
 Wept the more for dreams of joy.

In this ontological parable, it appears that Eliot makes a case for the female-artist who wishes to get back to the blissful Edenic state of union with the mother through a similar union in her writing with the "mother tongue of our imagination" (*Middlemarch* 38). Like Dickinson, Eliot was fully concerned with the theme of life's being "cheated with alloy." Dickinson wrote in the poem "Of Death I try to think like this --" of that "dismay which is the zest of sweetness."

Such reference to language associations from early childhood in Eliot and a similar interest on Dickinson's part might be approached through the critical work of the French psychoanalytic feminists. Much of their work is based on their reading of Lacan. Broadly

outlined such theorists as Irigaray, Cixous and Kristeva develop a basis for understanding women's language or *écriture féminine* as stemming from a pre-Oedipal, pre-linguistic, pre-symbolic space, where the female child enjoys a unity with the mother.

Psycho-linguistic theory in broad terms begins from the perspective of woman's "fall" into language, or the symbolic event of women's lapse into culture, into society. From a feminist/psychological perspective I wish to trace such a fall." In psycho-linguistic development theory, children generally take on language for two functions -- to declare separation from the mother and to express themselves. This is a conflicting role, for, on the one hand, using words enables the child to communicate with parents and all of society eventually, but it also allows for separation and independence (in Dickinson's words from her most famous poem on the choices she made as a female poet, Poem 508, "to stop being theirs"). Such a dual role for language, fraught with anxiety, and I contend even more anxiety producing for women, is played out in both Dickinson and Eliot.

The complexity of Eliot's notion of female autonomy and intellectual greatness stems then not only from her own ambivalence toward her mother, but is also a reflection of her society's view of women. For the female artist, the conflict between women's traditional sphere and her need to create is played out in the poetic drama Armstrong. The conflict portrayed is similar to that of the poet-speaker in Dickinson's poems on the artistic life, for example, "I would not paint a picture." In Eliot's Armstrong there is a conflict between female genius and the conventional female life. In it the singer rejects her lover's view that marriage is woman's highest fulfillment; then she loses her voice, and is urged by her maid and her teacher Leo to devote herself to others. This loss and her admonition to expiate her "sins" suggests the punishment awaiting those women who reject their traditional roles.

How does Eliot's relationship with her own mother affect her attitudes in the novels and the poetry? Ruby V. Redinger in George Eliot: The Emergent Self describes the mother-daughter relationship in some detail. As a very young child, Mary Anne Evans was aware of her mother as both ill (from a gradual waning after the birth of Mary Anne) and then absent (the young child was sent to school before the age of five). When she was older she was called home from school to nurse her mother in her final illness. Redinger assesses the impact on Eliot in the following way:

Her earliest guilt was probably reactivated by her growing awareness of her role in her mother's prolonged illness, and then still more consciously reinforced by her being called home. . . to nurse her mother during her final illness. Even the most loving nursing of a parent is an experience which releases unsuspected hostility in far more normally balanced individuals than she was. This new impetus to guilt would have reinforced her ambivalence for her mother, and the conflict must have been augmented yet again during her life with her father, when as his housekeeper she set herself up (consciously or not) as Christiana's rival (43).

All the Eliot biographies affirm the difficult relationship she had with her distant, sickly mother, whose death during Eliot's girlhood created unresolved feelings that remained with her throughout her life and were certainly evident in the themes of her work.

Dickinson plays out similar conflicts with the mother in her poetry by her need to disassociate from her. Dickinson's own words to Higginson, "I never had a mother," indicate that, like Eliot, she appeared to have felt little identification with or closeness to her mother. However, when Mrs. Dickinson was dying, her daughter's letters reveal a closeness that seemed

PLEASE NOTE

**Page(s) missing in number only; text follows.
Filmed as received.**

page 176

University Microfilms International

to stem from her adoption of the nurturing role toward her mother. Dickinson's complex attitude toward her mother may have significance for her concept of the mother tongue and her articulation of it.

To some critics the overarching movement of the Dickinson canon comes from her complex feelings about the mother's role. This is particularly so for such critics as Barbara Clark Mossberg in When a Daughter Is a Writer. Mossberg asserts that Dickinson's letters and poems describe an absent, weak, uncaring mother who is not the role model the young 19th-century girl-poet needs or wants. Yet given the confines of her society, Dickinson's mother was no aberration. Mossberg makes a detailed case for Dickinson's concomitant disavowal of her mother (read "typical woman") in her struggle to become an autonomous poet. Mossberg's examination of the concept of motherhood is long overdue, yet rather than relying heavily on biographical readings of the poems, I merely wish to suggest that, as with Eliot, Dickinson's complex symbology for mother and what she represents has many sources.

Dickinson is preoccupied in many poems with home, including the nightmare-like dislocation poems of her being expelled from home or losing her way home. Perhaps they are symbolic of the lost mother's face. The poem I will discuss next shares affinities with Maggie's story, too, in The Mill on the Floss. The poem's events remind us of the scene when Maggie returns to her home late in the narrative. Ironically, she is turned away from her home, not by her mother, who has been so neglectful of her throughout the novel, but by her brother Tom. (This is not so curious, since in her novel Eliot has been using Tom as a mother-substitute for Maggie all along.) The relevant scene occurs after her "disgrace," when she comes back to her brother Tom after her fateful abortive elopement with Stephen and says to him: "I am come back to you -- I am come home." Home is supposed to be a place of acceptance, and particularly for 19th-century woman the place they are expected to be; however, from Tom there is no welcome back into her

home. In his male definition of the word "home" it is a place of comfort for females, only if they do not transgress, particularly sexually, as he believes Maggie has done.

Here is Dickinson's poem which shares striking affinities with Maggie's situation.

Poem 609

I Years had been from Home

And now before the Door

I dared not enter, lest a Face

I never saw before

Stare stolid into mine

And ask my Business there --

"My Business but a Life I left

Was such remaining there?"

I leaned upon the Awe __

I lingered with Before __

The Second like an Ocean rolled

And broke against my ear --

I laughed a crumbling Laugh

That I could fear a door

Who Consternation compassed

And never winced before.

I fitted to the Latch
 My Hand, with trembling care
 Lest back the awful Door should spring
 And leave me in the Floor --

Then moved my Fingers off
 As cautiously as Glass
 And held my ears, and like a Thief
 Fled gasping from the House --

Poem 609 depicts an internalization of the aftermath of personal change and how it obliterates the former notion of home. It is as if the speaker is punishing herself for moving away from the expectations and beliefs of the original family, the home in the poem. It may also reflect Dickinson's own fears at figuratively leaving the home (or subverting it "Vesuvius at home") in order to become this autonomous person, this female poet. Stylistically, it is a poem of silences and missing pieces, just as surely as it presents a missing life, a lost place. In it Dickinson suggests the horror of alienation from home, through a nightmare-like quality of knocking at the door of the home and not finding what she expected (the mother's face which is also her own?). In the part of the poem left unarticulated, the part we must "fit to the latch" (or the key to the poem that it is rather like a dream, a nightmare) is the fear that the opened door would reveal a stranger who reflects back upon her own strangeness. In fact, within that image there is the suggestion that the face expected is also her own face, as in a dream where we are

both participant and viewer, object and subject, so that in opening the door and expecting the face in the mirror (the Lacanian mirrored mother, perhaps?) she sees a stranger.

"Home" for the 19th-century female was a loaded word, whose connotations included sanctity and insularity. Whatever added distinctions Dickinson brought to it, and there were several, it is important to understand its cultural context, particularly its American cultural context. Nineteenth-century America was even more reactionary in its views than 19th-century England. The cult of domesticity fostered the notion of the home as the place which staved off the encroaching tentacles of politics and materialism. Even higher education for girls offered at Dickinson's own Mt. Holyoke was problematic, both preparing young women for the world, but simultaneously denigrating it and valorizing the home and married life as the most acceptable place for women. There was at the Academy a typical insularity which sought to shut out the world from its students and to create a homelike atmosphere acting in loco parentis. In the school recorder's journal for Mt. Holyoke, Dickinson's college, an entry dated March 3, 1848 during the Mexican-American War indicates some regret at the forced insularity: "We know little of the political world . . . I sometimes think too little."³⁹

Another American woman who was writing at the same time as Dickinson was also well aware of the pull of the home and society's views on its sanctity, particularly for women, Margaret Fuller. Before her great escape from home to Europe, where through her involvement in war and politics, she became the exception that proved the rule, Fuller writes in her diary about the nagging guilt that she has for leaving home and seeing world. The guilt seems to come from the feeling that by this move, she might somehow have been denying her womanhood. Another female American writer of the same era, Alice James, the agoraphobic sister of Henry

³⁹ As quoted in Jay Leyda *Days* (I: 139).

and William, seemed to be so aware of the pull of home that she was unable to move from it at all; in fact, from a combination of physical and mental distress, she never left her bed. In reflecting on these other American female writers and their strong reactions to home, I wish to place Dickinson in context to establish her on some kind of continuum and to suggest how such notions of home colored the poetry.

No student of Dickinson is unaware of how important home, particularly the Homestead itself, was to her. Rarely traveling, except on brief visits of necessity to Philadelphia, Boston, and Washington D.C., she made of her home a place of origins for her life of the mind. In this, she may have been closest to Thoreau who boasted of traveling extensively in Concord. She too would boast of her power to travel in time and space through her idiosyncratic poetry without ever leaving Amherst in her famous words: "I dwell in Possibility/ a fairer house than prose."

Poem 609 is interesting in that it shares similarities with two poems of Dickinson's, 276 and 1670, which have strong sexual overtones. This is particularly integral to my purposes here because I wish to suggest how, for both Eliot's Maggie and Dickinson's speakers, the dissociation from home (and from mother) became a nexus for their move toward sexuality, paralleling the expulsion from the Garden of Eden, and its simultaneous stigmatizing of the nakedness of its inhabitants. While Poem 609 indicates alienation from home, Poem 1670 becomes even more personal and closer to the poet's home (or psyche): it focuses on her room, her bed. The statement "not with him at home" suggests the displacement of feelings one is unused to or uncomfortable with onto a physical place, the "not-home."

In winter in my room

I came upon a Worm

Pink lank and warm

But as he was a worm
And worms presume
Not quite with him at home
Secured him by a string
To something neighboring
And went along.

A Trifle afterward
A thing occurred
I'd not believe it if I heard
But state with creeping blood
A snake with mottles rare
Surveyed my chamber floor
In features as the worm before
But ringed with power
The very string with which
I tied him -- too
When he was mean and new
That string was there --

I shrank -- "How fair you are!"
Propitiation's claw --
"Afraid he hissed
Of me?"

"No cordiality" --

He fathomed me --

Then to a Rhythm *Slim*

Secreted in his Form

As Patterns swim

Projected him.

That time I flew

Both eyes his way

Lest he pursue

Nor ever ceased to run

Till in a distant Town

Towns on from mine

I set me down

This was a dream --

According to Alice Hall Petry, this poem may have been prompted by Dickinson's reading of the 1861 Oliver Wendell Holmes's novel Elsie Venner, which is a "psychological study of a genetic aberration {which} recounts how a pregnant woman, attacked in her home by a rattlesnake, gives birth to a child with ophidian characteristics" ("Teaching Dickinson to the Fine Arts Major" 58). Such a suggestion seems convincing in that Dickinson often used her reading as an impetus for writing, and this story had just the right mix of strangeness and sexuality to suit her proclivities.

Before beginning the discussion, I would like to recall an earlier use of the snake in Dickinson's letters which will help to establish its accrued meaning as a topos in her poetry. The snake, obviously, is a loaded term because of its Biblical overtones. It may be that Dickinson identified with the serpent, perhaps valorizing him, as Milton did as a grand weaver of lies. For Dickinson, such "lies" are the stuff of her poetry. In a letter dated January 29th, 1850 to her friend Abiah Root, Dickinson links herself as a weaver of tales with the snake. She has just finished writing a long tale about a cold personified as a "little creature" who wouldn't leave her side, even sharing her bed. Then she remarks, half-playfully to Abiah:

They are flowers of speech, they both *make*, and *tell* deliberate falsehoods, avoid them as the snake, and turn aside as from the Bottle snake, and I don't *think* you will be harmed. Honestly tho', a snake bite is a serious matter, and there can't be too much said, or done about it. The big serpent bites the deepest, and we get so accustomed to its bites that we don't mind about them. "Verily I say unto you fear *him*." (Letter 31)

With this insightful letter as a gloss I wish to suggest a reading for the poem. It directly relates the loss of home (and its link with childhood and mother) with a movement into sexuality, with clear affinities to Eve's relationship with the snake in the Garden of Eden. This encounter with the snake in her room begins benignly enough with a worm, yet ignoring it (ignoring sexuality) results in the worm's transformation. Repression breeds even stronger images of sexuality and maleness as the snake looms over the later stanzas of the poem impervious to the "string" the speaker tries to contain him with (perhaps a reference to the sewing of the poems in her famous poem about the spider/spinner). Fear of male sexuality (the phallic images are almost too obvious) and all the overtones of literary power he represents, leaves her fleeing from

her room and indeed her town. Again the Dickinson speaker is asserting sexuality and literary power and then fleeing from it, showing her complexly ambivalent view of both.

This poem has curious affinities with Poem 276 on another night visitor to her room, perhaps the good twin of this snake.

Poem 276

Many a phrase has the English language --

I have heard but one --

Low as the laughter of the Cricket,

Loud, as the Thunder's Tongue --

Murmuring, like old Caspian Choirs,

When the Tide's a lull --

Saying itself in new inflection --

Like a Whippoorwill --

Breaking in bright Orthography

On my simple sleep --

Thundering its Prospective --

Till I stir, and weep --

Not for the Sorrow, done me --

But the push of Joy --

Say it again, Saxon!

Hush -- Only to me!

The visitor in this poem is identified as "Saxon," whispering his golden sounds as the poet reminds us "only to me." That young woman in her room longs for the erotic visitor, representing the Anglo-Saxon language. In the earlier poem, the snake does not speak; instead he is inchoate (he "hisses" and he fathoms and he looks at the floor.) In short there is no human ability to speak or he does not speak to her, which perhaps suggests the reason the speaker shrinks from him, offering "propitiation." This feeble attempt at flattery is seen through by the intelligent yet mute snake. Why is this night vision so dark and fear-producing, while the Saxon in the other poem is welcomed, although both are clearly sexualized/literary visitants? Perhaps it is that this snake/visitant is pure power, pure male power, that simply does not speak to her. As an aspect of the artist-poet, this female speaker recognizes the snake is moving only to his own rhythm and secretes no inspiration for the female in her, only a form which defined him and him alone.

In Poem 276 "Many a phrase has the English language" presents a clear acceptance of the union of male and female in her love affair with language. In this poem language itself, in its personification as a marauding Saxon (Anglo-Saxon language), comes to her in her sleep. Language breaks into her dreams in a sublimely ecstatic moment (similar perhaps to the ecstatic moments that the St. Theresa of Eliot's Preface to Middlemarch enjoyed).

The English language, personified as a lover, has ravished her in her bed, come to her like a marauding Saxon in the pre-history of linguistic birth. The event is personified as a kind of sublime moment of unity with the life force of language. Language here becomes the music of the universe, the reverse of a lullaby, since its reverberations waken her in her bed. There is also reference to the Johannine Gospel, which Dickinson used in so many of her poems about

language: "The Word made Flesh." Here is another Annunciation where the poet, like Mary, becomes a vessel for the "word that dwelt among us." It is a singular election, for this narrator is privileged to hear a harmonious blending of all of nature's sounds, from the cricket to the tide, to the thunder and the bird. It is so peculiarly Dickinson for the "push of joy" to be the cause of her weeping "not for the Sorrow, done me."

This is Dickinson writing from the gendered body, using traditional sex roles of female/speaker, ravished by the male/language to describe her encounter with language. It is important that she chose the word "Saxon" rather than "Anglo" from the roots of the English language (Anglo-Saxon). Initially, at least, she conveys the sense of the forced marauding nature of this experience. Her whole body is involved in the experience, which becomes a secret ("hush") and occurs at night, when Dickinson herself had the time and inclination to do her writing. It is of further significance that this poem might be suggesting the language of dreams, which has its own peculiar language, different from the language of daylight, literally breaking into her sleep with its "bright orthography," much more powerful than normal everyday language, and perhaps closer to the wordless mother language of an Edenic past. Much of Dickinson's poetry seems to mime dream syntax, perhaps in her need to separate herself from male centered language, the language of everyday, to find the way back to a hidden, subconscious language whose roots go back to a mother-child dyad in the womb, the dream of a common language, as Adrienne Rich was to put it a century later. Perhaps, then, this poem may be seen in that light, as not only borrowing images from the sexual act, but also the birth of a new language ("the push of joy") whose newborn cries signal a unity with the cries of Mother nature catalogued in the poem.

In Poem 1670 "In Winter in my room", the speaker fears the visitor and makes a quick exit from her room, her house, and town, desperate measures for a poet-speaker to whom home

was everything. That poem showed the dark side of life, whether sexuality or the source of poetic inspiration as an overwhelming force from which to flee. In one of her most controversial and intriguing poems, "My Life had stood a loaded gun" the intent also seems to be to explore the male side of inspiration, the explosive, volcanic, gunlike thing that is her battle with language.

