The Religious Imagery in Emily Dickinson's Love Poems

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Table of Contents

Chapter                                    Page

Introduction                                1
  I. Emily Dickinson's Background            1
  II. The Objects of Emily Dickinson's Love  11
  III. The Art of Emily Dickinson            24

Conclusion                                  61

Appendix                                    63

Texts and Critical Works                    70
Introduction

Poetry is a creation, and the word "poet" means "maker." During the Middle Ages, in fact, the usual term in Greek for poet was "maker." Creativity is miraculous because the creation is essentially new. Creation in its ultimate sense stems from God, the supreme "maker," who "created the heaven and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). Poetic or symbolic creation is but a microcosm of the larger creation.

Symbolism, by derivation, means a "throwing together," and its elemental parts are material fact and emotional significance. A symbol is more meaningful than any ordinary statement because the symbol is the method of revealing and representing abstraction by visible or sensuous representation, thereby making the abstraction more understandable. Symbolic qualities are found extensively in religion, in such religious utterances as the Bible, and in poetry. In religion and poetry alike, the symbol is the primary instrument for unification and universality. Many times, poets drew from the fundamental sources of religion and the Bible for their imagery and symbolism.

Emily Dickinson drew much of the symbolism for her poems from religion and the Bible. Her poetry served not only as an outlet for her creative talent, but often as an instrument for the outpouring of her private thoughts and emotions. Since her sensitivity was extremely acute, her verse was charged with much emotional power, and her chief characteristic was her intensity. Her poetic achievement frequently reveals the two chief problems
of her life: religion and love.

A number of poets have combined the elements of religion and love. The greatest of all religious poems glorifying love is Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. Although Emily Dickinson's love poetry with religious imagery cannot be compared in totality to that of any preceding poet because her technique was peculiarly her own, Henry J. Wells has stated that she approaches Dante in the impersonal quality of some of her most moving love poetry. In some of her subject matter and imagery she may be compared with John Donne. At times in her exuberance in expressing love in religious terms, she resembles Richard Crashaw, a seventeenth-century poet of the Counter Reformation. Her traits of terseness, directness, and fervor are like those of the first great lyric poet of Greece, Sappho.¹ Sappho's expression of love in mythological terms was derived from her pagan culture; Emily Dickinson's treatment of love in Christian terms was derived for the most part from her Puritan environment.

This paper will discuss to what extent Emily Dickinson's heritage, environment, and experience formed her attitudes on religion and love, and will explain how successful she was in translating her intense emotional experience of love into poetry by examining her use of religious imagery.

I. Emily Dickinson's Background

Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) was a product of her time, and, as she stated, she thought "New Englandly."¹ Her religious milieu was Puritanism, which by 1850 had been entrenched in her village of Amherst, Massachusetts, for six generations. Her was a highly personal and individualistic religion in which a just, omniscient, and omnipotent God chose his children and revealed Himself through the Scriptures to the individual's conscience. As a result, the Puritan believed he was directly accountable to God. He was confident that God helped and inspired him to overcome evil by good. Self-denial was a virtue, and self-indulgence was the sin most feared. Since the fall of Adam through sin, man had been disposed to sin and would persist in sinning until his redemption. Puritan doctrine held that man must repent for his wrongdoings and seek forgiveness. Then the individual was certain of his forgiveness which came through the intercession of Christ the Savior, he was worthy to join the church. The battle against sin did not cease at this point but was continued all through life. Orthodox Congregationalism,² however, conditioned him to fear God and the punishment for transgressions. The Church of Amherst College, for example, stated in its Articles of Faith

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¹Millicent Todd Bingham, Emily Dickinson's Home (New York, 1955), p. 29.

²The term "Congregational" referred to the type of church government—each congregation was responsible only to itself.
in 1826 that "all who die without repentance, will at the day of judgment be condemned for their own sins, and will remain in impenitence and justly suffer everlasting punishment." Since God was just, He not only punished the wicked for their sins by everlasting damnation, but in the life to come He rewarded the good for their righteousness. The Puritan's belief in immortality was as unflinching as his faith in his earthly union with God. As a consequence of this spiritual association, the Puritan had a high sense of responsibility and self-discipline. Though at times the unbending standards the Puritan set for himself became a flaw, his intentions were good. His virtues were many: "...his sincerity and intellectual integrity; his readiness to accept responsibility and his devotion to public service; his forthright honesty, his staunch dependability, his 'antique courage,' and more than all, the intensity and depth of his piety—a sense of divine guidance which found expression in his concern for others—and his willingness to undergo personal sacrifice for his family, his neighbors and his community. These qualities produced a mighty inner strength." Puritanism was a vital faith, and the sturdy strength of character, a definite New England trait, was an outgrowth from it.

Rarely in history have plain living of an austere nature and a high level of intellectual attainment coexisted as successfully with such beneficial results for the community as in the small New England towns of the nineteenth century up to the Civil War. Some excelled Amherst in adherence

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1Ewingham, p. 35.
2Ibid., p. 44.
3George Frisbie Hicher, This as a Poet (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1957), p. 12.
to the prevailing religious doctrine combined with a zeal for mental improvement. All of the leading men of Amherst were ardent Congregationalists who interpreted Calvinism in an orthodox, yet never in a bigoted and unyielding way. They were extremely individualistic and, as a result of their Calvinistic background, were primarily concerned with self-improvement of mind and character. A great percentage of them were college graduates. Puritanism had taught them that self-discipline was essential to the elevation of mankind. Their dedicated service to both church and community was remarkable.

Religion permeated the way of life in Amherst. The ministers guided not only the spiritual life of the community, but the intellectual life as well. Though the intellectual climate was stimulating, with frequent lyceums and lectures available to the community through Amherst College, the predominant temper of the times was pious. In the homes Bible readings were a part of the daily routine. Since the Puritan Congregationalists were averse to vain amusements, most free time from duties was spent in self-improvement. Satisfaction was derived from work well done. The first half of the nineteenth century in Amherst was a period of introspection.

Attending church provided the chief excitement of the week. Church services were held three times on Sundays in the meeting house of the First Parish, a structure as severe as the religion preached there. The ministers showed remarkable oratorical skill in delivering long sermons on foreordination, painting glowing and vivid descriptions of hell, and expounding other such awesome topics. In fact, the longer the sermon, the better the preacher was considered to be.

Revivals were frequently held to curb any softening of spirit. In contrast to the usual reserve of the people, the religious intensity during
these evangelistic meetings created a high emotional pitch. The Reverend Daniel Bliss, the great missionary of the Amherst College Class of 1852, stated the four steps of the experience of conversion: "Conviction of deep guilt, a period of despair and struggle, surrender of will, the sudden benediction of peace." Only after such conversion would the conscience be an "infallible guide."\(^1\) Although the choice was an individual one because of the existing doctrine of free will, still the mores of the villagers exerted substantial pressures for the acceptance of the Christian faith as it was then interpreted. In New England, 1850 was known as the year of the Great Revival.\(^2\)

The family of Emily Dickinson had played a significant role in the religious affairs of the Amherst community. An ancestor of hers had been one of the founders of the church and town of Amherst. Her idealistic grandfather, Samuel Fowler Dickinson, was the principal founder of Amherst College; he spent all his wealth trying to promote the enlightenment of the world through education and religion. He was a deacon of the First Church for nearly forty years, town clerk for fourteen years, a representative in the General Court for twelve years, and a member of the Massachusetts Senate for one term.\(^3\) He brought up his son Edward, Emily's father, to be public-spirited.

Edward, who followed his father's profession of law, became the leading attorney in Amherst, recouped the family fortune, and throughout his life was

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\(^1\) 'Icicher, p. 13.

\(^2\) In 1850 Emily Dickinson's father, her sister, Lavinia, and her good friend and future sister-in-law, Susan Gilbert, joined the church.

\(^3\) 'Icicher, p. 25.
actively involved in service to the village, the College, the state, and the church. He was a member of the Massachusetts Legislature in 1839 and 1840, and the Senate in 1842 and 1843. He served with distinction as a member of the Governor's Council under Governor N. Briggs, was a delegate to the Whig Convention, and was a member of Congress from 1853 to 1855. He was nominated for the post of Lieutenant Governor in 1860, but declined the nomination.

A man of inextinguishable will, unquestionable integrity, and indefatigable loyalty to duty, he was a highly respected leading citizen of his community and a typical Whig gentleman. An austere individual who, like others in Amherst, had been nurtured in the Puritan concepts of self-denial, self-discipline, and responsibility, his satisfactions in life were derived for the most part from interior resources rather than from pleasure-seeking. He was a powerful figure whose word was law to his wife, to his son, Justin, and to his two daughters, Emily and Lavinia. Although he was a pillar of the First Church, he joined it somewhat late in life at the age of forty-seven, expressing the desire to be "a better man." ¹ His wife, about whom her daughter Emily once commented that she did not "care for thought," and whose only positive trait seemed to be a strong fear of death, had been converted in 1831; she believed in and practised the Calvinistic tenets. ²

The Dickinson family did not confine their attentions to religion alone but took an active part in the intellectual affairs of the community as well. Much of their attention, like that of other villagers of Amherst, was directed to Amherst College. Emily's father and brother between them

¹ MARTHA DICKINSON BIANCHI, The Life and Letters of Emily Dickinson (Boston, 1924), p. 93.
² Bingham, p. 3.
held the office of College Treasurer for sixty years. Although the total population of the village in 1850 was only three thousand fifty-seven and the living conditions were still somewhat primitive, Amherst, nevertheless, was regarded as an educational center by that time. The community took great pride in this instrument for perpetuating the Puritan ideals of New England. The Congregational churches of western Massachusetts had been concerned about the spread of Unitarianism as "propagated from Cambridge (Harvard)," and they believed that the Unitarian emphasis on toleration and salvation through righteousness alone was undermining the fear of God and punishment for wrongdoing upon which orthodox Congregationalism depended. This was an important consideration in the founding of the institution in 1821. Its purpose was to educate by classical training "indigent and pious young men."

During the administration of President Heman Humphrey (1823-48) most of the Amherst graduates became either ministers or missionaries. By the 1840's Amherst college missionaries were to be found in many parts of Asia, Europe, and the South Seas. They added to the spiritual and intellectual resources of Amherst with the relics and letters they sent, and they were highly esteemed by the citizens of Amherst.

Like other children of her time, Emily Dickinson received the rudiments of her education at the public district school which she attended for perhaps three to four years. Before she was eleven years old, however, she had begun to attend Amherst Academy. Emily was always an eager student.

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1 Hinchen, p. 2.
2 Hinchen, p. 18.
although she was in and out of school several times during the seven years of her enrollment. Her teachers were dedicated and, for the most part, young. She wrote to her friend Abiah Root in March, 1847, "I am always in love with my teachers."  

