A JUNGIAN STUDY OF ANTITHESIS IN THE POETRY OF EMILY DICKINSON

by

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CW	Jung, C. G. The Collected Works of C. G. Jung. Ed. G. Adler, M. Fordham, and H. Read. 20 vols. New York: Pantheon Books for Bollingen Foundation, 1960-1979.
J	Johnson, Thomas, ed. The Poems of Emily Dickinson. 3 vols. Cambridge: Belknap-Harvard UP, 1955.
L	Johnson, Thomas and Theodora Ward, ed. The Letters of Emily Dickinson. 3 vols. Cambridge: Belknap-Harvard UP, 1956.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

> Surgeons must be very careful
> When they take the knife!
> Underneath their fine incisions
> Stirs the culprit - Life! (J 108)

Emily Dickinson's works offer uniquely formidable challenges to the world of literary criticism. First of all, her manuscripts are a critic's nemesis. Left after her death, partially tied in bundles of eighteen to twenty poems each but often incomplete or with numerous variant wordings, her 1,775 poems resemble a lifetime's work jumbled in a trunk. Dickinson's inconsistent handwriting proved to be the only basis for arranging her poems chronologically, an imperfect system at best. Her rough drafts and incomplete fragments offer more confusion than light in deciphering the typical critical tools of developmental staging or biographical support for her works. Many poems have been irreparably "improved" by well-meaning editors, and, despite the fact that Dickinson died in 1886, we have had all of her poems in print only since 1955. Her letters (those fortuitously preserved by recipients, for her own drafts and letters were destroyed after her death) offer much helpful information, for she was indeed a prolific correspondent, but several unexplainable gaps compound the mysteries of her life. So

few friends and relatives actually knew Dickinson that we have very limited first-person witness to the "myth of Amherst." Unfortunately, family controversies preceding and following her death (particularly the Austin Dickinson/Mabel Loomis Todd affair) further distorted the accounts of those few family members who had known her intimately. Added to these difficulties Dickinson's own eccentricities of isolation and reticence, the literary critic is essentially left able to rely only on the poems themselves for illumination of her genius.

However, the poems are not self-explanatory:

> The same adjectives keep recurring in discussions of Emily Dickinson's poetry: cryptic, enigmatic, vague, ambiguous, allusive, riddle-like, lapidary, compressed, elliptical. Most of the poems do not yield their contents readily, and some of them appear to be impregnable. Dickinson criticism is no more and no less than a record of attempts to decipher the images, to solve the riddles and identify the allusions to go to the heart of the poems. (Duchac vii)

Concerning the complexity and diversity of her poetry, Albert Gelpi has surmised that she "could be possessed only by the experience of the immediate moment, and so her art expressed itself in short lyrics each of which incarnated a moment" (Mind 92). As a result of this compressed brevity, none of her poems appear to synthesize the whole of her experience. In fact much of her work dances in paradox, apparently contradicting itself in stance, mood, or voice from poem to poem. Those who attempt to build an autobiographical case or relate her work to events are subverted by

her disclaimer: "When I state myself, as a Representative of the Verse--it does not mean--me--but a supposed person" (L 268).

Although scores of critical analyses emerging from diverse perspectives and critical camps have perpetuated quite a din of discourse on the subject of her poetry, no one seems to tire of the debate. Emily Dickinson's intellect, skill, courage, and aloofness from social pressures enabled her to produce a body of work that continues to inspire praise and speculation from her admirers. Harold Bloom's estimation of her position in the literary world is significantly adulatory:

> Of all poets writing in English in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, I judge Emily Dickinson to present us with the most authentic cognitive difficulties. Vast and subtle intellect cannot itself make a poet; the essential qualities are inventiveness, mastery of trope and craft, and that weird flair for intuiting significance through rhythm to which we can give no proper name. Dickinson has all these, as well as a mind so original and powerful that we scarcely have begun, even now, to catch up with her. (1)

Presumably we are still only beginning to understand the unique genius of Emily Dickinson. Although scholars have poured over her impressive body of poems, no consensus of critical theory has captured the totality of her genius or determined the master key to her style. Her respected biographer, Richard Sewall, finds this elusiveness only natural:

> It is not surprising that Sophocles and Shakespeare should be closer to us, have clearer shape in our minds, than our near contemporary, the elusive poet of

> Amherst. With them, we know where we are--roughly, that is, and with the help of generations of scholarly and critical inquiry. With Emily Dickinson, the long process of assimilation has, relatively speaking, just begun. She is not yet ours, and she will not be until her hopes and fears and mysteries become as plain to us as Antigone's or Hamlet's are, and with much the same claim on us. (xi)

According to Sewall, we are participants in the birthing process of Dickinson criticism.

Ironically, for a woman who exulted in extreme isolation and absolute privacy, her life's story and the motivations for her writing have become the most public of domains for speculative inquiry:

> It has been hypothesized that because of a weak mother, a strong father, and the mores of a Victorian society, the poet was sexually repressed and passive, became agoraphobic, and underwent catatonic agonies of psychological disorganization. Or, a victim of a patriarchal home and culture, she experienced the anxiety of gender and showed symptoms of anorexia nervosa, at least emotionally. Or, in love with the wrong man (a married man), she became pregnant and had an abortion. She was, it has been argued, a lesbian. It also is said that she was unable to maintain close friendships with other women. Expressing as a young woman a nostalgia for childhood and a concern about "how to grow up," she may be seen as either childlike or narcissistic. And finally, there is the suggestion that she was manic depressive. (Phillips 2)

One wonders if such open speculation of her private life would bring mirth or moans from the myth of Amherst today. However, each of these theses has been considered in scholarly fashion with careful selections from Dickinson's voluminous poems and letters

readily supplied as support. The difficulty lies in seeing how the texts could possibly support them all.

In spite of these difficulties in Dickinson criticism, the highly personal intensity of her poetry repeatedly points us to the intensity of her life and the uniqueness of her genius. As Theodora Ward, the co-editor of her letters, has stated:

> It is almost impossible to give concentrated attention to her poems and letters without wishing to probe the source from which came the extraordinary power of her poetic utterance. The quality of personal involvement pervades not only the most lyrical of her poems but the most abstract as well, leading the reader to seek farther than an intellectual or aesthetic stimulus for an explanation of their origin. Genius may be spontaneous, but it cannot manifest itself without making use of the elements that comprise the individual it has endowed. It is by following the mainstream of the emotional life that we come closest to the creative sources. (v)

Regardless of the particular difficulties in interpreting Dickinson's life and works, the paradoxes of her "letter to the world," with its personal and universal tensions of emotional and intellectual polarities, continue to captivate the reader. Like no other poet before her, Emily Dickinson translated a remote existence in Amherst, Massachusetts, into an archetypal telegram to the human race:

> At the very center of her work, herself both the subject and object of her poems, she wrought, out of her own highly individual and nervous self-analyses, a poetry which, paradoxically, generates a universal not merely personal or particular passion. It is this power which places her among the major American poets. (Jennings 79)

In addition to this universal emotional appeal, Dickinson's poetry appears to draw its power, in part, from the daring juxtaposition of the far reaches of the human dilemma in tight embrace:

> Dickinson's major achievement may consist in her demand that romantic hope must admit pain and disappointment, that freedom must not ignore but include necessity, that paradise must be achieved by quest through the "buzz and din." Still, the tension between the two worlds is everywhere evidenced and it is this tension--apparent in the smallest minutiae of style as in the largest narrative patterns--that most clearly identifies Emily Dickinson. (Weisbuch 10)

This paper will not attempt to add one more speculative theory to the numerous psychoanalytic or biographic interpretations of Emily Dickinson's life, a questionable and repetitive endeavor. However, Jungian psychoanalytic literary criticism may reveal clues to her appeal, especially those poems that are energized by the antitheses of human experience held in dynamic tension. This approach will require an initial examination of the particular possibilities and limitations of psychoanalytic criticism before proceeding to a close examination of selected poems.

CHAPTER II

THE HAZARDS OF PSYCHOANALYTIC CRITICISM

> Had we the first intimation of the Definition of Life, the calmest of us would be Lunatics-- (L 492)

Perhaps the greatest value of psychoanalytic literary criticism lies not in what it reveals about the life of the author being scrutinized (as in psychobiography), but in discovering what the literature itself reveals about the human experience and how it reveals these insights to the reader. Too often we find it more comfortable to investigate the colorful or scandalous life of the author rather than turn the spyglass on ourselves and our shared internal complexities. To attempt a psychoanalysis of an artist's work requires great care and responsibility. If we are not careful, we may find it too easy to see only what we want to see:

> Psychoanalysis grants license for seeing unconscious patterns and motives in poetry. Herein lies its chief value applied to literature. But this license incurs responsibilities. Judgment, balance, and restraint are needed. Otherwise anything can be read into a poem, and can be wrenched to conform with any biographical thesis. (Tanner 107)

Despite its inherent pitfalls, a psychoanalytic approach to a poem can produce meaningful and significant insight. After all,

everything that we can understand about the way we think or process experience is potentially helpful in understanding the ways that literature "works," yet ground rules are clearly needed.

The poetry of Emily Dickinson provides rich soil for psychoanalytic consideration because of its enigmatic and highly intimate qualities. Although the critic may be frustrated by her complexity and ambiguity, Robert Weisbuch suggests that such difficulties are actually helpful in unearthing the heart of her poetry. Dickinson's words themselves provide us an access to her mind, yet her unusual lifestyle distracts many who are psychologically bent in their search. Dickinson scholar Martin Bickman helps to clarify the central issue:

> . . . the ultimate test of a critical approach must be practical, and the poetry of Emily Dickinson still presents the critic with basic practical problems, such as what an individual poem is "about." With increasingly more accurate and more extensive historical and biographical knowledge, the relationship between the life and the work remains problematical, as much of a riddle. Though analyses of specific poems and groups of poems proliferate, the divergences and disagreements overshadow any kind of consensus. The most promising direction . . . lies in using the Romantic and Jungian theory of the psyche as a middle term between the cultural and the personal on the one hand and the immediacy and universality of the work of art on the other. (117)

Bickman's advice invites a consideration of how Jung's theory of the psyche and its relationship to poetry offers a possible clarification of the relationship of psychoanalysis to literary criticism.

