To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Barbara M. Murray entitled "The Scarlet Experiment: Emily Dickinson's Abortion Experience." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.

William H. Shurr, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council:

Vice Provost and
Dean of the Graduate School

THE SCARLET EXPERIMENT:

EMILY DICKINSON'S ABORTION EXPERIENCE

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Barbara M. Murray

December 1988

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Barbara M. Murray

ABSTRACT

Ever since Emily Dickinson began writing, a blanket of protectiveness has encircled the poet. This study strives to peel away the glossing of Dickinson's life and art as it undertakes to answer the question: Did Emily Dickinson suffer an abortion around 1861-1862?

Chapter I, "Death, Heaven, the Victorians, and Emily Dickinson," presents the literary and sociological contexts for the argument. It gives an overview of nineteenth-century America's interpretations of death, examines the age's conception of Heaven and the afterlife, and discusses the popular nineteenth-century genre of death literature, consolation literature, a tradition in which this study argues that Dickinson wrote the poems capturing her abortion/bereavement experience.

Chapter II, "The Master Letters: Intimations of Intimacy, Pregnancy, and Death," looks at Dickinson's characteristic behavioral pattern within relationships and examines her friendship with Charles Wadsworth (this study's nominee for Dickinson's "Master" and father of her unborn child) by way of the relationship's only written substantiation in the three extant "Master Letters."

Chapter III, "The Abortion Sequence," establishes the historical, sociological, and biographical data that would allow for a Dickinson abortion, and documents the experience through close analysis of twenty-eight poems that appear to narrate events leading

analysis of twenty-eight poems that appear to narrate events leading up to, during, and immediately following the abortion.

Chapter IV, "Denial: `That Dull--Benumbing Time'," recognizes the intense undercurrent of grieving in the poetry following 1861 and posits that the poems result from Dickinson's intense bereavement following her child's death. The chapter surveys the five stages of grief as determined by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and focuses on the first stage of denial--the most different of the stages because of its lack of emotion and feelings--as it manifests itself in a group of Dickinson poems after 1861.

Chapter V, "'Tis Good--The Looking Back on Grief," gives close reading to poems concerning the active stages of grieving as Dickinson works her way to acceptance of the child's death.

This holistic study concludes that Dickinson very probably experienced an abortion/bereavement experience that she captured and sought consolation for in her poetry following 1861.

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INTRODUCTION

As Lavinia Dickinson steadily fed the paper progeny of her late older sister's life into the hungry Franklin stove, she may have paused intermittently to read the writings of Emily's own and some familiar and unfamiliar hands. Did she, Emily's confidante and protector with sole access to her sister's private papers and letters, learn anything she had not known about her elusive sister's life and vast correspondence? Or did she resist reading these personal letters and papers and blindly and unwittingly destroy the minutae of Emily Dickinson's life that have become so intriguingly important to Dickinson critics, scholars, and readers?

According to Millicent Todd Bingham in Ancestor's Brocades, Lavinia obediently and mechanically burned Emily's papers unread before she discovered the poems:

> Shortly after Emily's death her sister Lavinia came to me actually trembling with excitement. She had discovered a veritable treasure--a box full of Emily's poems which she had had no instructions to destroy. She had already burned without examination hundreds of manuscripts and letters to Emily, many of them from nationally known persons, thus, she believed, carrying out her sister's wishes, without really intelligent discrimination. (16-17)

However, Bingham claims that Lavinia, like every serious Dickinson reader since, later "bitterly regretted such inordinate haste" (Ancestor's 17).

What if a similar impulse to the one that had stayed Lavinia's hand from incinerating the poetry had occurred, and she had not burned

Emily's papers? Would we know any more about the certainties of Emily's intriguing life? Undoubtedly those manuscripts contained many of the facts and substantiations about facets of Dickinson's life and art that critics, scholars, and readers of Emily Dickinson have only been able to wonder or to speculate about: the identity of the addressee of the three existing Master letters, the reason(s) for Emily's withdrawal from society, and the contents of the missing letters from the Reverend Charles Wadsworth. However, had Lavinia not destroyed these papers, there are no certainties she would have made their contents public. At best, Lavinia, like the rest of the Dickinson family, was tenaciously protective of her family's privacy. As Richard B. Sewall, author of the biography The Life of Emily Dickinson, contends:

> The Dickinsons were not only reticent themselves; they respected each other's reticence, and protected it. Once in later years when Vinnie was asked if she could not get Emily to go out sometimes, she replied: "But why should I? She is quite happy and contented as she is. I would only disturb her." An even more striking example of her respect for Emily's privacy is in one of her remarks recorded by a friend after Emily's death. She was asked whether she had studied Emily's poems extensively. She replied, "Certainly not. I never looked at Emily's poems except those she herself showed me. Had she wished me to do so, she would have made her wishes known." Apparently she felt that even to look at them after Emily's death would be disloyal. . . . (1: 155-156)

The central problem confronting anyone undertaking a study of Dickinson is this Dickinsonian reticence, not only of the poet about herself, but also of those surrounding her. An air of reverence, almost love, for the poet and her works surrounds Emily Dickinson. It was evident during her lifetime as Vinnie shielded her older sister from unwelcome probings and painful social encounters. Vinnie's

lionesque protectiveness continued following the poet's death, especially after publication of the first volumes of the poems. Vinnie so admired her sister and her talent that she wanted the world to share in them, but when the poems created a clamoring for more and more knowledge about the poet, Vinnie became recalcitrant and more censorius than ever, despite the fact that Emily was then no longer alive and beyond the reach of criticism.

In editing Dickinson's letters for publication, Emily's brother Austin was also protective of his sister's and family's reputations. He carefully went through the transcripts made by editor Mabel Loomis Todd and deleted what he told her were:

> long tiresome passages about how much he was missed at home; reiteration of Emily's devotion to him; details about his clothes, keeping them in repair and how to send them to and from Boston in the days when packages were usually transported through the courtesy of traveling acquaintances. (Bingham, Home 53-54)

Along with passages referring to his estranged wife with whom he was still living, Susan Gilbert Dickinson, he also excised frequent references to mentioned and supposed family illnesses; apparently he was concerned that Emily and the family not be viewed as hypochondriacs and that the information disseminated to the public not be of a too personal nature.

Even Dickinson's editor, Mabel Loomis Todd, began to exhibit an attitude of protectiveness toward the singer of Amherst as she became immersed in the posthumous editing of Emily's poems and letters. Whether this attitude grew out of deference to the surviving players of the Dickinson drama, particularly Austin Dickinson, who was Mabel's close friend and lover; whether it was to protect the lengthy

investment of time she had made in editing Emily's poems and letters for the reading public (Cody 27); or whether it was out of reverence for the poet, who in life had become Mabel's friend (though they never met face to face while Emily was alive), is difficult to say. But one thing is certain; Mabel Loomis Todd found the oddities of Dickinson's life and existence peculiar enough at first to make them the subject of at least several letters to her parents shortly after she and her husband arrived in Amherst. She wrote to her parents on 6 November 1881:

> I must tell you about the character of Amherst. It is a lady whom the people call the Myth. She is a sister of Mr. Dickinson, & seems to be the climax of all the family oddity. She has not been outside of her own house in fifteen years, except once to see a new church, when she crept out at night & viewed it by moonlight. . . . She dresses wholly in white, & her mind is said to be perfectly wonderful. She writes finely, but no one ever sees her. Her sister . . . invited me to come & sing to her mother sometime. . . . People tell me that the myth will hear every note--she will be near, but unseen. (Leyda 2: 357)

After Emily's death, however, Mabel Todd, who was in great demand around the country at speaking engagements following her editing and the publishing of the first volume of Emily's poems, made a point of carefully selecting the information that she disseminated about the reclusive, increasingly mystery-shrouded poet. According to Todd's daughter:

> Emily's seclusion, the dominant theme in every study of her life, will doubtless continue to be stumbling block as it was to reviewers in 1890. My mother used every opportunity--in everything she wrote, in every lecture she gave--to explain that it was "a perfectly normal blossoming of Emily's spirit." (Bingham, Ancestor's 96)