During her adolescence her inner search for spiritual answers began. She revealed for the first time in a letter dated January 31, 1846, her dilemma to her friend Abiah Root, who was going through the ordeal of religious conversion, "I am far from being thoughtless on the subject of religion....I am continually putting off becoming a christian [sic]...How ungrateful I am to live day by day upon Christ's [sic] bounty and still be in a state of enmity to him & his cause....Although I am not a christian [sic] still I feel deeply the importance of attending to the subject before it is too late." 2 In another letter dated September 8, 1846, she stated, "I have perfect confidence in God and his promises—and yet I know not why, I feel the world has a predominant place in my affections." 3

With great enthusiasm Emily entered Mount Holyoke Female Seminary when she was seventeen years old. Like Amherst Academy and Amherst College, Mount Holyoke Seminary had the same purpose—to promulgate and perpetuate the doctrine of Calvinism. Since many Amherst College graduates were missionaries, one of the acknowledged objects of Mount Holyoke was to provide suitable wives for them. Under the zealous and intensely pious direction of Mary Lyon, the students had a rigorous schedule of studies and devotional

1 Thomas E. Johnson and Theadora Ward, eds., The Letters of Emily Dickinson (Cambridge, 1958), 1, 45.
2 Ibid., 27-29.
3 Ibid., 38.
meditations. The condition of the soul of each girl was as carefully examined as the scholastic attainment. Emily had no difficulty in her adjustment to new friends—in fact, she was quite popular—or to her studies, which consisted of chemistry, physiology, astronomy, rhetoric, and English composition. She received a better classical training from capable teachers during her year at Mount Holyoke than most gentlewomen of this period.

Toward the religious expectations of the school, however, she was recalcitrant. Religious revivals were held throughout the year to encourage the young women to pledge themselves to the church. Emily was concerned about her spiritual state, but she was reluctant to commit herself. From Mount Holyoke she wrote to Abiah Root on January 17, 1848, "There is a great deal of religious interest here and many are flocking to the ark of safety. I have not yet given up to the claims of Christ, but trust I am not entirely thoughtless on so important a serious a subject."¹ Again to Abiah Root in the spring of 1848 she wrote, "I regret that last term, when that golden opportunity was mine, that I did not give up and become a Christian. It is not now too late, so my friends tell me, so my offended conscience whispers, but it is hard for me to give up the world."²

Emily apparently never overcame the feeling of inadequacy that resulted from her religious experience at Mount Holyoke. Yet, oppressed as she was by the religious intensity of the school, she completed the courses for the year satisfactorily in spite of a long absence caused by a bronchial condition. Nevertheless the discipline at Mount Holyoke had been such a strain on her

¹Johnson and Ward, I, 60.
²Ibid., 67.
that her father decided not to send her back the following year.

Until at least her twenty-fifth year, Emily Dickinson attended church with regularity. Twice on Sundays, morning and afternoon, she would walk with her family to the meeting house. Frequently she found the sermons inspiring, occasionally frightening. As she confessed in a few of her letters, her mind would sometimes stray from the sermon to more worldly thoughts. At times her sharp wit overcame her, and she would see humor in anything ranging from the rendering of a hymn by the choir to the sternness of the preacher. To her family, religion was a sad and solemn duty that prepared them for death. God to them was "a dread and awful Majesty, whose wrath was to be appeased by dreary observance and repeated incantations to remove the curse left by Adam hanging over their innocent and timorous heads."¹ To Emily, religion was not this way at all. She was the only member of her family who never joined the church. Somehow she could not accept the idea of a punishing God or the concept of predestination. Her independence of spirit and mind resisted all persuasions by friends and ministers for her to join the church. Her family with the exception of her sister-in-law apparently did not urge her to conform. During her life she frequently turned to ministers in her times of stress even though their theological insights never fully satisfied her search for truth. She could not accept the conventions they preached but had to explore the spiritual realm herself. She seemed to believe that she was sinful, but her honesty to herself was more compelling than her ability to accept a doctrine which she could not believe. She struggled with this dilemma throughout her life.

¹Bianchi, p. 97.
and found the fact that she could not accept orthodoxy quite disturbing.

In spite of her inability to accept the dogmatic doctrines of her day, Emily Dickinson was close to realizing the concept of Jonathan Edwards that the purpose of existence is to pursue liberty or heaven, which is gained only by agony and travail. As Jonathan Edwards professed, she believed that the individual must seek his ideal alone, and that through self-discovery one grows; and though she did not join the church, she clung throughout her life, even in times of stress, to many of the Puritan doctrines which she had absorbed during her youth. At the time of her death in 1886 this statement about her written by Susan Gilbert Dickinson appeared in the Springfield Republican: "With no creed, no formulated faith, hardly knowing the names of dogmas, she walked this life with the gentleness and reverence of old saints, with the firm step of martyrs who sing while they suffer...."1

1 Bianchi, p. 105.
II. The Objects of Emily Dickinson's Love

Love— is anterior to life
Posterior— to Death
Initial of Creation, and
The Exponent of earth—

Emily Dickinson's intensity and vitality found release in different forms of expressions of love. Closest to her was her family. She had a deep respect for her father who was perhaps the greatest shaping influence on her life. She and her sister, Lavinia, were life-long companions since neither married. Her brother, Austin, of whom she was perhaps fondest of all, lived next door after his marriage; consequently the family unit was closely knit.

Possibly home was always a haven for her. Her year away from home at St. Holyoke had been marked by homesickness. The interdependency of the members of her family was great. Because Amherst was small and closely knit, young women did not leave home unless to marry or to teach. Emily's daily life was regulated by parental authority, family loyalty, and the demands of the household routine. She maintained several friendships both in Amherst and through her active correspondence. Visitors came frequently to the Dickinson home. Her private joys were her garden, her books, her walks with her dog, and her writing.

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1 The numbers ascribed to the poems by Emily Dickinson in this paper are those designated by Thomas H. Johnson in The Poems of Emily Dickinson (Cambridge, 1963), the definitive edition of her poetry.
While in school she was fond of almost all of her teachers. While at Amherst Academy her favorite young teacher was Leonard Humphrey, whom she called her "master." In 1847 Emily began a friendship with Benjamin Newton, a student in her father's law office. Newton introduced her to Emerson's Poems and the writings of the Brontë sisters, and he taught her to delight in literature. A Unitarian (considered too liberal by many in Amherst), he helped to free her further from the orthodox concepts of Heaven and Hell. He not only stimulated her to think independently but encouraged her to write poetry. The untimely death of these two young men both grieved and shocked her. After Newton's death she wrote to his minister, a total stranger to her, inquiring about Newton's willingness to die and asking if the minister felt Ben Newton was "at Home in Heaven."\(^1\) In her poem "I never lost as much but twice," written about 1858, she speaks of losing two important friendships through death and of fearing the loss of a third. Perhaps then these two men are the ones described, and the third almost certainly is Charles Wadsworth.\(^2\)

She selected her friends—or her "silver shelf," as she termed them—from those who were outstanding in their chosen fields and from whom she could learn. Her feeling for them was intense; she called them her "estate." Among them were the Rev. Charles Wadsworth, Samuel Bowles, Dr. and Mrs. Josiah Holland, Col. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, and Judge Otis P. Lord. She herself initiated the friendships with the Rev. Mr. Wadsworth and Col. Higginson; the others were friends of her family.

An acute sensibility added to an inquisitive and searching mind

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seems to have led her to a lifelong need for a "preceptor." It is somewhat difficult to understand why Emily Dickinson when seeking a "preceptor" and critic did not align herself with one who would have been attuned to her in both spiritual and literary matters. New England of this period abounded in original thinkers. Ralph Waldo Emerson, to whose writings she had been introduced by Benjamin Newton, twice visited Austin Dickinson. Although there is no record that Emily Dickinson met Emerson during these visits or any other visits he made to Amherst, she could have met him. Emerson was only one of many who were rejecting the Puritan doctrine and seeking spiritual answers in an intellectual way. As one of the chief proponents of Transcendentalism, he believed in the self-sufficiency of the individual and held that man's relationship to God was a personal one which could best be established directly by the individual instead of through a ritualistic church. Emerson negated such doctrines as predestination and original sin which Emily Dickinson, too, found unacceptable. Neither Emerson nor Emily Dickinson believed in an arbitrary God or followed traditional authority. Emily Dickinson had heard that Theodore Parker, the scholar among the transcendentalists, was "Poison," but after reading one of his books in 1859 (probably Experience as a Minister, published that same year), she remarked that she liked "poison very well." Regardless of the liberal ideas that reached her, hers was still an individual search for truth which she had to experience and test alone.

Through her large correspondence with her friends, she stayed in touch with the world from which she gradually withdrew. Her emotional

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1. Whicher, p. 192.
intensity was always acute, and her biographer Thomas H. Johnson believes that she became a recluse chiefly because of the increasing acuteness of this personality trait.

In a letter to Col. Higginson in 1885 Emily Dickinson wrote: "Biography first convinces us of the fleeting of the Biographed." This statement of hers about the difficulty of discovering the truth concerning another individual may well apply to herself. The accumulation of her letters and poems has been a tremendous task with some uncertainties remaining about her life story because she did not keep any memoranda. In her largely circumscribed life, Emily often made events out of incidents. Many of her interested but over-zealous biographers also have been guilty of this excessiveness. Because she did not date her poetry or keep a journal or diary, biographers have had a difficult time arriving at what actually transpired in her life. A few skeptics have suggested that her love poems are the result of her over-active imagination alone. However, the beauty, intensity, and thought combine to argue that her poetry was based on real emotion. It would be difficult to believe that she had experienced the joy and sorrow of love only vicariously through the jotting down of her poems on, at times, any scrap of paper available. There was almost certainly a real object of her affections, whether or not her love was returned. She did not share her love poetry with others as she had many of her other poems.

George Frisbie Whicher offers three important reasons for probing into the life of Emily Dickinson to discover what, if any part, love played.

1. Isabel Loomis Todd, *Letters of Emily Dickinson* (New York, 1931), p. XXIII.
1. A large part of her poetry is concerned with love for a man whom she could not marry and describes how she dealt with her frustrations;

2. Since her imagination was keen, it is important to separate her poetry stemming from actual experience from that which derived from her powers of invention and dramatization;

3. During her lifetime Emily Dickinson was the subject of irresponsible gossip, and to destroy false notions, truth must be discovered.

During her lifetime stories circulated about her love affair. For example, one story was of her love for a young man. This affection was supposedly thwarted by her domineering father. Another legend was of her reciprocated love for a married man who left for a far-away city when Emily refused to elope with him, and thereafter both lived lives of disappointment. Whichever negates both of these theories and asserts that her desire or need for intellectual and spiritual guidance was the "master passion of her life."  

In her second letter to Thomas W. Higginson, written April 25, 1862, she said in part: "Then a little girl, I had a friend who taught me Immortality; but venturing too near, himself, he never returned. Soon after, my tutor died, and for several years my lexicon was my only companion. Then

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1. Whicher, p. 81.

2. Ibid., p. 83.

3. "friend" in this statement may be referring to Leonard Humphrey who died in 1850, or to Jacob Holt who died in 1849, or to John Laurens Spencer who died in 1851. She had been a friend to these young men and had shown concern for them in her letters. [Jay Leyda, The Years and Hours of Emily Dickinson (New Haven, 1960), I, 144, 184, 218.]

4. The "tutor" probably was Ben Newton. (Whicher, p. 90.)
I found one more, but he was not contented I be his scholar, so he left the land.  

Whicher believes that Emily Dickinson's love poems are authentic, but that we should not expect to find an exact statement of the history of her love in her poetry, since poets are privileged to elaborate.