Carl Jung, noted Swiss psychologist, studied the psychological relationships of art, religion, and science. He was particularly intrigued by the revelations of the unconscious made possible through artistic expression. However, he was careful to note the boundaries of each discipline:

> Art by its very nature is not science, and science by its very nature is not art; both these spheres of the mind have something in reserve that is peculiar to them and can be explained only in its own terms. Hence, when we speak of the relation of psychology to art, we shall treat only of that aspect of art which can be submitted to psychological scrutiny without violating its nature. Whatever the psychologist has to say about art will be confined to the process of artistic creation and has nothing to to with its innermost essence. . . . (CW XV, par. 99)

Jung had deep respect for the sanctity of artistic vision and expression and held strong opinions about the application of psychoanalysis to the distinctive entities of art and the artist:

> . . . in the work of art (irrespective of the personal psychology of the poet) the vision represents a deeper and more impressive experience than human passion. In works of art of this nature--and we must never confuse them with the artist as a person--it cannot be doubted that the vision is a genuine primordial experience, no matter what the rationalists may say. It is not something derived as secondary, it is not symptomatic of something else, it is a true symbol--that is, an expression for something real but unknown. (C W XV, par. 148)

Albert Gelpi reflects Jung's respect for the poet's psyche in his description of the psyche's unconscious promptings and relationship to social and cultural events:

> . . . I have come to see more and more clearly that accounting for the "mind" of the poet or of the poem is only a partial account, an anatomy of what has taken shape at or near the surface of consciousness. "Psyche" is a more inclusive and integrative word. It recognizes that conscious manifestations cannot be separated from the mysterious promptings and impulses of the unconscious which either engender those manifestations or struggle against them; it recognizes, further, that external conditions of social and cultural history affect and provoke not just those conscious phenomena, but the volatile, turbid unconscious as well. All artists are more rooted in and susceptible to that shadowy area than most of us. Many artists explicitly take the unconscious as the matrix of their art. . . . (Tenth Muse x)

As Jung describes this phenomenon of the psyche of the poet, he claims it "catches a glimpse of the psychic world that terrifies the primitive [uninitiated] and is at the same time his greatest hope" (CW XV, par. 149).

Delving into the psychic world is a terrifying business for poet, reader, and critic alike. Too often, critics have sought safety behind a medical analysis of a poet's mind to explain the ambiguities of his or her work. Jung strongly disapproves of such an approach:

> In order to do justice to a work of art, analytical psychology must rid itself entirely of medical prejudice; for a work of art is not a disease, and consequently requires a different approach from the medical one. . . . It is a thing and not a personality; hence it cannot be

> judged by personal criteria. Indeed, the special significance of a true work of art resides in the fact that it has escaped from the limitations of the personal and has soared beyond the personal concerns of its creator. (CW XV, par. 107)

To understand this point we shall look briefly at John Cody's After Great Pain: The Inner Life of Emily Dickinson (1971), which is often cited as insightful by Freudian literary critics for Cody's thorough analysis of Emily Dickinson's unsatisfactory relationship to her mother. Cody asserts that this failure in relationship handicapped Dickinson's sexual development in relation to both sexes, causing her to become psychotic and to experience a nervous breakdown, which worked to her advantage because "she had a deep need to feel unloved, unappreciated, and rejected in order to bring about the barren, arid, emotional climate that she intuitively realized was necessary for the flowering of her poetic fantasies" (497). Cody makes several clinical diagnoses of Dickinson's condition and then supports them with references to her poetic imagery in an attempt to elucidate both her poetry and her life's mysteries. In one case concerning Dickinson's use of eye imagery in several poems, he argues that Dickinson feared for her eyes because eyes can penetrate as well as receive. This makes them male phallic. Thus, fear for her eyes was a fear of losing her maleness (436). Or, at another point, he states that the sun is to many patients an unconscious symbol of the father figure. References to sunlight in her poetry are thus equated with her father's gaze, leading her to develop photophobia (423). In a strong attack on

Cody's work, Stephen Tanner harshly corrects Cody's method of criticism:

> Freed from the constraining considerations of context, chronology, and conscious intention, and buoyed on the elitism of allegedly scientific knowledge and clinical experience, he is enticed into overly ingenious interpretation and surmise that too easily make the leap from the possible to the probable to the factual. (107)

Jung's opinion of this type of approach to literary criticism is apparently in harmony with Tanner's:

> Though the material [the poet] works with and its individual treatment can easily be traced back to the poet's personal relations with his parents, this does not enable us to understand his poetry. . . . One poet may be influenced by his relation to his father, another by the tie to his mother, while a third shows unmistakable traces of sexual repression in his poetry. Since all this can be said equally well not only of every neurotic but of every normal human being, nothing specific is gained for the judgment of a work of art. . . . (CW XV par. 100)

At another point, Jung points out the attraction and danger of this type of "reduction of art to personal factors":

> The reduction of the vision to a personal experience makes it something unreal and unauthentic--a mere substitute. . . . The vision thus loses its primordial quality and becomes nothing but a symptom; the teeming chaos shrinks to the proportions of a psychic disturbance. We feel reassured by this explanation, and turn back to our picture of a well-ordered cosmos. . . . We should do well, I think, to bear clearly in mind the full consequences of this reduction of art to personal factors, and see where it leads. The truth is that it deflects our attention from the psychology of the work

> of art and focuses it on the psychology of the artist. . . . (CW XV par. 147)

This one reference to Cody's work, a more typically Freudian approach, is included merely to serve as a cautious reminder of certain pitfalls in psychoanalytic study.

While attempting to avoid such reductionism to personal psychoanalysis of Emily Dickinson's life and art, we do want to pursue a psychoanalytic approach to literary criticism based on Jungian principles, an approach which honors literary art as distinct from its purely personal sources. We shall do that by examining Dickinson's use of antithesis and its appeal for the reader. In choosing this course, we must respectfully accept the humbling fact that art is not totally decipherable. We may be tempted to reduce art to simplistic terms, but in doing so we run the risk of missing its full impact:

> A work of art may never be fully explained in terms of the author's personal psychology nor that of the critic or reader. To do so is to limit its vigor, to dismantle its impact, to distort its meaning. What may be apprehended . . . is the urgency of the author's message and its appeal to many different ages and societies. (Knapp, A Jungian Approach to Literature 366)

So if we can escape "a primordial desire to peep behind Miss Dickinson's window shades" (Clendenning xx), perhaps we can discover more of her circuitous truth with which she plans to dazzle us gradually, lest we go blind:

> Tell all the truth but tell it slant--
> Success in Circuit lies.

Too bright for our infirm Delight
The Truth's superb surprise

As Lightning to the Children eased
With explanation kind
The Truth must dazzle gradually
Or every man be blind-- (J 1129)

CHAPTER III

A JUNGIAN APPROACH: THE TENSION OF OPPOSITES

The fascination of genius is in its paradox. (L xvi)

Before examining selected poems in the next chapter, we shall first attempt to discover the nature of Dickinson's widespread appeal and its psychological significance. This appeal seems rooted in at least one ironic constant in the overwhelming tumult of her life and work--the tension of paradox:

> Anyone who carefully examines the life and mind of Emily Dickinson is constantly checked in making statements about her by the appearance of the opposite characteristic to the one just noted. The fascination of her character [and her poetry?] is enhanced by paradoxes that continually baffle the observer. She had an extraordinary capacity for love and friendship, yet she shunned society. She was so absorbed in the spiritual world as to seem too ethereal for daily life, yet she could be as earthy as the bread, cakes, and puddings she made, and could turn instantly from a preoccupation with infinity to a playful and pithy humor. Full of tender sympathy for anyone she knew who was wronged, she could be mercilous in her characterizations and was highly intolerant of stupidity. . . . Perhaps the secret of her contradictions lay in the fact that she lived always so close to her own center that she maintained a tension between the opposites that left her free from domination by either side. If one is tempted by her failure to meet the world on its own terms to label her a neurotic, she suddenly blows away all categories by a revelation of how superbly she lived

> all that was vital within her chosen limits, never shirking or failing to meet whatever experience come to her in all its implications. (Ward 96)

These contradictions in her life are the battleground for her poetry as well. Her subjects encompass the broadest gamut of human experience, quite often throwing conflicting images in close juxtaposition. Rather than diffuse her work, these opposing forces energize her poetry with dynamic tension, and in these tensions the reader finds not only a common voice for the human spirit but also a key to her genius.

Critic Elizabeth Jennings emphasizes this participatory nature of Dickinson's battles; we are invited to share in the struggling process itself as well as the emerging truths:

> It is as if we, her readers, were privileged to overhear her meditations and her arguments with herself. This is intense poetry in the very best sense, taut and vibrant not with emotions and ideas which the poet has already formulated outside her poems, but alive with the very process of thought and feeling. A vision is thus caught on the wing, not trapped but held and halted momentarily, just long enough for the poem to be written. (81)

But our reaction to Dickinson's poetry amounts to more than mere spectator participation in her private struggle. We identify at a deeper level, in a more universal sense, with the heart of her message. We sense, as Jennings describes, that "her poems somehow give the effect of largeness, of reverberations . . . as if they produce momentous and memorable echoes" (78). Jung would identify these "echoes" as "archetypal":

> The primordial image, or archetype, is a figure--be it daemon, a human being or a process--that constantly recurs in the course of history and appears wherever creative fantasy is freely expressed. In each of these images there is a little piece of human psychology and human fate, a remnant of the joys and sorrows that have been repeated countless times in our ancestral history, and on the average follow ever the same course.
>
> The moment when this mythological situation reappears is always characterized by a peculiar emotional intensity; it is as though chords in us were struck that had never resounded before, or as though forces whose existence we never suspected were unloosed. What makes the struggle for adaptation so laborious is the fact that we have constantly to be dealing with individual and atypical situations. So it is not surprising that when an archetypal situation occurs we suddenly feel an extraordinary sense of release, as though transported, or caught up in an overwhelming power. At such moments we are no longer individuals but the race; the voice of all mankind resounds in us. . . .
>
> The impact of an archetype, whether it takes the form of immediate experience or is expressed through the spoken word, stirs us because it summons up a voice that is stronger than our own. Whoever speaks in primordial images speaks with a thousand voices. . . . He transmutes our personal destiny into the destiny of mankind, and evokes in us all those beneficent forces that ever and anon have enabled humanity to find a refuge from every peril and to outlive the longest night. That is the secret of great art and of its effect upon us. (CW XV par. 127-130)

Whether or not one accepts this (probably unprovable) implication of inherited experience, certain abstract patterns, among them antitheses, are both universal and provide the emotional appeal ascribed by Jung to "archetypes" (Whitlark 290).