My Life had stood--a Loaded Gun--
 In Corners--till a Day--
 The Owner passed--identified--
 And carried Me away--
 And now We roam in Sovereign Woods--
 And now We hunt the Doe--
 And every time I speak for Him--
 The Mountains straight reply--
 And do I smile, such cordial light
 Upon the Valley glow--
 It is as a Vesuvian face
 Had let its pleasure through--
 To foe of His--I'm deadly foe--
 None stir the second time--
 On whom I lay a Yellow Eye--
 Or an emphatic Thumb--
 Though I than He--must longer live
 He longer must--than I--
 For I have but the power to kill,
 Without--the power to die--

In this poem Dickinson's speaker remains curiously untouched by the horrors; in fact, we lose the female persona whose life formerly was lived in the shadows and corners. Instead we find her transmogrified in a later stanza as a hunter, perhaps androgynous, who will even kill the female animal, the doe, and will separate herself from the maternal side of the animal world (in this case the feathers of the female duck, the eiderdown in a pillow). It is as if the three poems have moved on a continuum from a merging of the male and female, to a fleeing from the male, to a total acceptance of the violent male-signified source of inspiration.

For both Eliot and Dickinson, embedded in the search for the mother tongue is a similar drive toward naming. Perhaps this single-mindedness reflects the desire of the female poet to practice and refine language and make it into their mother tongue, by renaming and redefining everything within the poet/speaker's compass. This constant preoccupation with naming is evident in so many of Dickinson's poems which are focused on definition, particularly of states of feeling or attitudes that are considered unfathomable or that have been taken for granted. Many of her poems begin and/or end with definitions, while the copulative verb "to be" forms the bulk of her verbs.

In Eliot, too, there is a similar need to redefine experience. This is particularly so in her female bildungsroman The Mill in the Floss in which Eliot seems to re-define reality from the point of view of the underclass, the young female growing up without a legacy to follow, Maggie. There is also a desire to name things as precisely and scientifically as possible. It is clear that such a desire for scientific exactitude has its origins in science just as Dickinson's was nurtured by her reading of Edward Hitchcock's scientific/religious works. In the summer of 1856 while on a naturalizing expedition with George Henry Lewes, she writes of this: "I never before longed so much to know the names of things as during this visit to Ilfracombe. The desire is part of a

tendency that is now constantly growing in me to escape from all vagueness and inaccuracy into the daylight of distinct vivid ideas. The mere fact of naming an object tends to give definiteness to our conception of it -- we have then a sign that at once calls up in our minds the distinctive qualities which mark out for us that particular object from all others" (Intro. Mill, 16).

Eliot seems to want to change prevailing norms in her concept of redefinition and renaming by changing the perspective to that of the female, the disenfranchised. When the perspective changes we get a slightly comical irreverent stance. This clearly occurs with much of Dickinson's poetry from the point of view of the "supposed person" of the young naive girl. In Eliot's work, too, when she has, for example, the young naive but very intelligent Maggie take on certain givens in her society and redefine them there is both trouble and fun.

Naming experiences/redefining them or criticizing the accepted terms relates to a larger issue that these two writers share: the re-defining of patriarchal myths and literary history. While it may be true that all writers attempt this re-definition, it seems that Dickinson and Eliot share close affinities. Dickinson, in this stanza from Poem 3, shows early promise of the ease with which she could poke fun at established patriarchal myths and languages:

"Sic transit gloria mundi,"

"How doth the busy bee,"

"Dum vivimus vivamus,"

I stay mine enemy!

Oh "veni, vidi, vici!"

Oh caput cap-a-pie!

And oh "memento mori"

When I am far from thee! . . .

Eliot in The Mill on the Floss takes on the Roman and Greek myths, both through an examination of the Latin language itself, as well as those warrior stories that perpetuate rigid male-female stereotypes.

In Maggie's first visit with her brother Tom at school, she encounters his Latin grammar, and makes interesting deductions, all from the perspective of language and gender. with some interesting results. She learns the basic sexual bifurcation of the language, through the endings that change, as she reads the rules of Eton's grammar with Tom: "The names of trees will be feminine, such as elm, cypress, cedar."⁴⁰ She notices, too, that even the examples in the text are sexist, for she remarks that she dislikes the astronomers who hate women, referring to an actual example taken from the 1831 Eton grammar.⁴¹ Finally, she shows her desire to take over Latin with her own linguistic prowess in the scene where she is asserting herself against Tom's allegations that as a girl she can never know Latin:

"I know what Latin is very well, said Maggie, confidently. "Latin's a language. There are Latin words in the Dictionary. There's 'bonus,' a 'gift.'"

"Now, you're just wrong there, Miss Maggie!" said Tom, secretly astonished. "You think you're very wise! But 'bonus' means good, as it happens-- 'bonus, bona, bonum.'"

⁴⁰ This appears in the Penguin edition (676) under "Explanatory Note 53," which discusses the scene (219).

⁴¹ This is explained in " Explanatory Note 55" (219).

“Well, that’s no reason why it shouldn’t mean ‘gift,’” said Maggie, stoutly. “It may mean several things. Almost every word does.” (214)

Yet it is the criticism of patriarchal myths that is one of the most important parts of Maggie’s encounter with a “boy’s” education. The scene is dissected by Nancy K. Miller in Getting Personal in her Chapter entitled “Philoctetes’ Sister: Feminist Literary Criticism and the New Misogyny.” The title is taken from Maggie’s discussion with her brother Tom and Philip about the Roman warrior Philoctetes. The immediate scene of this discussion takes place when Maggie is visiting young Tom at the home of his tutor. Tom has cut himself with a sword re-enacting the Greek “fighting stories” he is studying, and Philip in a palliative gesture enchants the brother and sister with another man who hurt his foot like Tom, Philoctetes, who as the myth goes was left by his comrades on a desert island because he was annoying them with his howls of pain. Maggie’s reaction is to question whether “Philoctetes had a sister, and why she didn’t go with him on the desert island and take care of him” (Mill 259).

Miller’s purpose in retelling this incident is to emphasize Maggie’s (and by implication Eliot’s) desire to place women as subjects of inherited (and as in this case male-dominated) narratives. She writes: “Maggie imagines a sister for Philoctetes and inserts herself in a story otherwise notable as Wilson [Edmund Wilson in The Wound and the Bow] points out, for being ‘devoid of feminine interest’ in order to place herself as a subject of cultural narrative” (103).

Analogous to this shared reliance on naming is an epigrammatic, not quite sententious attitude on the part of both writers which aims to present epigrammatic truths. This is not to say that this is only the province of female writers, but to suggest that both Eliot and Dickinson seemed to favor the form. They may be emphasizing and reworking such an epigram form in order to become more comfortable with it as women writers. For example, in Dickinson there are

so many poems that begin or end with short pithy statements of fact like, “Your thoughts don’t have words everyday” or “Hope is the thing with feathers.”⁴² In studying Dickinson many college students note these slogan-like bits of wisdom to be singled out and taken to heart, and, in fact, they also cherish them because they are often the easiest thing to understand about Dickinson’s poetry. Interspersed throughout Eliot’s work are the same kinds of epigrams; in fact, during her lifetime, as described in Haight’s biography, a book of wise sayings by Eliot was published, gleaned from her fiction and non-fiction. The author was an adoring young man from Scotland , Alexander Main, who edited Wise, Witty, and Tender Sayings of George Eliot.⁴³ Here are some examples from Middlemarch in Ch. 21: “We are all of us born in moral stupidity, taking the world as an udder to feed our supreme selves” or in Chapter 32: “The troublesome ones in a family are usually either the wits or the idiots.”

I believe that both writers in these similar pursuits seem to be trying out the hieratic mode here in their epigrammatic wit, perhaps taking on that rather male province and subverting it a little. For example, Dickinson’s statements deliberately subvert sententiousness by her use of homely almost comical tropes, offering instead simple vernacular almost childlike circumlocutions (i.e. “the thing with feathers” instead of bird). Perhaps also using her own definition rather than the accepted nomenclature “bird” says something about her desire not to use the ordinary established language but another of her own fashioning.

⁴² This last has recently appeared on New York City subway cars, as part of the MTA’s desire to put, as their slogan says, “Poetry in Motion.”

⁴³ Janice Carlisle in “Reading Middlemarch, Then and Now” discusses this book and explains how the editor was called the “gusher” by Eliot’s publisher Blackwood, and was tolerated by Eliot because she needed the “opium exhaled by an adoring reader” (103).

Women's Role's/ Women's Lives

Both Eliot and Dickinson were ambivalent about woman's role and the woman writer's role in the 19th century. In Eliot this ambivalence takes the form of an intense interest in the social construction of gender, which is evident particularly in Maggie, who in the semi-autobiographical Mill on the Floss is alternately misunderstood and ignored in her provincial society. Such a scrutiny of the travails gender imposes continues in her dissection of marriage, inheritance, and female ambition in Middlemarch. Also, as a critic Eliot searched for women writers who were not afraid to be female in every sense of the word, while she offered scathing criticism for "silly women novelists" of her day. In her criticism for the Westminster Review entitled "Woman in France" Eliot wrote of the success of French female writers who, unlike their British contemporaries, had the courage and the cultural acceptance to write as women, proving that there is gender in literature. Eliot remarks: "With a few remarkable exceptions, our own feminine literature is made up of books which could have been better written by men; books which have the same relation to literature in general, as academic prize poems have to poetry; when not a feeble imitation they are usually an absurd exaggeration of the masculine style, like the swaggering gait of bad actresses in male attire."⁴⁴ Eliot's own strategy of taking on a male pseudonym and using her ironic detached voice to delineate both male and female characters omnisciently might be seen, ironically, as a paradigm for "the good actress in male attire" she remarks on. Perhaps one reason this appears to be so is that Eliot both in her own day and, later by certain feminist critics in the late 20th century, was misread and misrepresented. Her guise of a male pseudonym set in motion another version of the Emperor's new clothes. In a review of Adam Bede that first appeared in the Economist in 1859, the reviewer extols the male mind of

⁴⁴ As quoted in Ruth Redinger's George Eliot: The Emerging Self (283).

the novelist as against the narrow, unreal and less practical female novelist's: his reviewer's appreciation is ironically counterpointed with Eliot herself who wrote of the need above for a break from imitation of the male style.

Novel-writing has of late years devolved so largely upon women, that it is quite rare to meet with a well-matured and carefully executed novel by a man of genius. In novels written by women, the exaltation and predominance of one class of feelings, and the slight and inadequate treatment of all that lies beyond their immediate influence, make even the best of them seem kind of *Saturnalia* of love and the domestic affections, the practical business part of it being either slurred over or ludicrously misapprehended. Novels written by men are nearly always more in keeping with the actual world, have a wider outlook, and embrace a greater personal sort of knowledge to be gained from them; when they are original and clever and artistically constructed, they are more delightful as well as more profitable than *the best novels by women*. [italics mine]. *Adam Bede* is one of the best of this class of novels.⁴⁵

The significant aspect of this issue is that Eliot used her male pseudonym to hide her identity and her gender from the reading public, at least until as she could become established and give the lie to such reviewers. That reviewer represents a critical reception which would have been likely to denigrate women writers and would not have given such praise to Eliot's novel if it had been known to have been written by a woman, particularly one who flaunted the code of 19th-century womanhood in so many ways. Both the disguised authorship of the novels

⁴⁵ As quoted in Carolyn Heilbrun's Toward a Recognition of Androgyny (73-4).

and the anonymity of her non-fiction work must have been a strong burden to bear for Eliot. Her biographers describe which of her contemporaries guessed her identity and the debacle over the male author who supposedly authored Adam Bede.⁴⁶ Although recapping all of this is not my purpose here, I do believe that Eliot must have felt the incredible burden of her gender both in preventing the public from linking her with the early fiction and also in dealing with societal ostracizing, at least in the early years of her live-in “wife without the sign” (to borrow Dickinson’s phrase from another poem on this theme) relationship with Lewes. She, however, dealt with it by shaping her critical reception by becoming George Eliot.

Marriage, too, is a role for women that appears in Eliot’s work and reflects on her life experiences. In her novels it often becomes a means of pointing out the inequalities in the male-female relationship. There are several strong reasons for Eliot’s distrust of marriage from the woman’s point of view. One is the sad example in her own immediate family of her older sister Chrissey’s situation. Her being poor, and married with many children was a source of profound distress for Eliot. In a letter to Cara Bray she wrote: “My chief trouble is poor Chrissey. Think of her in that ugly house with six small children who are inevitably made naughty by being thrown close together from morning till night” (Letters II 90).⁴⁷ Another strong reason for her criticism of marriage was, of course, her own relationship with George Henry Lewes. His own marriage had lapsed into one of convenience, with his wife taking a lover, who also fathered some of her children. Divorce, rare anyway at that time, was an impossibility for him.

⁴⁶ Both the Redinger and Haight biographies treat this interesting but, for this study, irrelevant information.

⁴⁷ As quoted in Haight’s biography of George Eliot (126).

Both of Eliot's veils of secrecy, her "bandaged" sex and her "wife-without-the sign" relationship must have been fascinating to Dickinson when she came to learn of them through newspaper and magazine accounts, as well as the early biography. The fascination would come in part because Dickinson herself was a poseur both in her life and her work and was also particularly concerned with a gendered poetics. I believe that a valid case can be made for Dickinson's adoption of poses and attitudes she encountered through her reading of Eliot, both through her life and the works.⁴⁸ Dickinson's poetry on being "a wife without the sign" and her taking on of the male psyche may have been bolstered by her knowledge that Eliot was enacting this in her life. Perhaps, like Robert Browning with his dramatic monologues, Dickinson was adopting personas of historical figures to create her lyrics. An early letter to Susan Dickinson indicates her interest in such posing. The remarks are worth noting, particularly because most of her important comments about her poetics are in letters to Susan, who is a trusted confidante about her female poetics:

I'm so amused at my own ubiquity that I hardly know what to say . . .
Why, dear Susie, it mustn't scare you if I loom up from Hindoostan, or drop
from an Apennine, or peer at you suddenly from the hollow of a tree, calling
myself King Charles, Sancho Panza, or Herod, King of the Jews -- I suppose it is
all the same. (Letter 107)

Whether or not this poem intentionally refers to Eliot's life, there is a startling correspondence between Poem 1737 and Eliot's life. Although Johnson numbers this poem 1737, which would indicate it came rather late in Dickinson's life, the real date of the poem is open to

⁴⁸ Other critics have remarked on her reading of other texts as an impetus for her own work. Most notable is the recent study by Judith Farr who in The Passion of Emily Dickinson discusses her affinities with certain of the elements of Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre.

conjecture, since Johnson states: "No autograph copy of the poem is known. It is here reproduced from a transcript made by Mrs. Todd"(III, 1169).

Rearrange a "Wife's" affection!

When they dislocate my Brain!

Amputate my freckled Bosom!

Make me bearded like a man!

Blush, my spirit, in thy Fastness --

Blush, my unacknowledged clay --

Seven years of troth have taught thee

More than Wifehood ever may!

Love that never leaped its socket --

Trust entrenched in narrow pain --

Constancy thro' fire -- awarded --

Anguish -- bare of anodyne!

Burden -- borne so far triumphant --

None suspect me of the crown,

For I wear the "Thorns" till Sunset,

Then -- my Diadem put on.

Big my Secret but it's bandaged --

It will never get away

Till the Day its Weary Keeper
 Leads it through the Grave to thee.

This poem's initial lines shock with their adoption of male secondary sex characteristics and female self-mutilation. Invoking maleness as a kind of talisman to ward off thoughts of her inconstancy, Dickinson's speaker begins with an image of her being un-sexed, much like Lady Macbeth who dons her maleness to bolster her resolve. Like Eliot in her real life, this speaker has a secret life, not married (here it is seven years of troth) yet she is constant. This is very similar to Eliot's choice of being "bearded" with the name George Eliot as her talisman to ward off "evil" critics. Of course, as with any Dickinson poem, images conflate and metamorphise just as the scenes and faces in dreams. Thus images of being "married without the sign" are merging with her speaker's taking on of a secret hidden role, one symbolized by the diadem as a sign of the highest honor for woman, the queen. Dickinson's persona here can also be seen as describing a bandaged secret, which many have seen as her life as a poet, one which goes on at night, while the daylight world knows nothing of it. Dickinson's persona recognizes she has had to forego a typical life as a woman in order to give all to her art. This, of course, is quite similar to Eliot's life as a novelist, which was also hidden, at least in the early years when her identity became known. (It is interesting to read the relish with which both Eliot and Lewes kept up this elaborate pretense of "Mr. Eliot" a reticent friend of Lewes, quietly writing novels and sending them to Lewes as his literary broker of sorts).

I do not wish to lose sight of all the ramifications of this poem for Dickinson's female poetics, yet I wish to suggest that there have been various sources for her themes, including Eliot's brave life as Mrs. Lewses, which did not adhere to the "dimity convictions" Dickinson abhorred. This belief in love above all else (which the Lewes-Evans relationship personified)

might have struck a chord of responsiveness in Dickinson, who condoned her own brother's long love affair with Mabel Loomis Todd. Another indication of Dickinson's acceptance of Eliot's life was the fact that Dickinson did not have any compunction about referring to her as Mrs. Lewes. After reading the Cross biography, Dickinson remarks in a letter to Mrs. Holland that "none of us know her enough to judge her, so her Maker must be her 'Crowners Quest'--Saul criticized his Savior till he became enamored of him--then he was less loquacious--" (Sewall 702). But, more important than the references to love affairs is the idea the poem conveys that Dickinson was aware of a literary foremother who lived her life with the freedom more acceptable for males of her time, while keeping constant to her writing and enjoying recognition for it.