Emily Dickinson once remarked: "My life has been too simple and stern to embarrass any." An understanding of her environment and character would cause one to accept her statement. Even though she was largely a freethinker in forming her religious attitudes against cant and the severer aspects of Puritan doctrine, she was never able to release herself entirely from her Calvinistic inheritance and surroundings, influences which emphasized the examination of the soul's affections and self-improvement. Consequently a search in her life for a clandestine affair would seem a waste of time.

The twenty-eight-year association she had with the Rev. Charles Wadsworth may have begun at the outset as a result of the religious conflict with which she had been struggling. He became one of the most important figures in her life. Emily must have met the Rev. Mr. Wadsworth, minister at the Arch Street Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia from 1850 to April of 1862, during her visit to that city in 1854. A dynamic and eloquent preacher with enormous appeal and reputation, he was at the same time a shy, reserved man. Emily took the initiative in this friendship.

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1 The "one more" most likely was the Rev. Charles Wadsworth. (Whicher, p. 86.)

2 Todd, p. XIII.

Though all but one of the letters exchanged between them were destroyed, the correspondence meant much to her. Because of her self-assurance as a poetess at this time and the creativity inspired by her love for Wedsworth, Johnson describes the relationship as a turning point in her life.\(^1\) Although she met him only three or four times, and then but briefly, Wedsworth served as an ideal for her and was important in her development as a poet.

Between 1854 and 1861 Wedsworth served as her "preceptor" and comforter. Wedsworth adhered to all of the accepted Calvinistic doctrines of his day. He believed that God distributed property and rewards among the godly and provided the wonders and beauties of this world for man's enjoyment. He envisioned an everlasting paradise. Those who had failed to gain the joys in the present world could look forward to eternal bliss in the future life.\(^2\) Since the Book of Revelation was Emily's favorite book of the Bible, she apparently found some comfort in the idea of a future reward that would compensate for deprivation in this life.

No other association or friendship during this period was as important to her as the one with Wedsworth. He made at least two calls on her: the first was in early 1860, and the last was in the summer of 1860. The poem beginning "There came a day at summer's full," written in a semifinal copy in 1861,\(^3\) describes a momentous meeting with someone she loved enough to envision marriage with in the life following death.\(^4\) The emotional

\(^1\)Johnson, p. 56.  
\(^2\)Chicher, pp. 99-112.  
\(^3\)Studies of characteristic changes of her handwriting in both her letters (where evidence of a date is available) and her poems have enabled Thomas H. Johnson to arrive at the dates of the poems he has assigned to them.  
\(^4\)This poem is discussed on pp. 47-48 of this paper.
intensity of this poem argues for the reality of feeling she must have had at a meeting with someone she loved.

The facts that Tadsworth was a happily married man and that his character was above reproach are agreed upon by the biographers of Emily Dickinson and refute any supposition that he urged her to elope with him at such a meeting as previously mentioned. Nor should the fact that Emily Dickinson mentioned Tadsworth to none except Samuel Bowles, whom she perhaps made her confidant, and to her sister Lavinia suggest suspicion of Tadsworth's or her motives.

Tadsworth accepted a call to Calvary Church in San Francisco in December, 1861. Possibly his leaving precipitated the crisis in her life which she wrote about to Higginson in 1862: "I had a terror since September—I could tell to none—and so I sing, as the Boy does by the Burying Ground—because I am afraid."¹ (This statement also reveals her purpose in writing poetry.) Tadsworth left for his new position on the first of May, 1862. It was at this time that Emily Dickinson adopted the white mode of dress, which she called her "white election," and began to use the name "Calvary" in her poems.² The poetry she wrote during this period is intensely emotional and shows that she is beyond the stage of being in love with love.

The "marriage" and renunciation poems of late 1861 and early 1862 are powerful in their statement of feeling. Evidences of her deep desire

¹Johnson, p. 81.

²In 1862 she used the name "Calvary" nine times, and in 1863 she used it once. Thomas N. Johnson points out that no other place name appears throughout her poetry with such personal association. (p. 82)
for marriage are manifest. When an earthly marriage was denied her, she envisioned a spiritual one. The following lines suggest her hopeless love and grief as a consequence.

"How sick to wait"
"Mine--by the right of the white election"
"I cannot live with you--that would be life"
"At least to pray is left, is left"
"Is bliss then such abyss"

I believe that Emily Dickinson had created an ideal mental image of love for the Rev. Charles Wadsworth. This extended in her imagination even to erotic poetry as evidenced in the poem "Wild nights, wild nights." There is no doubt that a crisis in her love occurred at this time; her effort to express it resulted in an outpouring of poetry. The years from 1861 to 1865 were her most prolific.

Wadsworth returned to Philadelphia in 1869 and remained there until his death on April 1, 1882. In early 1883 Emily wrote to Mrs. Holland: "All other surprise is at last monotonous, but the Death of the Loved is all moments--now. Love has but one Date--the first of April. Today, Yesterday, and Forever...Of love that never found its earthly close, what sequel?"¹ In October, 1882 she had written to Mrs. Holland: "August has brought the most to me--April--robbed me most in incessant instances...Can Trouble dwell with April Days?"² In December, 1882, she wrote at the end of a letter: "Is God Love's Adversary?"³

After the death of Wadsworth she wrote to his friend James R. Clark

¹ Wad., Letters, p. 170.
² Ibid., p. 60.
³ Nicher, p. 100.
seeking information about her "beloved clergyman" as she had when her friend Ben Newton died. Then James Clark died, she continued the correspondence concerning Wadsworth with the brother of the former, Charles H. Clark. She eagerly sought information about him because she explained, he had never spoken to her about either himself or his home. She wanted to know, for example, if any of Wadsworth's children resembled him. "I hoped that 'Millie' might, to whom he clung so tenderly. How irreparable should there be no perpetuation of a nature so treasured!" (Wadsworth had told Emily Dickinson that his son "Millie" resembled her.) She referred to her relationship with Wadsworth as an "intimacy of many years," and termed him "my dearest earthly friend," the "atom I preferred to all the lists of clay," and her "Shepherd from little girlhood."3

Emily Dickinson wrote once that it was better to keep a secret, though in fear, than share it and fear both the secret and the one in whom the confidence was placed.4 She kept secret the love she had later in her life for Judge Otis P. Lord of Salem.

No one knew how important Judge Lord, her father's closest friend, came to be to her during the last seven or eight years of her life. He and his wife had known Emily since her childhood—practically as members of the family circle. The love of Emily Dickinson and Judge Lord presumably began

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1In a letter to his wife from Boston dated March 18, 1838, Edward Dickinson called her "my dearest earthly friend." (Leyda, I, 47)

2From poem 664.

3Todd, pp. 343-345.

4Johnson, Poems, I, 302.
after the death of his wife in 1877.

Perhaps Judge Lord proposed marriage to Emily Dickinson. His nieces by marriage who lived with him following the death of his wife appear to have opposed the relationship between him and Emily. On April 8, 1880, Judge Lord's niece wrote to ked Dickinson, Emily's nephew, with a touch of sarcasm: "Uncle Lord is writing in the next room a letter for the 'Mansion'—such a sweet one, I suppose."\(^1\) However, it is more probable that it was Emily who refused marriage, because such a change in her life at this stage would have been too difficult for her. For over twenty years she had lived a life of seclusion and, like a delicate flower, she was incapable of being "transplanted" at so late a stage in her life.

With Emily Dickinson's love poems were found passages from the earliest extant drafts of her letters to Judge Lord. These passages placed under the year 1876 in Volume II of Jay Leyda's The Years and Hours of Emily Dickinson reveal the passionate love she felt for him as in the following excerpts.

"I confess that I love him—I rejoice that I love him—that gave him to me to love—the exaltation floods me—
I cannot find my channel—The Creek turns Sea—at thought of thee...

"Oh, my too beloved, Save me from the idolatry which would crush us both—..."

"It is strange that I miss you at night so much when I was never with you—but the punctual love invokes you soon as my eyes are shut and I wake warm with the want sleep had almost filled—"\(^2\)

\(^1\) Leyda, II, 396.

\(^2\) Ibid., 305-306.
On November 18(?), 1882, Emily Dickinson wrote to Judge Lord:

"...a Night is so long, and it snowing too, another barrier to Hearts that overleap themselves. Emily 'Jumbo'! Sweetest name, but I know a sweeter--Emily Jumbo Lord. Have I your approval?"

In 1882 Judge Lord became seriously ill. His attack occurred May first—one month to the day following Bradsworth's death. Soon after, when assured that he would recover, Emily wrote to him describing her reaction to the first news of his illness: "my sight slipped and I thought I was freezing..."2

By this time Emily Dickinson had lost several people who had been especially dear to her: her father, Samuel Bowles, Dr. Holland, and the Rev. Mr. Bradsworth. Having an almost morbid curiosity about death, she reflected upon the subject at great length. The fact that she had lost some who had been part of her life caused her great grief, and she was deeply concerned about any further loss. Three months after the death of Judge Lord on March 13, 1884, Emily suffered a nervous collapse. In a letter dated April 21, she wrote: "I have lost...another cherished friend... and how to repair my shattered ranks is a besetting pain."3 She wrote to the executor of Judge Lord: "I was his only friend..."4 She composed three elegies in his memory: "Go thy great way," "Through the great waters sleep," and "quite empty, quite at rest."

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1 Leyda, II, 334-335.
2 Johnson, p. 66.
3 Todd, p. 354.
4 Leyda, II, 443.
A poignant poem written by Emily Dickinson in mid-March(?), 1884, is indicative of her love for one who had recently died:

So give me back to Death—
The Death. I never feared
Except that it deprived of thee—
And now, by Life deprived
In my own Grave I breathe
And estimate its size—
Its size is all that Hell can guess—
And all that Heaven was.

On the death of Emily Dickinson in 1886, Col. Higginson noted in his diary on May 19 that Winnie, Emily’s sister, had placed two heliotropes in Emily’s hand “to take to Judge Lord.” Following her request his letters and gifts were burned after she died.

It is interesting to note that the two men who were most important in the life of Emily Dickinson were of her father’s generation; Wadsworth was sixteen years her senior, and Judge Lord was eighteen years older than she.

Her love for Judge Lord apparently was not the lonely and torturous love she had experienced earlier. This love was in sharp contrast to her one-sided worship of Wadsworth; perhaps her satisfaction in her love for Judge Lord was that it was returned. Wadsworth had served as her bouse. By the time she fell in love with Judge Lord, she was a fully-developed poet. Her love for Wadsworth had been ethereal in nature, while the love she shared with Judge Lord was mature and mutual.

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1 Todd, p. 431.
III. The Art of Emily Dickinson

Emily Dickinson began assembling her poems into little packets in 1850. That year probably marked the beginning of her awareness of her role as a poet. The years of her greatest productivity were between 1858 and 1865. Thomas H. Johnson states that she almost certainly wrote two-thirds of her poems during those eight years. Her most prolific year was 1862, when she wrote three hundred sixty-six poems. In a letter of that year to Dr. and Mrs. Holland, Emily Dickinson evidently stated her destiny: "My business is to love...My business is to sing." It appears that her love for Charles Eliot Norton, which probably began in 1861, had inspired a great outburst of poetry. "After 1862 she wrote with a vision which gives her a rank as a philosophical poet."3

Emily Dickinson wrote a total of 1,776 poems which are composed of about 19,100 lines.4 Two hundred three of her poems are on the theme of love. The first lines of these love poems are listed chronologically in an appendix to this paper.