A major tenet of Jungian psychology deals with this creative tension of opposites. Although Jung did not apply this facet of his thinking directly to the field of poetry, its parallel significance is clearly helpful in understanding Dickinson's appeal:

> In terms of energy, polarity means a potential, and wherever a potential exists there is the possibility of a current, a flow of events, for the tension of opposites strives for balance. (CW IX, i par. 426)

Indeed, this polarity is a necessity, according to Jung, to achieve cognition or discrimination in the thinking process:

> . . . equivalent opposites are necessary conditions inherent in the act of cognition, and without them no discrimination would be possible. (CW IX, ii par. 112)

In Behind the Great Wall, James Whitlark proposes that one aspect of the struggle of consciousness versus unconsciousness in language and literature is actually the spiraling evolution of "antithesis":

> The tendency to describe experience in terms of antitheses appears to be inborn, while the exact nature of them apparently derives from each culture. Even the distinction between consciousness and the unconscious is one of these simplifying antitheses, for what we really experience (as Jung himself occasionally admitted) is a continuum from most to least conscious cerebral activity, rather than a mind neatly chopped into ego, personal unconscious, Collective Unconscious, etcetera. (209)

Whitlark's description of antithesis as a process rather than an image enables us to see the conscious/unconscious struggle in art or poetry as an emotionally charged activity which "often represents the process of unification in the dynamic moment just before

victory is attained" (210). Jung defines this evolutionary struggle of opposites toward a unifying victory as the "transcendent function":

> How the harmonizing of conscious and unconscious data is to be undertaken cannot be indicated in the form of a recipe. It is an irrational process which expresses itself in definite symbols. . . . In this case, knowledge of the symbols is indispensable, for it is in them that the union of conscious and unconscious contents is consummated. Out of this union emerge new situations and new conscious attitudes. I have therefore called the union of opposites the "transcendent function." (CW IX, i par. 289)

In this "transcendent function," the tension of opposites is very real and potentially painful, yet it is necessary for the development of the individual:

> Consciousness and unconsciousness do not make a whole when one of them is suppressed and injured by the other. If they must contend, let it at least be a fair fight with equal rights on both sides. Both are aspects of life. Consciousness should defend its reason and protect itself, and the chaotic life of the unconscious should be given the chance of having its way too--as much of it as we can stand. This means open conflict and open collaboration at once. That, evidently, is the way human life should be. It is the old game of hammer and anvil: between them the patient iron is forged into an indestructible whole, an "individual." (CW IX, i par. 288)

Jung's blacksmith analogy of hammer and anvil coincidentally brings to mind the imagery of a familiar Dickinson poem which describes the forging of an individual's soul in similar terms:

> Dare you see a Soul at the White Heat?
> Then crouch within the door--
> Red--is the Fire's common tint--
> But when the vivid Ore

> Has vanquished Flame's conditions,
> It quivers from the Forge
> Without a color, but the light
> Of unanointed Blaze.
> Least Village has its Blacksmith
> Whose Anvil's even ring
> Stands symbol for the finer Forge
> That soundless tugs--within--
> Refining these impatient Ores
> With Hammer, and with Blaze
> Until the Designated Light
> Repudiate the Forge-- (J 365)

Both Dickinson and Jung seem to agree on the goal of this ongoing conflict as being the development or maturation of the individual. Jung's term for this refining process is "individuation":

> Jung had suggested time and time again that psychic life is a dynamic, uninterrupted permutation between the conscious and the unconscious. Such an interchange can, if properly realized, lead toward the integration of conflicting elements within the personality and toward wholeness of the Self--a process he termed <u>individuation</u>. To develop one's potential, to become increasingly conscious of one's attributes and deficiencies, to remain open to new enrichment, enables an individual to reach some kind of psychological equilibrium and fulfillment. (Knapp, <u>Women in 20th Century Literature</u> 9)

Emily Dickinson extends to us an invitation to "crouch within the door" of her internal forge and witness the refining white heat of her soul. Witnessing her struggle toward individuation arouses recognition of our shared psychological conflict, taking the literary work out of its individual and conventional context and connecting it to a Jungian "archetypal" one.

Dickinson's struggle with opposites in tension is a characteristic of her life and work that has been frequently noted but from a variety of perspectives. There is common agreement that her most prolific period of writing, from 1858 to 1866 (she apparently wrote 366 poems in 1862 alone), was also an intensely stressful period of Dickinson's life:

> Opposites played an important part in her life, not only within herself but in the circumstances that affected her. The times of greatest vitality, when there was an upsurge of powerful emotions, provided the most violent contrasts of light and dark, joy and pain. (Ward 97)

Weisbuch has suggested that at times it seems as though there are two Emily's at work in her poems: the "visionary celebrant and the skeptical sufferer" (3). However, it might be more accurate to suggest that the polarities within Dickinson identified with the celebrant and sufferer simultaneously, coexisting in tension, which made her struggle not only more painful but potentially dangerous and destructive. According to a noted Jungian scholar and psychotherapist, Eleanor Bertine, "The collective unconscious teems with such paradoxes, and they threaten to explode the unlucky human mind into fragments" (256). Dickinson describes her awareness of these potential explosions as she maintains her pursuit of the struggle rather than submit to any domination of her spirit: "I had no Monarch in my life, and cannot rule myself, and when I try to organize--my little Force explodes--and leaves me bare and charred" (L xvii). Northrup Frye has described Dickinson's

internal battle as "two states of the human soul, a vision of innocence and a vision of 'experience,' or ordinary life. One is a vision of 'Presence,' the other of 'Place'; in one the primary fact of life is partnership, in the other it is parting" (Miller 14). Here again, the critic's temptation is to divide Dickinson into halves instead of seeing the conflicting opposites as a dynamic progression.

However, critics do recognize that Dickinson's forces in opposition constantly shift, emerge, and transform so as to make simple antithisizing inadequate. Bertine acknowledges that opposites in tension may be part of a developmental continuum:

> I have said that the opposites are the result of the splitting of the primordial continuum of the undifferentiated unconscious by a spark of consciousness, an ego, which is a definite and limited point in space and time to which the split-apart halves then become relative. Thus, contents just rising above the threshold of consciousness are apt to appear as dual, ambiguous. . . . Evidently, the pairs of opposites are differentiated successively, not all at once. As consciousness becomes more discriminating, it realizes opposites where none were seen before. . . . (252)

If we become dizzy by Dickinson's shifting stance from one side of a dichotomy to the other, from saint to shadow, from celebrant to sufferer, from holy seer to housewife, we are reminded by Bertine that such shifting is part of the natural force of this continuum:

> The individual is a totality and by definition contains both the opposites. He has a shadow which does not permit him to live only on the virtuous side and refuse its dark counterpart. There are times when he cannot follow the preferred path of goodness and at the same time be true to his whole being. But neither will that

> wholeness allow him to go carelessly on a jag of evil. His conscious ego might be glad to do good only, but that way would be to put collective goodness ahead of Selfhood. Indeed he may even feel it as a great temptation to go the approved way instead of striking out on his own responsibility. And, paradoxically enough, it really is a temptation, for any virtue in excess of one's psychological development will constellate the law of enantiodramia, which postulates the alteration of the opposites in time, one succeeding the other, as day giving place to night, summer to winter, systole to diastole. (253-4)

Dickinson's refusal to follow the "preferred path of goodness" in order to be true to her quest for individuation is readily seen in a letter to a friend during their youth concerning her ambivalence about not becoming a Christian:

> Abiah, you may be surprised to hear me speak as I do, knowing that I express no interest in the all-important subject, but I am not happy, and 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. I had quite a long talk with Abby while at home and I doubt not she will soon cast her burden on Christ. She is sober, and keenly sensitive on the subject, and she says she only desires to be good. How I wish I could say that with sincerity, but I fear I never can. (L 23)

These ambivalent feelings about "being good" and following her own honest path are also evident in this poem:

> I have a King, who does not speak--
> So--wondering--thro' the hours meek
> I trudge the day away--
> Half glad when it is night, and sleep,

If, haply, thro' a dream, to peep
In parlors, shut by day.

And if I do--when morning comes--
It is as if a hundred drums
Did round my pillow roll,
And should fill all my Childish sky,
And Bells keep saying "Victory"
From steeples in my soul!

And if I don't--the little Bird
Within the Orchard, is not heard,
And I omit to pray
"Father, thy will be done" today
For my will goes the other way,
and it were perjury! (J 103)

Here Dickinson alludes to the daily spiritual pilgrimage which occasionally allows her insights, perhaps through dreams, which allow the bells to ring in the "steeples of her soul," and yet those occasions are balanced with days she can't honestly utter "thy will be done." The "if I do / if I don't" ambivalence suggests that both experiences have occurred and shall occur in a continuing cycle of evolving individuation. Dickinson labels this ambivalence a "compound vision" which eventually produces an objective insight of time and faith through the backward and forward struggle of experience:

The Admirations--and Contempts--of time
Show justest--through an Open Tomb--
The Dying--as it were a height
Reorganizes Estimate
And what We saw not
We distinguish clear--
And mostly--see not

What We saw before--
'Tis Compound Vision--
Light--enabling Light--
The Finite--furnished
With the Infinite
Convex--and Concave Witness--
Back--toward Time--
And forward--
Toward the God of Him-- (J 906)

Through the compound vision and witness of Emily Dickinson's poetry, we glimpse a "soul at the white heat," a soul intensely and honestly engaged in a battle for individual identity, a battle we are all called to join.