After it became apparent following initial publication of the poetry that Emily Dickinson was an American poet of great stature and

interest, Mabel Loomis Todd began collecting the poet's correspondence for publication. As Millicent Todd Bingham acknowledges, however, "To publish `personal and private' letters at all was at that time a dubious venture (Home 47). Apparently, people of the mid-nineteenth century had, as Richard B. Sewall states, an "obsessive aversion to publicity" (2: 627) that continued well into the late nineteenth century, evidenced in the perfunctory and unquestioned burning of both Wadsworth's and Dickinson's private papers and correspondence upon their deaths in the 1880s. Many respondents to Todd's and Lavinia's requests for the poet's letters even sought to protect Dickinson by editing her correspondence before turning it over for transcription, dating, and publication. Even Samuel Bowles, Emily's friend and editor of the Springfield Republican, admitted to some trepidation in handing over his collection of Dickinson letters because of the private nature of some of the correspondence. But perhaps the most telling example is seen in the case of the sisters Norcross. These women were Emily's cousins and two of her major correspondents. The spinster sisters not only would not allow Todd access to the letters to make her own transcripts, but recopied the letters themselves and deleted sections they deemed too private to share with the world. Answering Todd's request, Frances responded on 1 August 1894:

> I cannot send the letters, not because I fear they will be lost, but because my sister and I are not willing that anyone even Vinnie should have the free reading of them; many of them have whole sentences which were intended for no eyes but ours, and on our account as well as Emily's no one else will ever read them. (Sewall 2: 627)

In the involved editing process of Dickinson's poetry a trend toward protectiveness can be detected as well. It is common knowledge

that between 1890 and 1891 Thomas Wentworth Higginson and Mabel Loomis Todd set about regularizing the poet's unconventional and often curious phrases and near rhymes in accordance with nineteenth-century standards of taste as they prepared the manuscripts for publishing. Not commonly known, however, is that the "creative editing" of the Dickinson poems began before Higginson and Todd started the formal editing process. R. W. Franklin in The Editing of Emily Dickinson (1967) recounts the history of one poetry packet that suffered deliberate mutilation after its binding by Emily and indexing by Todd:

> The mutilation of packet 80 was not accidental, but quite deliberately done. The two leaves were cut out of the packet and the sewing holes trimmed off so that the leaves would not appear to have come from a packet. Then leaf 80-9 was carefully cut and leaf 80-8 was carefully torn, into two pieces each, so that the poems on the opposite sides of "One Sister have I in the house" [an effusively affectionate poem about Susan Dickinson--Austin's estranged wife and Emily and Mabel Todd's one-time close friend] would be left undamaged. Then the torn edge of 80-8 was torn again so that the two edges would not appear to match, and the top trim edge of both leaves was torn, apparently for no other reason than to make reassembly difficult. Finally, in black ink the sides containing "One Sister" were heavily cancelled, with the line "Sue--forevermore!" canceled the heaviest of all. (Editing 76)

Whether to protect Emily or himself or herself, this conscious editor obviously wanted to destroy the loving poem about Susan Dickinson. One recalls that Austin had systematically gone through Emily's letters editing any mention of his wife's name, "to insure that her name would not be printed." He went so far as to "[erase] when the letters were in pencil; when they were in ink, he used heavy cancellation, substituted readings, and even cut out undesireable paragraphs with scissors" (Franklin, Editing 79).

According to Franklin, the only people who had access to the

pre-indexed packets between 1887 and 1891 were Lavinia and Austin (Editing 78). All the Dickinsons had experienced great difficulty with Sue, who the family discovered too late was markedly different in attitudes and manners of doing things from themselves. Insecure Sue, who had been the daughter of a town drunkard, had established early in her marriage with Austin that she had little interest in being a wife, mother, and member of the insular, dignified, aloof, and reticent Dickinson clan; as a reaction to her past, she appears to have been more concerned with achieving prominent social standing, a desire that caused her to become increasingly distanced from and incompatible with not only her husband but also the rest of the Dickinsons as time went on. Consequently, Lavinia and Austin held no great love for Sue. Both brother and sister, however, dearly loved their sister Emily, so much in fact that neither of them wanted her name yoked in public view with that of Sue, who had become more and more opprobrious in her criticisms and seemingly malicious actions toward the family, especially after Austin had taken Mabel Loomis Todd for his mistress. Thus, Franklin concludes, "One of them [Austin or Lavinia], or both, was responsible for the defacement of packet 80" (Editing 78).

To further document the blanket of protectiveness that surrounded the poet, even following her death, we must also recognize that sometime following July or August 1891 half of the original fascicle packets were further consciously mutilated. They have come down to us "shuffled, cut up, and generally dealt with roughly" (Franklin, Editing 34). Mabel Loomis Todd had already indexed, transcribed, and returned these to Lavinia. They were held thereafter

in the respective possessions of Susan Dickinson; Martha Dickinson Bianchi (Susan's daughter); and finally Alfred Leete Hampson (Mrs. Bianchi's friend) (Franklin, Editing 34). Though no evidence would incriminate any of these heirs of such defacement, any one or several of them possibly could be the perpetrator(s).

One final historical fact that attests further to the protectiveness of the poet by her compeers is the missing Dickinson family medical records for the years between 1861-1862, when Emily suffered severe mental and physical anguish (Shurr 179). It is curious that all other Dickinson ailments and doctors are recorded for all other years. Almost at every turn, it appears that someone quite calculatingly and systematically eliminated what might have been telling biographical and historical facts about the poet.

This same ardent protectivenesss can be felt in two seminal works on Dickinson, Ancestor's Brocades (1945) and Emily Dickinson's Home (1955), by Mabel Loomis Todd's daughter, Millicent Todd Bingham. In Emily Dickinson's Home Bingham perpetuates this protectiveness when she pointedly prefaces the book by saying that it is her intention in the book, in which she reproduces and comments upon the texts and events of the Dickinson family letters, to "replace queerness with reasonableness as an explanation of Emily Dickinson's conduct" (xv). In this book-length attempt to portray the poet as normal and thus protect her from the stories about her queerness that developed during Emily's lifetime and were perpetuated after publication of her poetry, she argues that the poet's "gradual withdrawal is seen to be a natural

response--given her genius--which she could have made to a world in which, as she said, there was so much matter-of-fact" (xv).

This protective mindset about the poet is not exclusive to Emily's contemporaries--her close associates, friends, family, and editors--but even filters into many of the critical and scholarly works written about the poet and her work since its sporadic publication. The trend begun by the poet herself and continued by her contemporaries has carried over into modern works of criticism and interpretation about Dickinson, her oddly reclusive behavior, and resulting biographically fragmented poetry. In part, this trend has been naturally perpetuated by critics, scholars, and interpreters because they must, of necessity, draw on the selected Dickinson manuscripts and materials available that have been protectively and "creatively" edited by her family, her contemporaries, her friends, and her original editors and biographers in their desire to make her appear a relatively normal as well as gifted poet. This protective tendency in her contemporaries and in later critics and scholars also in part stems from an affinity they have developed with this poetic recluse and a resulting comfortableness with the consciously-created image of the poet. This reluctance to break free from the constraints of Dickinson's obviously manipulated image and to entertain new interpretations of Dickinson's life and art, which are unavoidably and inextricably linked, is a characteristic of Dickinson criticism that John F. Cody notes and traces through many major critical and interpretive works on the poet in his innovative psychological study, After Great Pain (1971). Approaching Dickinson from a psychological

standpoint, Cody chooses to use the term normalization instead of protectiveness. Regardless of the term, however, he perceives the critics' "normalization" of the poet as originating from a protective impulse toward Dickinson arising from the affinity they feel with her. He perceives this protective tendency or normalization in much the same vein of Thomas Wentworth Higginson's original attempts at regularizing the poetry in order to eliminate its deviation from the norm of nineteenth-century reading tastes. In short, Cody argues:

> Each writer places his own construction on facets of the poet's unusual behavior, and one is struck by the number and divergence of explanations assigned to each oddity of conduct. It is therefore all the more provocative that the question which, in one form or another, all Dickinson scholars feel constrained to answer--whether Emily Dickinson was "mad" or "sane"--should meet with the unanimous conclusion that she was "sane." (24)

What's more, Cody claims, these critics rationalize away Emily Dickinson's eccentric behaviors by isolating them from the context of her decidedly odd relationships with others to create a syndrome unique to the poet:

> What makes the condition these writers portray a new syndrome is their insistence that her intense responses were normal for her and unrelated to any psychological maladjustment in her interpersonal relationships. . . . (24-25)

A psychologist himself, an incredulous Cody concludes,

> They want to get at the truth about Emily Dickinson but to admit to the existence of insanity is irreconcilable with their respect for her great gifts and brilliant intelligence. (36)

Cody is thus aproponent of the theory that Emily Dickinson suffered a psychotic breakdown, and he is somewhat indignant at family, friends, editors, critics, and biographers for blurring into normality the odd behaviors and "the great cries of pain that emanate

from the poems" (Cody 29). Cody sees the need for a less covert, less normalizing, more realistic evaluation of the poet and her work.