Louis Untermeyer ranked some of her love poems as the greatest ever

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1Emily Dickinson, p. 69.
3Johnson, Emily Dickinson, p. 100.
Emily Dickinson was a craftsman who carefully selected words and images which were to her charged with both thought and emotion. Her achievement lies in the fact that she gave the greatest possible weight of meaning to each word she used, and also in her concentration of tight symbolic structure. In style and form she was an innovator. She was as wayward and as nonconforming to the poetic practices as she was to the Puritan doctrines of her time.

One of her outstanding characteristics was her ability to analyze and objectify her most subtle inward feelings—confining her attention to one emotion at a time. Much of her poetry is concerned with studying the different emotions evoked by love. At times she could be almost clinically detached in her vivid analyses of emotion which she must have experienced personally in order to have achieved as much reality as she did. She plumbed both the mind and the emotions. Her world was an interior one; her mind was her kingdom, and its capital, the heart. Together they formed "A single Continent." The ruler of her realm was the soul. Her observations and experiences convinced her of the evanescent quality of love—both human and divine. Yet fleeting as the emotions might be, she had the ability to record with unsurpassed skill the different emotional and mental changes caused by love.

Although Emily Dickinson was not a systematic thinker, her need for a faith was always present. At times she fervently seemed to believe; in other moods she could range from skepticism to derision. The purpose of

1Louis Untermeyer, "Emily Dickinson," SRL, VI (July, 1930), 1169-1171.

many of her best poems was to discover a "Glean" of spiritual insight into love. Her interest in the small, particular truth placed her in the Puritan tradition of literature. The number of religious references and images in her poems affirms her preoccupation with religion.

Emily Dickinson’s use of religion and love is not paradoxical. Religion and love possess similar essentials. Both are forms of worship and adoration of another being outside the self. In religion, devotion is transmitted to God; in love, affection is directed to the beloved. In their truest sense both religion and love evoke such qualities in the worshipper as honor, service, fidelity, reverence, gratitude, and admiration. Religion teaches that God’s love is the most supreme form of love. In comparison, mortal love is but a microcosm. Divine love has frequently served poets, however, as a measure of the intensity of human love.

Possibly for the above-mentioned reasons Emily Dickinson used religious imagery in her love poems as often as she did. Religion came to be the language of her soul. Emily Dickinson used religious imagery to express the intensity of her emotions, not for ornamentation. She drew on the most significant ideas, words, and images in religion and the Bible for her intense expression of love. Both religion and the Bible provided her with inspiration as well as with sources of allusion and quotation.

Emily Dickinson’s familiarity with and frequent use of the Bible stemmed from the emphasis placed on the Scriptures by her religious heritage, the practice of daily Bible readings in her home by her family, and her actual enjoyment of reading the Bible. The Bible constituted a supreme poem to her

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1 Anderson, p. 190.
2 Micher, p. 157.
and was the primary source of the imagery in her poems. It was an inexhaustible mine to her for many of her words, ideas, and symbols. Her figures of speech were taken from approximately thirty books of the Bible. In order of most frequent use were Matthew, The Revelation, John, I and II Corinthians, Exodus, and Psalms. The poetical parts of the Bible interested her more than its historical portions. Her biographer, Thomas H. Johnson has stated:

"...the shaping of her thought in terms of biblical interest, events, and precept is apparent in almost every poem she wrote. She transmitted universals into particulars by means of such figures of speech: 'location's narrow way,' 'the smitten rock,' 'broad possessions,' 'this accepted breath,' 'the scarlet way,' 'the morning stars,' 'the straight pass of suffering,' 'the apple of the tree,'...All are drawn from the Bible and require on the part of the reader a like familiarity if the full import is to be rendered."

Her treatment of love, one of her major themes, abounds in religious references. In one hundred twenty-nine of the poems—over half—listed in the appendix to this paper, she used religious imagery.

Emily Dickinson used sixty-four biblical names or theological terms throughout her poetry. Some of these references appear more than once in her love poems. Since they were apparently of special significance to her, they will be discussed separately from the poems themselves.

Emily Dickinson had been taught by the sermons she had heard, the hymns she had sung, and the Bible itself that heaven was like a kingdom, and that there were different ranks within it. The terms "Kingdom" and

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1Johnson, Emily Dickinson, p. 152.
2Howard, p. 229.
"rank" appear in her love poems. According to the Puritan concept, all who were taken into heaven received crowns. Her use of the word "crown" almost always seems to imply an honor given, and dedication to the one who bestows it. (The exception is her use of "crown of thorns," which represents extreme worldly suffering.) Her frequent use of royal terms and titles such as "Empress," "Duke," "Czar," and "Queen" may have been inspired by her favorite book of the New Testament, The Revelation; in this book the primary metaphor is that of royalty, and the secondary image is that of marriage.

The Biblical term "Seal" appears in several of Emily Dickinson's poems. Charles R. Anderson has interpreted her meaning of this word as follows: "The Biblical sign by which God claims man for his own has been shown in the poems of the heavenly bridal to be a 'Seal,' the ring by which the beloved is married into immortal life."¹

Even Emily Dickinson's frequent use of the color "white" in her poems may have been inspired by the Bible. Her meanings of this color, however, are as elusive as her unexplained adoption of dressing exclusively in white during the last fifteen or twenty years of her life. "White" must have been a powerful symbol to her since she used it as frequently as she did. The traditional color of the bridal gown, of course, is white. In the Bible this color is used most generally as the symbol for regeneration or spiritual re-birth. Among the many Biblical references to "white" are the following:

Ecclesiastes 9:8, "Let thy garments be always white..."
Isaiah 1:18, "...Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow..."
Daniel 12:10, "Many shall be purified, and made white..."
Psalm 51:7, "...wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow."

¹ Stairway of Surprise, p. 217.
The Revelation 3:5, "He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment..."
The Revelation 7:13-14, "...that are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."
The Revelation 19:8 (Describing the bride of the Lamb), "...and to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white..."

Moses was one of her favorite Biblical figures because he, like Emily Dickinson, saw a Promised Land that he could not enter.¹

At times Emily Dickinson compared the face of her beloved to Jesus'.

The crucifixion of Jesus meant to her human agony; the crucifix was the symbol to her of this human agony. She associated with Wadsworth the place of the crucifixion of Jesus, Calvary; and Calvary, like Gethsemane, represented to her extreme mortal suffering.

Following crucifixion or suffering came resurrection. Wadsworth, like other Calvinists, held that deprivation and suffering on earth would bring a compensatory reward in heaven. Heaven was an eternal paradise. In several poems Emily Dickinson envisioned her reward in heaven as a reunion with the loved one of whom she had been deprived on earth. Her repeated usage of this concept suggests her acceptance of it. She often used for comparison or contrast the heaven/earth theme which seemed to mean to her at times the pleasure/pain concept. Occasionally she compared human love to divine love, and earthly marriage to heavenly marriage.

Emily Dickinson once wrote: "Tell all the truth but tell it slant."²

¹ Whicher, pp. 155-156.
² Leyda, I, XXII.
Her intent is sometimes difficult to determine because of her frequently cryptic style. Charles R. Anderson has commented: "It is not always possible to tell in a given context whether she is delineating both sacred and profane love like Titian, embodying a spiritual essence in sensual metaphor as in the Song of Songs, or climbing the ladder from initial to celestial love with Plato."¹

Emily Dickinson followed the Biblical example of using "dust" and "spirit" to represent body and soul. She sometimes compared mortal birth to spiritual re-birth or regeneration. Death signified a change to her; at times her usage of "immortality," "infinity," and "heaven" seems almost interchangeable.

She found the terminology of Christian religion, particularly terms of Calvinism, useful in her poetry. Election, one of the five tenets of Calvinism, means divine choice or predestination. Grace, meaning divine mercy or forgiveness or the divine assistance given to men for his regeneration, was another doctrine of Calvinism which she used.² She also found meaningful for application to her love poetry the term "Covenant," an important term to the Calvinists, meaning the promises of God as revealed in the Holy Scriptures. The sacrament of baptism appears in some of her love poems with the sacrament of marriage.

At times the syntax in her poetry is reminiscent of the style of her King James version of the Bible. The pronoun "thee" derived from the Scriptures was more powerful when she was addressing her lover in her poems than

¹Stairway of Surprise, p. 167.
²The three remaining tenets of Calvinism are limited atonement, total depravity, and the perseverance of the saints.
the "you" which she used in her conversation and letter-writing. Occasionally her choice of verbs, such as "hallow," "date," and "maketh," are Biblical in form. At times her adjectives were taken from the Bible, for example, "divine" and "celestial." Her favorite verse forms, "common meter" and "short meter," were adaptations of hymns which she had sung in her youth.¹

This paper will focus special attention on one of the most predominant images in the love poetry of Emily Dickinson, the metaphor of marriage derived from the Song of Solomon and The Revelation, favorite books of the Bible in New England. Her treatment of this symbol vacillated from human to divine love, from an earthly marriage to a heavenly marriage. The "bridal" and marriage poems form the largest group of her love poetry. This group is one of the most interesting groups of her poetry because the poems illustrate how extensively she used religious and Biblical imagery in connection with the theme of love, and they reveal her attitudes toward marriage. The poems in this group are subjective studies of her involvement in love and show her desire for marriage. She perhaps reached the pinnacle of her art in these poems because of her success in translating her intense feelings into lyric poetry. The artistry in the way she used religious imagery in these is representative of her achievement in the rest of her love poems.

For these reasons the poems containing religious imagery from the "bridal" and marriage group have been selected for examination. They total nineteen poems—fourteen of which were written in the years 1861 and 1862 at the height of her love for Haddockworth. The group is composed of the following poems, which are listed chronologically.

¹ Moncher, p. 243.
About 1860

I'm "wife"--I've finished that--

About 1861

Forever at his side to walk
He put the belt around my life--
Doubt Me! My Dir Companion!
What if I say I shall not wait!

About 1862

There came a day at Summer's full
The face I carry with me--last--
A hope--at Daybreak I shall be--
I am ashamed--I hide--
The world--stands--solemn--to me--
I'm ceded--I've stopped being Their's [sic]
Her sweet weight on my heart a light
Wine--by the light of the White Election
'Twas a long parting--but the time
Title divine--is mine!

About 1864

Given to Marriage unto Thee
I learned--at least--what home could be--

Date Undetermined

Rearrange a "life's" affection
The grave my little cottage is

These poems will be considered according to the following sub-topics:

Desire for Marriage, Bride, Wife, Possession, and Fidelity.

Desire for Marriage

The earliest of the published poems written about 1859, although not of the "bridal" or marriage group showing her desire for marriage (which is stated by implication), will serve as an introduction to this theme. Emily Dickinson once described herself to Dickinson at the outset of their correspondence as "small, like a wren," and in the poem beginning "For every Bird a Nest--," the wren is unable to find a nest, possibly because she is over-fastidious and has set her sights too high.
Perhaps a home too high--
An Aristocracy!
The little are desires--

Perhaps of twine so fine--
Of twine even supertine,
Her pride aspires--

The search for a "nest" by the wren is not venturesome, but "timid." The first line of the poem might refer to Matthew 8:20, "And Jesus saith unto him,...the birds of the air have nests." Her added identification of the wren as a seeker is the term "Pilgrim" in:

Therefore when boughs are free--
Householis in every tree--
Pilgrim be found?