CHAPTER IV

ANTITHESIS: THE TROUBLE WITH TRANSPORT

> Water, is taught by thirst.
> Land--by the Oceans passed.
> Transport--by throe--
> Peace--by its battles told--
> Love, by Memorial Mold--
> Birds, by the Snow. (J 135)

The antitheses found in Dickinson's poetry encompass a wide range of human experience and thought, so wide that any attempt at organizing or cataloging her subject matter would be a gargantuan task. But the tension within these sets of opposites seems uniformly focused on both the internal battle and the external process of psychological evolution. Not only are we to survive this warfare of opposites within us, we are to mature as a result of it:

> From the beginning, Emily Dickinson was aware that life was "Half a transport/half a trouble"-- contrary states which had somehow to be reconciled or accommodated. The poems worry again and again about the duality of experience: pain and pleasure; woe and bliss; "bandaged moments" and "moments of escape"; moments of impotence and "moments of dominion"; hell and heaven; torment and grace. Consciousness was divided not only in its internal function but in its apprehension of objective reality. (Gelpi, Mind 104)

Weisbuch describes this dualism in Dickinson's poetry as a war of two worlds within her--of "Vision" and "Veto":

> Still two major "worlds," two prevailing and apparently conflicting attitudes toward experience, run through the myriad visions [of her poetry]. . . . In Dickinson's first world, commonplace objects and acts blaze into ultimate significance; the infinite is available for the right asking in every moment; transport is a matter of will, "Paradise is of the option" (L 319). . . . In Dickinson's celebratory, Transcendentalist world, everyday events and objects are italicized into symbols, appearances rush toward essences, and possibilities never end.
>
> But elsewhere Dickinson defines her power and freedom as consisting equally "in Vision--and in Veto!" (J 528). . . . The veto power of Dickinson's second pain-filled world stands ready to negate or qualify the self-legislated grandeur of the first. . . . In this second world, the Transcendental possibilities of the first tantalize only to torture. The quester's very nature prevents realization of the intensely beheld goal; or, worse, the moment in which time is transcended crumbles back into chronos . . . psychological limitations, fleshly fears, the failures of experience to fulfill hope, and, above all, the nullifying fact of mortality assert themselves in this second "mirror world." (1-2)

Here we might take exception to Weisbuch's suggestion that the "Transcendental possibilities of the first [world] tantalize only to torture [the second, painfilled world]," for the torturing of the second world does not simply leave it in the same condition. A change or evolution of the soul is in process. The struggle of the two worlds causes a new world to emerge, which then in turn finds itself in conflict with new opposition.

The contribution of Jungian thought to this dualism is not only the affirmation that such warring elements are a natural part of the human struggle, but that such conflict is a wholesome and necessary process if the individual is to discover the true "self." We owe a great debt of gratitude to those courageous few, like Emily Dickinson, who not only have the courage to fight the battle but also have the integrity, grace, and genius to communicate their struggle in resonating language to those of us who wish to follow their lead:

> A new path always has to be tried out by the few who take it, with all its risks, as their ineluctable and accepted choice. The morality of the analyzed person may be said to consist in an honest attempt to know himself in relation to both the inner and the outer realms, and in a religious devotion to the process of reconciling the warring elements within. Then, out of the original chaotic menagerie an ordered human whole may emerge, a self which is truly made in the image of God. (Bertine 67)

Here Bertine reaffirms the Jungian concept that struggle evokes progress, not simply a crumbling "back into chronos," as Weisbuch describes it.

This chapter will examine the antitheses in Dickinson's poetry within the specific dualities of joy versus pain and mortality versus immortality. Although these subjects are necessarily limited, they appear representative of Dickinson's verse. Through them Dickinson's philosophy concerning the painful, mortal journey to "Paradise" is evident: "Paradise is no Journey because it is within--but for that very cause though--it is the most Arduous of Journeys" (L 926).

Joy and Pain

Emily Dickinson spent her life on familiar terms with both joy and pain. Although we do not know the exact cause or causes for her period of greatest emotional turmoil between her twenty-ninth and thirty-sixth years, we do know from her writing that this period initiated her into both provinces:

> The disturbance was of a spontaneous nature, not the result of any one set of circumstances, but the effect on a sensitive personality of slowly accumulated pressures, both within and without, working against inherent forces for growth and fulfillment. In the ensuing struggle, so painful that it might have wrecked a weaker mind, she preserved her sanity by the transformation into art of all phases of her inner experience during the time of crisis. . . . (Ward v)

The reward for her pain was apparently not only a dramatic increase in artistic productivity, but also an increased awareness of the relative equality of pain and pleasure, so that the two extremes balanced each other in an economical sense. We, therefore, cannot expect great joy without paying for it with great pain:

> For each ecstatic instant
> We must an anguish pay
> In keen and quivering ratio
> To the ecstasy.
>
> For each beloved hour
> Sharp pittance of years--
> Bitter contested farthings--
> And Coffers heaped with Tears! (J 125)

In another poem she suggests that pain is a necessary prerequisite to experience delight and that the price is worth the reward, no

matter how great the sacrifice. She knew, to use the words of St. Augustine in his Confessions, that the "ebb and flow" of joy and pain constitute the "rhythm" of our world, and that it always seems as if "the greater joy is ushered in by the greater pain" which precedes it (157):

> Must be a Woe--
> A loss or so--
> To bend the eye
> Best Beauty's way--
>
> But--once aslant
> It notes Delight
> As difficult
> As Stalactite
>
> A Common Bliss
> Were had for less--
> The price--is
> even as the Grace--
>
> Our lord--thought no
> Extravagance
> To pay--a Cross-- (J 571)

Here, experiencing "a Woe" trains the eye to see beauty, even when that beauty is as difficult to perceive as stalactites buried beneath the surface. For those less ambitious, more common joys are to be had for less cost, but the example of Christ's willing sacrifice suggests that much greater ecstasy is available for the courageous who choose to pay the price. Dickinson's omission of the final line to fill the quatrain suggests a pause for response, possibly challenging the reader to consider his or her choice in contrast to Christ's and thus inspire the movement toward individuation within the reader.

In some of her more complex poems, Dickinson explores more deeply the relationship of tension between pain and joy in the interwoven texture of life:

> Her effect of reality is achieved not by an accent on pleasure or pain but by her dramatic use of their interaction. As an artist she took full advantage of contrast as a mode of definition, making the pleasure-pain antithesis a running strategy of her poetry. (Anderson 9)

In her poem "The Soul has Bandaged moments," Dickinson describes three intense states of the soul that are defined by their interacting agony and ecstasy:

> The Soul has Bandaged moments--
> When too appalled to stir
> She feels some ghastly Fright come up
> And stop to look at her--
>
> Salute her--with long fingers--
> Caress her freezing hair--
> Sip, Goblin, from the very lips
> The Lover--hovered--o'er--
> Unworthy, that a thought so mean
> Accost a Theme--so--fair
>
> The soul has moments of Escape--
> When bursting all the doors--
> She dances like a Bomb, abroad,
> And swings upon the Hours,
>
> As do the Bee--delirious borne---
> Long Dungeoned from his Rose--
> Touch Liberty--then know no more,
> But Noon, and Paradise--

The Soul's retaken moments--
When, Felon led along,
With shackles on the plumed feet,
And staples, in the Song,

The Horror welcomes her, again,
These, are not brayed of Tongue-- (J 512)

In the state described in the first two stanzas, Dickinson describes the Soul that is made vulnerable to an attack of fear by its painful, "bandaged" condition. Left recuperating and defenseless following some crisis (perhaps the loss of the "Lover"), the soul is left immobile and susceptible to a ghastly fear of repeated pain or even death. It succumbs to a horrifying intimate encounter as "Fright" caresses her hair with long fingers, causing her scalp to crawl, and then "sips" or kisses the very lips the "Lover" had "hovered-o'er" as a bee before its sting. The scene is "unworthy" or improper in that, in all fairness, the delicate, victimized soul should not be accosted when in such a helpless condition of pain; yet we know that, in truth, we are our most susceptible to immobilizing fear when we are struck down by life's handicapping wounds. In the next state of the soul, Dickinson, in contrast, describes the ecstasy of escape from painful, "bandaged" bondage, as the soul experiences a transcendental moment of freedom. This freedom has greater impact and significance when juxtaposed to the former terror of captivating pain. In this state the soul bursts through the doors of physical captivity and "dances like a Bomb," suggesting dangerous, delirious abandonment, unmindful of and unhampered by the

restraints of mortal time or "Hours." The soul is borne, just as the bee by its erratic flight, into "Noon," Dickinson's recurring symbol for eternity, and "Paradise" (Griffith 218). However, it is only allowed to "Touch Liberty," not embrace it, for this state is but a moment of escape from mortality. In the final state presented in the last two stanzas, the soul is retaken into captivity with chained feet and restricted song. She is "welcomed" by the chilling, familiar "Horror" of the first state, a recognition that strikes the soul dumb with dread. And yet this state is not what Weisbuch calls a "darker" state, a result of the soul's experience of lost freedom and power (124). Instead, the soul is now in bondage but not bandaged, more wise than wounded, and as a "Felon" whose strength must be restrained, less vulnerable to the next onslaught of "Fright." Thus, a Jungian approach to this poem provides a sense of forward motion, or individuation, in what otherwise would appear to be a description of psychic deadlock.