The present study, similar to Cody's, seeks to explode the "myth" of Dickinson as a New England nun who was an unloved, unwed, unfulfilled, and ultimately unhappy recluse writing poetry that was infused with life yet inspired not by life experience but her own creative imagination. Like many studies before it, this study undertakes the challenge of reexamining the existing Dickinson documents and evidence; however, its purpose is to probe beyond their protective exteriors and place its findings into a larger context of factors affecting the poet's life and art. This study seeks not to protect but to reveal and open doorways to a less covert, less normalizing, and thus more realistic, holistic interpretation of the poet and her verse. More specifically, this study will offer a new interpretation for a selected group of Dickinson poems beginning about 1861-1862.

Around 1861-1862 Emily Dickinson suffered what critics agree was a shattering experience that affected her physically and emotionally, leaving her bedridden for the better part of a summer and emotionally raw. The intensity of this trauma is reflected often in her poems, many from around this time and others from the next twenty-six years of the poet's life. Furthermore, the 366 poems she wrote in 1862 alone, the most of any year of her life and nearly a quarter of her total production, also attest to the disturbing effect this experience had upon the poet. Many scholars and critics have offered their own theories to account for the jarring event that triggered

these many curious poetic references, this outpouring of poems, and the poet's gradual withdrawal from society; however, because no incontrovertible evidence concerning the cause of this unknown experience exists--in large part because of the protectiveness enshrouding the poet--room for speculation and interpretation remains.

Through an examination of the historical, cultural, sociological, and psychological aspects of Dickinson's life, culture, and poetry, the aim of this examination is to demonstrate that Dickinson suffered a physically and emotionally debilitating abortion experience, the emotional reverberations of which she recurrently felt and captured in her poetry the rest of her life. The present study draws for its opening impetus upon another revealing, myth-exploding work about Dickinson. William H. Shurr's The Marriage of Emily Dickinson (1983) makes the case that the Reverend Charles Wadsworth was Emily Dickinson's lover and the unnamed addressee of the fascicle poetry. Noting Shurr's suggestion that the shattering event in Dickinson's life around 1861-1862 might have been an abortion and his observation that around the time of Dickinson's crisis allusions to a mysterious death, burial, and a small unmarked grave begin to appear, this study investigates ground left unexplored in Shurr's brief abortion discussion to offer a substantiated answer to the question that his intriguing, but incomplete, speculations raise yet do not fully answer: Did Dickinson suffer an abortion around 1861 or 1862?

This study, recognizing certain fairly consistent reappearing patterns of imagery; repeated words and phrases used in connection with her child; appellations for the child; special uses Dickinson

makes of the neuter pronoun "it" in her poetry; biographical and historical facts; nineteenth-century views of death and interpretations of Heaven; relatively recent studies of the psychological sequelae of abortions; and a classical model of the progressive course of grief as concluded by Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and other thanatologists and psychologists, plots the course of what seems to have been an actual event. Moreover, it will give close reading to Dickinson's letters and poems to determine Dickinson's physical, emotional, and psychological reactions and adjustments to such a personal experience.

Taking note of Dickinson's apparent preoccupations with death and loss, Chapter I is a general introduction, laying out the literary and sociological contexts into which the argument will be placed. It gives an overview of the nineteenth-century interpretations of death. Moreover, it presents and examines the century's conception of Heaven and the afterlife originating from a complex matrix of cultural, historical, religious, and social factors that figure importantly in Dickinson's poems concerning the abortion. Furthermore, it discusses the genre of death literature. This genre, known as consolation literature, rose to phenomenal popularity as a simultaneous result of and propagator of nineteenth-century sociological and religious-based absorption in death and is central to interpretation of the poems dealing with Dickinson's abortion experience.

Recognizing and tracing Dickinson's characteristic pattern of behavior within her many failed relationships, Chapter II examines the extant biographical and historical evidence of the poet's friendship

with Charles Wadsworth, this study's most likely candidate for "Master" of the Master Letters. Furthermore, taking into account R. W. Franklin's new ordering, dating, and determination of the textual content of the Master Letters, these letters, as the only surviving written documentation of a relationship with Master/Wadsworth, are read closely for evidence of an abortion experience.

Chapter III makes the case for the abortion. It sets forth the historical, sociological, and biographical data that would allow such an interpretation of Emily Dickinson's poetry. This chapter also documents the abortion experience itself through a close analysis of twenty-eight poems that appear to narrate the physical and emotional events leading up to, during, and immediately following the abortion.

Chapter IV acknowledges the findings of fairly recent research into the predictability of the psychological sequelae of abortion as untenable and argues that the aftermath of Dickinson's abortion experience, reflected as an undercurrent of intense grieving and loss in the poetry of 1861-1862 and following, can be explained as the result of a severe bereavement reaction. Consequently, this chapter presents a brief discussion of the classic five stages of adjustment to grief (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance) that are applied to poems concerning the aftermath of her abortion, her letters, and her experiences and are offered as subtantiation of the abortion experience. Taking into account the fact that Dickinson's post-abortion experience can be seen as a bereavement reaction, Chapter IV also argues that in poems forming the basis of this study,

Dickinson is writing in the tradition of nineteenth-century consolation literature as she seeks solace in her grief and adjustment to this death. Furthermore, Chapter IV isolates and examines poems of denial as the first intensive and prolonged numbing stage of grief over the loss of her child.

Chapter V gives close reading to the poems concerning the active stages of the grieving process: anger, bargaining, depression, and ultimate acceptance of the child's death through abortion.

Finally, the conclusion answers the question that provides the driving force of this study: Did Emily Dickinson have an abortion around 1861-1862? Moreover, the conclusion places this study's holistic, unprotective reading of these Dickinson poems and letters within the context of other extant treatments of Dickinson's life and art.

CHAPTER I

DEATH, HEAVEN, THE VICTORIANS, AND EMILY DICKINSON

It is ironic that death, the naturally-occurring protector itself, and the nineteenth-century death custom of burning the deceased's personal belongings could so limit our knowledge about Emily Dickinson, the poet who so concerned herself with death that she has been accused by many of being "obsessed" with the subject. The poet's niece, Martha Dickinson Bianchi, in The Life and Letters of Emily Dickinson (1924) states that the poet was "eternally preoccupied with death" (83). Dickinson's first editor, Mabel Loomis Todd, and Todd's daughter, Millicent Todd Bingham, editors of Bolts of Melody (1945) record a similar absorption:

> From the time when Emily Dickinson first began to write poetry until her last fading pencil marks on tattered bits of paper, the mystery of death absorbed her. (5)

S. P. Rosenbaum in A Concordance to the Poems of Emily Dickinson (1964)--a computer-tabulated list of all words, their frequencies, and locations in all 1775 of Dickinson's poems--cites numerous occurrences of selected words associated with death:

die	-- 94	grave's	-- 2
died	-- 30	graves	-- 4
dead	-- 58	heaven	-- 143
death	-- 141	immortal	-- 13
death's	-- 14	immortality	-- 44
dying	-- 48	tomb	-- 21
grave	-- 60	tombs	-- 3

Significantly, death itself in this list is surpassed in numbers of mentions only by Heaven. These two terms were frequently used by Dickinson, because, as we shall see in this chapter, they had an intimate connection in poet's mind specifically considering poems dealing with the abortion. Of even broader significance, the concepts of death and Heaven were inextricably linked in the collective consciousness of nineteenth-century America. The words in this list constitute only the obvious references--and by no means all; no tabulation yet exists of the submerged, implied, or related references to death or the life beyond in Dickinson's poetry, such as in poem J482,[1] "We Cover Thee--Sweet Face." In this poem no straightforward mention of death or the dead occurs, yet the reader knows that the speaker is preparing the addressee for burial.