The use of the word "Pilgrim" adds a further implication to the meaning of home to her—a shrine. The poem begins on a plaintive note but evolves into an attitude of appreciation for her talents in the final stanza:

Yet who of all the throng
Dancing around the sun
Does so rejoice?

At the time of this poem, if it can be accepted as an autobiographical statement, she desired marriage but had not found a satisfactory partner.

The poem suffers from its conventionality in treatment of its theme.

About 1864 Emily Dickinson revealed again her desire for a home or marriage in the long poem beginning "I learned—at least—what home could be—." The faltering tone of the first line suggests the pain with which she contemplates the subject of "Home." The poem continues in an idyllic imagining of what the daily home-life would be with the one she loves.

That morning in our garden—measured
That Bee—So we—to holy--

The Afternoons—Together spent—
And Twilight—in the lanes—
Some ministry to poorer lives—
Seen poorest—thro' our pains
The word "ministry" in the preceding stanza immediately brings Tadworth to mind.

The following line must have been deeply significant to her since it stands apart from the seven stanzas.

And then Return--and Right--and Home--

The final stanza of this poem comes harshly and painfully to reality:

This seems a Home--
And Home is not--
But what that Place could be--
Afflicts me--as a Setting Sun--
Where Dawn--knows how to be--

At the beginning of the poem she states, "How ignorant I had been/
Of pretty ways of Covenant--/ How awkward at the Hymn." A literal interpretation of this is that until she met her beloved, she had no conception of the greatness of God's promises nor understanding of praise to God when His gifts were bestowed.

The poem veers from realism to romantic reverie--then returns to realism. Emily Dickinson was by no means a Romantic, and when she approached sentimentalism, her art generally suffered.

In comparison with the preceding poem "For every Bird a Nest--," which apparently had no lover in mind, this poem shows devotion to a beloved image. Thinking of marriage to him "drowns" her, "like the Dip/ Of a Celestial Sea," or eternity or immortality. Taking care of him would be to her "A new--diviner--care--." Her reflection on life spent with her lover brings frustration in addition to pain.
The following poem describes desire experienced in a dream.

Her sweet delight on my heart a flight
Had scarcely designed to lie
Then, stirring, for Belief's delight,
My Bride had slipped away--

If 'twas a dream—made solid—just
The Heaven to confirm—
Or if Myself were dreamed of Her—
The power to presume—

With Him remain—who unto Me—
Gave—even us to All—
A Fiction superseding Faith—
By so much—as 'twas real—

The poem is written from a man's point of view. He stirs in the state between consciousness and unconsciousness, "for Belief's delight," to see if the dream is a reality. Then the dream recedes he tries to determine whether the dream was so realistic because it was a sign of "the Heaven" he will actually realize, or because it was merely a manifestation of his deep desire. The "Fiction" instead of actuality, which this dream is, is more substantial to him than "Faith." The heaven in the life-to-come, desired by the Puritan because it was the highest spiritual attainment for man, is eclipsed by the "Heaven" he has had in his dream.

The interplay in this scene of reality and the dream state, which at times can heighten reality, is effective. This poem is an expression of emotional states in consciousness and unconsciousness. It was written in Emily Dickinson's flood year of creativity—at the time of Edworth's departure.

Emily Dickinson achieved the heights of lyricism in the following
poem on the theme of "bride."

A Wife--at Daybreak I shall be
Sunrise--hast thou a flag for me?
At Midnight, I am but a maid,
How short it takes to make it bride--
Then--midnight, I have passed from thee
Unto the East, and Victory--

Midnight--Good Night! I hear them call,
The angels bustle in the hall--
Softly my future climbs the stair,
I fumble at my Childhood's prayer
So soon to be a Child no more--
Eternity, I'm coming--Sir,
Savior--I've seen the face--before!

In her poem her imagery wavers from a seemingly earthly marriage about to take place to, in the second stanza, a heavenly or divine marriage. The type of marriage seems immaterial, because her emotions of anticipation and joy are all-important. "Midnight" symbolizes to her the ending of a way of life--of childhood and maidenhood. The symbols she uses for the start of a new life for her are "East" and "Daybreak." Becoming a "Child" means "Victory" to her. A change as tremendous as this one from a "Child" to a "Brige," another symbol of a beginning, takes but little time--from "Midnight" to "Daybreak." She bids farewell to the old way of life.

From this point the poem moves toward divine love with "angels bustle in the hall--." The following line implies her rising to immortality or heaven. She has outgrown her "Childhood's prayer" as attested by the verb "fumble," and realizes that there is not much time left for her to be a "Child." There is no sadness in leaving the old and familiar way of life because she is eagerly going to the new "eternity."

In the first stanza the mention of "flag" brings to mind a double
meaning: a banner of triumph and a flower for a bride. (In the Bible
there are four references to the word "flag," and in each case the re-
ference is to the flower.)

She responds to the call to a new life, "eternity," and addresses
Jesus as "Savior." The concluding line may imply that the face of her
earthly lover to her is like the face of Jesus.¹

The highly condensed and intensified expression of feeling in this
poem is representative of her highest achievement in lyrical expression.

Her entire concern in the poem which begins "I am ashamed—I hide—"
is her adjustment to the new role of "a Bride." In the first stanza her
shame comes from her modesty and her surprise at being chosen to bear
this honored title.

I am ashamed—I hide—
That right have I—to be a Bride—
So late a Powerless Girl—
Nowhere to hide my dazzled face—
No one to teach me that new Grace—
Nor introduce—my soul—

"That new Grace" is another term for the condition of being "Bride," and
implies that she is in God's favor by being chosen to be a bride. She
believes that she did not have the necessary requirements since she was
"a Powerless Girl." Her inadequacy and inexperience are the causes of
her shame. Since she has no one to teach her "that new Grace," she will
have to learn by herself. One-third of the poem is spent in determining
how she will garb herself—in "raiment," a term used forty-eight times in

¹In the poem beginning "I cannot live with You—," Emily Dickinson
tells her beloved that she cannot rise to heaven with him because her
lover's face "could put out Jesus'--." Both poems were written in her
"flood year" of 1862.
the Bible and generally meaning a fine garment—and "Fabrics of Cashmere," and "Trinket." Her next interest is how she will conduct herself:

Skill—to hold my brow like an earl—
Stead—like a Pippowill [sic]—
Prove—like a Pearl—

She focuses the greatest part of her attention, however, on the formation of her character in this new role:

Fashion my Spirit quaint—white—
Quick—like a Liquor—
Gay—like Light—
Bring be my best Pride—
No more ashamed—
No more to hide —
Meek—let it be—too proud—for Pride—
Baptized—this Day—"Bride—

She has emerged from her attitude of shame in the first stanza to an awareness in the final stanza of her capacity to accept this honor. The transition in the last stanza is first to "my best pride," then to meekness. The word "meek" is mentioned several times in the Bible, for example:

Psalm 37:11, "But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace."
Isaiah 29:10, "The meek also shall increase their joy in the Lord."
Matthew 5:5, "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth."
1 Peter 3:4 (duty of wives and husbands.), "...even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price."

Although any of these quotations might be her meaning, the last seems most applicable.

That this role of "Bride" is a spiritual change to her is shown in the final line by the attaching of another sacrament, baptism, to the sacrament of marriage. Her implied analogy between the two sacraments
of baptism and marriage is appropriate because both sacraments have uniting qualities; in the former, one is received into the congregation of Christ, and in the latter, one is joined to another mortal. No mention is made in this poem of the bridegroom. The poem is about growth—from insecurity to self-confidence. It is an effective subjective study, and, at the same time, successful as poetry because of the delicate precision of image.

Life

Emily Dickinson used "Belt" rather than the usual symbol of the wedding ring to represent the encirclement of love in the following poem:

He put the Belt around my life—
I heard the Buckle snap—
And turned away, imperial,
My Lifetime folding up—
Deliberate, as a Duke would do
A Kingdom’s Title Deed—
Henceforth, a dedicated sort—
A Member of the Cloud.

Yet not too far to come at call—
And do the little Toils
That make the Circuit of the Nest—
And deal occasional smiles
To lives that stoop to notice mine—
And kindly ask it in—
Those invitation, know you not
For Whom I must decline?

Her awareness of the encircling of love is shown in line two, and she realizes the change of status which is a turning point in her life. She describes this change in royal terms, and her comparison is extreme to match her emotions. The acceptance of a "Kingdom" by a "Duke" is compared to the acceptance of this love by her. Apparently this image is insufficient to her, and therefore she carries the metaphor further by announcing her dedication to him and terms herself "A Member of the Cloud."
In the Old and New Testaments of the Bible there are ninety-six references to the word "cloud." Most frequently it means a conveyance for God or for his angels. In The Revelation 11:12, however, two prophets are brought from death to life again by God, and "they ascended up to heaven in a cloud..." This chapter continues in verses sixteen and seventeen: "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more...and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

In stanza two of the poem Emily Dickinson quickly makes the transition back to her ties of ordinary earthly activities, which are the "Circuit" of the supreme love she has. One meaning of "Circuit" here is probably circumference, and this echoes the circular "Belt" mentioned in the first line. Verses four, five, and six of Psalm 19 may also be illuminating here: "...the sun, which is as a bridgroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race. His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it..." Here the meaning is more of a regular journeying or route in pursuit of work, which to her are her "little Toils." Her meaning of "Circuit" may, therefore, be a double one. In the conclusion of the poem she states that there will be no involvement with any other people in her life. The total poem, then, turns from self and the change wrought in herself by this love, to her duties which she must still perform regardless of this change, to the difference this new condition will make in her relationships with others. The year in which this poem was written, 1861, is probably when she first realized her love for Charles Sedgworth and dedicated herself to him.

In the following poem Emily Dickinson stands in awe of being married to and bearing the name of another forever.
The symbolic binding entity in this poem is "that perfect--pearl" which represents the same idea as "bend" in the preceding poem. She doubts her worthiness here to wear this "pearl" because she is "so unadorned," echoing "a powerless girl" in the poem "I am ashamed--I hide--." She continues with a prayer that this marriage will help to further purify, "A white gift," her beloved, "that munificence," who has chosen her for a wife. By selecting her, he has made her "a queen," the highest rank she could imagine for a woman, and one that equalled to her the role of a wife. She is grateful that the dream she had had of marriage is in reality true; she had thought that her conception of marriage was greater than she could actually expect to realize. The tone of this poem is of gratitude and humility for this marriage granted her. The theme is more unified here than it was in the previous poem.

An earlier poem written about 1060 on the theme of wifehood has an entirely different tone.

I'm "wife"--I've finished that--
That other state--
I'm Czar--I'm "oman" now--
It's safer so--
How odd the Girl's life looks
Behind this soft Eclipse--
I think that Earth feels so
To folks in Heaven--now--

This being comfort--then
That other kind--was pain--
But why compare?
I'm "life"! Stop there!