The transitions from state to state in the poem counteract in opposition and tension, contrasting the agonizing and the sublime conditions of the soul within the human continuum:

> There are imprisoned moments, moments of escape, and moments of recapture: distinct, yet because of the fragility of each, transpiring in a continuum of oppositions. This tenuous reversability is implied even in the metaphors which characterize the moment of escape. . . . It is hard to tell the prison or tomb from escape; each moment threatens to turn to its opposite. . . . (Gelpi, Tenth Muse 226)

Here Gelpi acknowledges the continuum but misses the forward motion of the poem, assuming that the moments of escape and imprisonment counteract each other evenly. But the soul has changed in the process and returns, no longer wounded, but nevertheless hampered with shackles and staples to restrict its new-found strength in song. Dickinson's return to an imprisoned, painful state suggests that she may have experienced joy more often as a temporary state of escape than of permanent residence. The imperiled "unworthy" predicament of the soul suggests Dickinson's dismay concerning the predominantly confining nature of the continuum, where joy has a price and escape has a time limit:

> In a poem like "The Soul has Bandaged moments," Dickinson complains not merely that bliss does not last, but that it is given and then taken away. This apparently slight semantic difference creates a great difference in attitude. If "flux" were the problem, the poet's task would be to achieve resignation, while this belated negative Judgement creates resentment and demands cosmological justification from God. (Weisbuch 124)

Weisbuch correctly identifies the changed, stronger voice of the poet in the third state, but assumes it is the bitter cry of resentment and rebellion. However, these moments "not brayed of tongue" are personified instead by the quiet posture of an unbowed soul for whom the price of shackles and staples is "thought no / Extravagance / to pay" for soaring to "Noon" and "Paradise." Dickinson's struggle with pain offered her not just resentment or rebellion, but new evidence of empirical joy and transcendence,

which in turn gave her the energized courage to plunge into the next agonizing stage of the continuum toward individuation.

Mortality and Immortality

One natural extension of Dickinson's struggle with joy and pain is her widely acknowledged preoccupation with mortality and immortality. Her dominant religious question concerns the survival of the soul after death, and she alternately declares faith and doubt with equal vehemence on the issue, torn by her emotional hunger and by her rational skepticism. The presence of God appears real, mythical or unlikely to her by turns. She can neither accept nor reject traditional assurances of an afterlife; her expectations vacillate between a transcendental naturalism and sheer terror of nihilism. Although her questions concerning mortality and immortality are universal, her vantage point tends to be intensely personal and concrete, coloring her poetry with every hue from dread to ecstasy in a spectrum of psychological antithesis.

Dickinson's comments on death pervade poems on many other subjects, making the grouping of her points of view on death difficult. One approach that lends itself to the study of antithesis in her poetry is the comparison of two of Dickinson's favorite stances on the subject, specifically the speaker as the survivor of death in contrast to the speaker as the victim of death. The most revealing of these poems dramatize the isolated instant in which death occurs, placing mortality and immortality side by side and only a breath apart. In this narrative frame we may examine Dickinson's

perennial struggle with the enigma of immortality which haunted her as well as consoled her:

> . . . the thought of death could soothe as well as lacerate Emily Dickinson. . . . The certainty of her own death was at once the supreme problem she had to face but also a kind of psychological outlet, without which her life would have been unendurable. (Griffith 113)

Dickinson's psychological freedom to shift in points of view enables her to examine the subject of death from all perspectives and reveals to us a somewhat surprising factor, that she appears more at peace with her own death than with the death of others.

A short poem which introduces this study of "compound vision" of death is "a Coffin--is a small Domain," in which she presents viewpoints from both within and outside the grave:

> A Coffin--is a small Domain,
> Yet Able to contain
> A Citizen of Paradise
> In its diminished Plane.
>
> A Grave--is a retricted Breadth--
> Yet ampler than the Sun--
> And all the Seas He populates
> And Lands He looks upon
>
> To Him who on its small Repose
> Bestows a single Friend--
> Circumference without Relief--
> or Estimate--or End-- (J 943)

The poem begins with a paradox from the point of view of the deceased, that the coffin, a "small Domain," should be large enough to contain a "Citizen of Paradise," suggesting an expansive existence

of the soul. The next stanza continues the spatial contrast of the restricted size of the grave to the unlimited freedom of the soul following death, that the grave actually widens the horizons of experience for the one who has died to include all that the sun shines upon. However, the point of view shifts in the third stanza to that of the person who is left bereft by the death of his friend, and to him, the "Circumference" weighs as a heavy burden "without Relief" or "End." The contrast of finite to infinite is still in place as a motif, but in the third stanza the tone shifts with the personal stance to emphasize the overwhelming oppression for the survivor rather than the liberating expansion for the deceased. Although the grave is small and restricted, death mystically is "yet abler" and "yet ampler" to overcome its boundaries. The survivor, on the other hand, is left to consider awesome questions which have no answer or conclusion. Here is one indication that Dickinson at times sees an ironic reversal of the usual assumption that grieving would be preferable to dying.

Dickinson's antithetical association of dying with joyful liberation and surviving with painful oppression is even more clearly evident in her first-person narratives of death. In "The last Night that She lived," a poem describing death through the eyes of a survivor, the persona attends a woman who is dying, but the focus is on the crowd of the observers, not the deceased:

> The last Night that She lived
> It was a Common Night

Except the Dying--this to Us
Made Nature different

We noticed smallest things--
Things overlooked before
By this great light upon our Minds
Italicized--as 'twere.

As We went out and in
Between Her final Room
And Rooms where Those to be alive
Tomorrow were, a Blame

That others could exist
While She must finish quite
A Jealousy for Her arose
So nearly infinite--

We waited while She passed--
It was a narrow time--
Too jostled were Our Souls to speak
At length the notice came.

She mentioned, and forgot--
Then lightly as a Reed
Bent to the Water, struggled scarce--
Consented, and was dead--

And We--We placed the Hair--
And drew the Head erect--
And then an awful leisure was
Belief to regulate-- (J 1100)

Here again, we see the finite, commonplace details of life electrified by the intensely understated impact of death on the living. In the first stanza, the persona declares it would have been an ordinary night except for the dying, which turned all of "Nature" inside out. Small things now became "Italicized" with meaning and significance.

The nervous pacing out and in between the rooms of the living and the dying creates a tension of anticipation approaching what Griffith calls "rigidly curbed hysteria" (118). The confusion of blame for living and jealousy of dying compounds the anxiety and anguish of the survivors. The "narrow time" in which their souls were "Too jostled" to speak depicts the psychological numbing created by witnessing a death. In contrast, the victim of death seems completely at peace as she consents to die. The poem's only figurative image, "lightly as a Reed / Bent to the Water, struggled scarce--," depicts the only beauty in a poem that has uncharacteristicly sparse and barren diction. As Phillips has suggested, "The spare imagery of the narrative both relieves the emotions and makes them more acute" (196). In the final stanza, the persona with accompanying "survivors" arranges the corpse, knowing that the greatest difficulty was yet to come: regulating or controlling belief in the face of death. Dickinson's "awful leisure" suggests that time and thought are a painful burden for the survivors, for with the concreteness of this experience they will be forced to face fearful contemplations of their own mortality and threatened immortality. Once again, Dickinson's skill of colliding death with life, doubt with faith, and fear with peace in a Jungian tension of opposing forces gives us a glimpse of her individuated struggle to attain hope.

Next, we shall consider an often anthologized Dickinson poem in which she adopts the role of the deceased with a distinct shift in

tone and voice. Although other death poems adopt this point of view with a more serious, philosophical approach, "I Heard a Fly buzz--when I died--" is suitable in this discussion because of its more whimsical tone concerning the experience of physical death from the victim's point of view. This poem has received much critical attention with a wide range of interpretation; however, approaching the poem through the adopted persona of the narrator reveals Dickinson's ease with the subject of her own personal encounter with death. The poem's deathbed scene is once again complete with the traditional gathering of onlookers:

> I heard a Fly buzz--when I died--
> The Stillness in the Room
> Was like the Stillness in the Air--
> Between the Heaves of Storm--
>
> The Eyes around--had wrung them dry--
> And Breaths were gathering firm
> For that last Onset--when the King
> Be witnessed--in the Room--
>
> I willed my Keepsakes--Signed away
> What portion of me be
> Assignable--and then it was
> There interposed a Fly--
>
> With Blue--uncertain stumbling Buzz--
> Between the light--and me--
> And then the Windows failed--and then
> I could not see to see-- (J 465)

Dickinson's use of antithesis in this poem is paramount to its Jungian interpretation. First, the setting injects paradox into a typical New England formal gathering to witness the passing from

one life to the next. The room is heavy with the accustomed grief and dread of the mourners, but we notice that the speaker is not emotionally affected by the scene other than in somewhat self-preoccupied anticipation of a dramatic, significant moment in which the speaker will be the focus of attention. However, the first line offsets this scene with the acknowledgement that the fly's buzzing distracts everyone's, even the speaker's, attention from the solemnity of the moment. In the second stanza, Dickinson's diction prepares us for the parody of the scene as she draws on cliches of eyes wrung dry, breaths gathered firm, and the anticipated dramatic arrival of the "King" to complete the rising action. As the moment nears, the speaker assumes the spotlight, making the last will and testament and then preparing, perhaps, to state a formal farewell when "There interposed a Fly-- / With Blue-- uncertain stumbling Buzz-- / Between the light--and me--." The fly's aggravating, "stumbling buzz" is incongruous to the solemnity of the scene. This irritating annoyance, suggestive of the uglier side of death with its associated corruption and decay, totally destroys the formality of this dignified moment. And yet even the deceased is so distracted that she fails to witness her own climactic exit, straining to see through the "Windows" of her eyes, now a cheated outsider to her own moment of glory.