A careful reader of The Letters of Emily Dickinson (1958) will notice that they are replete with mentions of death--actual deaths that have occurred, such as in her letter to Austin Dickinson dated 21 April 1853 in which she tells of an acquaintance's death:

> Anna Warner died Tuesday night, and will be buried tomorrow, I suppose. They seem to feel very badly. She has been sick a great while now. You will not be surprised at hearing it. . . . (Letters 1: 245)

Or she discusses her feeling about death itself and the afterlife, such as in a letter dated 31 January 1846 written at the age of

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[1]Unless otherwise specified, subsequent references to individual Dickinson poems will include the number originally assigned each poem by the poet's editor Thomas H. Johnson in The Poems of Emily Dickinson; the poem's number will be preceded by a J and followed by the poem's first line in the absence of a title for ease of identification.

twenty-six to her childhood friend Abiah Root. She muses:

> Does not Eternity appear dreadful to you. I often get thinking of it and it seems so dark to me that I almost wish there was no Eternity. To think that we must forever live and never cease to be. It seems as if Death which all so dread because it launches us upon an unknown world would be a relief to so endless a state of existence. I don't know why it is but it does not seem to me that I shall ever close my eyes in death. I cannot realize that the grave will be my last home--that friends will weep over my coffin and that my name be mentioned, as one who has ceased to be among the haunts of the living, and it will be wondered where my disembodied spirit has flown.... (Letters 1: 28)

Many more--far too many to mention here[2]--have noted and questioned Emily Dickinson's interest in death, and have set out to explain and to interpret it against the background of her poetry, her letters, and existing fragments of biography.

One seminal event in Dickinson's life that death has conspired with the inherent Dickinsonian protectiveness to keep secret is one that critics and scholars isolate as crucial to her art and its incipient development. Around 1861-1862, when the poet was about thirty-two, she suffered a catastrophic experience that incapacitated her physically and emotionally. And while the specifics of this event have been denied us because they, like the secret's owners, are locked within the confines of graves, the existence of this event is confirmed by the poet herself. The intensity of this near-paralyzing

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[2]Because no comprehensive survey article or bibliography documenting critical and/or interpretive treatments of Dickinson's interest in death is known to this author, the interested reader should consult Thomas W. Ford's Heaven Beguiles the Tired: Death in the Poetry of Emily Dickinson (Alabama: Alabama, 1966), 185-187n for a brief and general overview of the major critics' examinations and interpretations (1838-1966) of the poet's interest in this subject. For more recent and comprehensive listings, refer to the June/December issues of Dickinson Studies in which each year is published an annual bibliography of scholarship.

physical, mental, and emotional trauma is reflected often in her poems, many from around this time and others from the next twenty-six years of the poet's life.

A formalist critic would certainly object to this study's yoking of art and biography and be compelled to ask: Why infer biography from art? Why not simply focus on the autonomous art work? These questions must be answered satisfactorily when considering the very biographical approach of the present study of Dickinson. One answer might be that Dickinson was indeed such a fascinating enigma herself that one has difficulty separating the artist from the art work. Another answer suggests itself: Some of Dickinson's poetry is so obscure and enigmatic that one resorts to biography in an effort to fill in the mysterious missing pieces. While providing partial answers, these suggested responses do not wholly satisfy. Is it the poetry or the poet then that is ultimately intriguing? Actually, it is <u>both</u>, with the poetry being the medium that affords material for the questioning. The poetry itself almost challenges a kind of literary detective work if one would understand it. Dickinson took as her poetic subject life--life as she knew it. And if we acknowledge the intimate connection between life and poetry, with poetry being a distillation of life experience as perceived from a poet's vantage point, Dickinson's biography is germane, even essential, to a revealing study of her poetry, particularly those poems originating around 1861-1862 and following. The personal, autobiographical or confessional element is strong in Emily Dickinson's poetry, demonstrating that she is as much a true daughter of the American

Puritan introspective tradition as are sons Jonathan Edwards in his spiritual autobiography, Personal Narrative; Benjamin Franklin in his autobiography of his American success story; Frederick Douglass in The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass, his autobiography about life as a slave; or Henry Adams in his autobiography The Education of Henry Adams concerning the shaping of his mind in a technological and discordant America.

But Dickinson's introspection did not lead to overt biographical poetry. The speaker of Dickinson's poem J1129 advises her reader to tell the truth, but "tell it Slant" so as not to give oneself away directly. And Dickinson adeptly pursued this circuitous tack in her life and in her poetry. Consequently, at best, Dickinson is elusive, mysterious. However, lest one forget, in the same poem, prior to the warning to speak around the truth, she admonishes the listener to "Tell all the truth" (italics mine). Does Dickinson tell all the truth about herself in her poetry, but simply encode it so that only those aware see it head on? This is difficult to say, particularly because of all the missing historical and biographical data about the poet's life. What is certain is that while she and her family may have been reticent about and protective of the Emily we wish to know, as Richard Sewall contends, "she said a great deal [about herself] in nearly eighteen hundred poems and over a thousand letters. . . ." (Sewall 2: 3). For example, some of the facts that we learn from the poetry are: Emily had a dog named Carlo; she must have detested snakes--otherwise how could she have characterized that chilling, emptying feeling of encountering one unawares?; she felt at

home with many of nature's creatures; she had difficulty conforming to formalized religious traditions; she disliked winter and conversely loved the spring and summer. Because these are just a sampling of the more obvious personal facts, much more awaits discovery for the persistent and open critic. The poems are full of specialized, personal references dropped by the poet that the reader hoping to understand the poems must try to comprehend. Of course, one must also consider that Dickinson did not write for publication--but for herself and an audience of private friends she frequently corresponded with and sent poetry to. As such, Dickinson's is a personal, reflective, introspective poetry with many obvious referents and references removed. Thus, with Dickinson, poetry and biography are inextricably entwined and are thus a challenge to her would-be reader.

Some of her poems have more of the core removed than others. These are the truly challenging and mystifying pieces that Jay Leyda in The Years and Hours of Emily Dickinson has termed poems with "omitted centers" (1: xxi). Many of these poems are connected by dating, content, and allusiveness to this important event in the poet's life around 1861-1862. Critics and biographers have conjectured that the resounding nature of this experience provided the stimulus for her bizarre, reclusive lifestyle and the primary impetus for her art. In fact, Dickinson criticism has often tried to fill in the details of this enigma. Many critics have attempted the resurrection of the particulars of this period through the examination of historical, biographical, poetic, and even psychological evidence, yet none have probed much farther than the carefully protected and

manipulated image created by those of the poet's contemporaries and later appreciators who would have her viewed as a New England nun. They have offered their own theories to account for the jarring event that triggered many curious poetic references to a time of trauma in Dickinson's life and this outpouring of poems around and following this time. However, not all avenues of interpretation have been explored thoroughly.

One particularly noticeable characteristic of the poetry around this time that merits extensive critical attention is the number of death-related images that appear. While Dickinson is always concerned with death, these references appear to be more concentrated and more urgent than the usual diffuse treatments of death's various aspects. Dickinson refers several times to a mysterious death and burial, a small and unmarked grave, and a sorely missed absent loved one awaiting her in Heaven. Moreover, the sense of loss and grieving that frequently underpins Dickinson's poetry surfaces and becomes excruciatingly real and realized in words. However, before this study proceeds to a detailed analysis of these death-related images and their meaning for the disabling event between 1861- 1862, it is essential to understand the religious, historical, sociological, and cultural origins of the interpretations of death and Heaven as they were viewed in Dickinson's nineteenth-century America, for it was from these contexts that the poet formed her own views about such subjects that are focal to this study.

If one approaches Dickinson from a twentieth-century vantage point on death, one would be hard put not to conclude as some critics

that she was excessively morbid and "obssessed" with the subject, for the modern attitude toward death, as David Stannard attests, is one of "avoidance and denial." We put our dying loved ones in hospitals or nursing homes, where they are kept sedated so as not to be troublesome. We delegate what used to be the familial duties of burial preparation and entombment to morticians and funeral directors. The individual's devalued importance and his or her unhampered replacement within modern society have fostered this attitude concerning death:

> every individual can be replaced with such facility that his absence deeply affects at best only his most intimate relations. In a world bereft of ultimate meaning either in life or in death--in which neither the community of the living nor the vision of a mystical but literal afterlife any longer provides solace--modern man, in the face of death, has been forced to choose between the alternatives of outright avoidance or a secularized masquerade. . . . (194)

Stannard would argue that modern Americans opt for the "outright avoidance" option because "the modern American way of death is a direct response to the modern American way of life" (195).