The mood in this poem is a mixture of triumph, pride, and relief that she has acquired the new and mature station in life of "wife." This was her first attempt to gain through her imagination expressed in poetry what she was deprived of in reality. The omission of a definite or indefinite article before the word "wife" seems to place it as a term of rank. In the poem she does confer a title on herself, "Czar," although of the wrong gender. The position of wife, then, is to her one of high degree. By being "wife" she finds fulfillment and is therefore "woman" in the most complete sense; this is the highest attainment for her. She sets off these two terms in quotation marks, perhaps to elevate them as much as possible. From the vantage point of a married woman, she surveys her previous condition, "the Girl's life," and finds that in comparison to this state, the other "was pain." Her analogy then is that as a wife regards maidentown, those in heaven must view life on earth. Without any further exploration of this pleasure/pain concept, she concludes with satisfaction that being "life" is sufficient for her. This is only one of several poems in which Emily Dickinson utilizes the pleasure/pain comparison. Her clipped statements add some power to the poem, but she did not achieve the maturity at this point in handling the topic of marriage that she did in the following poem, which was written two years later in 1862.
I'm ceded--I've stopped being Their's [sic]
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,
By 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 Mill--The Crescent dropped--
Existence's whole arc, filled up,
With one small Madam.

My second Rank--too small the first--
Crowned--Crowning--on my Father's breast--
A half unconscious Queen--
But this time--inadequate--Dread,
With will to choose, or to reject,
And I choose, just a Crown--

Although the tone of triumph in this poem is reminiscent of the tone in the preceding poem, "I'm 'wife'--I've finished that--," and the topic is the same, Emily Dickinson extends the comparison and contrast of Childhood and 'Life' which are represented respectively by the sacraments baptism and marriage. The contrasts of baptism and marriage are established from her premise that in each of these sacraments she has received both a name and a rank. The nineteen-line poem is perfectly balanced with a concentration of nine and one-half lines on each sacrament. In baptism, representing the unknowing state of childhood, the name she received was "Their's [sic]," and she has outgrown it now as she has outgrown her toys. This first name was received "without the choice." Her first rank was "A half unconscious Queen" which was "too small." Her childhood and its name and rank are now inadequate. In the sacrament of marriage she has made a deliberate choice of "supremest name." Her rank is superior to that of childhood because of her awareness
and power to choose. In the poem "The world—stands solemn—to me—," she was chosen: "...that munificence, that chose/ So undorned—a queen—." In both poems the selection gives her the title of "Queen"; in the poem "I'm 'wife'—I've finished that—," she became a "Czar" or a king. Whether the title of rank be "Czar," "Queen," or "wife," the meaning is "woman" in the most complete sense of fulfillment. She makes the meaning of this idea explicit in this poem with a moon image, "Called to my full—the Crescent dropped—." The "Crescent" is the symbol to her of virginity. The lines "Baptized, before, without the choice,/ But this time, consciously, of Grace—," imply that marriage is a baptism. She blended these sacraments in the previous poem "I am ashamed—I hide—" with the line "Baptized—this Day—a Bride—."

The achievement of this poem lies in the successful inter-weaving of her comparison and contrast through her chiefly religious imagery. Two changes in her life are dramatized in an artistic attempt.

Possession

The following poem is another lyric achievement.

Title divine—is mine!
The life—without the sign!
Acute Degree—conferred on me—
Empress of Calvary!
Royal—all but the Crown!
Betrothed—without the swoon
God sends us Women—
Then you—hold—Garnet to Garnet—
Gold—to Gold—
Born—bridled—shrouded—
In a Day—
"My Husband"—women say—
Stroking the melody—
Is this—the way?
In this poem she considers herself married, but there are three components missing in her role of "life." They are "the Sign" which perhaps signifies the chance of more which takes place in marriage, "the Crown" or the rank of wife she would gain by an actual marriage, and "The swoon" or the joy of experiencing a betrothal and the union of marriage. The lines "when you--hold--Carnet to Carnet--/ Gold--to Gold" might suggest physical union. She represents her type of wedding day in the following way: "Born--Bridalled--Buried/ in a Day--" Her title here is "Empress of Calvary," and reflects her extreme suffering caused by the deprivation of a real marriage. Possibly the title has a connection with Tadworth, who became the minister at Calvary Church in San Francisco the year this poem was written. With the symbol of Calvary, however, comes the promise of redemption, and the use of the adjective "divine" in the first line gives the title of "life" a spiritual rank. The final three lines contain a wistful note which reveals the emotion she has for the title of "life." The compression of both thought and emotion in this poem achieves lyrical success.

The following poem seems to be a companion poem to the previous one. Both were written in 1862.

Mine--by the Right of the White Election!
Mine--by the Royal Seal!
Mine--by the Sign in the Scarlet prison--
Bars--cannot conceal!

Mine--here--in Vision--and in Veto!
Mine--by the Grave's Repeal--
Titled--Confirmed--
Delirious Charter!
Mine--long at Ages steal!

Emily Dickinson uses the possessive "Mine" six times in this poem of
forty-five words. The six exclamation points and the many dashes add to the mood of intensity created by the images and conciseness of expression.

Probably in the year in which this poem was written, Emily Dickinson adopted exclusively the white mode of dress. In the first line, the color white used with the Calvinistic doctrine of choice, "Election," the strongest term for choice from her religious heritage, may mean a dedication on her part to the loved one she cannot actually have. She uses the Biblical term "Seal," the designation by which God claims man as his own, for her claim to her beloved. Her suffering from the deprivation of her loved one, "the Scarlet prison--", has revealed "the Sign" of her rightful possession, which "Bars--cannot conceal!"

Since she has been deprived of her loved one in this life by the "Veto" of someone or some situation, she has conjured up a mental image of him, a "Vision." "Mine--by the Grave's Repeal" perhaps means the repeal by death of whatever "law" has kept them apart; death will provide life everlasting which will reunite her with her beloved. The "Charter" or compact consisting of the qualifications cited previously in her poem which make him belong to her is "delirious" because she has earned the right to eternal union with him. Her use of legal terminology here like the word "ceded" in the poem "I'm ceded--I've stopped being Their's [sic]" most likely was derived from the legal jargon of her father, her brother, and the friends, for example Judge Otis P. Lord, who were attorneys.

Her particular achievement in this poem of possession is her mastery of metaphor. Her ability also is reflected in the rendering of passionate feelings in concise ejaculations. Both this poem and the preceding one, "Title divine--is mine," reveal her elliptical method, and her love of
economy of line and epithet.

In the following three poems she continues using the tenet, adhered to by the Rev. Mr. Edsworth as well as by other Calvinists, that heaven will reward those who suffered on earth.

Although the poem beginning "There Came a Day at Summer's full," was enclosed in a letter dated April 25, 1862, Emily Dickinson had written the semifinal draft in late 1861.¹ This poem concerns two star-crossed lovers who meet, and since they are unable to spend this life together, they pledge that they will be united in marriage in heaven.²

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

In stanza two she comments that in spite of the tremendous significance of this meeting, the outer world of nature continues its normal functions.

The poem continues as follows:

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 Sealèd Church
Permitted to commune this--time--
Lest we too awkward show
At Supper of the Lamb.

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

¹Johnson, Poems, p. 249.
²For a possible explanation of this poem, see p. 17 of this paper.
Sufficient troth, that we shall rise--
Deposed—at length, the Grave--
To that new Marriage,
Justified—through Calvaries of Love--

The feelings and decisions of renunciation are mutual. The moment of
their meeting is a sacred one, as the numerous religious references indicate.
At times even the verbs and phrasing seem to have a Biblical sound, as in
the second stanza: "As if no soul the solstice passed! That maketh all
things new," a reference to The Revelation 21:5, "And he that sat upon the
throne said, Behold, I make all things new...."

The circumstance which makes this parting tragic for those two lovers
is that they have to live apart in this life. The only "Bond" given at the
departure is that "Each bound the Other's Crucifix--," their supreme mortal
suffering, which is "Sufficient troth" that they will be married in heaven.
They will be entitled to "that new Marriage" because of their extreme suf-
ferings, "Calvaries," for love on earth. The mood of the poem is intensely
reverent. The despair of the lovers is eased by the promise that in another
life they will be joined together.

Probably in no other poem did Emily Dickinson use more religious
imagery than she did in this one. Her creative imagination dealt with love
in an exalted manner.

The following poem shows extremely intense emotion:

What if I say I shall not wait!
What if I burst the fleshly Gate--
And pass escaped—to thee!

What if I file this Mortal—off--
See where it hurt me—That's enough--
And step in Liberty!
They cannot take me—any more!
Dungeons can call—and Guns implore
Unmeaning—now—to me—

As laughter—was—an hour ago—
Or Laces—or a Travelling Show—
Or who died—yesterday!

This poem seems in form a reply to her lover that she is unable to
wait any longer to be with him and is contemplating suicide. The under-
standing apparently is that although they must remain apart in this life,
they will unite in heaven. The line "what if I file this Mortal—off—"
reminds one of Hamlet's soliloquy "To be or not to be..." During the
time of Wadsworth's leaving, Emily Dickinson appears to have been grief-
stricken and terrified that she would lose control of her emotions and reason.
At this period she reflected several times on a life that would follow death.
Her main concern then is a reunion with her lover. In some poems she mentions
that it was she who made the decision of renunciation; at other times, as in
the previous poem, the decision of renunciation is on the part of both, be-
cause of circumstances beyond their control. Their plan and hope is to re-
unite in heaven. In view of Wadsworth's character, the idea of renunciation
would seem to have derived from poetic license rather than from actuality.
In this poem she expresses the idea that this life is a prison to her because
she is not with the one she loves. "The fleshly Gate" is the door leading
from this life to the one that follows. She speaks as a prisoner desiring
freedom might: "burst the fleshly Gate—," "File this Mortal—off—" as a
prisoner might file off his shackles, and then "step in Liberty!" Filing
away her mortal life or dying is painful, but worth the suffering for freedom.
Freedom, then, is being with her loved one. With him in the life-to-come she
will have reached safety as she will be beyond the restrictions and confines-
ments of this life—"Dungeons" and "Guns" which represent the forces in this
world which have kept her a prisoner and, consequently, apart from her lover.
The worldly life will be as meaningless then to her as "laughter—was—an hour
ago---" and the more intense "Or who died—yesterday!"

The vehement and sustained passion throughout the poem is highly ef-
fective. Her symbols of the bondage she is in on earth are conventional but
treated with originality.

The theme of the following poem is again the spiritual marriage of
two lovers who are reunited in heaven after a long separation on earth.

'Twas a long Parting—but the time
For Interview—had Come—
Before the Judgment Seat of God—
The last—and second time

These Fleshless Lovers met—
A Heaven in a Gaze—
A Heaven of Heavens—the Privilege
Of one another's Eyes—

No Lifetime set—on Them—
Appeared as the new
Unborn—except They had beheld—
Born infinitely—now—

Was Bridal—e'er like This?
A paradise—the Host—
And Cherubim—and Seraphim—
The unobtrusive Guest—

The poem begins by mentioning that this is their "last—and second
meeting," an odd inversion that is effective because it places the more im-
portant first, and also because the inversion creates more power and emphasis
in the statement. This is the "last" meeting because they will not be
separated again. Their first meeting had presumably been at the time of their
parting on earth. Now as "Fleshless Lovers," they have an "interview" with
and receive their judgment from God. They, themselves, impart ecstasy to each other simply by the "privilege" of "a cease" which to her is so sublime that it is "Heaven."