This poem can be read on many levels, but as Anderson has suggested,

> To take this poem literally as an attempted inside view of the gradual extinction of consciousness and the

> beginning of the soul's flight into eternity would be to distort its meaning, for this is not an imaginary projection of her own death. In structure, in language, in imagery it is simply an ironic reversal of the conventional attitudes of her time and place toward the significance of the moment of death. (232)

It is important to note that here we have evidence of Dickinson's ability to see herself and her society objectively on a subject which at other times would evoke psychic trauma within her. One facet of her genius, which Jung would be quick to note, is her ability to view even her own anxieties from the opposing viewpoint, which she could do most successfully in this poem through the persona of the deceased. As the speaker strains for one last glimpse of life rather than the hidden secrets of immortality, we sense Dickinson's resigned acceptance that the unknowable is still the unknowable, despite our anxious concerns.

Dickinson's struggles with mortality and immortality were the driving force of her life and poetry, but in her quest for certainty she had the wisdom to know that the infinite would always exceed her grasp. Moreover, she did not allow that cruel fact merely to tantalize or torture her. She accepted anguish as the price for each "ecstatic instant" and "shackles" for each brush with "noon," thereby equipping herself for "the most arduous of Journeys"--to Paradise.

CHAPTER V

"COSTUMELESS CONSCIOUSNESS": AN ANDROGYNOUS ENCOUNTER

> I do not know the man so bold
> He dare in lonely Place
> That awful stranger Consciousness
> Deliberately face-- (J 1323)

Although Dickinson's life predated the birth of modern psychology, her work reflects an intuitive knowledge of the hidden recesses of the mind and the struggles of what we might call the conscious and unconscious levels of existence. Her vocabulary for describing this psychic struggle employs such words as "soul," "mind," "consciousness," or "self." Dickinson seemed extraordinarily aware of her own processes for transforming experience into art, skillfully relating those experiences to conscious sensations or images. However, Ward suggests that "unconscious forces were at work beneath the safe realm of 'sense,' and a few poems contain images from so deep a level that she may not have understood them herself" (61). Ward's description reminds us of Gelpi's respect for the poet's psyche, which he claimed could not distinguish conscious manifestations from the "mysterious promptings and impulses of the unconscious" (Tenth Muse x). Recognizing the potential pitfalls in this area, our focus here must not be to

distinguish conscious from unconscious images as much as to examine Dickinson's own awareness of her psychological battles and her techniques for resolving them, specifically through poetry which describes the confrontation of an interior "other" and the visualization of individuation. Evidence of her own divided consciousness, the androgynous nature of selected poems, and the perimeters of her spiritual quest help to establish a Jungian approach to Dickinson's psychological conflicts.

In some of her more aphoristic verse, Dickinson describes these conflicts in terms of the soul's sovereign power to rule over its own civil strife:

> The Soul unto itself
> Is an imperial friend--
> Or the most agonizing Spy--
> An Enemy--could send--
>
> Secure against its own--
> No treason it can fear--
> Itself--its Sovereign--of itself
> The Soul should stand in Awe-- (J 683)

Here we note Dickinson's awareness that the Soul could be either friend or foe, and yet she has confidence that these opposing forces share a desire for mutual survival. In a similar poem, she acknowledges that although peace of mind sounds attractive, its cost is too high:

> Me from Myself--to banish--
> Had I Art--
> Impregnable my Fortress
> Unto All Heart--

But since Myself--assault Me--
How have I peace
Except by subjugating
Consciousness?

And since We're mutual Monarch
How this be
Except by Abdication--
Me--of Me? (J 642)

Not willing to abdicate her own throne of consciousness, Dickinson preferred the anguish of battle to the ignorant bliss of the unexamined life. Dickinson's relish for the battle is foundational to her defense of spiritual liberty. This independence of spirit expressed itself not only in her rejection of traditional religious ritual but also in her refusal to be restricted by any limitations other than those of her own making:

No Race can torture me--
My Soul--at Liberty--
Behind this mortal Bone
There knits a bolder One--

You cannot prick with saw--
Nor pierce with Scimitar--
Two Bodies--Therefore be--
Bind one--The Other fly--

The Eagle of his Nest
No easier divest--
And gain the Sky
Than mayest Thou--

Except Thyself maybe
Thine Enemy--
Captivity is Consciousness--
So's Liberty. (J 384)

Here we see that Dickinson's duality of soul becomes her means of escaping others' restrictive definition. Yet in the final, cryptic stanza of the poem, Dickinson ironically implies that "Consciousness" may at times serve as a self-determined, captive state of mind and at the same time a liberating or enlightening self-knowledge. This word play underscores Dickinson's dependence on opposing tensions to work out her equilibrium of identity, a Jungian expression of individuation.

Other Dickinson poems depict her fear of an unexpected encounter with a hidden self. This terror appears to be borne more by the surprise of the unknown than by fear of being overcome, although even that means of annihilation would be preferable to not pursuing the quest:

> In the dim corridors of the mind one can prepare to meet and defend oneself from objective fears, but the greatest horror to be encountered is the sudden consciousness of the hidden self, as close as one's own shadow, yet charged with ghostly power. . . . The ego has remained unconscious and unafraid until the revelation occurs. (Ward 67)

Such hidden ghosts haunt Dickinson's mind, suggesting fears of the past, as in "I Years had been from Home" (J 609), or depicting the shadow self of "Thyself maybe / Thine Enemy" in the poem discussed above. In either case, Dickinson senses a life-threatening danger in the confrontation:

> One need not be a Chamber--to be Haunted--
> One need not be a House--

The Brain has Corridors--surpassing
Material Place--

Far safer, of a Midnight Meeting
External Ghost
Than its interior Confronting--
That Cooler Host.

Far safer, through an Abbey gallop,
The Stones a'chase--
Than Unarmed, one's a'self encounter--
In lonesome Place--

Ourself behind ourself, concealed--
Should startle most--
Assassin his in our Apartment
Be Horror's least.

The Body--borrows a Revolver--
He bolts the Door--
O'erlooking a superior spectre--
Or More-- (J 670)

In comparing the encounter of one's shadow self to the unexpected confrontation of a ghost, Dickinson obviously considers the former to be more horrifying. Her use of architectural imagery in this poem suggests Jung's psychological analogy of a house or chamber to a person's mind (CW 9ii, 352). In this case, the house resembles the spooky castle of Gothic fiction in which the speaker unwittingly bolts the door against the assassin intruder, overlooking the "superior spectre" of the unconscious now locked within (Juhasz 89). This element of terror creates an even more morbid chill in "I felt a funeral in my brain" in which Dickinson's encounter with the

unconscious as a state of mind parallels a horrifying free-fall into an abyss:

> I felt a Funeral, in my Brain
> And Mourners to and fro
> Kept treading--treading--till it seemed
> That Sense was breaking through--
>
> And when they all were seated,
> A Service, like a Drum--
> Kept beating--beating--til I thought
> My Mind was going numb--
>
> And then I heard them lift a Box
> And creak across my Soul
> With those same Boots of Lead, again,
> Then Space--began to toll,
>
> As all the Heavens were a Bell,
> And Being, but an Ear,
> And I, and Silence, some strange Race
> Wrecked, solitary, here--
>
> And then a Plank in Reason, broke,
> And I dropped down, and down--
> And hit a World, at every plunge,
> And Finished knowing--then-- (J 280)

The funeral taking place in the poem suggests the death or cessation of one level of consciousness, perhaps as a result of despair or depression, where sense and reason crumble as unreliable supports. "Being" is reduced to an "Ear" and the sense of hearing dominates the poem with dreadfully repeated treading, beating, creaking, and tolling. The speaker is again unarmed and alone, except for the companion "Silence," when the plunge into the abyss ends all "knowing" or rational thought. The "knowing" of this final line could

conversely imply a "circumference of expanded or violated consciousness" as Weisbuch suggests (105). In either case, this enigmatic poem comes very close to revealing Dickinson's awareness of the unconscious mind as unexplored territory, which, though alien to her world of skeptical realism, helps to identify the poem's common appeal:

> [The poet] not only shows his conscious attitudes, but inevitably reveals something of his unconscious mind, both on a personal level and on the deeper one that touches his relation to those underlying psychological patterns common to all men. (Ward viii)

In "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain," Dickinson concedes that verbal description of this frightening unknown world of the unconscious is impossible, for any conceptualizing of what comes after "knowing" would be ineffable, a point to be discused in the next chapter.

The next group of poems focusing on Dickinson's conscious/ unconscious struggle shifts in stance by personifying her shadow self in a more intimate way, nearer to the "imperial friend" than the "agonizing spy" of previous poems. These poems present a provoking challenge to the critic because of their adoption of a male speaker or addressee. Although various psychological approaches have attempted to interpret these poems by examining Dickinson's possible romantic relationships in life, a more fruitful approach is suggested by the concept of Jungian androgyny:

> Out of these images and thought patterns [of sacred marriage] evolved a tenet of Romantic psychology, reaching its most extensive formulation in Jungian thought, that each person is psychologically

> androgynous, and that the contrasexual element represents the unknown, unrealized part that has to be integrated with consciousness. . . . In American Romanticism Margaret Fuller formulates this theory most explicitly: "Male and female represent the two sides of the great radical dualism. But, in fact, they are perpetually passing into one another. Fluid hardens to solid, solid rushes to fluid. There is no wholly masculine man, no purely feminine woman."
>
> We can see these ideas as immediate pychic realities in the works of Edgar Allan Poe and Emily Dickinson, where a figure of the opposite sex, surrounded by an aura of the mysterious and numinous, holds out the promise of harmonious unity, of initiation into higher secrets, a promise usually accompanied, though, by the possibilities of dissolution and death. (Bickman 59)

Jung felt the presence of this figure of the opposite sex within the individual explained the presence of a number of familiar literary images:

> According to Jung, a contrasexual and psychic context exists within the female as animus, and is described as an inner man; it is also present in the male as anima. Anima and animus have been delineated in creative works, symbolically, and since time immemorial: feminine images ranging from harlot to the hyperdulian virgin; and male forces, encompassing Don Juans to divinities. When experienced unconsciously, both anima and animus can wreak havoc; when sentient, they can not only be a source of inspiration, but can lead to a greater understanding in human relationships by opening the door onto the deeper layers of the psyche--the collective unconscious. (Knapp, Women 4)