Taking Emily Dickinson and her writing into account while considering this contemporary outlook on death, we can see that in some ways she is modern, but in more ways she is a reflection of her age. Dickinson has been called a precursor to modern existentialist writers because of her poetic treatment of her angst about God's existence and her ability to find meaning within herself and her own life. However, that she and her culture considered individuals easily and effortlessly replaceable, or that they avoided and denied death outright (and <u>outright</u> is the important word here) is incorrect. When placed within the context of the nineteenth-century's views of death

and the afterlife, Dickinson becomes a cultural representative of her age.

Just as the modern American way of death is directly responsive to the modern American way of life, so too was the manner of handling death in the nineteenth century a direct response to the age's way of life. In his study of American death attitudes and practices between 1830-1920, Inventing the American Way of Death, James Farrell writes that each culture, each era, constructs its own "cosmology" or "the study of the origins, structure and processes of the universe as a whole" (17). Moreover, this cosmology

> is a model of the universe, based on inherited beliefs and new findings about the universe. The model describes what the components of the universe are, how they began, and how they interact. It tells people who they are in relation to other components of the universe, how to view their bodies and their desires, where they come from and where they are going, what they can know and how to know it, how to act in relation to nature and the supernatural, and what their lives mean. (17)

More importantly, however, Farrell contends that

> By constructing cosmologies, people create the universe in their own image. That image develops in specific social circumstances, and shapes the experience of people in those circumstances. Usually people try to keep social conceptions in accord with social conditions and vice versa. . . . (16-17)

Thus, all meaningful human activities and events will be considered in a people's cosmology. A monumental event in people's lives, death is one element always considered. According to Farrell,

> With regard to death, a cosomology explains what death is, what causes death, why it occurs, how to prepare for death, how to act in the face of death, and where human death fits into the cosmic system. A cosmology thus transforms a physical fact into a meaningful event. By creating models of the universe, cultures create contexts for death. (17)

Death is, and has always been, humans' greatest fear. As such, it is

a great determiner of any society. Each culture deals with this great fear, according to David Stannard, "as Bacon wrote, 'as children fear to go in the dark.'" They "first . . . imagin[e] something exist[s] in the darkness, and then . . . [act] . . . accordingly" (10). Thus, each culture self-determines how it views and reacts to death. "The behavior of a people in the face of dying is the result of their attitude toward and their vision of death" (9), which "reinforce one another, and thus fused, give meaning, order and stability to their cultural source" (Stannard 10).

While this "cosmization," or process of creating a cosmology of the universe in a society's own image, may involve religion if a "sense of the sacred accompanies cosmization," religion is not a necessary component. However, as Farrell points out, "In America, religious cosmologies treat death more directly than their secular counterparts, both in theory and practice" and so "religion in affecting attitudes toward death must be emphasized" because "religion does reveal deep-seated human convictions about the meanings of life and death" (17).

Farrell divides American cultural reactions to death from colonial America to 1920 into five periods: 1) The Reformed Tradition (1500-1700); 2) The Enlightenment (1700-1800); 3) Unitarianism (early 1800s); 4) Romanticism (mid-1800s); and 5) The Evangelical Era (late 1800s). The greatest and farthest-reaching changes in the American view of death occurred in the nineteenth century, the time period of the present study. And for this study's purposes, within Farrell's framework, the last three periods--Unitarianism of the early

nineteenth century, Romanticism of the mid-nineteenth century, and the Evangelical Era of the mid-later nineteenth century--will be emphasized; these are the views of death that together most profoundly shaped and affected Emily Dickinson's own attitudes about and views of death and Heaven.

Cosmologies do not suddenly originate. They are the products of a culture's way of life developed in conjunction with and as a reaction to inherited belief. The American cosmology and views about death did not originate here, but were brought from England with the Puritans.

In the Reformed Tradition (1500-1700) death was an event that was both anticipated and feared. For these Puritan religious reformers who believed in a Calvinist God and doctrine of predestination, death should have been a release from their earthly sufferings and their induction into Heaven; however, the distance between their religious rhetoric about death and death's actuality created great tension for the Puritans. The fundamental sticking-point about death for the Puritans was their "doctrine of assurance" (Stannard 153). According to this doctrine, it was impossible to determine with any assurance who was or who was not a member of God's elect. Thus, until one died, one could not know (Stannard 154), and Puritans went apprehensively and reluctantly to their deaths.

During the Enlightenment (1700-1800), the Reformed Tradition's view of death began to change, as did the view of the world. The watchword for the age was <u>reason</u>, and people of the Englightenment approached even death rationally. Inasmuch as the deistic God of the

eighteenth century had created the clock-like universe, started it going, and stepped back to watch it follow its law-governed course and to watch man discover these laws, death in the eighteenth century was considered a natural event. People of this age did not fear death as had the Puritans. During Puritanism's heyday, the traditional rhetoric about death and the culture's attitude toward death were out of alignment; during the eighteenth century these factors came into synchronization:

> the tension between rhetoric and reality that made death and dying so troublesome in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries was inverted during the Great Awakening. . . . . a new optimism was becoming evident. . . . (Stannard 146)

The rationalists of the eighteenth century, by doing away with the tension, removed the sting and fear from death and made possible the change of context for death:

> The revivalists [of the Great Awakening of the 1740s] had adopted the message brought to New England by the itinerant George Whitefield: that it was possible to determine with certainty who was marked for salvation and who was not. The doctrine of assurance had lost its dynamic meaning. . . . (Stannard 154)

In the evolution of American attitudes toward and views concerning death, the influence of Unitarianism (Early 1800s) can be seen as a bridge yoking the ideas about death from the Englightenment to the era of Romanticism. Unitarianism affected a shift in America's vision of death.

A Boston-centered religion, Unitarianism appealed to the "commercial and professional classes." As a reaction to the "opportunistic individualism" and the increasing commercial evils of the nineteenth century, Unitarian ministers "preached a gospel of `capitalism, theism, liberalism, and optimism.'" They were not

opposed to rising industrialism; they simply wanted to control its effects. They, as the "moral elite," employed a sentimental religion and ethical absolutism to justify and make acceptable this capitalistic way of life (Farrell 27).

Their God, like the Englightenment's God, was rational; however, unlike the aloof, abstract Englightenment's deity, the Unitarian God was a personal, benevolent Creator in control of the universe. Unitarianism also upheld the Englightenment's optimistic evaluation of the perfectibility of people: "Rational individuals created in the likeness to God and exercising free will would ultimately save themselves" (Farrell 27).

The afterlife to the Unitarians held both traditional concepts of rewards and punishments. Against the tradition, however, they possessed an optimistic vision of the afterlife. They perceived the traditional purpose of an eternal stay in Hell as erroneous; rather, the Unitarians contended that the ultimate purpose of afterlife suffering was temporary, not vindictive, and for the individual's reformation (Farrell 28). Germinating from the Reformed and Englightenment traditions, these beliefs had a profound effect upon shaping the new attitudes toward life and death.

Death to the Unitarians was not an event to be dreaded for several reasons. First, because they conceived of a rational and benevolent God who personally oversaw the natural processes which brought about an individual's death, they had less reason to fear it. In fact, the idea of a serene and stoic death greatly appealed to members of this group (Farrell 28).

Second, the Unitarians did not fear death because they perceived little difference between life on earth and the afterlife. Each included different stages of instruction toward perfection for the individual. One state was simply an extension of the other. They viewed the deaths of "informed" individuals as a graduation ceremony to advanced celestial instruction. And they described Heaven as a sort of class reunion where they would meet again with common school classmates (Farrell 29). According to James Farrell, the Unitarians "minimized the distance between death and life, between the dead and the living. . . ." They "emphasized the continuity of life instead of the finality of death . . . ." (Farrell 28-29).

Finally, because the Unitarians "regarded death as an instructional tool" (Farrell 29) toward perfection for the living, they created an innovative instructional device--Mt. Auburn Cemetery. This cemetery was not only a device to instruct visitors in the proper attitude toward death, it was also a social and moral teacher. Stanley French's article about the development of the American cemetery, entitled "The Cemetery as Cultural Institution," writes,

> The creation of Mount Auburn marked a change in prevailing attitudes about death and burial. It was a new type of burial place designed not only to be a decent place of interment, but to serve as a cultural institution as well. . . . (70)

Prior to the early nineteenth century, not much thought was given to burying grounds. They were places of avoidance for the living:

> Since the beginning of settlement in New England the standard places of burial had been amid the living--in the middle of towns, in churchyards or in churches, a practice which in England dated back to the eighth century. In New England town commons were also frequently employed as graveyards. It is obvious from the dearth of comments about early New England graveyards, from the nature of the comments that do exist and from the grim

> symbolism of the period's monuments, that graveyards were treated as unattractive necessities to be avoided as much as possible by the living. This attitude continued from the beginnings of the settlement into the early years of the nineteenth century. (French 71)

Because of this attitude, the graveyards of New England and throughout the other colonies and states fell into a state of neglect and disrepair. Moreover, with steadily increasing population and eventual crowding and multiple interments in traditionally designated areas, burying grounds began to pose health hazards.