In stanza three she declares that these lovers have no time limit set for them; mortal lovers have only a "Lifetime." She compares their new experience of spiritual re-birth to the mortal's birth. This is "infinitier" because they are aware of the transition they are making from one form of life to a higher form. In the final stanza she emphasizes the importance and worth of this experience by asking if any earthly marriage could possibly approach the sanctity and majesty of this heavenly "Bridal" which has "A Paradise--the Host--/ And Cherubim--and Seraphim--/ The unobtrusive Guest--."

She seems to create deliberately a mood of incompleteness in this poem. The setting of heaven is the most exalted setting man can envision. Her emotion of exultation from the reunion with her lover in heaven is successfully carried throughout the poem. The metaphor in the poem is extreme but effective.

In the following poem the face of her beloved gain for her admittance to and "Rank" in heaven.

The face I carry with me--last--
When I go out of Time--
To take my Rank--by--in the West--
That face--will just be thine--

I'll hand it to the angel--
That--Sir--was my Degree--
In Kingdoms--you have heard the Raised--
Refer to--possibly.
He'll take it--scan it--step aside--
Return--with such a crown
As Gabriel--never capered at--
And beg me put it on--

And then--he'll turn me round and round--
To an admiring sky--
As one that bore her Master's name--
Sufficient Royalty!

In this poem the credentials--"the face" of her beloved--she brings with her entitle her to a crown of high esteem, and because of this she excites attention and admiration from "an admiring sky--." She refers to her lover as "Master," and the poem wavers at this point in meaning as to whether it is referring to a human or divine "Master." The name "Master," of course, was the one given to Jesus by his disciples. The statement "As one that bore her Master's name--" implies by the past tense of the verb a marriage previous to her arrival in heaven. Possessing his name is "Sufficient Royalty" for her.

Her enjoyment of a somewhat cryptic style may be seen here. The elaborate conceit that Emily Dickinson uses here is carried out successfully. That her lover is so exalted as to astonish even Gabriel is bold in conception.

Fidelity

The following poem goes beyond the statement of the wedding vows, "Until Death do us part."

Forever at His side to walk--
The smaller of the two!
Brain of His Brain--
Blood of His Blood--
Two lives--One being--now--
The first eleven lines of this poem concern the partnership on earth; the last five lines are about the continuance of this partnership in heaven.

The first line is in the form of a pledge. The stanza continues with the statements that she has become part of him although they are two lives, and she is "the smaller," perhaps an indication of dependency and humility. Her "Two lives--One Being--now" is a re-echoing of Ephesians 5:31: "...and they two shall be one..." as well as of Matthew 19:5: "...and they twain shall be one flesh." Emily Dickinson carries this idea even further by adding to her "Blood of His Blood--" another uniting compact, "Brain of His Brain--." 

Stanza two is one of dedication and loyalty. Again the pleasure/pain concept is utilized. She will bear his grief, and will sacrifice her joy for him.

The first two stanzas which envision the future are from the first person singular point of view. In stanza three there is a shift from the nameless "I" of the first two stanzas to the plural and uniting "we." The pronominal usage in this poem is interesting to note. "My" and "we" are each used once; "His" is mentioned four times, reflecting love's selflessness.

Mortals can know each other, she states, but their knowledge is limited because of their human inability to comprehend anything and anyone completely. "A Change," signifying death and the assumption of immortality, into heaven
will bring omniscience to men. Her intent in this poem is to depict an eternal relationship between her beloved and herself.

The familiar term she applies to those in heaven, "Hept Neighborhoods of Men--," is similar to the one she used in the poem "I'm 'Wife'--l've finished that--," when she designated those who have assumed immortality as "...Folks in Heaven--now." Applying such familiar worldly terms to heavenly spirits is unusual and effective because it associates reality with a realm generally difficult to envision in concrete terms. This method also brings the spiritual order into a more personal and material state. Apparently Emily Dickinson felt more at ease in envisioning heaven in terms of the world which in her youth was hard for her to relinquish. The heaven that she is eager to obtain always has her lover either waiting for her or entering with her. Obviously, from this group of love poems, there would be no heaven for her without her beloved. In the present world her imagination could apparently suffice; in the future would she seemed to believe that the reality of love would occur.

The next two poems to be considered are strong statements of fidelity. The first was written in 1861 and exhibits extreme emotional upheaval.

 Doubt Me! My Jim Companion!  
 Why, God, would be content  
 With but a fraction of the Life  
 Poured thee, without a stint--  
 The whole of me--forever--  
 That more the Woman can,  
 Say quick that I may dower thee  
 With last Delight I own!  
 It cannot be my Spirit--  
 For that was thine, before--  
 I ceded all of Dust I knew--  
 That Opulence the more  
 Had I--a freckled Maiden,  
 Whose farthest of Degree,  
 Was--that she might--  
 Some distant Heaven,  
 Dwell timidly, with thee!
Sift her, from Brow to Barefoot!
Strain till your last Surmise--
Drop, like a Tapestry, away,
Before the Fire's Voes--
Minnow her finest fondness--
But hallow just the snow
Intact, in Everlasting flakes--
Oh, Caviler [sic], for you!

Both the construction and idea of this poem convey extreme emotional intensity. In more than thirty poems, Emily Dickinson attempted to measure love. This poem is concerned with proving the amount of love she has for her "fin companion," a fitting term since the object of her affections, presumably the Rev. Charles Reedworth, existed to her chiefly through her imagination. She has given her entire life to him, and in a bold comparison she continues: "why, God, would be content/ with but a fraction of the Life/ Poured thee, without a stint." This is certainly a shocking statement for one of her environment to make, and it shows how consuming her love is for this man. So strong is her love that she pledges "The whole of me, forever." This type of pledge was made by the Calvinists, but to God instead of man. If there is anything more to sacrifice for him, she will quickly "dower" him with it. This verb of course brings to mind the goods or estate which a woman brings to her husband on marriage.

In stanza two she states that she has already considered as belonging to him her soul, "my Spirit," and her body, "Dust." "Spirit" and "dust" are found throughout the Bible, meaning respectively soul and body. A poem written about 1864 on the theme of death further illustrates her usage of these terms.

Death is a Dialogue between
The Spirit and the Dust.
"Dissolve" says Death--The Spirit "Sir
I have another Trust[")--
Death doubts it—Argues from the Ground—
The Spirit turns away
Just laying off for evidence
An Overcoat of Clay.

The "Spirit" in the poem just cited has a prior commitment. In the poem under consideration, "Doubt Me! My Dim Companion," the poet has committed her "Spirit" and "Dust" to her beloved.

In the poem "The World—stands—solemn—-to me—," Emily Dickinson had made the statement, "A modesty befits the soul/ That bears another's—name—," and in that poem she termed herself "So undecorated—a Queen." In the poem "I am ashamed—-I hide—," she had described herself as "A Powerless Girl." In the poem "Doubt Me! My Dim Companion," she continues the humble description of herself as "...a freckled Maiden," who has no further "opulence" to give her beloved than her "Spirit" and her "Dust." Her foremost attribute has been her hope to live with her lover in heaven. Here again is her awareness that she cannot live with her beloved in this life; consequently, her hope is to be with him in a life-to-come. The repetition of this theme which began in the year 1861, the year she probably fell in love with Wadsworth, seems indicative of her reliance on and belief in this hope of reunion with her lover in heaven.

In stanza three Emily Dickinson challenges her lover to test her love for him by a variety of unusual ways, "Gift," "Strain," and "Winnow," until he has no more doubt of her love, "...till your last Surmise—/ Drop, like a Tapestry, away, / before the Fire's eyes—." She asks him to "hallow" her "snow," or putir, which she has kept intact eternally for him alone. The poem in its entirety is a lyric cry to prove her extreme love.

The following poem of undetermined date because no copy in her handwriting or it has been found, is also on the theme of fidelity. It matches
the tone of the preceding poem.

Rearrange a "Life's" affection!
Then 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 Lifehood ever may!

Love that never loosed its socket--
Trust entrenched in narrow pain
Constancy thro' fire--awarded--
Anguish--bare of anodyne!

Bрем--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 Feary Keeper
Leads it through the Grave to thee.

In stanza one Emily Dickinson sets off "Life" in quotation marks which seem to imply that she does not bear the title of wife in a complete sense. She strongly asserts that as long as she remains a thinking woman she will be loyal to him.

In the second stanza she states that her troth has been of seven years' duration. She has learned more from these seven years of "troth" through the "narrow" pain—an unusual and effective term used in the following stanza, probably meaning intense—than she would have learned from the more normal years of being a wife. Her constancy has withstood the test of fire.

No one realizes her suffering, that she wears the crown of "Thorns" which were given to Jesus to wear at his crucifixion, because her suffering is "bandaged" in order to be kept "Secret" and out of others' sight. She will
reveal it only after death to her beloved, the theme again that her mortal suffering for love on earth will bring her the reward in heaven of reunion with her beloved. "Sunset" is her symbol in this poem for the end of this life, after which she will receive a "diadem."

This poem too is marked by and noteworthy for the intensity of its religious imagery. Comparing her mortal lot to the suffering of Jesus on the Cross, implied by the crown of "Thorns," in extreme, and vividly conveys to the reader of this poem the intensity of her suffering on earth. Suffering of this nature without any hope of relief and satisfaction or reward would be too much for man. Emily Dickinson realized the undying characteristic of hope as an element of man's nature as she stated in the following:

Hope is the thing with feathers--
That perches in the soul--
And sings the tune without the words--
And never stops--at all

Her hope in the poem "Rearrange a 'Life's' affection" is stated in the conviction that her suffering will gain for her a reunion in heaven with her beloved as well as a divine crown which will replace her crown of "Thorns."

Another poem of undetermined date is the following:

The grave my little cottage is,
Where "Keeping house" for thee
I make my parlor orderly
And lay the marble tee.

For two divided briefly,
A cycle, it may be,
Till everlasting life unite
In strong society.

The tone of this poem is serene, and its calmness stands in marked

1Johnson, Poems, I, 182.
contrast to the fervor of the preceding poem. The almost macabre effect achieved in the first stanza of this poem, which describes ordinary household duties being performed in the grave, is relieved in the second stanza by the ultimate and "everlasting" reunion of two lovers who have been "divided briefly" presumably by death. Their union or "society" then will be "strong" because it will be unbreakable.

In nine poems comprising the "bridal" and marriage group, the pervasive theme is union or reunion in heaven with her loved one, presumably Wadsworth. All of the poems discussed which are a part of the "bridal" and marriage group have had religious imagery of love and marriage in connection with her beloved. The following poem is an image of marriage with love for God.

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--

In this poem, Emily Dickinson speaks almost as if she were a Roman Catholic nun. Attempts have been made to construe Emily Dickinson's occasional usage of Roman Catholic terms and her withdrawal from the world as indicative of her desire to be a nun. It must be remembered, however, that she was an experimenter in her art and religion, and that she explored many areas to find both artistic and spiritual insights. The mood of solemnity found in this poem could be counterbalanced at other times when she addressed

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1Sister Mary James Power, In the Name of the Bee (New York, 1943).
God in her poetry with an arch or audacious spirit.