Whether or not Poem 1737 and others I discuss directly reflect Dickinson's reading of Eliot's life and work, it is important to recognize that the two writers shared affinities in relation to certain themes. Poem 1737 also suggests an androgynous human life in its striking first stanza which indicates a need to break gender barriers. In fact, what we understand today about left and right brain activity and that such activity often has been sex-role stereotyped as male or female, might indicate that Dickinson's suggestion of dislocating a brain was certainly accurate. This trope of femalehood as a "bandaged secret" is in one sense echoing the Freudian notion of the female as lacking something (the penis literally) or in Lacanian terms, the Law of the Father to which the woman must eventually succumb. Yet, Dickinson sees such a "lack" as positive, evoking magical transformations by night. "Thorns" become crowns in her nightly inversion, a "queen" performs the ritual. Perhaps the ending lines of the poem suggests that a longing for death as a way of circumventing this gender-biased world is the lot of women: "Till the Day Its Weary Keeper/Leads it through the Grave to thee."

Like Eliot, Dickinson critically examines woman's roles and the construction of the female gender, often "cross-dressing" her exploration of gendered boundaries. If in her "wife" poems she scrutinizes that female role, in others, she also creates male alter egos. For example,

she has poems in which she sees herself as “Tim.” In some of her letters she presents herself as Uncle Emily to her nieces and nephews. Even a cursory perusal of her poetry shows that she had masculine, feminine, and even neuter (her puzzling “its”) personas.

What does this taking on of male personas mean for Dickinson? And what affinities do they have with Eliot? They certainly attempt to look at gender from varied perspectives, and also perhaps to align herself, as Eliot does in her choice of a pseudonym, with the male stereotyped by society as stronger and freer. But there are other reasons I see for Dickinson’s adoption of male selves: when she is “Uncle Emily” in her familial letters to her brother’s children, it may be that she is ironically suggesting that an avuncular role of advice-giver might be more societally sanctioned and thus have more influence. The same expediency might hold true for the poems. In some poems, there is a need to indicate dialogue between two speakers, male and female, while in others, the language of male speakers is tried on for its power and general effect. Yet, her choice of male speakers has other sources as well, and are the subject of much critical speculation lately. An example of this occurs in one of her most famous poems on gendered depictions. In one version of the poem “I showed him heights he never saw” she also sent a version to Sue that switched gender identities, “I showed her heights she never saw.” The reasons for such changes and for many of her poems of ambiguous sexual identity, as well as her clear depiction of her female speaker with elements of male sexuality, have been much debated recently.

Eliot and Dickinson’s shared attitude toward gender might be clarified through some recent feminist criticism, for example Showalter’s article on “cross-dressing” and Gilbert’s “Costumes of the Mind.” While focusing on the different uses of the metaphor of transvestitism for modernist male and female writers, Gilbert’s remarks are appropriate for both Eliot and Dickinson, for she asserts that women writers use such metaphors to subvert the hierarchical view of male writers, privileging the fluidity of gender or androgyny. Perhaps some of Dickinson’s male posing was used to separate herself from the popular female poetry of her time which often

was quite derivative, working on genteel rather stultified notions of female poetry. Like Eliot's aversion toward silly women novelists, Dickinson was not kind to the popular women's poetry of her age as evident both in her letters and the poems themselves. Some of the poems seem to be distortions and critiques of such conventional genteel ladies' verse, as I have shown in the chapter on her affinities with Helen Hunt Jackson.

Eliot and Dickinson's focus on gender, and their concomitant use of the male voice at times, might reflect on their respective lives and in particular to their ambivalent and complex attitudes to male mentors in their lives. In Eliot's biography it is clear that her difficult familial relations with her priggish brother and dominant father and her search for power, intellectual stimulation and recognition, led her to various liaisons with leading male thinkers of her time. In fact, having lived with Lewes as his "wife" Eliot shocked some of her contemporaries when she married Cross so soon after Lewes died. Such an attitude stemmed from the fact as Oscar Browning wrote that "her relations with Lewes . . . rose from an overmastering devotion "which some were puzzled to see "succeeded by another equally strong." However, Browning points to a reason for Eliot's second marriage, one which gives us insight into his belief that she needed male support: "no one can have studied the character of George Eliot, even superficially, without being convinced how necessary it was for her to have some one to depend upon, and how much her nature yearned for sympathy and support"⁴⁹

This attitude represents a simplistic and sexist attitude towards her. This patronizing view of both Eliot and her male mentors is similar to those held for so long about Dickinson and all the male preceptors in her life, from her early teacher Benjamin Newton on to Samuel Bowles, and of course Higginson. For both writers, their relationships with male mentors are fraught with complex similarities, which may, in turn, affect their presentation of male voices and characters.

⁴⁹ As quoted in Haight (134) from Oscar Browning's 1890 Life of George Eliot

CHAPTER SIX

THE LORE/LURE OF THE LOST TWINS: THE FACE OF THE ANDROGYNE

IN THE WORK OF DICKINSON AND ELIOT

If they ask my identity
 what can I say but
 I am the androgyne
 I am the living mind you fail to describe
 in your dead language
 the lost noun, the verb surviving
 only in the infinitive
 the letters of my name are written under the lids
 of the newborn child

--Adrienne Rich

Androgyny

Androgyny has had a long tradition in literature, with roots both in philosophy and religion. An excellent source for a history of this tradition, Carolyn G. Heilbrun's Toward a Recognition of Androgyny, traces the lore of opposite sex twins to the myth of humanity's androgynous beginnings: "Central to almost every religion is the belief that the original human pair were opposite sex twins born at a miraculous birth and destined to be lovers. Even the double account in Genesis suggests this, although the Jewish tradition, committed to the

superiority and dominance of the male, changed the story, displacing the twins onto the next generation, where each of Adam's sons were born together with a girl destined to be his wife" (35). Heilbrun goes on to show that the most well-known set of such twins were Artemis and Apollo, "who between them are the oracles and guardians of all human experience, sun and moon. Apollo has certain 'feminine' qualities, Artemis certain 'masculine' ones" (39).

This concept of the androgyne forms a significant part of the female poetics of both Dickinson and Eliot. The lure of such an excellent symbol for tracing the origins of gender difference seems to have captured both writers. Androgyny is relevant to Eliot's depiction of Maggie and Tom in The Mill on the Floss and to the siblings in her Sonnet sequence Brother and Sister. While these siblings are not literally twins, they share for Eliot an edenic closeness in the Sonnet sequence. In The Mill on the Floss there is a desire, at least on Maggie's part, for complete unity throughout the novel with her brother Tom. Neither Stephen nor Philip holds the place in Maggie's heart that Tom does, undeserving though he may be. The sheer weight of this relationship suggests its deeper meaning and Tom's significance. Eliot's investment in Tom as a symbol pays off much more than Maggie's investment in him as her brother. Maggie is in search of complete acceptance by Tom, who is a composite of the most stereotypical notion of the male in Eliot's society. The older male Maggie has emulated since birth, Tom has access to experiences that she is not privy to as a typical 19th century woman, e.g. his schooling in Latin and other subjects she wants to learn. And, of course, the depth of feeling Maggie has for her brother signifies her unconscious desire to *be* the brother, the desired and most accepted child in the family. This is not to say that in the Freudian sense she has penis envy, but that she longs for a place in society that is equal to a man's.

Before attempting a fuller discussion of this idea, I wish to state that I am in no way suggesting that Eliot is working here from suppressed images of incest desire in relation to her

own brother, nor in its reflection in the Maggie-Tom relationship in The Mill on the Floss or the Brother-Sister Sonnet Sequence. I believe she was, like Dickinson, exploring avenues to open up the traditional notion of male and female in order to move toward a recognition of female possibility in a sex-role stereotyped society.

An interesting biographical event might indicate that Eliot was aware of the intensity of her use of the Brother-Sister relationship in her work. This incident shows her defensiveness about close sibling relationships, although to my knowledge during her lifetime no suggestion of incest desire ever clung to any of her works. However it is interesting to note that Haight's biography quotes from Eliot's letters in which she reports the gossip about Byron's incestuous relationship with his half-sister. This was precipitated by Harriet Beecher Stowe's discussion of it and her written defense of Byron's wife, and, in fact, might have dredged up in Eliot so visceral a reaction (she was very upset at Stowe's damaging comments which maligned Byron) because of fears that her own depiction of the theme of love between sister and brother might be misconstrued. Her reaction to the suggestion of impropriety between Byron and his half-sister may have been affected by her secret fear that there might be a misunderstanding of her thematic use of a close sibling connection in her own work.

Carolyn Heilbrun's study of androgyny discusses specific novelists and their portrayal of androgyny, with this caveat: "In discussing androgyny and the novel, one is under the necessary and difficult restraint of not confusing androgyny with feminism. The confusion is almost inevitable because the anti-androgynous temper against which the great novels were also written is also the temper against which the fighters for women's rights raged. . ."(58). Yet she insists feminist novels may perhaps be distinguished from androgynous novels in at least one way: "In androgynous novels, the reader identifies with the male and female characters equally: in feminist novels, only with the female hero"(58). I do not see such distinctions in quite the way

Heilbrun does, and in fact, I feel that my response to Middlemarch is that I more fully identify with Dorothea throughout, and can muster no sympathy at all for Casaubon, although some for Lydgate. If that makes this more of a feminist novel than merely androgynous in Heilbrun's view, I must say that I find the concept of androgyny and how it affects Eliot's (and, of course, Dickinson's) female poetics my primary concern here.

Heilbrun sees George Eliot as the novelist who has linked the 'masculine' and 'feminine' impulses quite well. However, she has some reservations:

She is far too sharply aware of the constraints upon females, of the lack of direct channels for their highest endeavors, to produce an actually androgynous character. Nor did she ever suggest the possible way in which a highly endowed woman might discover a destiny concordant with her talents. The destinies of all her heroines are, in great or small degree, constricted -- nor was she ever to pretend or imagine otherwise. (82-3)

I cannot agree fully with this assessment, for I believe Eliot has moved very close to androgyny in some of her female characters, giving them traits traditionally not thought to be female and furthermore has imagined for them destinies which do subvert the traditional roles for gifted females. For example, in The Mill on the Floss young Maggie is seen as much more intellectually gifted than her brother, and her bravery in trying to rescue him from the flood is a counterpoint to Tom's earlier silly reenactment of a classical sword fight, which left him wounded and frightened. Dorothea in Middlemarch has none of the interest in typically female pursuits that her sister Celia represents. She shows no early inclination for dogs or children or jewels or clothes, and is interested instead in buildings for the poor and plans for social reform. She can become a real friend to a man, something that the surgeon Lydgate, whom many have seen as her male equal in the novel, understands too late in a culture where male-female

friendships were not at all common. Finally, she has inchoate yearnings for the type of freer, more androgynous life that St. Theresa of Eliot's "Preface" represents in the novel. All of these elements in Eliot's women create powerful androgynous images that are more fully human and not limited by gender.

In Dickinson also we see the theme of the androgyne, especially in its adumbrations of hidden twins in her poetry. Her lovers are often quite alike and can communicate telepathically as twin lore traditionally describes them. For example, in one poem, which I will discuss fully further on, such a complete bond is underscored through the desire to reach back to edenic closeness: "Each was to each the sealed church, permitted to commune this time at Supper of the lord." Often, too, Dickinson works on the principle of androgyny, "Tim" being an alter ego twin name for herself, while one of the female counterparts for herself is "Daisy." Etymologically, "Daisy" comes from day's eye, which in traditional metaphor was used to delineate the romantic relationship of the woman following the strong male, just as the daisy or day's eye follows the sun's path across the sky, opening with the Sun. (Much of her use of male, female, and neuter speakers has been discussed in the last chapter.) Yet Dickinson also works on the notion of twins in her desire for ultimate unity and her desire to create a complete androgynous human being. In fact the theme of androgyny relates to Dickinson's poems on death, since death itself is often eroticized as a male lover. Perhaps death is yearned for so often in the poetry because it promises some surcease of the disjunction between lovers or the frustration of the androgynous spirit. In fact as Heilbrun has pointed out in her study, the original principle of androgyny does not only include the male-female principle joined, but in an often ignored part of the original myth of Aristophanes, there is also the male-male and female-female unity. This has implications in the gendered erotics of death that Dickinson depicts and in her love poems, which have been seen as both homosexual and heterosexual.

Thus Dickinson's poems and letters of homoerotic love may also indicate a deep need to express an androgynous ability to love sexually without the strictures of sex-role stereotyping. Perhaps, however, such movement in Dickinson can be understood through a discussion of her theme of renunciation and all the ramifications it produces. Renunciation has crucial connection, also, for both Eliot and Dickinson. It enters into their separate thematic interest in dissecting gendered behavior in an effort to move beyond it to a less sex-role stereotyped, which, in turn, paves the way for androgynous behavior and androgynous characters.

The Role of Renunciation

Eliot and Dickinson share affinities also in their complex and ambivalent attitudes toward the theme of worldly renunciation. Both writers exhibit pulls toward and away from renunciation in their life and work. Eliot's general theme of renunciation has been under fire from feminist critics because they feel she denies her heroines the gains she herself had in her own life.⁵⁰ However, as I will show, in Eliot and Dickinson, renunciation is neither the final stance they advocate nor is it meant to be taken at face value. Instead, to borrow Dickinson's term, renunciation is to be taken as "slant." I believe it can be viewed as an element in their complex vision of androgyny.

In Dickinson, the pull toward renunciation is evident both in her own seclusion and in her personas who link themselves with the suffering Christ. One of the most obvious of her attitudes toward renunciation appears in the poem that defines it:

⁵⁰ I am thinking particularly of Gilbert and Gubar's The Madwoman in the Attic and Zelda Austen's article "Why Feminist Critics Are Angry with George Eliot," which describes the feminist case against Eliot.

Poem 745

“Renunciation--is a piercing Virtue--

The letting go

A Presence--of an Expectation--”

Not now--

The putting out of Eyes--

Just Sunrise--

Lest Day--

Day’s Great Progenitor--

Outvie

Renunciation--is the Choosing

Against itself--

Itself to justify

Unto itself--

When larger function--

Make that appear--

Smaller--that Covered Vision--Here--

The speaker is willing to lose here, almost as if in a daring reversal to her societal sanctioned place, she adopts this creed: if women’s lot is to give up and give way because of gender politics, I will revel in this, co-opt renunciation for my own ends, celebrate it grandly, explore it for its jubilant pathos. Thus, this poem signals her poetics where absence, loss, starvation become tropes to be explored for their value and meaning to female experience. Yet, this poem itself in its initial definition recognizes that in letting go of anything, a stage is being

set for the "presence of an expectation." This sense of renunciation as a preparation for something greater may be seen as an analogy for her own desire for androgyny. In renouncing the normal expectations of her lot as a woman, the poet/speaker is leaving herself open to larger and different choices, the "choosing against itself" and its female-signified characteristics that will move her toward "larger function," which an androgynous life and androgynous symbols should represent.

Poems on the theme of pain and suffering often present a persona aligned with Christ the sufferer, calling herself Bride of Christ or Empress of Calvary. In their attempts to link the female-speakers of these poems with the male-divinity, many critics have discussed the connection with Christ's pain and suffering. Overlooked, however, is another more obscure element of her strategy: Dickinson is laying the foundation for a search for wholeness, for a human being who has both male and female qualities. In fact, the mystery of the Trinitarian godhead is a perfect symbol for the unity of body and soul, with which the female speaker/poet weds. Poem 817 clearly announces this theme, since its speaker sees herself as the "Bride" of "Father" "Son" and "Holy Ghost." Something is seen to be missing in this trinity -- a female element. In wedding the self, the *female* self with this symbol, the patriarchal myth of godhead becomes enlarged to include both male and female elements.

Given in Marriage unto Thee

Oh thou Celestial Host--

Bride of the Father and the Son

Bride of the Holy Ghost.

Other Betrothal shall dissolve--

Wedlock of Will, decay--

Only the Keeper of this Ring

Conquer Mortality--

Dickinson may be urging a movement back to lost early myths of godheads and origins. Histories of myth and religion present such different mythic traditions. Jewish mystical tradition viewed Jehovah as an androgyne, the name compounded of Jah (jod) and the pre-Hebraic name of Eve, Havah. Secret traditions of the early Christian held to the ancient Oriental ideal of the deity who is male and female, often portrayed as a dual-sexed creature, left side female and right male.⁵¹

Often in representing her speakers as Bride of Christ, Dickinson was focusing on their common experience with Christ as sufferers. Perhaps it was that she saw a woman's life as a life of suffering, for all that had been taken from her by society's circumscribing of her place. While this pattern is particular to Dickinson for several reasons, it also places her in a tradition of female poetics. In particular, Luce Irigaray in Speculum of the Other Woman has described such a pattern of female suffering in women writers, associating woman with the suffering Christ.

In discussing this next poem, 1072, "Title divine is mine!" I do not want to enter the debate as to whether this has biographical reference to a male lover, particularly Samuel Bowles (to whom it was presumed to have been sent by Sewall).⁵² Instead, I wish to examine it as one of Dickinson's strongest statements linking the theme of the Bride of Christ to the sense of anguish that her gender brings.

⁵¹ The Woman's Dictionary of Symbols and Sacred Objects by Barbara G. Walker contains a compendium of various biblical and religious beliefs that contain androgynous gods.

⁵² See Sewall's discussion in the biography (483-4).

Poem 1072

Title divine--is mine!
 The Wife--without the Sign!
 Acute Degree---conferred on me--
 Empress of Calvary!
 Royal--all but the Crown!
 Betrothed--without the swoon
 God sends us Women--
 When you--hold--Garnet to Garnet--
 Gold--to Gold--
 Born--Bridalled--Shrouded--
 In a Day--
 "My Husband"--women say--
 Is *this*--the way?

The suffering of the female is aligned with Christ's suffering, as she confers on herself the title "Empress of Calvary." Woman's lot, here in her role as "wife," is to see her whole life close with one "title," presumably "wife" or "Mrs." She may be "born" to that new life, but she is "bridalled" with its pun on curbing the spirit of a woman (like breaking in a horse?) and killing her completely ("shrouded"). Her last line: "Is *this*-- the way?" may be an ironic counterpoint that highlights her choice of a different road, the title divine of woman poet, a road which is a marriage, of sorts, to poetry. It is evident through Dickinson's poetry on the theme of renunciation that her complex attitude toward her sense of herself is being worked out, over and

against other more traditionally prescribed roles for women, perhaps recognizing in her generic role as a poet that she may eschew old, outdated notions of what it means to be a woman.