Justice Joseph Story's address to those attending the dedication of Mount Auburn in 1831 enumerated the reasons supporting the establishment of rural cemeteries--cemeteries outside the city limits--like Mt. Auburn and deplored the state of city and town graveyards, especially Boston's:

> He criticized [Boston's burial grounds] as overcrowded, unkempt, unhealthy, and unsightly. Between 1790 and 1830, Boston's population grew from 18,000 to 61,392. The population of the cities of the dead increased at a similar rate, but the land space of the city did not. Therefore, Bostonians had "measure[d] out a narrow portion of earth for our graveyards, and heap[ed] the dead upon each other with a cold, calculating parsimony." With sextons employed in the actual interment of the dead, little care was devoted to the maintenance of burial grounds. Also, in opening old graves and tombs for the commitment of new corpses, cemetery workers allegedly exposed the living to miasmic vapors generated by the decay of the dead. . . . (Farrell 102-103)

Consequently, the removal of the burial ground--now called a "cemetery," a place of sleep and rest and not just decay--outside city limits served as a solution to the health hazards that traditional and inadequate places of burial posed. Yet, the rural cemetery was far more than this; it was a direct reflection of a people's "new conceptions of themselves, their society, the environment and death" (Farrell 99) that had arisen out of the nineteenth century's

> [r]apid urban growth and population mobility, booming business and commerial adventures, aggregations of surplus wealth, concentrations of educated and public-spirited people . . . [and] Romantic affection for Nature. (Farrell 101-102)

Most importantly, the rural cemetery movement took its impetus from "revisions of religious doctrines" (Farrell 102) that allowed death, the dead, and the afterlife to be perceived in new ways.

Traditionally in America there existed a sharp dividing line between the living and the dead; however, the supporters of rural cemeteries fostered the Unitarian belief in the bridge between this world and the next, blurring the traditional line as they attempted to sell their idea of earthly burial:

> the literature of rural cemeteries also offered three themes of reunion designed to ease the anticipation of separation that death itself threatened. At death, said rural cemetery supporters, the individual could expect to commune with God, with nature, and with deceased family and friends. . . . (Farrell 105)

The idea of going to God at death was not unfamiliar; in fact, this concept was quite traditional. However, the idea of communing with nature was unique, and one that was thought could console and teach the living about the appropriate role of and attitude toward death in the scheme of the universe:

> In the new type of cemetery the plentitude and beauties of nature combined with art would convert the graveyard from a shunned place of horror into an enchanting place of succor and instruction. The world of nature would inculcate primarily the lessons of natural theology. The fullness of nature in the rural cemetery would enable people to see death in perspective so that they might realize that "in the mighty system of the universe, not a single step of the destroyer, Time, but is made subservient to some ulterior purpose of reproduction, and the circle of creation and destruction is eternal." (French 78-79)

It was hoped by rural cemetery supporters that people would visit the cemeteries, like parks. And they did--frequently--thinking

of the dead and enjoying the quiet beauties of the natural setting. Dickinson herself visited Mt. Auburn with her family in 1846 at age sixteen. It favorably impressed her and she shared her positive impressions in a letter to Abby Root:

> Have you ever been to Mt. Auburn? If not you can form but slight conception of the "City of the Dead." It seems as if Nature had formed the spot with a distinct idea in view of it being a resting place for her children, where wearied and disappointed they might stretch themselves beneath the spreading cypress and close their eyes. . . . (Letters 1: 36)

In Dickinson's own words here can be seen the seeds of the close association between Nature and death that were to blossom in the next age of Romanticism and in her poetry as well.

The idea of communing with deceased family and friends was a novel one. With the creation of a newly mobile and populated American society, interment in a rural cemetery "would give people more of a sense of historical continuity, a feeling of social roots, a `sense of perpetual home' and remind them that the standard of living and blessings of a republic they owed to those who have gone before" (French 80-81). Moreover, the depiction of the grave as being a home, a resting place with family and friends, appealed to many:

> Like the home, the grave was portrayed as a haven in a heartless world. Just as the family was the central unit of civil society, so also would it be the organizational unit of the rural cemetery . . . . Rural Cemeteries allowed families to reside together even after "death do us part.". . . (Farrell 106-107)

For the bereaved and all visitors, the attractive, inviting natural surroundings of the rural cemetery filled with deceased family and friends would instruct them in morality:

> The thoughts automatically inculcated by the decent cemetery would assuage the suffering of the mourner; it would make the young and careless pensive, the wise wiser; the vain would become

> aware of and correct their vanities, the avaricious would be rendered less grasping, the ambitious would be purified, the lessons of history would be remembered and patriotism enhanced, theological truths would be more easily perceived and morality would be strengthened. . . . (French 84)

Thus, the rural cemetery accomplished several ends. It grew out of and objectively reflected early nineteenth-century American concerns and ideas. It solved the overcrowding and health hazards presented by the traditional burying grounds in the centers of cities. It changed the concept of traditional graveyards from places of interment to places of rest with loved ones for the dead and places of moral inculcation for the living. And most importantly, it picked up and built upon the Unitarian beliefs of a minimal distance between life and death as continuing stages of instruction toward perfection--certainly lessening the century's fear of death. Moreover, these ideas were to affect all religious denominations (Farrell 30), either in reaction against them as being too rational or in acceptance of them as basic beliefs; thus Unitarianism became firmly ensconced in the American way of death, the effects of which can be most prominently seen in the Age of Romanticism.

A time of growth and expansion in America, increased industrial and urban development, and the establishment of communal utopian societies removed from city life, the age of Romanticism (Mid-1800s) was an era that contained many contradictions. Most importantly, Romanticism was a reaction against the narrowly rational systematic thought of the Englightenment.

A difficult age to characterize fully because of its diversity, the Romantic era fostered people who possessed in common

certain general characteristics:

> moral enthusiasm, faith in the value of individualism, and intuitive perception, and a presumption that the natural world was a source of goodness and man's societies a source of corruption. (McMillan 551)

Unlike the aloof God of the Age of Reason, the God of the Romantics was not a God apart but a God who was a part of his creation. As James Farrell cogently puts it,

> The Romantic cosmology celebrated the essential correspondence of God, nature and humanity. God, or the Spiritual Presence that sometimes substituted for God, permeated both nature and people. (30)

But rather than concern themselves with the inscrutable nature of God, the Romantics focused their attention on the other forms in which God or spirit was found--nature and humanity (Farrell 30). God became transfigured into the feminine Mother Nature--an important gender distinction in an age that came to reevaluate women's position in the universe--and she was perceived as the universe's impelling, vital force:

> The Romantic movement of God into nature was not simply a process of Deus in machina. In fact, the identity of the divine and the natural altered the static, mechanistic conception of nature that had prevailed in the Englightenment. The Romantics saw nature as a dynamic organism infused with vital force. The regular motions of the Enlightenment's mental machine gave way to the mystery and majesty of a nature that seemed to have taken personal traits from the traditional God, and transformed them into a feminine character. In this way, the Romantic combination of God and nature engendered a further change in the nineteenth-century cosmos, as Mother Nature rivaled Father God as the source of vital force and the cause of death in the cosmos. (Farrell 30-31)

Death in this cosmological context differed vastly from that of colonial times or of the Enlightenment. In fact, death could take one of two contrasting possible perspectives. In the first view,

death for the individual was "the ultimate communion with the universe" because it provided simultaneously a correspondence between God, nature, and humanity in the environment of the rural cemetery (Farrell 32). Poet William Cullen Bryant was perhaps the most representative spokesman for this view in his poems "Thanatopsis" and later "A Forest Hymn" in which he set forth the ideas of the cyclic regenerative immortality behind death. "Bryant celebrated the immortality of life, even as he admitted the inevitability of individual death" (Farrell 32-33). In this rather soothing view of death, the subscriber must accept death's inevitability, but also the inevitability of infinite regeneration and resurrection, lessening the innate fear of death. And Dickinson was well acquainted with this Massachusetts neighbor's view of death, particularly as treated in "Thanatopsis" from which she sometimes quoted in her poetry (Capps 111-112).