In the poem quoted above, the marriage is, of course, to the Trinity, and this "edlock of hill" transcends any other type of marriage because it is everlasting. This stands in contradiction to the previous poem cited and others where she asserted that in heaven she would live everlasting with her lover. Here she states that only the one who wears the ring of union with God will "Conquer Mortality--."

Thomas H. Johnson believes that Emily Dickinson's life-long need for a guiding spirit or "preceptor" whom she could adore from afar in her imagination was the explanation for her creation of the "bridal" and marriage poems.¹ It is true that in this group of poems she reveals the subordinate role which her dependent nature preferred to enact. I am convinced that the reason for the shadowy image of her lover in these poems is that she was recording the effects which this love had on her, frequently in religious terms. I further believe that in addition to her need for guidance was her need for love which she had to experience in her imagination because her love for Wadsworth was unrequited. That her love was intense is possibly substantiated best by the ecstatic lyricism in the poem "Title divine--is mine." Her love for Judge Lord later in life was probably reciprocated, with the result that the solitary lyric cry was no longer necessary as an outlet for her emotions; in this love she would communicate her feelings directly.

¹Emily Dickinson, p. 79.
Conclusion

Emily Dickinson actively dealt with—largely through her poetry—the two frustrations of her life: her love for God and her love for man. The suffering from her unrequited love achieved universal expression in her poetry. Her grief helped inspire her to search more passionately than she had before for answers to some of her religious dilemmas. Her mind was too searching to accept any sectarian argument without satisfaction that it held true for her. She transcended her religious heritage by personally testing for validity the precepts she had been taught. She could accept, for example, the concept of Jonathan Edwards, a part of her religious inheritance perhaps further explained by Tadworth, that redemption of salvation is achieved only by suffering. Since she was deprived of her supreme desire on earth, she hoped for compensation in heaven. She was spiritually strengthened by the emotional ordeal she had endured. Perhaps her examinations of love and religion explain the proximity of her human love to divine love, with each, in a way, interpreting the other. Charles R. Anderson has designated Emily Dickinson as "the most profoundly religious poet this country has produced."¹

One may ask, was Emily Dickinson a great lyric poetess, and if so, by what standards of judgment may one support this view? This writer feels that in her poetry Emily Dickinson meets adequately the literary standards

¹Stairway of Surprise, p. 296.
of Longinus in his *Essay on the Sublime*. First, she dealt with her love in an exalted manner, exercising creative imagination in the fashion of a gifted artist. Then, her poetry in its best specimens reveals a vehement and sustained passion for craftsmanship, in that the beginning, middle, and end of each poem is of a high quality of workmanship. Third, her mastery of metaphor and other figures of speech, wherein the poet shows her power of translation from her own gifted insight into her subject in terms understandable and illuminating to her readers, is exemplary. In the fourth place, her mind, nourished on the Bible, draws upon a rich fund of diction and allusion highly significant to her readers. Finally, there is a masterly sense of architectonics in the composition of her poetry. Each poem represents a unit of thought, reveals the requisites of good craftsmanship in the medium she has chosen for expression of her ideas and emotions, and is at the same time a distinguishable unit in the chain of development of self, art, and philosophy of the poet.
Appendix

The following list contains all of the love poems written by Emily Dickinson arranged by year. Those marked by asterisks contain religious imagery and/or religious references of various sorts. The total number of poems written in any one year is indicated in parentheses following the date. The dating and the numbering of the poems are those of Thomas H. Johnson, The Poems of Emily Dickinson (Cambridge, 1963).

1858 (Approximately fifty poems)

Heart! We will forget him! (47)
*I never lost as much but twice (49)

1859 (Approximately one hundred poems)

The Daisy follows soft the Sun-- (106)

1860 (Approximately sixty-five poems)

*My River runs to thee-- (162)
*At last, to be identified! (174)
*He was weak, and I was strong--then-- (190)
*I'm "wife"--I've finished that-- (199)
*My Eye is fuller than my vase-- (202)
*The Rose did oaper on her cheek-- (206)
*With thee, in the Desert (209)
*Come slowly--Eden! (211)
*Least Rivers--docile to some sea. (212)

1861 (More than eighty poems)

*If He dissolve--then--there is nothing--more-- (236)
*Ah, Moon--and Star! (240)
*Forever at His side to walk-- (246)
*What would I give to see his face? (247)
*Wild Nights--Wild Nights! (249)
*You see I cannot see--your life-time-- (253)
*A single Screw of Flesh (253)
*Did we disobey Him? (257)
*One Life of so much Consequence (270)
*A solemn thing--it was--I said (271)
*He put the Belt around my life-- (273)
*Doubt me! My Dim Companion! (275)
The Drop, that wrestles in the Sea

I got so I could hear his name--

One year ago--jots what?

There came a day at Summer's full,

1862 (366 Poems)

Your Riches--taught me--Poverty.

"Morning"--means "Milking"-- to the Farmer

The Soul selects her own Society--

I should have been too glad, I see

Just so--Jesus raps--

The face I carry with me--last--

I know that He exists.

I tend my flowers for thee--

My Reward for Being, was This.

"Twas the old--road--through pain--

"This Opposite--enticing--

Although I put away his life--

How sick--to wait--in any place--

but thine

Of course--I prayed--

The Sweetest Heresy received [sic]

Take your Heaven further on--

"Twas Love--not me--

I had not minded--"alls--

A tongue--to tell Him I am true!

Not in this world to see his face--

I'll clutch--and clutch--

The Moon is distant from the Sea--

To love thee Year by Year--

Forget! The lady with the Amulet

"Love--thou art high--

So well that I can live without--

"A Wife--at Daybreak I shall be--

"I live with him--I see His Face--

"The power to be true to You

I am alive--I guess--

I am ashamed--I hide--

"They put Us far apart--

I had no time to hate--

"Why do I love" You, Sir?

"We Cover Thee--Sweet Face--

While it is alive

"The World--stands--solemnly--to me--

"I envy Seas, whereon He rides--

He touched me, so I live to know

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

Their's [sic]

"If you were coming in the Fall,
*Her sweet weight on my Heart a Night (518)
Sweet--You forgot--but I remembered (523)
*Mine--by the Right of the White Election! (528)
I'll prove it now--whoever doubt (537)
*That I did always love (543)
*I cross till I am weary (550)
*I measure every Grief I meet (561)
*Have I learned the Whole of love-- (568)
I could die--to know-- (570)
*The Test of Love--is Death-- (573)
*If I may have it, when it's [sic] dead (577)
I give myself to Him-- (580)
*Empty my Heart of Thee-- (587)
He found my Being--set it up-- (603)
*I see thee better--in the Dark-- (611)
*I rose--because He sank-- (615)
*It makes no difference abroad-- (620)
*Twas a long Parting--but the time (625)
*Ourselves were wed one summer--dear-- (631)
To my small Heart His fire came-- (683)
*I cannot live with You-- (640)
*I could suffice for Him, I knew-- (643)
*You left me--fire--two Legacies-- (644)
*I think to live--may be a Miss (646)
*Promise This--then You be dying-- (648)
*The first day, when you praised me, Sweet, (659)
Could I but ride indefinite (661)
*Again--his voice is at the door-- (663)
*Of all the Souls that stand Create-- (664)
*Title divine--is mine! (1072)

1863 (Approximately 140 poems)

No Romance sold unto (669)
*The Love a Life can show Below (673)
*The Soul that hath a Guest (674)
*Conscious am I in my Chamber, (679)
*Victory comes late (690)
I could bring You Jewels--and I a
mind to-- (697)
*Out of sight? What of that? (703)
No matter--now--Sweet-- (704)
*Where Thou art--that is Home (725)
*Let Us play Yesterday-- (728)
*Alter! When the Hills do-- (729)
She rose to His Requirement (732)
You said that I "was Great"--one Day-- (738)
*You taught me waiting with myself-- (740)
*My Worthiness is all my Doubt-- (751)
My Life had stood—a Loaded Gun
You constituted Time
If blame be my side—forfeit me—
To wait an hour—is long—
Joy to have merited the Pain—

1864 (Nearly two hundred poems)

So set it’s [sic] Sun in Thee
Unable are the loved to die
The Luxury to apprehend
Love reckons by itself—alone—
Dying! To be afraid of thee

I sing to use the sitting
This Chaos, Sweet, upon my life
That distance was between Us
Because the bee may blameless hum
Each Tear I’ll keep for Him
I’ve none to tell me to but Thee

A Shade upon the mind there passes
We outgrow love, like other things

Till Death—is narrow Loving—
I make die Crescent fill or lack—
I cannot be ashamed

Love—is anterior to Life—
Struck, was I, nor yet by Lightning—
What I see not, I better see—

I learned—at least—what more could be—

That shall I do when the summer troubles—
We met as Sparkes—Diverging hints
Verst Thou but ill—that I might show thee

All forgot for recollecting

Writter to see Him, I may be
Robbed by Death—but that was easy—

1865 (Approximately eighty poems)

The Stimulus, beyond the Grave
Mind me—I still can sing—
Up life”—still with my little bundle
Too scant, ’twas to die for you,
I knew that I had gained
Was my one Glory—
It was a quiet way—
Sang from the Heart, Sire
1860

"Soul, take thy risk"

1870

"Distance—is not the Realm of Fox"

1872

"Because he loved her"
"Somewhere upon the general earth"

1873

"Safe despair it is that raves—"
"To pile like Thunder to it's [sic] close
The incidents of love"
"Because that you are going"

1876

"Faithful to the end" Amended
"Long Years apart—can make no"

1878

"Let my first knowing be of thee"
"My Heart ran so to thee"
"When a Lover is a Beggar"
"Behold this little Lane—"
"I thought the Train would never come"

1879

"His voice decripit was with Joy"
"How destitute is he"

1880

"We shall find the Cube of the Rainbow."
"Love is done when Love's begun,"
"All that I do"
"Of whom so dear"
"The Pile of Years is not so high"
1861

*How fleet—how indiscreet an one—*

1882

*I grooped for him before I knew
Tried always and condemned by thee*

1883

To be forgot by Thee
By lonely gift and hindered ords
*The Clock strikes One*

1884

Few, yet enough
*Tis not the swaying frame we miss,
*So give me back to Death
Still own thee—still thou art

1885

*Tell thee—could I—Then I will*

No autographed copies or other substantiating evidence of date has
been found for the following poems. Therefore, their dates are undetermined.

| Love's stricken "why"
| I did not reach Thee
| *I see thee clearer for the Grave*
| *Sometimes with the Heart*
| *Speech is one symptom of Affection*
| The look of thee, what is it like
| He was my host—he was my guest,
| *I've got an arrow here.*
| *Love can do all but raise the Dead*
| *Proud of my broken heart, since thou didst break it,*
| *Rearrange a "life's" affection!*
| *The grave my little cottage is,*
| To lose thee—sweeter than to gain
| That Love is all there is,

*1864*

Emily Dickinson wrote, in addition, many poems of despair, some about
ecstatic joy, and some on renunciation which may have been connected with
love or a lover, but which are not included here because no direct relationship or statement directly applicable to the theme of love could be found.
Texts and Critical Works

Books


Periodicals