Another poem suggests that the opposite of suffering, "joy," can cause pain in a life which has been so used to pain that it has become acceptable.

Poem 252

I can wade grief

Whole pools of it

I'm used to that--

But the least push of Joy

Breaks up my feet--

And I tip--drunken--

Let no Pebble--smile--

'Twas the New Liquor--

That was all!

Power is only Pain--

Stranded, thro' Discipline,

Till Weights--will hang--

Give Balm--to Giants--

And they'll wilt, like Men--

Give Himmaleh--

They'll Carry--Him!

In Poem 46 "I taste a liquor never brewed" Dickinson paints the female poet/self as "a little tippler leaning against the sun," that is inebriated through the incredible euphoria of writing poetry. That poem shares imagery with the speaker of Poem 252 whose feet will "tip--drunken--" from the "least push of joy." This connection suggests that the "joy" represented in this poem is the obverse of the "joy" in the other. In other words, Dickinson seems to be slyly suggesting that traditional "joys of womanhood" might "break up my feet" (a reference to the poetic foot?) and keep her from her life's work, climbing her Mt. Himmaleh. Like Christ, she is accepting her suffering because it will give "power through pain."

In Eliot the pull toward renunciation takes the form of her heroines' quests for more than the quotidian, necessitating a renouncing of its compensations. For example, in The Mill on the Floss, Maggie, like Dickinson's speakers, tries to imitate Christ in her worldly renunciation. This occurs after Maggie's father has brought disgrace upon his family. This negative legacy seems to be the only one Maggie can inherit as a woman. In her chastened state, poor Maggie is ripe for the philosophy of Thomas á Kempis in The Imitation of Christ, which gives her a path of Christ-like renunciation to follow.

Eliot's works reflect her belief that true renunciation means real sacrifice. She writes: "The very perception that the thing we renounce is precious, is something never to be compensated to us, which constitutes the beauty and heroism of renunciation." She goes on to excoriate the skewed conception of renunciation: "the notion that duty looks stern, but all the while has her hands full of sugar-plums, with which she will reward us by-and-by, is the favorite cant of optimists. . . ."⁵³ In fact, Eliot may have associated true renunciation with that of

⁵³ This comment is quoted by Haight in his biography of George Eliot (182). It is taken from a review of a novel by Constance Jewsbury, Constance Herbert: a Tendency-roman.

renouncing the self and its solipsistic vantage point, thus eventuating in a more inclusive and compassionate point of view. Such a point of view is one which the Middlemarch narrator had hoped that Dorothea would adopt. In that novel one of her most important authorial intrusions concerns Dorothea's neglecting to see that Casaubon has an "equivalent center of self" which Dorothea myopically ignored. Considering Eliot's rather harsh but well-deserved treatment of Casaubon in the novel, presumably she is also warning herself as novelist-narrator to at least attempt a more inclusive (and compassionate?) attitude toward Dorothea's husband, perhaps in her attempt to represent both the male and female views of events, so as to more fully represent an androgynous vision.

Part of Eliot's complex rendering of renunciation may suggest that it is more available to the female, not in a negative way of preventing her from being fulfilled as a complete human being, but as one who could present female alternatives to the male mode of being in the world. In fact, one might see Eliot's "Finale" to Middlemarch as a true valorization of woman's peculiar ability to forget the self, using her life as Dorothea has done to do good for others in an ethics of compassion and caring, rather than competition and acquisition. Such a view of the female province created by Eliot is one which can be seen to understand the value of the female life. Carol Gilligan in In a Different Voice has defined such a female ethics as one whose concept of self and morality is intertwined with a strong focus on relationships, community and caring. Gilligan stresses that so many of our traditional notions of psychological development use the male as the norm. In fact, she goes through Erik Erickson's patterns to point out the differences in female development that have been ignored, minimized and denigrated. Basing her ideas on theorists like Nancy Chodorow, who have paved the way, Gilligan presents a clear, insightful blueprint of woman's mode of living in the world. Such a mode is characterized in ways that have been traditionally seen as less important and/or weak or illogical and apt to block maturity,

yet should be seen as alternative patterns for psychological maturity, and should begin to replace and/or alternate with male patterns. This is not to say that Gilligan and other female developmental theorists are viewing female-centered patterns as better or as substitutes for earlier male-centered ones. Rather they suggest in the words of Sandra Harding in The Science Question in Feminism that we must begin by trying “to formulate a ‘woman-centered’ hypothesis in order even to comprehend a gender-free one” (138). This sense of alternative patterns for living may have been Eliot’s mission, also. Such patterns included in her novels would help to move her characters on a continuum toward less gender-restricted behavior.

Gilligan discusses one mode of moral responsibility to the self and one’s sense of right, and offers the example of Maggie in The Mill on the Floss. The scene she refers to occurs just after Maggie’s brother Tom has discovered her secret relationship with Philip Wakem, whom a family feud has made an outcast to the Tulliver family. Maggie’s response to her brother’s accusation of her breach of faith reveals a bifurcated attitude on her part. Gilligan quotes from Maggie’s “apology”: This scene occurs in the Section “Wheat and Tares” in Chapter 7:

I don’t want to defend myself . . . I know I’ve been wrong--often continually. But yet, sometimes when I have done wrong, it has been because I have feelings that you would be the better or if you had them. If you were in fault ever, if you had done anything very wrong, I should be sorry for the pain it brought you; I should not want punishment to be heaped on you.

Gilligan analyzes this passage as an example of female insight into questions of morality. Maggie exemplifies for her the “age-old split between thinking and feeling, justice and mercy” between traditional patterns of male and female thinking (69). Yet, according to Gilligan, she is confronting her brother with the other side of the issue, the personal feeling level. Her answer reflects these two judging patterns: “one traditionally associated with masculinity and the

public world of social power, the other with femininity and the privacy of domestic interchange“(69).

Both Eliot and Dickinson read Thomas á Kempis's Imitation of Christ and directly reflected his ideas in their work on the theme of renunciation. The biographies and letters of both authors contain references to this religious work which show a profound use of á Kempis's views, in both straight and ironic ways. The most fully developed presentation of Eliot's use of The Imitation of Christ is in her novel The Mill on the Floss. As the letters and Sewall's biography attest, Dickinson also read The Imitation of Christ. The Dickinson library holdings contain an 1857 edition. Sewall writes of its influence: "To Emily Dickinson, in her mid-twenties, already feeling estranged from certain aspects of things spiritual and temporal in her small, self-conscious New England community, The Imitation of Christ, must have come with a jolt" (688). He goes on to say that the chapter of The Imitation of Christ which is the most heavily annotated by Dickinson is the one on the Cross, deducing that this suggests it is not the consolation that Christ brings but his suffering with which Dickinson identifies. I agree with his assessment of its impact on her. Her focus in the use of the Imitation seems to center on the sections entitled "Solitude" "Silence" and "A Retired Life," which admonish the reader to retire and become an exile so that inner growth can be forthcoming. Such identification with Christ's suffering, I have suggested earlier in this chapter, is clearly apparent in Dickinson's poems that create an affinity with the speaker/self and the suffering Christ, often using the term "Bride of Christ" or "Empress of Calvary." Her concept of renunciation is as rich and complex as Eliot's. An examination of this theme in Eliot and Dickinson's work will indicate that neither writer is presenting a simplistic portrayal of either the myth of the woman-as-masochist or that of the angel in the house too ethereal for the real world.

Maggie Tulliver in The Mill on the Floss bases her renunciation on her lifelong love for the works of Thomas `á Kempis. Eliot clearly presents this book as one Maggie seizes on as a code of ethics to follow after her father's disgrace and her own fall into self-pity. In the essay "Maxims and the Mill on the Floss" Mary Jacobus makes the connection between Eliot's purpose and Maggie's identification with Thomas á Kempis as a model for renunciation: "Eliot makes her heroine live and die by the inherited morality of female suffering--as if, in the economy of the text, it was necessary for Maggie to die renouncing in order for her author to release the flood of desire that is language itself. . . . Through Thomas á Kempis, Eliot achieves a simultaneous management of both knowledge and desire, evoking an 'invisible' or 'supreme teacher' within the soul, whose voice promises 'entrance into that satisfaction which (Maggie) had so long been craving in vain' " (75). Such a view ignores the concept of female development that I believe Eliot is presenting in the character of Maggie. Maggie has long outgrown the concept of renunciation for renunciation's sake that she adopted in her adolescent bout of self-pity. The scenes with Philip in the Red Deeps have effectively moved her back into the world. At the end of the novel, after the disaster with Stephen and her brother Tom's subsequent rejection of her, Maggie is not reverting to a pale imitation of the Imitation of Christ in her behavior. Her life, like that of Dickinson's speaker in "Renunciation--is a piercing Virtue--" has become a "presence for an expectation."

It appears that Maggie is so affected by her reading of Thomas á Kempis that she first proceeds to give up most books, then her scholar/friend Philip, and finally her lover Stephen Guest. It appears as if all desire becomes suspect to her. It is almost as if she is being offered as a representative of the traditional view of woman -- to be desire-less, to be only the desired, the object. Yet, aware as we are of Eliot's own life and the complexity of her vision, how are we to take such renunciations? Surely not at face value.

While the young Mary Ann Evans under the spell of Evangelicalism was herself not as avid a reader of books as the later George Eliot steeped in the Higher Criticism, she did not renounce any of her books, her scholar/mentors in her formative years nor her lover Lewes. The simple answer which has often been given is that Eliot denies her heroines the gains she herself had. For some critics this is because she has internalized the male attitudes toward women of her age, while simultaneously using her position as omniscient (often male) narrator to vent her anger on symbols of patriarchy. For example, their argument contends in Mill that from this motive Tom is killed along with Maggie, and in Middlemarch Casaubon falls prey to an early heart attack.⁵⁴

I believe, however, that through such deus ex machina plot elements, Eliot rids Middlemarch of a distasteful tyrant in Casaubon, and allows Dorothea to get a second act, her story rather than his story. Similarly, in the cataclysmic ending of The Mill on the Floss Maggie may die (which may look like a renunciation), yet structurally Eliot is giving closure to a far more important theme that is integral to her work as a female writer: Maggie's female development. Her female sense of ethics has created in her a bifurcated vision which can see her action in loving Stephen as also a killing action toward her cousin, his fiancé. Her renunciation is fraught with anxiety and is truly a product of her own conscience, not imprinted from without through some code of ethics she borrows from a religious book. She prefers the community of women, which her eventual rapprochement with her cousin Lucy symbolizes.

Another way of perceiving the ending of The Mill on the Floss is to see it as solidifying Eliot's move toward less sex-role stereotyped constructs for men and women, as she moves toward a world of androgyny. The final union of the brother and sister, Tom and Maggie, in their

⁵⁴ Such a view is that of Gilbert and Gubar in Madwoman in the Attic.

deaths in the flood may be seen as such a movement, with the male and female principle uniting as one. Perhaps this is an attempt to work out in narrative form the ideas of Feuerbach, whom Eliot read and translated. In particular, Feuerbach, in his revision of Plato's concept of androgyny, contended that the yearning toward one which is the desire of the two sexes, is to become complete since they are two halves of a whole human being. Eliot's ending creates a unity for the two siblings that they never attained in life: "The boat reappeared--but brother and sister had gone down in an embrace never to be parted --living through again in one supreme moment, the days when they had clasped their little hands in love, and roamed the daisied fields together" (655).

This theme of renunciation leaves Eliot open to the accusation that she makes her female characters submit or be overtaken by the politics of gender, even though she herself has not succumbed to such strictures in her own life. Similarly, Dickinson's focus on the theme of renunciation leaves her open to skewed biographical readings of the poems that hinge on fundamental errors in reading lyric poetry. Working backward directly (rather than "slant" to use Dickinson's word) from the poetry to the life leads to several errors, including the belief that the poet was agoraphobic or anorexic or fearful of all relationships because of a primal love affair with any of certain candidates, both male and female, or a skewed relationship with her mother and father in her early years.

In the work of Eliot and Dickinson, the theme of renunciation is a useful tool to delineate the parameters of the typical female condition of their 19th-century societies. In fact, one could stipulate that renunciation became a means for bypassing the typical arenas for women (love affairs, marriage, motherhood) and at the same time coopting, for positive ends, the very notion of female passivity. Such "renunciation" reflects the notion that the female is not partaking, not getting caught up in the quotidian, which has traditionally been seen as more

likely to be the lot of the female rather than the male. Thus the speakers in Dickinson's poems and the heroines in Eliot's fiction are saying "No," which is the beginning of real power. Dickinson was well aware of such negative power; she once wrote to Judge Lord: "Don't you know that the word No! is the wildest word in the English language"(Sewall 655). Her poetry depicts variations of renunciation, i.e. abstemiousness, the withholding of experience to heighten its significance. Surely the impetus for all this is not that she is succumbing to a literary anorexia. Nor do I believe that Eliot was denying her literary children, the Dorotheas and Maggies, the full life she experienced because she alone must be the exception that proved the rule. What I wish to demonstrate is that both writers are using the theme of renunciation as a means of exploring societal expectations for the male and female. They seem to be trying an experiment, of sorts, however halting and non-programmatic, to move beyond the gendered constructions of the self.

Shared Symbolism

Water as a symbol becomes for both Eliot and Dickinson a medium for working out their sublime visions of androgyny. It is an appropriate symbol because it represents primal origins, which was evident both in the Creation myths of the Bible and in the newly developing Darwinian Evolution that was a part of both Eliot and Dickinson's background of experience. To Dickinson water (her "Flood Subject") became the overriding thrust into possibility, the unknown, or Immortality as she once identified it in a letter to Samuel Bowles. To Eliot, also, water was a fundamental symbol with which she could chart her belief in human origins that ignored sexual difference. Undeniably these visions held vistas of the sublime and were rendered by both in ways that were richly individual. Yet there are remarkable affinities in their use of water in the developing theme of androgyny.

Eliot's The Mill on the Floss seems an appropriate beginning for this discussion of water imagery. The ending of that novel presents the Flood as an image of the final renunciation of her heroine, the wrath of an uncaring, rather sexist God, the apocalyptic vision of fusion between two conflicting forces, the feminine and the masculine, personified in Maggie and her brother Tom. Another element of the symbology of water is in the River Floss, which is foregrounded in the title of Eliot's novel, and has been tamed only once, according to ancient folklore, by the Virgin of the Floss. Maggie, who is obviously typified by this figure, is not as lucky as her foremother, since she succumbs to the flood at the end of the novel. On the other hand, the strong possibility exists that through this flood, which drowns male and female alike, Eliot is suggesting that it is almost impossible for the male and female to really get together in this sex-role stereotyped society. Instead, there is a hoped for unity after death, much as so many of the personas in Dickinson's love poetry expect unity with the loved one only after death. Are both Eliot and Dickinson suggesting that souls can unite after death because they have no gender determined by the body? Is this the implication of Dickinson's famous words about letters being dearer to her than actual conversation because they are signs of the "incorporeal being?"

It is curious too that both Eliot and Dickinson present images of female engulfment, through a tidal wave of water, that typifies society's drowning exactments from the women both writers portray in their work. (Tidal waves have been shown by female psychologists to be an integral part of the dream symbology for many women).⁵⁵ Their use of water imagery shares similarities in its complexity, since water is seen both as a symbol of rebirth and also annihilation in the sense of engulfment. For both writers water is used to convey strong creative

⁵⁵ Theories of psychology have suggested that women have been conditioned to feel an increased sense of powerlessness over their lives, which might account for their increased incidence of tidal wave dreams.

energy as well as the medium of sexual desire. Its power as an androgynous symbol resides in this dual nature: in very simple and somewhat bifurcated terms, water represents the mother in its relation to origins and its wonderful calm fluidity, yet it has elements of the male in its potential for violence and out-of-control energy. Certain feminist theorists focus on the female valency of water as a symbol. Perhaps the clearest statement of water as a reflection of the female principle occurs in the work of Luce Irigaray. As Stanton remarks in her excellent article, "Difference on Trial," Irigaray in several of her essays "consistently exploits the age-old association of mother and water, capitalizing on the homophony between *mère/mer*: it's my mother! The sea floats her, ripples her, flows together with her daughter, in all our ways. Then unseparated they sweep along their changing waters, without fear of their bodies, without bony stiffness, without a shell . . . And sea for mother (*mer pour mère*) gives herself up to pleasure in her bath of writing' (La, 143)" (169).

For Dickinson, water imagery varies in symbolic meaning. In one poem about the sea, Poem 520 "I started Early--Took my Dog--" a female-speaker is about to be engulfed by the masculine water. Her working out of the conflicts of losing the self, and the parts of the self that are female signified, becomes one step on the continuum in the charting of androgyny. Dickinson attempts to show the danger of water's metaphoric valency. Before discussing the poem fully, I wish to present some background. In 1866, in a letter to Higginson lamenting the death of her dog Carlo, Dickinson remarks that Immortality was her "Flood subject," calling in metonymic fashion on her "Finless Mind" which should explore the sea only from the safety of the river "bank" (Letter 454). Poem 520 recreates a female persona's imaginative encounter with water that is at first quite benign and then becomes increasingly terrifying.