In the second possible view of death, adherents saw death as

> a source of the sublime, an awe-inspiring event that elevated human emotions to peak sensitivity. . . . . [T]hey stressed the horror of death in order to elicit fear, the strongest of human emotions. They considered death an adversary, and the struggle between death and the individual as a battle of epic proportions. They emphasized the horrors of death and the grave, the futile fight with conqueror worm, and the terrible prospect of burial alive. (Farrell 33-34)

Edgar Allan Poe as representative voice for this sensation-seeking perspective on death must immediately come to mind as one remembers such creatures of his invention as Madeleine Usher in his "Fall of the House of Usher" or the desperately bereaved narrator of "Liegia," who struggles mortally with the adversary Death. As one might suspect, this view of death, designed to produce a sense of the sublime focused

upon the emotion of fear; it created greater apprehension for the dying and heightened grief for survivors who imagined their loved ones suffering all kinds of unspeakable torments in death (Farrell 34). Dickinson also may very well have been exposed to Poe's sensationalist view of death, for she belonged to a literary club when young that "almost certainly included in their reading . . . shorter pieces by Poe. . . ." (Capps 19).

These two divergent attitudes toward death and dying emerged as a result of great changes and tensions in nineteenth-century America. Rising capitalism and specialization in industry led to changing roles of men, women, and the clergy; a deteriorating sense of community; and "growning individual anonymity" (Stannard 185). These two contrary views of death also propagated change; the Romantic Era's attempt to maintain and reconcile two diametrically opposing views of death brought about greater social tensions because the sublimist view of death brought to the fore a sharply increased "awareness of the emotions engendered by death and the funeral" (Farrell 34). Rather than give themselves up to the emotions of fear over growing isolation, however, "efforts [were made] to channel these feelings in the direction of social order" (Farrell 34) through sentimentality.

As a reaction to social and commerical expansion and the sublime view of death, Victorian America idealized death in sentimental, self-indulgent emotions and ostentatious, expensive death practices and customs. These were socially accepted and communally shared methods of dealing with the terrors of death and overcoming increasing individual isolation:

> Sentimental Americans domesticated death, thus trying to overcome their terror of it, by developing socially acceptable channels for Romantic expressionism. When an individual died, sentimental survivors directed their private grief into public mourning. . . . . outlets for expression of grief followed well-defined social forms and required substantial outlays of money. Thus, by socializing the emotional intensity of Romantic individualism, sentimentality established itself as a civic virtue. . . . (Farrell 34)

This is not to say that all Americans shared the sentimentalization of death and its practices, because this is not the case (Stannard 184). However, a majority, in the face of a fading sense of community, did subscribe to the avoidance reaction of the domestication of death, banishing "the reality of death by a spiritualistic and sentimentalized embracing of it" (Stannard 185).

The prevailing popular conception of the afterlife as a continuation of earthly life, in actuality a denial of death, was accompanied by a change in death and funeral customs, one of which was that of the rural cemetery where families could go and commune concurrently with the dead, nature, and God. Moreover, funeral and mourning customs began to change in order to accomodate the new perceptions. Funeral homes and funeral directors replaced traditional home preparation and burial of the dead (Green 168). Elaborately adorned, metal, rectangular caskets, that were "guaranteed against leakage" (Green 168) and boasted "a soft lining and a name plate inside the box" with a "lock and key" (Douglas, "Heaven" 61) substituted for the traditional pine, human-shaped coffin. Ostentatious funeral parades, complete with black horses wearing black decorative plumes and drawing a specially and darkly-decorated hearse bearing the deceased, often wended its way slowly through town,

followed by mourners dressed in black, on its way to the rural cemetery. Homes of the deceased were also frequently decorated to signify a house in mourning. Black or purple funeral wreaths attached to a home's front entrance, popular hand-made or commercially produced pictures of a solitary, morose woman leaning against a gravestone surrounded by a stylized weeping willow used as memorial wall hangings of the deceased, or entire rooms lined in dark crepe (Farrell 34) were not uncommon.

Mourning etiquette also changed to accommodate death's new perception. The mourning period's length, manner of dress, and way of behaving while grieving were all socially prescribed and were rarely deviated from without social censure.

All of these--and many other[3]--newly-developed highly ritualized funeral and mourning customs and practices were designed to bind the bereaved together as a united group during a century of growing individual isolation and anonymity. Moreover, they were elaborate attempts to avoid death's harsh reality.

Although her wishes for her own funeral were simple, Dickinson frequently demonstrated in her poetry awareness of how her contemporaries tried "to divert their suffering and loss through ritual and ceremony" (Ferlazza 50), for example, in the poem J389:

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[3]For a more thorough discussion of the shifting funeral, burial, and mourning customs in nineteenth-century America, see Harvey Green's "A Home in Heaven: Religion, Death and Mourning," in The Light of the Home: An Intimate View of the Lives of Women in Victorian America (New York: Pantheon, 1983), 165-179.
ritual and ceremony" (Ferlazzo 50), for example, in the poem J389:

There's been a Death, in the Opposite House,
As lately as Today--
I know it, by the numb look
Such Houses have--alway--

The Neighbors rustle in and out--
The Doctor--drives away--
A Window opens like a Pod--
Abruptly--mechanically--

Somebody flings a Mattrass out--
The Children hurry by--
They wonder if it died--on that--
I used to--when a Boy--

The Minister--goes stiffly in--
As if the House were His--
And He owned all the Mourners--now--
And little Boys--besides--

And then the Milliner--and the Man
Of the Appalling Trade--
To take the measure of the House--

There'll be that Dark Parade--

Of Tassels--and of Coaches--soon--
It's[4] easy as a Sign--
The Intuition of the News--
In just a Country Town--

(J389, 1862, F27)[5]

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[4]In the transcription of the poems from R. W. Franklin's manuscript books of Dickinson's poetry, it is, at times, difficult to distinguish exactly where the poet intends the apostophe to appear in the word its because of her obscure handwriting. In this study, when the apostrophe seems to be on the right of the s in the manuscript, it will be placed on the right. When it appears to the left, it will be so placed.

[5]Following a citation of each entire or excerpted Dickinson poem in this study, the Johnson number of the poem, the date of the poem's composition as determined by R. W. Franklin in The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson (1981), and the fascicle packet number in which it appears (indicated by the abbreviation "F" and followed by the fascicle number)--if it is included in a packet bound by the poet--will be provided in parentheses.

Having lived next door to a cemetery and thus having witnessed many such funeral corteges in her hometown of Amherst, it is not surprising that Dickinson so aptly evokes an image of a nineteenth-century funeral in this and other poems (for example, J280, "I felt a Funeral in my Brain," or J98, "One dignity delays for all,") in which she demonstrates knowledge of the outward trappings of the Romantic era's attempts to deny death.

The last major American approach to death identified by James Farrell in Inventing the American Way of Death is what he calls the "Evangelical Era" (Late 1800s) (35). "[E]vangelical revivalism" supplied doctrinal content of the elaborate early Victorian funeral, whereas sentimentality replacing the fear of death shaped its form (Farrell 35). At the turn of the century, in direct reaction to the lack of religion during the Englightenment and the inherent materialism associated with the increasing industrialism and commercialism of the century, religious revivals in the manner and spirit of the Great Awakening of eighteenth-century America began taking place. After 1830, because of the social discord and disobedience that accompanied production, industrialists responded to "revivalists [who] preached a gospel of progress, challenging Christians to create a new world governed by religious self-control" (Farrell 35). Seeing the message of the evangelists as one that they could turn to their capitalistic advantages, manufacturers threw their lots in with them:

> They accepted the idea of a perfect social order voluntarily constructed by people of a moral free agency, and they exerted their economic power as employers to enlist the allegiance of workers in the fight for middle-class morality. (Farrell 35)

Doctrinally, evangelists promoted an individualistic religious experience based on morality and an afterlife that the individual had some say in.

> Evangelicals emphasized the importance of scripture, a conversion experience, and a life (and death) of Christian witness. They stressed God's persuasiveness more than His power, His moral government more than arbitrary election, the voluntary sinfulness of His people more than their innate depravity, and free agency and moral accountability more than predestination. (Farrell 35)

For sixty years these revivals among the middle class occurred and "by 1850 . . . [they] . . . had ravaged the American landscape, and changed the structure of social and religious life" (Farrell 35-36) as it concentrated on the moral lives of Christians who had been converted. Consequently, because of their pervasiveness and influence, "most Americans approached the issues of life and death from a religious perspective" (Farrell 36).