Although the concept of androgyny is helpful in approaching literature, the specific labels of "anima" and "animus" may be more a semantic convenience than a psychological reality. According to

Whitlark, the tendency to label these opposing forces may reduce their significance:

> Since the unconscious is defined as other than consciousness, in the simplest terms the former is imagined to be the opposite or complement of the latter. If a man thinks of his conscious self in terms of masculinity, he is likely to personify the Unconscious as its opposite, a mysterious feminine being, the anima. If, however, he imagines consciousness to be his daytime self, then unconsciousness is the dark, nocturnal, shadow side, the repressed portion of his mind. . . . Jung presents much literary and clinical evidence to suggest that the Unconscious is imagined as the opposite of consciousness. The problem with his typology begins when he tries to go beyond this generalization and divide these images into separate "archetypes." (208)

Taylor agrees with this concern for the labeling of archetypes by suggesting we "may avoid a sexist perspective if we assume that <u>animus</u> and <u>anima</u> merely name those figures that are strangers to ourselves" (144). Thus, we need not feel obliged to pinpoint real or imaginary masculine or feminine characters in Dickinson's life or mind to extract the essence of her psychic battles. Our approach to Dickinson is further helped by Herbert Read's suggestion that the anima/animus serves as the poet's muse, the power of inspiration that provides the link between the unconscious and the conscious of the poet (238). By examining the androgynous nature of these poems, we may avoid the distractions of merely speculative biographical circumstances and be freed to glimpse the nature of Dickinson's dualistic tension.

Many of Dickinson's poems describe a conversation or confrontation with a masculine "other," sometimes as an intimate friend. One of her earlier poems, "we don't cry--Tim and I" (J 196), describes in child-like tones a soulmate, similar to an imaginary playmate, whom she does not want to outlive: "take us simultaneous--Lord-- / I--'Tim'--and Me!" A poem written about 1862, her most traumatic period, depicts the search through her loneliness for a male companion or alter ego, a fellow prisoner who could pity her state:

> I tried to think a lonelier Thing
> Than any I had seen--
> Some Polar Expiation--An omen in the Bone
> Of Death's tremendous nearness--
>
> I probed Retrieveless things
> My Duplicate--to borrow--
> A Haggard Comfort springs
>
> From the belief that Somewhere--
> Within the Clutch of Thought--
> There dwells one other Creature
> Of Heavenly Love--forgot--
>
> I plucked at our Partition
> As one should pry the Walls--
> Between Himself--and Horror's Twin--
> Within opposing cells--
>
> I almost strove to clasp his Hand,
> Such Luxury--it grew--
> That as Myself--could pity Him--
> Perhaps he--pitied me-- (J 532)

Dickinson's probing for her "Duplicate" among "Retrieveless things" suggests an inward journey through the "Clutch of Thought" for a male companion in grief in an adjoining cell of her mind. The ambivalence of repugnance and embracing comradeship depicts the psychic tension of her own trauma. Her language is not a self-pitying protest; Dickinson's earnest desire to discover balance in her isolation approaches a spiritual quest. Indeed, if "he" understood "Polar Expiation," "Death's tremendous nearness," and "Heavenly Love--forgot--," he might be Christ himself, whose "pity" for her would be ennobling, not degrading. This religious element in her animus/companion poems illustrates an insight provided by Gelpi concerning Dickinson's struggle for androgyny:

> . . . her point is that love was for her an experience that had something to do with man and something to do with God: the masculine "other" filling what her female nature lacked, ached for, and, at the same time, feared. (Tenth Muse 242)

This complexity of Dickinson's desires for spiritual, romantic, and psychological fulfillment complicates many of her poems normally classified as "love poems," instilling a deeper significance than mere autobiographical experience. Gelpi suggests that reading her love poems as messages to her animus explains their "doomed" nature:

> The recognition of the lover as Dickinson's own animus and of the complications of her relationship to the animus lets us see more accurately what is happening in these poems. For while it is true that Dickinson wrote some of the most poignant and moving love poems in English, they all spell out love of a sort peculiarly and inevitably doomed: a love inseparable from--in fact

> characterized by--separation, pain, sickness, and finally death. This love-death could conceivably have had some basis in a failed love affair, but the absence of any convincing evidence despite the unflagging efforts of several generations of biographers, combined with the overwhelming evidence from the poems of how internalized the experience is made to be, points to the conclusion that love was lived out, in ecstasy and travail, as the drama of a divided consciousness. (Tenth Muse 250).

Jung supplies further reasons for not becoming too insistent on physical experience in interpreting the significance of the animus/lover relationship:

> The love-episode is a real experience really suffered, as so is the vision. It is not for us to say whether its content is of a physical, psychic, or metaphysical nature. In itself it had psychic reality, and this is no less real than physical reality. Human passion falls within the sphere of conscious experience, while the object of the vision lies beyond it. (CW 15 par. 148)

A revealing example of Dickinson's androgynous love poetry is "Wild Nights--Wild Nights!" which has been alternately interpreted as a wish for physical, spiritual, or psychological fulfillment:

> Wild Nights--Wild Nights!
> Were I with thee
> Wild Nights should be
> Our luxury!
>
> Futile--the Winds--
> To a Heart in port--
> Done with the Compass--
> Done with the Chart!

Rowing in Eden--
Ah, the Sea!
Might I but moor--Tonight--
In Thee! (J 249)

Ruth Miller stresses the religious interpretation, suggesting the poem describes the arrival in Heaven (92), despite the poem's difficulties in nautical syntax; Thomas Johnson prefers the erotic, romantic approach of a woman longing for her lover (Emily Dickinson 99), overlooking the subtle reversal of sexual roles in the poem with a masculine speaker; and Sewall even suggests, based on her letters, that the poem could be directed to her brother and sister-in-law (Life 431). Gelpi provides the clearest hope in explication of her love poetry, suggesting that these interpretations are not entirely wrong, just incomplete:

> The very diversity of interpretations and the intriguing but inconclusive evidence advanced in the cause of each confirm the fact that the "other" in Dickinson's love poems is finally none of the candidates, is finally "no one" at all. The poems describe a subjective drama, and both figures in the drama are first and last psychological factors. This is not to say that the drama is totally self-induced with no catalytic agent in Dickinson's biographical experience; but it is to conclude that even if there was an external agent and even if he (or she) served as a catalyst to arouse the poet's craving for erotic and spiritual satisfaction, the experience as played out in the poems is imaginary as well as vividly imagined; the "other" is a projected personification of the poet's emotional and religious needs much more than any person she has known or loved. "He" is real but not actual, and his reality is self-referential. "He" is a protagonist/antagonist in the drama of identity. (Tenth Muse 247-8)

Bickman affirms Gelpi's argument, stressing the dangers of attempting to extricate romantic and religious veins in her poetry:

> . . . the spiritual and the sexual are inextricably woven together and are part of the same emotional experience. The recipient of the actions is the "soul," but the actions themselves are vividly physical. . . . Not that she would have made discursive statements about the relationship of eroticism to the religious experience, but her poems are symbols . . . where apparently irreconcilable opposites are linked by moving to a deeper psychic level. (120-1)

"Wild Nights--Wild Nights!" may then at one level be describing the boundless ecstasy of her spiritual quest made possible by the harmonious, androgynous company of her soulmate. Other poems depict this spiritual/sexual duality in varying degrees of gender dominance. In "He fumbles at your Soul" (J 315), the animus is dominant and forceful, overpowering the speaker with "One--imperial--Thunderbolt-- / That scalps your naked Soul." In "I Made His Crescent fill or lack--" (J 909), the speaker maintains control of the animus in a goddess-like manner, yet concedes in the final stanza that "which is the Despot, neither knows-- / Nor whose--the Tyranny--." But in at least one poem, the relationship is more mutually dependent:

> He was weak, and I was strong--then--
> So He let me lead him in--
> I was weak, and He was strong then--
> So I let him lead me--Home.
>
> 'Twasn't far--the door was near--
> 'Twasn't dark--for He went--too--

'Twasn't loud, for He said nought--
That was all I cared to know.

Day knocked--and we must part--
Neither--was strongest--now--
He strove--and I strove--too
We didn't do it--tho'! (J 190)

The thrust of this poem is its sense of equilibrium that brings about union and solidarity. As the journey they share eases the fear, the conclusion makes parting impossible in their contention of opposing strengths as suggested in the final line. The animus of this poem suggests a friend who provides Dickinson with a companion for the journey, yet in other poems, such as "I started Early--Took my Dog--" (J 520) and "Because I could not stop for Death" (J 712), the animus companion represents the more intimidating forces of nature and death. In these poems, the animus seems to represent her fears of natural forces over which she has no control, and yet she cannot resist engaging them in confrontation. In each of these animus poems, we see Dickinson "moving beyond . . . to a deeper (or collective) unconscious where the animus waited to become a companion on the journey to a new mode of consciousness, an awareness that will make her an autonomous and androgynous person" (Taylor 133). Within Dickinson, the animus persists as that force which she at once most resists and desires to accompany.