I started Early -- Took my Dog --

And visited the Sea --

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 Bodice -- too --

And made as He would eat me up --
As wholly as a Dew
Upon a Dandelion's Sleeve --
And then -- I started -- too

And He -- He followed -- close behind --
I felt His silver Heel
Upon my Ankle -- 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 sea here might symbolize, as it does in Eliot's *River Floss*, an overwhelming force, whether of sexuality or the unconscious. The sea, at first, is male and dangerous, attempting to take over the body of the speaker. In fact, the synecdoche of "shoe," "apron," "bodice," "heels" and "ankle" are suggestive of the female body parts he is attempting to engulf or "eat. . . up." The sea who bows at her with a mighty look, after his attempt at ravishment, reminds one of that other chivalrous gentleman in "Because I could not stop for death" who takes the female narrator for her carriage ride to death, and who also uses a veneer of courtesy to hide his more sinister intent. Yet, unlike the female-speaker of that poem who literally goes along for the ride, finally surmising that the carriage's horses were headed for eternity (and by implication her physical death), the speaker of Poem 520 flees the sea's embrace.

The narrator becomes food for nature, the sea who would eat her up. The topos of smallness and ephemerality represents the speaker in this poem as a "mouse" and "a dew on a dandelion's sleeve." In many of Dickinson's poems, such posturing often disguises a paradoxical thrust toward greatness, but here, in terms of gender politics, i.e., in the presence of a male force of nature, this littleness is quite dangerous. Such danger is reinforced by the narrator's attempt in the retelling of the event to anthropomorphise alien nature; in fact, the sea is really being maternalized and domesticated through the metaphor of the house with its "basement" and "upper floor." His silver heel might reflect moon, and thus adopt some female signifiers. Throughout the poem the movement suggests the attempt at union between narrator and sea, with the obviously female narrator ("bodice" "apron") almost enthralled or numb until she senses danger ("and then I started too"). At one point she indicates his strength and their physical union

by suggesting that her ankle had felt his heel. The conflation of the two are strongly suggested here, as the sea is anthropomorphised into a man with a silver heel, like the fleet footed gods of ancient myth, yet the suggestion is still there that the heel also reflects the moon, symbol of the female principle. The narrator's fear becomes palpable in the halting repetitions of the male pronoun at the beginning of stanza 5, "And He -- He followed --close behind --" reinforced by three dashes in one line, the most she has placed in any line of the poem. The poem turns on different meanings of the word "started." First the narrator "started" out early on a solitary journey with a symbol of nature, the dog, who is a domesticated companion. (Dickinson often made reference to her dog Carlo and his role as her companion). Yet when the narrator discerns danger, she "started too" and the referent now is a conflated almost "startled" sense and a need to "start" (as in start back?) that is to return to safer ground, move back toward the shore and the safety of the town. Yet there is a simultaneous point of stasis in the middle of the poem which mimes the narrator's momentary paralysis. She is unable to be moved (or move herself?) much as those terrifying moments in nightmares when the actor in a dream becomes immobile in the face of danger. The image presented of the sea and its overwhelming wave suggests a tidal wave, one unexpected and out of control. Dreams of tidal waves are quite common, particularly for those who feel they have no control over their lives. The theme of this poem suggests something akin to such tidal waves through the strong sexuality of the encounter and the signs of imminent physical engulfment.

Perhaps Poem 732 will serve as a gloss on this poem since it shares imagery of sea and pearl and the dynamics of the male-female encounter. It might help to connect Dickinson's reading of sex-role stereotyped behavior.

She rose to His Requirement -- dropt
 The Playthings of Her Life
 To take the honorable Work
 Of Woman, and of Wife --

If ought She missed in Her new Day,
 Of Amplitude, or Awe --
 Or first Prospective -- Or the Gold
 In using, wear away,

It lay unmentioned -- as the Sea
 Develop Pearl, and Weed,
 But only to Himself -- be known
 The Fathoms they abide --

In this poem a woman who becomes a wife attempts to fit her life to her husband's. The rigidly classified roles for male and female focused on in the poem leave no room for a union that eschews such stereotyping. There is more than a little irony in the first stanza's remark of her dropping her former life and its "playthings" and taking on the "honorable Work" of wifehood. We know that amplitude and awe were very important to Dickinson, so we can gauge the somewhat hidden but not firmly repressed extra-textual feelings of the narrator here. This comment on the institution of marriage, ironic and suggestive, maximizes the poetic line to suggest doubt and perhaps even two attitudes at once. The woman is rising but it is to a male order or requirement, the suggestion being it is what he wants rather than what she does. The last

word of the first line is “dropt” which seems to belie that rising that has previously been mentioned. The word “playthings” at first glance might suggest this is unsuitable for this new adult life; however, as I have established earlier in many other poems, Dickinson valorized “play” and of course, used play as a synonym for writing poetry, so that the positive connotations of “playthings” should be considered. The actively abstruse diction and syntax of “if aught she missed of amplitude and awe,” which serves to separate this statement in kind from the more colloquial standard English of the rest of the poem, calls into question the very truth of the statement. Note too the simile at the end, double-edged as she is developing the good pearl of great price (a Biblical sign for a woman and used by Dickinson as another sign for her poetry) and weed, the afflatus of the sea, the negative and trite. This poem presents a total picture of marriage, from the point of view of both the male and female attitude, as well as a distanced narrator who is not the married “she” of the poem.

The poem just discussed presents a picture of marriage that is quite close to the marriage of Casaubon and Dorothea, as Eliot portrays it in Middlemarch. Dorothea, too, began her marriage with the expectation that she should rise to Casaubon’s “requirement” and move away from her former life and its “playthings” (what she saw as the frivolity of women’s lives as represented in her sister Celia) to take on a greater role as “wife.” Dorothea expected to align herself with his great work, as she initially saw it. Yet she began to realize that she never found the “amplitude and awe”(to borrow Dickinson’s words) she had expected. Dorothea’s situation becomes similar to that of Dickinson’s speaker whose suppressed feelings of disappointment are hidden within the deep structure of the poem. For Dorothea also can barely voice her repressed negative feelings for Casaubon. Eliot’s metaphors in this scene bring them to the foreground. The scene, described in Chapter 20, occurs on their extended honeymoon in Rome. Dorothea has been “sobbing bitterly” yet she “had no distinctly shapen grievance that she could state even to

herself”(224). The narrator tells us that she seeks to move away from Rome to a “place where she could feel alone with the earth and sky, away from the oppressive masquerade of ages. . .”(225). In an attempt to foreground Dorothea’s suppressed feelings, the narrator presents the language of dreams or “images which succeed each other like the magic-lantern pictures of a doze”(226). One of those inchoate feeling/images becomes forever after an objective correlative for Dorothea’s mood. Eliot describes it all: “the vastness of St. Peter’s, the huge bronze canopy, the excited intention in the attitudes and garments of the prophets and evangelists in the mosaics above, and the red drapery which was being hung for Christmas *spreading itself everywhere like a disease of the retina* (italics mine)” (226). Later on in the novel, this appropriate image is linked even more fully with Casaubon, for because of his diseased retinas, his failing eyesight, Dorothea has to help him with his work and learns that his great thesis is as useless and barren as he is.

In Eliot, particularly through Maggie, the sea seems to change in meaning as a symbol of the way stations of her life. It is a benign primordial symbol of Eden early in the novel when she recalls herself and Tom as young children fishing in the Floss. Later, it becomes a mark of her wavering indecision to succumb to the strong sexuality that Stephen suggests in her life, while at the end it is a vehicle for love, in that it reunites her and Tom, and simultaneously a symbol of destruction because they both drown. Eliot presents a kind of ur-symbol of the mother that permeates all Maggie’s encounters with the sea, the Virgin of the Floss, who creates a sense of water’s spiritual valency in developing Maggie’s character. Yet the meanings of the symbol seem to conflate at the point of Maggie’s elopement with Stephen. When she awakens the day after they have taken shelter on a large ship, pretending to be man and wife, Maggie has a curious dream of the virgin in the person of her cousin Lucy and Tom as St. Ogg. This may represent her repressed wish of being more acceptable to Tom if she became more like Lucy

(whom Eliot stresses Tom loves). Ironically, in taking Lucy's fiancé she has become at least through her relationship with Stephen partly like Lucy. The myth of the Virgin of the Floss has strong feminist overtones, for, in the legend, the Virgin rewards Ogg for accepting her request without questioning her motives, "gratifying the heart's need." In the myth Ogg showed his strong belief in female autonomy. Yet for Maggie the very act of going off with Lucy's fiancé in reality has just the opposite effect than in her dream: for when Maggie returns home, Tom disowns her brutally, for unlike his Ogg alter-ego, Tom is unable to gratify her simplest "heart's need"-- to allow her to explain her actions.

At times for Maggie the sea represents her feelings of edenic happiness, through the nurturance she felt from her brother, who represents the mother-love she never had from Mrs. Tulliver, whose cold indifference alternating with profound disappointment in her daughter is well-documented in the novel. In fact, Maggie herself underscores Tom's place in her life when she tells Philip why she loves Tom best: "The first thing I remember in my life is standing with Tom by the side of the Floss while he held my hand -- everything before that is dark to me" (402-03). This description suggests that she was born with Tom in the watery womb of the River Floss, almost miraculously with the role of mother and father blotted out. The siblings are symbolic of the two parts of the same androgynous human being, yet the irony is that this unity is really a kind of wish-fulfillment on Maggie's part, for from the first scenes of the novel young Maggie is attacked by Tom and shown as different from him because of her gender.

Another symbol I wish to concentrate fully on in Eliot's novels is that of the Red Deeps in The Mill on the Floss. This place has obvious female symbolism, as well as a striking affinity with some of Dickinson's poetry charged both with sexuality and renunciation. The Red Deeps has a forbidden aura allied with a dark sexuality. It is a hidden almost sacred place that Maggie seeks out in her loneliness and unhappiness after her father's downfall. At first it takes on the

form of a sacred grotto allied with her renunciation. It is a female sexual symbol, as well as a womb-like place of nurturance and hidden desire. Eventually the Red Deeps is penetrated by a male, but by Philip whom Eliot endows with many female qualities, stemming perhaps from his physical deformity that has formed him into a more nurturing, sensitive androgynous mix of male and female. He represents for Maggie the nurturance and love that she desires, and does not receive, from her mother and other family members.

Eliot's initial description of the Red Deeps creates its multivalent symbolism deftly and quickly. In her chapter entitled "Wheat and Tares" she very specifically situates this place:

Just where this line of bank sloped down again to the level, a by-road turned off and led to the other side of the rise . . . [which] was now clothed with brambles and trees, and here and there by a stretch of grass which a few sheep kept close-nibbled. In her childish days, Maggie held this place, called the Red Deeps, in very great awe, and needed all her confidence in Tom's bravery to reconcile her to an excursion thither . . . (393)

Originally this was a place of awe that Maggie feared; now she sought it out as a "pleasure she loved so well that sometimes, in her ardours of renunciation, she thought she ought to deny herself the frequent indulgence in it" (393). Into this quiet female place comes Philip, who has been hoping to find her there. Since his father is Mr. Tulliver's enemy, Maggie has been forbidden to see her childhood friend. Philip, deformed as a hunchback, falls in love with the beautiful Maggie. At this point Eliot is weaving threads of a Romeo-Juliet story with the fairytale of Beauty and the Beast, yet the stamp of female re-formulation of both stories will be clear. Philip importunes Maggie to meet him occasionally in the Red Deeps, and at first Maggie procrastinates on her decision while allowing Philip time to see her. Maggie tells him she has

given up most books, and Philip is appalled, particularly because the Maggie he knew was intellectually curious. He tempts her with The Pirate by Walter Scott; at first she seems to succumb to its spell and then in a parody of Eve being tempted in the Garden of Eden she gives it back: "No, thank you, . . . It would make me in love with this world again, as I used to be; it would make me long to see and know many things -- it would make me long for a full life" (402). She has been totally immersed in the philosophy of The Imitation of Christ and tells Philip "I must wait -- this life will not last long" (402).

Maggie's dilemma of vacillating between renunciation and living a life of concealment is one she worried about after her initial encounter with Philip: "But the severe monotonous warning came again and again -- that she was losing the simplicity and clearness of her life by admitting a ground of concealment, and that by forsaking the simple rule of renunciation, she was throwing herself under the seductive guidance of illimitable wants" (424). The overuse of the word "simplicity" should alert the reader to Eliot's purpose--that of underscoring the problems inherent in looking to simplify a female life that Eliot herself has spent almost 700 pages trying to present in all its complications. Echoes of Dickinson's personas also reverberate here. Dickinson creates dilemmas of renouncing the face of the beloved because the secrecy and concealment and the sheer joy of it threatens her very existence.

Maggie reveals to Philip insight into her own character as a way of making him understand her decision to renounce him and the world: "I was never satisfied with a *little* of anything. That is why it is better for me to do without earthly happiness altogether . . ." (428). This is echoed in Dickinson's poetry whose personas boast of their desire to renounce all earthly delights, even food, and the fear that having real happiness will obliterate them.

Maggie's year of meeting Philip in the Red Deeps ends when Tom finds out about it. Yet Philip has converted her away from her life of renunciation, at least temporarily, giving Maggie

many books to read, including the novel Corinne, and has declared his love for her and received love in return.

A curious passage prompted by their discussion of this novel indicates how Maggie sees the traditional role of woman as inspiration or object for men's literary aspirations. Its presence here indicates another aspect of the theme of androgyny, particularly relating to the writing of literature. Philip asks Maggie, "Wouldn't you really like to be a tenth Muse, then, Maggie?" She replies, "Not at all The Muses are uncomfortable goddesses, I think -- obliged always to carry rolls and musical instruments about with them. If I carried a harp in this climate, you know, I must have a green baize cover for it -- and I should be sure to leave it behind me by mistake" (432). Here, Maggie becomes a spokeswoman for Eliot who points out the ludicrous notion of one set of characteristics inherently wedded to the female sex. This traditional role for women of being placed on a pedestal is deflated in the slightly irreverent tone that Eliot creates through a shift in perspective to this young, practical disenfranchised girl. The underlying situation is Eliot's reformulation of notions of the woman as muse, traditionally seen as the impetus for creativity but not the creative spark itself. Eliot re-examines women's roles vis á vis writing or any other creative undertaking. Maggie, ever practical, sees right through this seemingly exalted place for woman (as muse) and by focusing on the physical discomfort and impracticality of such a role is simultaneously voicing Eliot's concern with patronizing male-dominated views of women.

Dickinson also has similar references to the traditional view of the muse throughout her work. She attacks the notion of the muse in various ways, including changing the traditional relationship of muse and artist. For example, she recognizes Sue and Lavinia as the dual-faced muse in her life. While Dickinson was neither wife nor a mother, she and her sister Lavinia were the primary caregivers in the home during Mrs. Dickinson's long period of invalidism. Toward

the end of her life after the deaths of her parents, Dickinson was given more time for her writing by Lavinia, who also remained unmarried and took on most of the household duties. Dickinson, who was grateful both for the time and Lavinia's encouragement, referred to her as her "inciting voice." She recognized her indebtedness to Lavinia. In 1883 she writes: "Your bond to your brother [Charles Clark] reminds me of mine to my sister--early, earnest, indissoluble. Without her life were fear, and Paradise a cowardice, except for her inciting voice" (Letter 799). Such a view of Lavinia as some type of female muse for the poet reverses not only the male-subject, woman-object paradigm, it also calls into question the role of the muse itself. Traditionally such a female muse would be a lofty, rather ethereal inspiration, much like the muses Philip remarks on in the scene discussed above in The Mill on the Floss. However, judging from the evidence of the Lavinia-Emily relationship in Sewall's biography, Lavinia was the most practical and earth-bound of muses. She was, in fact, a counterpoint to Sue, whom Dickinson seems to have identified as the other half of this double-faced female muse.⁵⁶ I find this sense of Lavinia as partial muse an interesting subversion of the traditional view of the female muse. Instead Dickinson substitutes an "inciting voice," which encouraged and cleared the way by taking up the household duties and allowing her the space and time to "think" (as Lavinia termed it in her own assessment of Emily's role in the family). Perhaps Lavinia's role was quite similar to that of Melville's or Emerson's wife who created a nurturing atmosphere for their poet/husbands.

There are other ways that Dickinson, like Eliot, subverts the traditional portrait of the female muse, for example, by calling on dead or unattainable males for her inspiration in the poetry. Thus Dickinson's recurrent motif of the dead or unattainable male lover might signal a

⁵⁶ While it is not my focus to argue this point extensively, I recommend Martha Nell Smith's Rowing in Eden for a full discussion of the contention that Sue was Dickinson's muse.

female parody of the muse in male literary tradition heritage --a tradition which characterized the female muse as either dead or unattainable, perhaps epitomized by Petrarch's Laura, a barely real girl-child whose value lies in her inaccessibility or of the dead female muses that populate Poe's elegies. Maybe both serve as models for Dickinson's gendered revision of the muse in her own poetry.

There seems to be a third revision of the traditional muse in Dickinson's poetry, an elimination of the muse altogether, declaring herself her own muse. Relevant to the latter stance is a letter written early on to her brother Austin soon after he has presumably sent her samples of his own writing. Here is the pertinent part of her letter dated March 27, 1853.

And Austin is a Poet, Austin writes a Psalm. Out of the way, Pegasus, Olympus enough "to him," and just say to those "nine muses" that *we have done with them. Raised a living muse ourselves, worth the whole lot of them.* [italics mine].

Now Brother Pegasus, I'll tell you what it is--I've been in the habit *myself* of writing some few things, and it rather appears to me that you're getting away my patent, so you'd better be somewhat careful, or I'll call the police!
(Letter 110)

There is a strong connection between the scenes in Mill in the Red Deeps and Dickinson's poetry, particularly about sexuality, renunciation, spiritual union, and The Imitation of Christ.

The Mill on the Floss had been published in 1860. The poem I wish to discuss for its affinities with the Red Deeps was written within a year of the novel's publication. We can safely

assume that Dickinson read the novel sometime between her mention of it in a letter of November 1862 and its publication in 1860. At that point in her life Dickinson was undergoing incredible transformations, not the least of which was her belief that she was a poet with a queenly role. She had asserted her role as poet in one of the more important poems of her annus mirabilis, 1862, "I'm ceded--I've stopped being Theirs--" (discussed fully in an earlier chapter of this study). That poem indicates how Dickinson was surrendering herself and then actively seeking a new life, putting away her "childhood toys" and her role as daughter "crying on her father's breast."

It must have seemed to Dickinson, at this crucial time in her life, that young Maggie's story was also her story. Like Maggie she desired to be seen as intellectually equal to her brother and accepted by her father. Maggie also underwent suffering and was undergoing crises, just as Dickinson was struggling to come to terms with her vocation as poet and all its ramifications. All of these parallels and others suggested throughout this section of the study add a somewhat retrospective glow to the poems she was writing that focused on similar themes in Eliot's novel.

It is very likely that consciously or not Dickinson was working through poetically some of the same ideas and themes that Eliot had suggested in the scenes between Philip and Maggie in the Red Deeps. We know that she was an avid reader of Eliot and that her literary technique was one which as Sue said in her obituary would seize on the kernel or essence of something she had read: "Keen and eclectic in her literary tastes, she sifted libraries from Shakespeare to Browning; quick as the electric spark in her intuitions and analyses, she seized the kernel instantly, almost impatient of the fewest words by which she must make her revelation."⁵⁷ It is not likely that Dickinson could have been aware of all her affinities, yet I am suggesting that

⁵⁷ This is quoted in This Brief Tragedy by John Evangelist Walsh, 113.

her choice of Eliot as foremother suggested she felt a kinship in their poetics, and very likely in their lives. In reading about Eliot's life and her novels and poems, Dickinson may also in some areas have been consciously trying to emulate elements of Eliot's style and themes.

Poem 322 is dated by Johnson as having been written in late 1861 and first published in Scribner's Magazine in August 1890 with the title "Renunciation." It focuses on a lover's meeting that shares many of the elements of the lovers in the Red Deeps.

There came a Day at Summer's full,
 Entirely for me --
 I thought that such were for the Saints,
 Where Resurrections -- be --

The Sun, as common, went abroad,
 The flowers, accustomed, blew,
 As if no soul the solstice passed
 That maketh all things new --

The time was scarce profaned, by speech --
 The symbol of a word
 Was needless, as at Sacrament,
 The Wardrobe -- of our Lord --

Each was to each The Sealed Church,
 Permitted to commune this -- time--

Lest we too awkward show
At Supper of the Lamb.

The Hours slid fast -- as Hours will,
Clutched tight, by greedy hands --
So faces on two Decks, look back,
Bound to opposing lands --

And so when all the time had leaked,
Without external sound
Each bound the Other's Crucifix --
We gave no other Bond --

Sufficient troth, that we shall rise --
Deposed -- at length, the Grave --
To that new Marriage,
Justified -- through Calvaries of Love --

Before discussing the poem, I wish to recall some of the pertinent parts of Eliot's scenes in the Red Deeps. Maggie's feelings toward Philip indicate a stronger spiritual bond on her part than on his. In fact, he becomes a substitute for the pact she had with the ideals of the Imitation of Christ. The book he offers her, Corinne, becomes a symbol for her of their pledge to one another, just as á Kempis's religious tract signaled her pledge to renunciation and imitation of the suffering Christ. She sees Philip as enlightening intellectually, and perhaps because she feels

no physical desire is more likely to see their union as intensely spiritual. The irony, of course, is that their meetings occur in a place that is symbolically quite complex. (The Red Deeps represents the sacred and the profane, the female and sexuality, as well as the Garden of Eden and Christ's site of temptation, Gethsemane.) This complex symbolism colors their pledge to one another, making it anything but simple.

In this poem Dickinson's lovers, like Eliot's, have a relationship that is anything but simple. Her lovers' complexities are even greater than Eliot's in that she does not differentiate between them sexually; they are curiously androgynous--simply twin souls/bodies meeting. Their love, like that of Eliot's lovers, partakes of both the sacred and the profane. They too are able to pledge their love in a profoundly sacred place, a place of renewal, like the new Eden of Dickinson's favorite Chapter of the New Testament, "Revelations" a place "for the Saints/Where Resurrections --be--." Their union also seems to reflect on some of the ideas of the The Imitation of Christ. Their lover's tryst is like a "Sacrament" or "Supper of the Lamb," an allusion to Christian liturgical rites of taking Christ's body through the Communion service. Even more important is that the lovers link each other with Christ, reflecting on the ideas in the Imitation to become wedded to Christ.⁵⁸ Like the union in that religious work, this union, too, is focused on suffering because the lovers will not be permitted more than this one intense moment of communion: "Permitted to commune this--time--/Lest we too awkward show/ at Supper of the Lamb." Both Dickinson's and Eliot's lovers are ill-fated because they can never repeat their intense moments in their respective Edens. Dickinson's lovers look to an afterlife, in the last lines of the poem, which becomes a heaven because it promises a sight of the lover's face. This

⁵⁸ The most important reference for the Bride of Christ is the Catholic nun, who pledges herself to her Christ, with a gold ring and a crucifix around her neck.

sense of the lover's face as the real Beatific vision for Dickinson underscores her difference from the intense religious orthodoxy of the Imitation.

Dickinson's clearest revision of the orthodox Christian view of the Beatific Vision appears in a letter written in 1878 to Samuel Bowles: "I fear we shall care very little for the technical resurrection, when to behold the one face that to us comprised it is too much for us--" (Letter 969). Her words suggest that the earthly lover after death will eschew the heavenly reward of ecstatic face to face union with Christ-God, and seek instead to have the lover's face.

Both Eliot and Dickinson use the ideas of Imitation in working out this concept of profane love substituting for spiritual love. As I indicated earlier, Maggie has just as surely substituted the lover Philip's face for her earlier vision, a life or renunciation that emerged from her reading of The Imitation. Philip and Maggie's pledge to one another, like Dickinson's lovers with their "Crucifix" as the sign of their "Bond," is signified by the decidedly non-religious novel Corinne that Philip gives her. Both Eliot and Dickinson are coopting religious symbolism for their own ends, particularly to describe relationships.

Martyrs and Saints

Eliot's ambivalence and irony in her depiction of sainthood, martyrdom and great work is seen in the relationships of Middlemarch and Mill on the Floss. After the "Prelude" on St. Theresa, Eliot's novel structurally proceeds to Dorothea's martyrdom on the altar of Casaubon's "great" key to all mythologies. In Mill she depicts Maggie's double martyrdom, first as she renounces life and love because of religious influence, then to an embracing of life first through Philip then Stephen, and on to a final peace with her brother at the expense of their mutual deaths.

Similarly, Dickinson's poetry on martyrs and saints shows striking correspondences to Eliot's ideas. Such martyrdom is shown to be a hollow act, serving only to shrink the spirit, as Eliot shows in her two most famous female characters. Dickinson too noted the hollowness in martyrdom:

Poem 792

Through the strait pass of suffering

The Martyrs -- even -- trod.

Their feet -- upon Temptation --

Their faces -- upon God --

A stately -- shriven -- Company --

Convulsion -- playing round --

Harmless -- as streaks of Meteor --

Upon a Planet's Bond --

Their faith -- the everlasting troth --

Their Expectation -- fair --

The Needle -- to the North Degree --

Wades -- so -- throe' polar Air!

Sometimes the artist-poet takes on the role of martyr, particularly when the pain of "mortal fate" leads her to seek to move away from the pain of martyrdom to the "art of peace." This is certainly a movement in Eliot's two protagonists, for both Dorothea and Maggie move to

transcend their pain, Dorothea through good works and a good-enough second marriage and Maggie with a loving rapprochement with her brother and her cousin Lucy. In this poem Dickinson was to redefine her definition of the “martyrdom” of the artist, not like the masochism of the narrow tribe of saint-martyrs in the poem above.

Poem 544

The Martyr Poets -- did not tell --
 But wrought their pang in syllable --
 That when their mortal name be numb --
 Their mortal fate-- encourage Some --

The Martyr Painters -- never spoke --
 Bequeathing -- rather -- to their Work --
 That when their conscious fingers cease --
 Some seek in Art -- the Art of Peace

The poem’s theme is not only that art may be therapy; it appears to present a more total vision of artists who are great because they have known deep sorrow. Such artists can bequeath to others “the art of peace.” A reading of this poem that recognizes Dickinson’s interest in female martyrdom and renunciation will see this as a view of female artistry or poetics.

Heroic saintliness as representative of the fully realized life for women primarily appears to be foregrounded in another section of Eliot’s work, the “Prelude” to Middlemarch. In it Eliot introduces the young St. Theresa of Avila whose “passionate, ideal nature demanded an epic life:

what were many-volumed romances of chivalry and the social conquests of a brilliant girl to her? Her flame quickly burned up the light fuel; and, fed from within, soared after some illimitable satisfaction, some object which would never justify weariness, which would reconcile self-despair with the rapturous consciousness of life beyond self. She found her epos in the reform of a religious order." The rest of the "Prelude" chronicles the plight of the would-be Theresas who came after her. For them (whose representative figure is Dorothea herself) Eliot sees a difficult path, for several reasons, including the lack of "coherent social faith and order which could perform the function of knowledge for the ardently willing soul." The narrator goes on to describe these latter day Theresas whose "loving heart beats and sobs after an unattained goodness" but meet instead with society's hindrances and become "foundress{es} of nothing." Dorothea is affirmed as such a character searching for the sublime.

Eliot's novel is realistic, for Dorothea at least moves toward a greater life, even though she falls short of great deeds. Yet, in the Prelude Eliot is also indicting her more modern age for women's plight. There are several reasons for this, including the fact that the Protestant Reformation, which took hold in England, had obliterated the great Catholic female religious orders. Such changes eroded the ability of women to use their altruism in larger ways. If St. Theresa could transform single, discrete and hidden charitable deeds into a larger, historically recognized context of her order, she for her sex managed to do what Dorothea in a later age could not. It seems to me that such notions form Eliot's own criticism of religion, her own version of Higher Criticism quite apart from her translations of Feuerbach and Strauss.

Many feminists indict Eliot for creating heroines who, unlike St. Theresa, are defeated by life, but her "Preface" clarifies her intention. Eliot knew that she herself as one of the most successful novelists in England was an anomaly. She would much rather depict the social forces

that kept women from succeeding than present a romantic view of their chances in her patriarchal society.

But what on closer scrutiny does this image of St. Theresa have to do with Eliot's theories and Dorothea's life? In the "Finale" of the novel, Eliot asks us to imagine many Dorotheas "some of which may present a far sadder sacrifice than that of the Dorothea whose story we know" (896). She ends with the reminder of our debt to these Dorotheas, whose lives are hidden (so reminiscent of Dickinson and her personas whose trope of hiddenness is well documented) and who are "nothing" only in so far as the masculine realm of capitalism might see them, for the 19th-century woman was relegated to the domestic realm, without career, incapable of work in the traditional capitalist sense. The last words express the hope: "that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been" (896).

This recalls one of Eliot's "daughters," Virginia Woolf, who in A Room of One's Own seems to echo these words of Eliot in her elegiac comments on the mythical Judith Shakespeare, whose invisible life was a sign of her gifts being wasted. Significantly, Woolf has "Judith's" legacy situated at the busy crossroads of a London street, which is the site of her suicide. This might suggest the legacy of male dominated capitalism and its effects on female literary history, as well as its legacy of rigidly solidified sex-role stereotyping. Eliot was in a sense more optimistic than Woolf, perhaps "half-owing" to her earlier time in history and the traditional optimism of the 19th century that was just beginning to see the many-faced evils of progress in technology and business. Eliot was, like Dickinson, trying to make the most of the quiet, secluded role of the woman to do good (Dorothea and others) which might go unrecognized but was a valuable gift to humanity nonetheless.

Curiously, however, it was Virginia Woolf who chastised Eliot for creating such a heroine as Dorothea and not giving her a fully formed life. Woolf's assessment, I believe, came

from the writer who had created a fully realized human life, the androgynous and almost immortal (four centuries old) human being, Orlando. In Orlando Woolf creates a legacy of androgyny (too late for George Eliot) but not for her critics to use as a gauge for assessing Eliot's achievement. Orlando, of course, goes beyond anything Eliot has achieved in its representation, but certainly would serve as a clearer key for Dickinson's achievement. It is a parodic biography of a four century old person who changes from male to female, and whose androgynous growth parallels English literary history. It would certainly lead to fruitful discussion if it were compared to the changeling that is the Dickinson persona, and the androgynous spirit that fueled her poetic mission.

Perhaps another less central part of the "Finale" will help to solidify this reading of Eliot. This "Finale" seems almost lost, embedded as it is within the summative afterward of the novel. In Eliot's wrap-up of the Vincys, she remarks that it is Mary who "wrote a little book for her boys, called Stories of Great Men, taken from Plutarch, and had it printed and published . . . every one in town was willing to give the credit of this work to Fred, observing that he had been to the University 'where the ancients were studied,' and might have been a clergyman if he had chosen" (890). There is obviously the injustice here of Mary's ability and intelligence in a "man's world" being ignored, but there is the sarcasm of Eliot's "everyone was willing" and, of course, the omniscient narrator setting things right by giving Mary credit for what she has written. However, there is definitely a complex attitude on Eliot's part, since she herself in her early career as editor and translator was "one of those willing" to allow men to get credit for the writing she did. In addition, there is the irony that Mary's translation has nothing in it of the female writer truly translating the male literary product, for Mary's literary effort is to reproduce another version of those heroic stories that have been inherited from the Greek and Roman empires that valorized men and left women on the periphery, those same stories that Maggie in

Mill on the Floss was attempting to translate into a more female rendition in the passages I have discussed above. This leaves us with an ending that, like so many of Dickinson's, brings up more questions than answers to complex issues surrounding gender.

Clairvoyant Eyes/"I"s: Sight/Insight in the Artist's Vision

Dickinson's poem "Like Eyes that Looked on Wastes" and Eliot's short story "The Lifted Veil" create two of the darkest statements of literary vision in their respective canons.

Poem 458

Like Eyes that looked on Wastes--

Incredulous of Ought

But Blank--and steady Wilderness--

Diversified by Night

Just Infinities of Nought--

As far as it could see--

So looked the face I looked upon--

So looked itself--on Me--

I offered it no Help--

Because the Cause was Mine--

The Misery a Compact

As hopeless--as divine--

Neither-- would be absolved--
 Neither would be a Queen
 Without the Other--Therefore--
 We perish--tho' We reign--

Dickinson's poem contains a balanced movement that uses the concept of twins as a symbol for poetic power. Perhaps this suggests the same-sex twins that also represent the origins of androgyny in Aristophanes. The face in the mirror faces another face, identical, but such a view is like looking at "wastes." The negative apocalyptic vision seems to present the evil twin of that other vision of the beloved Dickinson wrote about, her own profane version of the Beatific Vision. These eyes see only "nought" or "blank" with the occasional respite of "night" (an example of Dickinson's black humor). It is as if neither mirror nor lamp, to use Meyer Abrams's phrase for literary vision, seem to be of any use here. The artist has no faith in either.

This poem's dark vision is compounded through the suggestion that the "Compact" or the pledge to art has been wasted or squandered. In Emersonian terms, everything that is the "not-Me" has been lost through solipsism, which has clouded "the naked-eyeball" of the poet-speaker and has removed her transparent magic. Everything is self-referential; in a macabre turn, the two "I"s and the two person's eyes (the androgynous or two-sided poet?) can neither see nor create. The poem may very well reflect Dickinson's own fear for her physical vision, but that is only a small part of its import.

Poem 642 shares similar concerns with this poem. In it two sides of the self are warring:

Me from Myself--to banish--
 Had I Art--

Impregnable my Fortress

Unto All Heart--

But since Myself--assault Me--

How have I peace

Except by subjugating

Consciousness?

And since We're mutual Monarch

How this be

Except by Abdication--

Me--of Me?

Because of the inquisitory and dialogic stylistics of Poem 642, the vision of the artist's consciousness is not nearly as bleak as that of the narrator in "Like Eyes that Looked on Wastes." Those literary devices leave the sentiments expressed open to doubt, calling into question the terrible import of its vision of the disintegration of the I. (Such devices have been shown to be viewed by certain theories of female poetics to signify the female principle). However, "Like Eyes that Looked on Wastes--" leaves no way out for its speaker. This "Queen" is abdicating her throne; and there is no vision left. Instead it appears that there is only the pyrrhic victory of power being reined/reigned in: "We perish--tho' we reign." These poems project despair over poetic power. As a woman writing, Dickinson seemed to recognize the anxiety and ambivalence toward what she termed in a more optimistic perspective as her "golden dream."

George Eliot's short fiction, "The Lifted Veil," contains her only artist-protagonist-speaker. It is as if through this change in focus, she allowed herself what she had suppressed in her novel--her most pessimistic vision of creativity. Its striking disjuncture from her other fiction was immediately felt by her publisher. "The Lifted Veil" was seen by Blackwood as an anomaly, although he published it. In a letter to her he wrote: "I wish the theme had been a happier one, and I think you must have been worrying and disturbing yourself about something when you wrote" (Letters, III, 67).