The ultimate goal of Dickinson's conscious/unconscious quest is a spiritual integration, what Jung calls "the assimilation of the ego to a wider personality" (CW VIII par. 557). Bertine refers to this final goal as the "priceless treasure," the unconditional value, "the

still point in the turning world," which is the unity of the Self (255). Dickinson's desire for this goal as the end result of her struggle is visualized in many of her poems:

> Each life Converges to some Centre--
> Expressed--or still--
> Exists in every Human Nature
> A Goal--
>
> Embodied scarcely to itself--it may be--
> Too fair
> For Credibility's presumption
> To mar--
>
> Adored with caution--as a Brittle Heaven--
> To reach
> Were hopeless, as the Rainbow's Raiment
> To touch--
>
> Yet persevered toward--sure--for the Distance--
> How high--
> Unto the Saint's slow diligence--
> The Sky--
>
> Ungained--it may be--by a Life's low Venture--
> But then--
> Eternity enable the endeavoring
> Again. (J 680)

Dickinson's acceptance that this spiritual "Centre," though universally recognized, may ultimately be elusive in this life illustrates Jung's sense of archetypal identification. Thomas Hockersmith describes Dickinson's quest in these same terms:

> By struggling with the most basic yet profound questions while limiting herself to what she feels may be known with certainty, Dickinson evokes the sense of fear and helplessness that characterizes the ordeal of

> life. At the same time, she reveals the magnificence of its struggle. For Dickinson, this struggle is the essence of life itself. (293)

Dickinson's occasional despair in the quest is also evident in her poetry. Here she expresses fatigue, fragmented exultation, and confusion in the quest:

> I cross till I am weary
> A Mountain--in my mind--
> More Mountains--then a Sea--
> Tho Seas--And then
> A Desert--find--
>
> And My Horizon blocks
> With steady--drifting--Grains
> Of unconjectured quantity--
> As Asiatic Rains--
>
> Nor this--defeat my Pace
> It hinder from the West
> But as an enemy's Salute
> One hurrying to Rest--
>
> What merit had the Goal--
> Except there intervene
> Faint Doubt--and far Competitor--
> To jeopardize the Gain?
>
> At last--the Grace in sight--
> I shout unto my feet--
> I offer them the Whole of Heaven
> The instant that we meet--
>
> They strive--and yet delay--
> They perish--Do we die--
> Or is this Death's Experiment--
> Reversed--in Victory? (J 550)

Perhaps the most hopeful of Dickinson's poems depicting the resolution of the conscious/unconscious battle relate the journey in terms which suggest accompaniment, whether of the animus or fellow strugglers, to help the mind's eye as it "Adjusts itself to Midnight":

> We grow accustomed to the Dark--
> When Light is put away---
> As when the Neighbor holds the Lamp
> To witness her Goodbye--
> A Moment--We uncertain step
> For newness of the night--
> Then--fit our Vision to the Dark--
> And meet the Road--erect--
>
> And so of larger--Darknesses--
> Those Evenings of the Brain--
> When not a Moon disclose a sign--
> Or Star--come out--within--
>
> The Bravest--grope a little--
> And sometimes hit a Tree
> Directly in the Forehead--
> But as they learn to see--
>
> Either the Darkness alters--
> Or something in the sight
> Adjusts itself to Midnight--
> And Life steps almost straight. (J 419)

Here Dickinson's simple comparison of a guest stumbling home through the dark to the unsteady, faltering progress of the spirit during "Those Evenings of the Brain--" suggests hope that the "Bravest" who persevere will find that their eyes adjust slowly to

the stumbling blocks of life until they make it "home" to the "still point in the turning world."

The antithetical nature of Dickinson's interior struggle drove her to resolve it, not by escape or insanity, but by perseverance in confronting the "imperial friend" or "agonizing spy" while on her quest. Her poetry provided the outlet for this struggle and enabled her to translate the opposing tensions of her conscious and unconscious experience into words that defined the paradox of her soul.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

> Had I not seen the Sun
> I could have borne the shade
> But Light a newer Wilderness
> My Wilderness has made-- (J 1233)

Emily Dickinson's "Wilderness" is complex but its antitheses require a focus combining selected insights of Jungian and post-Jungian theorists and critics with interpretation of individual poems. Jung's and his followers' insights concerning the nature of our conscious and unconscious battles, the esteemed province of the poet's psyche, and the relentless tension of paradoxes necessary for spiritual development all play a role in shedding light on Dickinson's power. Yet the price she paid for her quest toward individuation, the "Cross" that she "thought no / Extravagance / To pay," was a renunciation of many of the world's values that few understood and many would diagnose as aberrant:

> She lived so close to the center of her being, to the mainspring of the life of the spirit, that she brought to every contact an emotional charge and an enhanced awareness that made extraordinary demands on her store of vital energy. She carried with her into every least happening in daily life the whole sum of her consciousness, and, since her consciousness covered a far broader field than that of the average person, every aspect of nature and every human situation was

> invested with the power to evoke a deep response. . . . A way of living that began as a necessity in a period of great stress continued as the habit of a lifetime, to the bafflement even of her friends, who could now fully understand that within her chosen limits her life was crowded with rich and varied experience." (Ward 72)

Dickinson's willingness to be misunderstood by those around her allowed her genius the freedom to exercise its power, a liberty she embraced enthusiastically with the confidence and wit that pervaded her poetry:

> Much Madness is divinest Sense--
> To a discerning Eye--
> Much Sense--the starkest Madness--
> 'Tis the Majority
> In this, as All, prevail--
> Assent--and you are sane--
> Demur--you're straightway dangerous--
> And handled with a Chain-- (J 435)

If those who knew her personally had more thoroughly understood her quest, they might have grown to respect her courage in living out the paradox of conflicting tensions found universally in the human experience:

> The Business of Circumference ended for Emily Dickinson in a conjunction of opposites suggestive of that elusive wholeness of being for which mystics and religious people, ranging all the way from alchemists to her churchgoing neighbors, yearned. It was a sign of her strength and audacity that she dared to try to encounter the mystery alone. She recognized from the outset the renunciation necessary to maintain herself; then she drove herself to the secret frontiers where the mystery waited to be engaged and, in the engagement, to test her out and drive her to the point of dissolution and despair. (Gelpi, Tenth Muse 278)

Perhaps the most overwhelming task assumed by Dickinson was to take that dissolution and despair, as well as their counterparts, "Noon" and "Paradise," and attempt to communicate them by means of the written word. In attempting to express the ineffable, Dickinson's rhetoric exhausts the dialectic of opposites and multiplies the "'Compound Vision" of "Convex--and Concave Witness" to a universal level of application. Her poetry provided the laboratory for her spiritual synthesis, forcing her to acknowledge at once the inadequacy and the potency of language:

> Better perhaps than any other poet, she knows and indicates that what is worth representing is beyond depiction, what is worth saying cannot be said. What she reads, on landscapes and in seasons, is propulsive force, the recurrence of perspectives that themselves are powers and instrumentalities of the only knowledge ever available. (Bloom 6)

The ultimate paradox of her poetry, then, is the power of her words as they describe the indescribable. She is her very strongest as she concedes defeat in her attempt to speak, all the while clearly speaking the unspeakable:

> The Tint I cannot take--is best--
> The color too remote
> That I could show it in Bazaar--
> A Guinea at a sight--
>
> The fine--impalpable Array--
> That swaggers on the eye
> Like Cleopatra's Company--
> Repeated--in the sky--

The Moments of Dominion
That happen on the Soul
And leave it with a Discontent
Too exquisite--to tell--

The eager look--on Landscapes--
As if they just repressed
Some Secret--that was pushing
Like Chariots--in the Vest--

The Pleading of the Summer--
That other Prank--of Snow--
That Cushions Mystery with Tulle,
For fear the Squirrels--know.

Their Graspless manners--mock us--
Until the Cheated Eye
Shuts arrogantly--in the Grave--
Another way--to see-- (J 627)

This series of negative depictions, of colors "too remote" to describe, of spiritual insights "too exquisite--to tell," of compelling landscapes too full of secretive impact, of seasonal mysteries too diaphanous to discover, all succeed in contradicting her claim of powerlessness. Their "Graspless manners" (meaning, perhaps, both our inability to grasp them and their imperial disinterest in grasping us) tease us, daring the impossible, mocking our arrogance and ineptitude, knowing we will fail to understand them in this life. Dickinson subtly subverts the mystery, having discovered "another way--to see," and shares it with us before the grave. Dickinson meekly confesses her struggle with philology, yet she repeatedly stuns us with her "Bolts of Melody":

A Word made Flesh is seldom
And tremblingly partook
Nor then perhaps reported
But have I not mistook
Each one of us has tasted
With ecstasies of stealth
The very food debated
To our specific strength--

A word that breathes distinctly
Has not the power to die
Cohesive as the Spirit
It may expire if He--
"Made Flesh and dwelt among us"
Could condescension be
Like this consent of Language
This loved Philology. (J 1651)

In this poem, Dickinson confesses her awe for the "Word that breathes distinctly," granting it immortality, and wishing that Christ's mysterious presence were as available to us in the flesh as "this loved Philology" has made itself known to us.

Thus, Dickinson acknowledges the tensions within her as well as her conscious and unconscious struggles with vision and expression, while depicting her recognition of the forces which shaped that vision:

I heard, as if I had no Ear
Until a Vital Word
Came all the way from Life to me
And then I knew I heard.

I saw, as if my Eye were on
Another, till a Thing
And now I know 'twas Light, because
It fitted them, came in.

I dwelt, as if Myself were not,
My Body, but within
Until a Might detected me
And set my kernel in.

And Spirit turned unto the Dust
"Old Friend, thou knowest me,"
And Time went out to tell the News
And met Eternity. (J 1039)

Emily Dickinson shares with us the epiphanies of her spiritual journey, contrasting the blindness and deafness of her uninitiated condition to the heightened sensitivity of her awareness of the Word, Light, and Might that changed her perception. The barrier between the immortality of the Spirit and the mortality of Dust falls with that recognition, and the tension between Time and Eternity dissolves as Dickinson suggests that the quest of her mortal existence turns out to be the eternal quest, after all. Her ultimate goal of becoming what Jung termed "individualized" was her ideal of "the perfected life":

The Props assist the House
Until the House is built
And then the Props withdraw
And adequate, erect,
The House support itself
And cease to recollect
The Auger and the Carpenter--
Just such a retrospect
Hath the perfected Life--
A past of Plank and Nail
And slowness--then the Scaffolds drop
Affirming it a Soul. (J 1142)

Emily Dickinson's poetry, held erect in scaffolded tension by planks above unconscious abysses and nails of psychic pain, stands before us as an independent yet compound witness to the forging of a human soul. As excruciating as that forging became for her, the ecstasy was worth the agony, for it taught her and consequently us, "another way---to see--."

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