This short story is particularly important in its connection with Dickinson's poetry because such a speaker comes closest, in Eliot's prose, to the "I" in lyric poetry, specifically Dickinson's "supposed person." As many critics have recognized, Latimer becomes a vehicle by which Eliot's own artistic consciousness is explored. Ruby Redinger makes an insightful comparison of Eliot and her character regarding double-consciousness. Herbert Spencer, she remarks, had recognized Eliot's "self-admitted possession of double consciousness, which he interpreted to mean 'a current of self-criticism' that would obstruct spontaneous expression"(401). With Eliot, Redinger claims, this consciousness became her greatest asset, giving us the peculiar George Eliot voice. Yet in Latimer such an artistic stance becomes a decidedly negative one, for his poetic sensibility was silenced by the double-sided gift of self-censure. In fact, one could make a case for a psychoanalytic reading of the story where his wife Bertha is simply a projection of his lack of sympathy with the world, solipsistically engendered. Thus, she represents his own death-wish.

Latimer's dual consciousness is similarly played out in many of Dickinson poems on psychic dissolution and split selves, for example, "Me from Myself--to banish--." His gift of clairvoyance and time travel is an affliction for him, particularly since it is revealed that his wife Bertha is planning to poison him and he knows the exact date of his death, September 29th 1850.

Curiously, he does nothing to change the outcome of any of his previsions. He may be a paradigm for the traditional narrator who, while revealing events, creates a world where his characters are free to pursue the ramifications of their own lives. In using death as a subtext here, Eliot shows a remarkable similarity to some of the death poems by Dickinson. In particular, Eliot's story and Dickinson's poem "My Life Had Stood a Loaded Gun" share a similar fear of the artist's power and indicate their overall concern with the peculiar position of the woman artist.

This preoccupation with eschatology in Latimer's story may also be an extreme version of the concept of renunciation in Eliot, for Latimer refuses or renounces the obvious corollary to his gift of omniscience: he will not act to prevent destruction, much like the speaker in Dickinson's poem is left at the end with the power to kill but not the power to die. In Dickinson, like Latimer, there is a fatalistic acceptance of death. Both her speakers and she seem to cede themselves over to it and use their remarkable powers of concentration and description to describe the experience in an almost detached manner.

"The Lifted Veil" has recently been the focus of belated critical attention, with one critic, Carroll Viera, in "'The Lifted Veil' and George Eliot's Early Aesthetic" going so far as to suggest that it attempts "to synthesize her evolving critical precepts by transmuting them into fictional form" (750). Whether this story represents a blueprint for Eliot's vision of the artist throughout her canon, it does provide remarkable insights in its relation to Dickinson's view of the artist.

In her use of the more personal first-person narrator, Latimer becomes a stand-in for the artist-self, who takes on qualities of the female artist. He, like Mary Anne Evans who adopted the George Eliot cross-dressed name, is a narrator endowed by Eliot with both male and female traits. She gives him "the poet's sensibility without his voice," a description that aptly describes

the female poet, who is often silenced and unheard, as Gilbert and Gubar contend in Shakespeare's Sisters. Thus, I argue that while Latimer, the narrator-protagonist of Eliot's story is a male in the story, his traits, much like Philip's in The Mill on the Floss are more female. He becomes for Eliot a nexus for certain traditionally female characteristics in the 19th century that she wished to dissect. For example, he bears "the stamp of a morbid organization, framed for passive suffering." His artistic talents seem to be more appreciative than active and thus traditionally more female than male. In fact, Latimer denigrates himself as "too feeble for the sublime resistance of poetic production." This artistic attitude is similar to that of the female speaker in Dickinson's poem "I would not paint a picture" who "claims" that she would rather be an audience than a creator, but yet in the guise of "the lady doth protest too much" is actually composing a poem that articulates the ambivalent hidden desires of the female artist.

Poem 505

I would not paint--a picture--
 I'd rather be the One
 Its bright impossibility
 To dwell--delicious--on--
 And wonder how the fingers feel
 Whose rare--celestial--stir--
 Evokes so sweet a Torment--
 Such sumptuous--Despair--

I would not talk, like Cornets--
 I rather be the One

Raised softly to the Ceilings--

And out, and easy on--

Through Villages of Ether--

Myself endued Balloon

Be but a lip of Metal--

The pier to my Pontoon--

Nor would I be a Poet--

It's finer--own the Ear--

Enamored--impotent--content--

The license to revere,

A privilege so awful

What would the Dower be,

Had I the Art to stun myself

With Bolts of Melody!

While the artist-protagonist Latimer shares traits with the speaker of Poem 505, he is much closer to the speaker-artist-gun of "A Loaded Gun."⁵⁹ Besides showing traits that are both male and female, and thus more androgynous, Latimer seems to be transferring onto his wife some of the negative qualities in himself, a part of his maleness, that he needs to repress. Thus Bertha becomes a repository for his death wish and his other violent and negative feelings. Perhaps, in this he is like the speaker in "My Life had stood a Loaded Gun" who has also

⁵⁹ I have already discussed this poem, however, I wish to suggest here its affinities with Eliot's Latimer.

displaced negative (or at least powerful) images of the self onto the “I” that guards the Master’s head and who will pull the trigger which s/he has under a “yellow Thumb.” I believe both artists are giving us their respective parables on the dual nature of creativity, its male and female qualities, and specifically its destructive and violent ramifications.

My Life had stood--a Loaded Gun--

In Corners--till a Day--

The Owner passed--identified--

And carried Me away--

And now We roam in Sovereign Woods--

And now We hunt the Doe--

And every time I speak for Him--

The Mountains straight reply--

And do I smile, such cordial light

Upon the Valley glow--

It is as a Vesuvian face

Had let its pleasure through--

To foe of His--I’m deadly foe--

None stir the second time--

On whom I lay a Yellow Eye

Or an emphatic thumb--

Though I than He--may longer live
 He longer must--than I--
 For I have but the power to kill,
 Without--the power to die--

Latimer and Dickinson's speaker are Byronic in their respective attitudes toward nature and the sublime. Dickinson's speaker is volcanic, creating a Vesuvian smile, shooting into the mountains which echo in reply, mountains that she in another poem saw as a distinctly female icon. This sense of violent power is intertwined with her belief in language. In Letter 656 Dickinson states that writing poetry was the power to "impel shapes to eyes at a distance" and was the power of life or death. "yet not a pencil in the street but has this awful power, though nobody arrests it." Latimer similarly recalls his intensely violent reaction to a trip to Geneva, "The first sight of the Alps, with the setting sun on them . . . seemed to me like an entrance into heaven." He recalls that lying down "in my boat . . . while I looked up at the departing glow leaving one mountain-top after the other, as if the prophet's chariot of fire were passing over them on its way to the home of light."

Latimer has a sensibility that gives him visionary powers and places him in the position of shying away from others because of it. His retiring life, coupled with his ability to see more than the quotidian, links him with many of Dickinson's speakers. He confesses: "The horror I had of again breaking in on the privacy of another soul, made me . . . draw the shroud of concealment more closely around my own." This is curiously close to the facts of Dickinson's life and of her poet/speakers who could "close the valves of {their} attention like stone" to all others.

Latimer is gifted with the proverbial Greek gift: in seeing beyond the veil he has seen what Dickinson herself warned of: "Had we the first intimation of the definition of life, the sanest of us would be Lunatics." Eliot herself in "The Lifted Veil" adumbrates theories she would develop more fully in Middlemarch where she writes, like Dickinson, of the precipice that lies beyond the human ken for the hubristically inclined: In Chapter 20, Eliot's narrator remarks: "If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence."

Similarly, Dickinson, with one eye on this "lunacy of light," would still doggedly "buffet the sea" in her relentless quest to discover meaning, whether in poems that probed the moment of death or afterlife, or those that attempted to describe extraordinary states of being, like madness. I believe that her words quoted above on the "intimation of life" are a direct reference to Wordsworthian romanticism, whose focus on "intimations of immortality" in "spots of time" would instill insights into the spiritual. Dickinson's aesthetic critique of Wordsworthian romanticism may very well be a gendered view dependent on her sense that as a female writing there is a concomitant, sometimes violently self-destructive price to be paid for such knowledge, or even the hubris to attempt such discovery.

Like Dickinson with her fears of "lunacy," Eliot's Latimer becomes, through this heightened gift of seeing through the veil of life, both artistically impotent and disenchanted with life. (In this story, we should remember Latimer's only "legacy to the world," to use Dickinson's words, is this depressing autobiographical fragment.) Latimer is a prefigurement of the deadened characters, exemplified most fully in Casaubon, whose gift leads him nowhere and whose "key" to learning is found to be meaningless and destructive both to self and others. He shares affinities with many of Dickinson's male figures of death. Latimer does have both male and

female qualities (Is he Eliot's Orlando?), yet he cannot sustain the traditionally female ability (as Carol Gilligan has described it) of care and compassion for others, which compensates for the loneliness of his gift of vision. In fact, at only one point in the story is he able to feel any bond at all with another human being and that is when his brother dies and he feels a "movement of deep pity towards {his father}" which "softened feeling made this the happiest time I has known since childhood." With Eliot, much more so than with Dickinson, the artist has a moral responsibility. Latimer, as a kind of meta-symbolic artist because of his clairvoyance, abdicates that great responsibility.

Thus sight, insight, loss of sight are all stances on a continuum which for both Eliot and Dickinson circumscribes their ambivalent attitude toward creativity. Early in his life Latimer had a brief period of blindness. Dickinson herself has brief periods of blindness when the eye disease she suffered with was acute, but more importantly, she uses images of blindness in her poetry, for example, "The Day I had my eye put out," in ways similar to Eliot. That is to say that both writers create a troubled world where all three steps toward artistic vision are problematic: simply seeing the world is not enough, nor is insight or inspiration, nor is complete blindness, obtuseness, or romanticized seeing. These stances are ones Eliot played with throughout her life: with characters like Dorothea in Middlemarch, Eliot underscores her romantic diffused picture of Casaubon with the fact that Dorothea is literally myopic. In "The Lifted Veil" Eliot finds that Latimer falls short of her vision of the moral artist. He is a symbol of what Veira calls "two irreconcilable contrarities -- a Romantic freedom and spontaneity and a Victorian discipline and sense of duty" (763). Yet it is curious that in describing his time of temporary blindness, Latimer sees it as his happiest time. Why? It may be that real insight can only be gained when the more quotidian natural sight is gone. This is a topos used by many male poets when presenting the poet-seer, from Tiresias onward.

However, it seems that with Latimer as a veiled symbol of the female poet Eliot attempts to get back to the maternal dyad where the child was nourished by a female art, a pre-Oedipal language of wordless cohesion. It is precisely when Latimer is afflicted with blindness that his bond with his mother is strengthened since she holds him on her knee and caresses him. Perhaps, this is a moment remembered of a pre-edenic unity with the mother that is to Eliot the source of all creativity, a wordless and sightless bonding with the sublime. This insight is intrinsic to her notion of female art, and is one that her letters and writings allude to often. One particularly relevant comment is in a letter to Maria Lewis in 1841: "Does not the notion of a less laborious mode of communication, of a perception approaching more nearly to intuition seem attractive?" (1, 1:107).

No assessment of Eliot's female poetics can occur without a discussion of the feminist criticism that has been leveled against her. This assessment must be clarified particularly because it affects this study of Dickinson's affinities with George Eliot, who I contend represents the movement toward transcending gender in which Dickinson is also engaged. The feminist position alleges that Eliot's heroines are not given enlarged roles for women similar to Eliot's own life. One of the clearest statements of the case is Zelda Austen's "Why Feminist Critics Are Angry with George Eliot?" This appeared in 1976 and has been balanced by recent feminist criticism on Eliot that begins to redress the wrongs heaped upon her in the name of a rather proscriptive feminism.

Austen's article presents a summary of several critical positions on Eliot's shortcomings and attempts to answer them. Feminist critics are angry in particular because the ending of Middlemarch does not permit Dorothea the success that Eliot had in her own life. Such critics are particularly upset by Dorothea's compromised marriage to Ladislav, who is not portrayed as her equal. Dorothea has settled for a life as the woman behind the man, however socially beneficial

the couple's life together is. One answer Austen gives to this is that Eliot chose to reflect the more common situation of women in the 19th century not the rare exception that she herself proved to be. To give Eliot her due, Austin explains that Eliot was reacting as a novelist against the idealized fiction of her predecessors and, along with others, was helping to usher in the realistic novel. In presenting Maggie and Dorothea as examples of these types of Eliot heroines, Austin counters with the argument that Eliot wanted them to be everywoman characters representing those who were frustrated through societal norms from achieving greater aspirations. Of course, the counter argument is that in so doing Eliot might have helped perpetuate the stereotypes in which women were trapped. Yet, Austin has a more reasonable view to which I also adhere, namely that we cannot throw out whole bodies of literature (male and female) if they do not adhere to present feminist concerns.

Furthermore, she sees as I do, that Eliot's vision of women was very inclusive in that it represented and was sympathetic to women of all types. For example, unlike other 19th century female novelists, Eliot was even sympathetic to female characters who totally embraced women's sphere, for example Lucy Deane in Mill and Rosamond in Middlemarch. In summary, she believes that Eliot did not have a narrow view of liberation for women. Eliot's view included not only a desire for economic and intellectual independence but it was enlarged to "include" fellowship with all women, even those still in 'bondage' (560).

Much of the criticism of Eliot is similar to that of the negative criticism that Dickinson has received -- namely that she identified with her speakers who lived out some of the negative aspects of their 19th-century gender roles. As I hope this study has suggested, Dickinson's presentation of such themes was characteristically "slant." Perhaps both writers' depiction of these negative and sexist stances for women may be seen as a result of their desire to work out (almost in a compulsive repetition) such out worn roles for women. By their very act of mimesis,

these great 19th-century female artists seemed to have created a world that through scrupulous depiction of reality was subverting that reality. One might see this movement as analogous to the way some 20th-century American critics have understood Naturalism in literature, not as a desire to wallow in the sexual and the violent and seamy but rather through over exaggeration of life's naturalistic traits to effect a spiritualization of an increasingly common society⁶⁰. Irigaray in "The Sex Which Is not One" has envisioned the desire of the female writing to use mimeticism in this way. She calls it "spoiling the game." I believe her words elucidate the same thrust in both Eliot and Dickinson.

In the first stage, there is, perhaps, only a single 'way,' that which has historically been assigned the feminine: *mimeticism*. It's a matter of assuming this role deliberately, which is already to transform subordination into affirmation, and thereby to start spoiling the game . . . To *play* (italic mine) at mimesis is then , for a woman. to try to rediscover the locus of her exploitation by discourse, without being simply reduced to it. It is to resubmit herself ... to ideas about her, elaborated in/by a masculine logic, but in order to 'manifest' by ludic repetition what was to remain hidden: the recovery of a possible operation of the feminine in language. It is also to 'unveil' the fact that if women mime so well it's because they cannot simply be reabsorbed in that function . *They remain elsewhere.*(73-74)⁶¹

One of the more reasoned new studies that aims to redress negative estimates of Eliot's feminism is Dorothea Barrett's Vocation and Desire: George Eliot's Heroines. Her objective is

⁶⁰ See Charles Child Walcott's study of naturalism, Naturalism

⁶¹ As quoted in Stanton's "Difference on Trial" (172).

to “attempt to reclaim the canonical writers, to point out the radicalism that has been obscured by generations of conservative interpretation” (xi). In fact her assessment of George Eliot, can apply equally to Emily Dickinson:

What is most striking about George Eliot is her inclusiveness: she is both passionate and prudish, radical and conservative, capable of an almost superhuman extension of sympathies and of the most corrosive disdain. All these conflicting elements struggle together in her fiction, and the result is not a series of elaborate moral fables but rather a protean vision of the dialectical engagement of human realities and possibilities. (200)

It is easy to see how the protean qualities of both writers have led critics, however inadvertently, to pick only traits that corresponded with their pre-conceived attitudes and thus to misconstrue these writers by giving only partial perspectives.

This section of the study on Eliot's role in the forming of Dickinson's poetics began with Dickinson's remarks about her life and work. I would like to end with Dickinson's remarks about Eliot's death and her final assessment of her. Like her intense reaction to the death of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Dickinson's remarks register a sense of personal loss, even though she had neither a personal nor epistolary relationship with Eliot. Two days after her death on December 28 1880, Dickinson writes : “Grieving for ‘George Eliot’ -- grieved for Dr. Smith, [her family's physician] our Family Savior, living Fingers that are left, have a strange warmth --“ (L 683). After receiving one of Eliot's obituary notices from Sue, early in 1881 Dickinson writes: “Thank you, Sue -- I was glad to read it -- Perhaps she who Experienced Eternity in Time, may receive Time's omitted Gift as part of the Bounty of Eternity --“ (L 688). In a later letter to the Norcross cousins she writes insightfully of the losses George Eliot experienced, perhaps the losses she intuited from her careful reading of the life and work:

The look of the words as they lay in print I shall never forget. Not their face in the casket could have had the eternity to me. Now, *my* George Eliot. The gift of belief which her greatness denied her, I trust she receives in the childhood of the kingdom of heaven. As childhood is earth's confiding time, perhaps having no childhood, she lost her way to the early trust, and no later came. (Letter 710)

Dickinson equates the words with the body of George Eliot, "their face in the casket." As with many of Dickinson's other friends and family, Eliot's finished life, her physical death has made her all the more real to the poet who dealt in spiritual essences, shunning the face to face encounter, and living on words. Eliot gained for Dickinson the attribute "my" only after her death, which in Dickinson's teleology made her a soul-mate, perhaps because like the poet herself "her greatness denied her {belief}." Astutely psychological, Dickinson creates a brief story of origins for Eliot: she had no childhood, no confiding time, no early trust. Most significantly she is suggesting that Eliot felt her own lack and made something great out of it, whether it was her early sorrowful relationship to her mother who was distant, sickly and died in Eliot's girlhood, or her difficult relationships with her father and brothers. It is often true that what we notice in others is that which is particularly relevant to our own lives. Dickinson is no exception; Eliot was "my George Eliot" because they shared so much.

Though the two writers never met, for Dickinson this was a real relationship, much like those epistolary relationships she favored in her remarks on letters as distilling the essence of a person, a mind alone or the "incorporeal being" as she phrased it. As I have argued in these last chapters, Dickinson had entered into a dialogue with Eliot's "essence" in her poetry and letters.

Perhaps the only final assessment of the overriding similarity of these two writers is their insistence on taking a difficult path, one which if their literary history has taught us anything was fuel for condemnation and misunderstanding. Essentially both seem to create a female world for

which there are no adequate explanations in either psychology or feminist criticism. In beginning to decipher their stories, we are able to tear apart the palimpsest, uncovering layer upon layer of subverted assumptions about gender both for the 19th-century mind and the late 20th-century one. And, most importantly, we are able to gauge Dickinson's female poetics more fully through this comparison with George Eliot.

CONCLUSION

Certain questions that I have raised about Emily Dickinson and her need to define herself against two very different women writers of her time need to be further explored. Did Dickinson favor forms and subjects which were more likely female than male, forms she evolved through her complex relationships with these two writers? What are her affinities with other female writers, both of her time and later? Deconstructionist and Feminist criticisms have paved the way for a critical scrutiny of the deeper structure of language in order to focus on absences and nuances which contribute to a total understanding of a text. I have tried in this study to suggest some of those less obvious structures and themes which contribute to an on-going debate about Dickinson's gendered poetics, and to focus on her relationship with two writers of her time with whom she shared affinities -- and, more importantly, whose poetics helped her to define her own. It is inevitable that the structure of this study in some way adopts the tone and style of its subject. With her, I hope that

The Props assist the House

Until the House is built

And then the Props withdraw

And adequate, erect,

The House support itself
And cease to recollect
The Augur and the Carpenter--
Just such a retrospect
Hath the perfected Life--
A past of Plank and Nail
And slowness--then the Scaffolds drop
Affirming it a Soul.

WORKS CITED

PRIMARY SOURCES

- Dickinson, Emily. The Letters of Emily Dickinson. Ed. Thomas H. Johnson and
Theodora Ward (3 vols.) Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of
Harvard University Press, 1958.
- _____. The Poems of Emily Dickinson. Ed. Thomas H. Johnson 3 volumes.
Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press, 1955.

SECONDARY SOURCES ON DICKINSON

- Anderson, Charles R. Emily Dickinson's Poetry. New York: Rhinehart and
Winston, 1960.
- Barker, Wendy. Lunacy of Light: Emily Dickinson and the Experience of
Metaphor. Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987.
- Boruch, Marianne. "Dickinson Descending." Georgia Review, 40 (1986):
863-77.
- Benfey, Christopher. Emily Dickinson: Lives of a Poet. New York: George
Braziller, 1986.
- Bennett, Paula. Emily Dickinson: Woman Poet. Iowa City, Iowa: University of
Iowa Press, 1990.
- _____. My Life, a Loaded Gun: Female Creativity and Feminist Poetics. Boston:
Beacon Press, 1986.

- Bianchi, Martha Dickinson. Emily Dickinson: Face to Face: Unpublished Letters with Notes and Reminiscences. Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1932.
- Bingham, Millicent Todd. Emily Dickinson's Home: Letters of Edward Dickinson and His Family. New York: Harper and Row, 1955.
- Boruch, Marianne. "Dickinson Descending." Georgia Review. 40 (1986): 863-77.
- Budick, E. Miller. Emily Dickinson and the Life of Language: A Study in Symbolist Poetics. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985.
- Cameron, Sharon. Choosing Not Choosing: Dickinson's Fascicles. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992.
- _____. Lyric Time: Dickinson and the Limits of Genre. Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979.
- Cody John. After Great Pain: The Inner Life of Emily Dickinson. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971.
- Dandurand, Karen.. Dickinson Scholarship: An Annotated Bibliography 1965-1985. New York: Garland, 1988.
- Diehle, Joanna Feit. Emily Dickinson and the Romantic Imagination. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988.
- Donovan, Josephine. "Toward a Women's Poetics." Feminist Issues in Literary Scholarship. Ed. Shari Benstock. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.
- Duchac, Joseph. The Poems of Emily Dickinson: an Annotated Guide to Commentary Published in English, 1890-1977. Boston: G.K.Hall, 1979.

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks.

Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960

____. Letters. Ed. Ralph L. Rush. New York: Random House, 1939.

____. The Portable Emerson. Ed. Mark van Doren. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946.

Farr, Judith. The Passion of Emily Dickinson. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992.

Franklin, Ralph W. The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981.

Garbowsky, Maryanne. The House Without the Door: A Study of Emily Dickinson and the Illness of Agoraphobia. Rutherford, New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1989.

Gere, Karen Richardson. "'My George Eliot' and My Emily Dickinson." Emily Dickinson Journal. III. 1 (1994): 24-40.

Hall, Alice Petry. "Teaching Dickinson to the Fine Arts Major." Approaches to Teaching Dickinson's Poetry. Eds. Robin Riley Fast and Christine Mack Gordon. New York: MLA, 1989. 56-61.

Homans, Margaret. Women Writers and Poetic Identity: Dorothy Wordsworth, Emily Bronte, Emily Dickinson. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980.

Johnson, Greg. Emily Dickinson: Perception and the Poet's Quest. Birmingham: University of Alabama, 1985.

- Juhasz, Suzanne. Naked and Fiery Forms, Modern American Poetry by Women: A New Tradition. New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1976.
- ____. "Reading Doubly: Dickinson, Gender and Multiple Meanings." Approaches to Teaching Dickinson's Poetry. Eds. Robin Riley Fast and Christine Mack Gordon. New York: MLA, 1989. 85-95.
- Juhasz, Suzanne and Cristanne Miller. Eds. Emily Dickinson: A Celebration for Readers. New York: Gordon and Breach, 1989.
- Lease, Benjamin. Emily Dickinson's Reading of Men and Books: Sacred Soundings. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990.
- Leyda, Jay. The Years and Hours of Emily Dickinson. 2 vols. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960.
- Loeffelholz, Mary. Dickinson and the Boundaries of Feminist Theory. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991.
- Loving, Jerome. Emily Dickinson: The Poet on the Second Story. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.
- Lubbers, Klaus. Emily Dickinson: The Critical Revolution. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1968.
- Keller, Karl. The Only Kangaroo Among the Beauty: Emily Dickinson and America. Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979.
- Martin, Wendy. An American Triptych: Anne Bradstreet, Emily Dickinson, Adrienne Rich. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984.
- Mc Neil, Helen. Emily Dickinson. New York: Pantheon, 1986.

Miller, Cristanne. "Dickinson's Language: Interpreting Truth Told Slant."

Approaches to Teaching Dickinson's Poetry. Eds. Robin Riley Fast and Christine Mack Gordon. New York: MLA, 1989. 78-84.

Mossberg, Barbara Antonia Clark. Emily Dickinson: When a Writer Is a Daughter. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1982.

"Poem 754: Workshop Discussion." Emily Dickinson: A Celebration for Readers. Eds. Suzanne Juhasz and Cristanne Miller. New York: Gordon and Breach. 1989.

Pollak, Vivian. Emily Dickinson: The Anxiety of Gender. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1984.

Porter, David. Dickinson: The Modern Idiom. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981.

Rosenbaum, S.P. Concordance to the Poems of Emily Dickinson. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1964.

Rupp, Richard H. Critics on Emily Dickinson. Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1972.

Sewall, Richard B., ed. Emily Dickinson: A Collection of Critical Essays. Twentieth Century Views. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963.

_____. The Life of Emily Dickinson. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974.

Shurr, William H. The Marriage of Emily Dickinson: A Study of the Fascicles. Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1983.

_____. New Poems of Emily Dickinson. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 1993.

Small, Judy Jo. Positive as Sound. Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1990.

Smith, Martha Nell Smith. Rowing in Eden: Reading Emily Dickinson. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992.

St. Armand, Barton Levi. Emily Dickinson and Her Culture: The Soul's Society. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

Telfer, Terry. "A Religious Context for Dickinson's Poetry." Dickinson Studies 1st Half (1990): 37-52.

Wolff, Cynthia Griffin. Life of Emily Dickinson. New York: Knopf, 1986.

WORKS BY/ABOUT GEORGE ELIOT

Austen, Zelda. "Why Feminist Critics Are Angry with George Eliot." College English. 37 (1976): 549-61.

Barrettt, Dorothea. Vocation and Desire: George Eliot's Heroines. New York and London: Routledge, 1989.

Blake, Kathleen, ed. Approaches to Teaching Middlemarch. New York: MLA, 1990.

Byatt, A.S. and Warren, Nicholas. eds. George Eliot: Selected Essays, Poems, and Other Writings. New York: Penguin, 1990.

Carlisle, Janice. "Reading Middlemarch Then and Now." Approaches to Teaching Eliot's Middlemarch. Ed. Kathleen Blake. New York: MLA, 1990. 98-108.

Cross, John Walter. George Eliot's Life Related on her Letters and Journals. 3 vols. Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1885.

Eliot, George. Daniel Deronda. (1876) New York: Penguin, 1980.

____. Middlemarch. (1871-72) New York: Penguin, 1979.

____. Selections from George Eliot's Letters. Ed. Gordon S. Haight. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985.

____. The Mill on the Floss. (1880) New York: Penguin, 1979.

Haight, Gordon. George Eliot: A Biography. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968.

Jacobus, Mary. "The Question of Language: Men of Maxims and The Mill on the Floss." Critical Inquiry. 8,2 (1981): 207-22.

Redinger, Ruby. George Eliot: The Emergent Self. New York: Knopf, 1964.

Viera, Carroll. "'The Lifted Veil' and George Eliot's Early Aesthetic." Nineteenth Century Fiction. 37, 3 (1984): 749-67.

WORKS BY/ABOUT HELEN HUNT JACKSON

Banning, Evelyn. Helen Hunt Jackson. New York: Vanguard Press, 1973.

Bloom, Harold, ed. Poems by Helen Hunt Jackson. New York: Arno Press, 1972.

Jackson, Helen Hunt. A Century of Dishonor. Boston: Harper and Brothers, 1881.

____. Hetty's Strange History. "No-Name" series. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1876.

____. Mercy Philbrick's Choice. "No-Name" series. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1876.

____. Ramona. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1884.

____. Saxe Holm's Stories. New York: Scribner and Sons, Series 1, 1874: Series 2, 1878.

____. Sonnets and Lyrics. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1886.

____. Verses by "H.H." Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1870, 1873.

Odell, Ruth. Helen Hunt Jackson. New York: Appleton-Century, 1939.

Whitaker, Rosemary. "Helen Hunt Jackson, 1830-1885." Legacy. 3, 1 (Spring 1986): 56-62.

SECONDARY GENERAL SOURCES

á Kempis, Thomas. The Imitation of Life. Chicago: Moody Press, 1958.

Arensberg, Mary, ed. The American Sublime. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986.

Baym, Nina. "The Madwoman and Her Languages: Why I Don't Do Feminist Theory." Feminisms. Eds. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1993. 154-67.

Bloom, Harold. A Map of Misreading. New York: Oxford University Press, 1975.

Benstock, Shari, ed. Feminist Issues in Literary Scholarship. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.

Brownstein, Rachel. Becoming a Heroine. New York: Viking Press, 1982.

Caws, Mary Ann. "The Conception of Engendering/The Erotics of Editing." The Poetics of Gender. Ed. Nancy K. Miller. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986. 42-62.

Cixous, Hélène. "The Laugh of the Medusa." Feminisms. Eds. Robyn R.

Warhol and Diane Price Herndl. New Brunswick: Rutgers University

Press, 1993. 334-49.

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks.

Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960

____. Letters. Ed. Ralph L. Rush. New York: Random House, 1939.

____. The Portable Emerson. Ed. Mark van Doren. Cambridge: Harvard

University Press, 1946.

Donovan, Josephine. "Toward A Women's Poetics." Feminist Issues in

Literary Scholarship. Ed. Shari Benstock. Bloomington: Indiana

University Press, 1987. 98-109.

Douglas, Ann. The Feminization of American Culture. New York: Alfred A.

Knopf, 1977.

Eagleton, Mary. Ed. Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader. Oxford: Basil

Blackwell, 1986.

Esposito [née Costa], Catherine. "The Law of the Iron Madonna: A Review Of

The Feminization of American Culture by Ann Douglas." Denver

Quarterly. 14,2 (Summer 1979): 38-40.

Fetterley, Judith and Pryse, Marjorie. Eds. American Women Regionalist:

1850-1910. New York: W.W. Norton. 1992.

Freud, Sigmund. "Femininity." New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis.

(1933). Trans. James Strachey. New York: Norton, 1965.

Gallop, Jane. The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis.

Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982.

- Garner, Shirley Nelson, ed. The(M)other Tongue: Essays in Feminist Psychoanalytic Interpretation. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.
- Gilbert, Sandra M. and Gubar, Susan. "Sexual Linguistics." The Feminist Reader. Eds. Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore. New York: Basil Blackwell, 1989. 81-100.
- _____. Shakespeare's Sisters: Feminist Essays on Women Poets. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979.
- _____. "Tradition and the Female Talent." (1984) The Poetics of Gender. Ed. Nancy K. Miller. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986. 183-207.
- _____. The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979.
- Gilligan, Carol. In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982.
- Hart, James D., ed. The Concise Oxford Companion to American Literature. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- Heilbrun, Carolyn G. Writing A Woman's Life. New York: Ballantine, 1988.
- _____. Toward a Recognition of Androgyny. New York: Knopf, 1964, rpt. 1973.
- Homans, Margaret. Bearing the Word: Language and Female Experience in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.
- Irigaray, Luce. Speculum of the Other Woman. Trans. Gillian C. Gill. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.

- _____. This Sex Which Is Not One. Trans. Catherine Porter. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.
- _____. "When Our Lips Speak Together." New French Feminisms. Trans. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron. Amherst: Amherst University Press, 1980. 68-74.
- Jacobus, Mary. Reading Woman: Essays in Feminist Criticism. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.
- Kauffman, Linda, ed. Gender and Theory: Dialogues on Feminist Criticism. New York: Basil Blackwell, Inc., 1989.
- Kinnell, Galway. Imperfect Thirst. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1994.
- Kolodny, Annette. "A Map for Rereading; or, Gender and the Interpretation of Texts." (M)other Tongue: Essays in Feminist Psychoanalytic Interpretation. Ed. Shirley Nelson Garner. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995. 257-68.
- Kristeva, Julia. "Stabat Mater." The Female Body in Western Culture. Ed. Susan Rubin Suleiman. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986.
- Marcus, Jane. "Still Practice, A/Wrested Alphabet." Feminist Issues in Literary Scholarship. Ed. Shari Benstock. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1987. 79-97.
- Marks, Elaine and Isabelle de Courtivron eds. New French Feminisms. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980.
- Miller, Nancy K. "Arachnologies: The Woman, the Text and the Critic." The Poetics of Gender. Ed. Nancy Miller. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986. 270-96.

____. "Emphasis Added: Plots and Plausibilities in Women's Fiction." PMLA.

- 96, 1, January 1981: 18-28.

____. ed. The Poetics of Gender. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.

Mitchell, Juliet. Women: The Longest Revolution. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.

Mitchell, Juliet and Jacqueline Rose, eds. Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the Ecole Freudienne. London and New York: Norton, 1983.

Moers, Ellen. Literary Women: The Great Writers. New York: Methuen, 1976.

Moi, Toril. "Feminist, Female, Feminine." The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism. Eds. Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore. New York: Basil Blackwell, 1989. 117-32.

Montefiore, Jan. Feminism and Poetry: Language, Experience, Identity in Women's Writing. New York: Pandora, 1987.

Poovey, Mary. The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.

Rich, Adrienne. "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision." In (M)other Tongue: Essays in Feminist Psychoanalytic Interpretation. Ed. Shirley Nelson Garner. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985. 18-25.

____. "Vesuvius at Home." Parnassus. 5 (1976): 59-69.

Rabuzzi, Kathryn Allen. The Sacred and the Feminine: Toward a Theology of Housework. New York: Seabury, 1982.

Showalter, Elaine. A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977.

- ____. "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" (1981) Repr. The New Feminist Criticism. Ed. Elaine Showalter. London: Virago, 1986, 250-68.
- ____. "Piecing and Writing" The Poetics of Gender. Ed. Nancy K. Miller. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986. 222-47.
- ____. "Toward a Feminist Poetics." Repr. Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader. Ed. Mary Eagleton. New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986. 188-90.
- Rothman, Sheila. "The Way She Died." Mirabella. August 1994: 138-41.
- Skura, Meredith Anne. The Literary Uses of the Psychoanalytic Process. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986.
- Stanton, Domna. "Difference on Trial." The Poetics of Gender. Ed. Nancy K. Miller. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986. 157-83.
- Strelka, Joseph P. Literary Criticism and Psychology. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976.
- Todd, Janet M. Feminist Literary History. New York: Routledge, 1988.
- Tomkins, Jane. "Me and My Shadow." Gender and Theory: Dialogues on Feminist Criticism. Ed. Linda Kauffman. New York: Basil Blackwell, 1989.
- Walker, Alice. "In Search of Our Mother's Gardens." Norton Anthology of Literature by Women. Eds. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. New York: W.W. Norton, 1985. 2374-82.
- Walker, Barbara G. Ed. The Woman's Dictionary of Symbols and Sacred Objects. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988.
- Woolf, Virginia. A Room of One's Own. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981.

Yaeger, Patricia. "Toward a Female Sublime." Gender and Theory: Dialogues on Feminist Criticism. Ed. Linda Kauffman. New York: Basil Blackwell, 1989.