During Dickinson's formative years and into early adulthood, the sweeping spirit of revivalism rocking New England also invaded Amherst. According to Richard B. Sewall, "No fewer than eight revivals swept Amherst, college and town, . . . roughly between 1840 and 1862" (24). Dickinson's letters between 1848 and 1854 are telling about the poet's responses to this infusion of Christianity into her community and her life. As Paul Ferlazzo characterizes them,

> The letters move from hopeful consideration of church membership, through rebellion and fear of its outcome, to a resigned determination to stand apart from her community. (29)

According to Millicent Todd Bingham, the revivals' primary purpose was to induce for each individual a true conversion experience:

> It was a man's duty as well as his right to obey his conscience. But unless he was convinced of the iniquity of his natural

> impulses, he was not likely to renounce his headstrong desires and yield without reservation to guidance from on high. During a revival the experience of conversion, induced by the exhortation and prayer, took place in four steps, defined by the Reverend Daniel Bliss--the great missionary of the Amherst class of 1852--as follows: "conviction of deep guilt, a period of despair and struggle, surrender of will, the sudden benediction of peace," as a sinner, having thrown himself on God's mercy and accepted Christ as his Redeemer, and shown his willingness to accept the guidance of The Holy Spirit, knows without any lingering doubt that he has been forgiven. Only then has his conscience been tempered to the point where it can be trusted as a infallible guide. (Home 91)

Though at first open, Dickinson never perceived herself as guilt-filled, never perceived God as anything but loving (Bingham, Home 93), nor could she relinquish control of her life and spirit; thus, she never personally experienced conversion. As Richard B. Sewall contends, "She could never see herself as a sinner in the hands of an angry God. She could never testify . . . to that direct visitation of the Spirit which was essential to membership in the church. . . ." (1: 24).

In 1850, the year of the Great Revival in New England (Bingham, Home 91), Dickinson wrote to a friend Jane Humphrey, expressing her wonder, fear, and growing skepticism about the conversions of most of her friends and family while she alone stood unmoved:

> Christ is calling everyone here, all my companions have answered, even my darling Vinnie believes she loves and trusts him, and I am standing alone in rebellion, and growing very careless. Abby, Mary, Jane and farthest of all my Vinnie have been seeking, and they all believe they have found; I can't tell you what they have found, but they think it is something precious. I wonder if it is? (Letters 1: 94)

In fact, by the end of 1850 she was resolute in her position as "one of the lingering bad ones" (Letters 1: 98) and wrote to Abby Root,

one of her newly-converted friends:

> The shore is safer, Abiah, but I love to buffet the sea--I cant count the bitter wrecks here in these pleasant waters, and hear the murmuring winds, but oh, I love the danger! You are learning control and firmness. Christ Jesus will love you more. I'm afraid he don't love me any! (Letters 1: 104)

Determined, rebellious, and ultimately alone in her religious convictions--or rather lack of them--Dickinson in the face of ravaging revivalism of nineteenth-century New England felt isolated and alienated from her society; however, this is not to say that she did not understand her culture. On the contrary, as Paul Ferlazzo states simply, "she possessed the culture but was not confined within it" (31). Dickinson was obviously very much aware of the Evangelicals and their teaching of the latter 1800s.

The evangelicals encouraged their converts to view death differently. Because of the evangelical ministers, not surprisingly, most people of this era viewed death in much the same biblical terms their Puritan forbears had perceived it: in death God was intervening in life because of Adam and Eve's sin and was reminding people of their own mortality brought on by that Original Sin (Farrell 36). However, unlike the Puritans who felt helpless in the face of predestination, evangelicals believed and preached that through repentence and Christ's sacrifice all could have a hand their own fates and achieve "the goal of a glorious death" if they were ever-ready for death that could occur at any moment (Farrell 37). Evangelical Christians were thus enjoined to "meditate frequently and solemnly on death" in all its aspects, especially the "triumphant entry into heaven," and to lead a life emulative of Christ,

"cultivating a spirit of devoted piety" as preparation for death (Farrell 37).

Considering that the ultimate goal of this era was to achieve a glorious death, demonstrating the glory of the gospel and advertising the dying as Christians "in the exercise of a triumphant and elevated faith" (Farrell 37) and thus indicative of salvation, interest in deathbed scenes was high. It is no secret that Dickinson expressed a deep interest in deathbed scenes, particularly those of her friends and associates. In the case of Ben Newton, who had been a law student in her father's office and her first "Preceptor," Dickinson wrote to his minister to inquire about the manner of his death.

> Pardon the liberty Sir, which a stranger takes in addressing you, but I think you may be familiar with the last hours of a Friend, and I therefore transgress a courtesy. . . . I think, Sir, you were the Pastor of Mr. B. F. Newton, who died sometime since in Worcester, and I often have hoped to know if his last hours were cheerful, and if he was willing to die. . . . (Letters 1: 282)

According to Richard B. Sewall, this inquiry "was the first of many similar ones she directed to men, mostly ministerial and always older than she, whom she regarded as able to help her with ultimate questions" (Sewall 2: 402). Some have considered such curiosity on Dickinson's part as grisly and morbid; however, in this age which so concerned itself with death, this type of questioning was, in fact, quite common (Sewall 2: 402).

It should not be mistaken that Protestants of the evangelical era were unafraid of death. Death did exist for them, and they did fear it; however, "their faith often stabilized their adjustment to

death" (Farrell 40). And they also had a say in their fates. In fact, this personal involvement in one's own fate advocated by the revivalists brought about a bifurcation in the individual's attitude toward death:

> The evangelical era had an ambivalent impact on American attitudes toward death. On the one hand, because of their involvement in the process, some people felt more assurance of their own salvation than their Puritan predecessors. On the other hand, for the same reason, the death of an unregenerate individual engendered more anxiety than in the Puritan era when people left election in God's hands alone. After 1850, the delicate balance of the evangelical era tipped away from fear and anxiety and toward assurance. By that time, however, scientific naturalists and religious liberals had begun to identify the religious partisans of the evangelical era as the caretakers of Calvinism in the modern world. From this perspective, both naturalists and liberals modified early nineteenth-century ideas of death. . . . (Farrell 42)

Because of their careful sectioning and discussion above, it may appear that the foregoing periods of cultural reactions to death and Heaven in nineteenth-century America were distinct; however, though they may be placed within certain general time frames and given certain distinct characteristics, it would be more accurate to view them as overlapping, interwoven, and existing concurrently. The nineteenth-century's Unitarian, Romantic, and Evangelical views of death are those with which Dickinson grew up and lived and from which she drew to form her own concepts of death and Heaven that figure so importantly to the poems in this study of the poet's abortion experience. This complicated complexion of differing ways of seeing death and the afterlife in Dickinson's time are not, however, the only influences that helped shape the poet's views. Certain biographical, educational, cultural, and literary influences helped mold Dickinson's ideas about death and Heaven.

Biographically, in conjunction with the century's keen interest in death and lavish funeral, burial, and mourning practices, it is important to note that from the time Emily was ten years old to the time she was twenty-five (1840-1855), before the family moved into their permanent residence of the Homestead, she lived in the Dickinson house on Pleasant Street adjoining the town cemetery. Because of the house's location, "Every funeral procession must pass their house. . . . (Bingham, Home 180). One can only conjecture the effect that the sight of frequent, perhaps daily, funeral corteges had upon the impressionable girl. One thing is likely, however. Such sights most likely often prompted her to reflect upon earthly life's tenuousness and death's cruel certainty, an awareness she amply demonstates in her poetry about death.

Historically, as compared to Puritan days of high mortality rates, one would think that death would not be so frequent an occurrence in the 1800s; however, despite the technological and health discoveries and changes, such as the institution of hospitals and the discovery of vaccines against certain diseases, mortality rates were still high in Dickinson's lifetime, especially among young children. In 1844 the poet suffered the first touch of death upon her life with the death of her playmate Sophia Holland. Seven years later, at twenty-one years of age, Dickinson again became shockingly aware of death's closeness. According to Richard Sewall:

> 1851 had been a year of deaths among the young people of Amherst, some of them Emily's close friends. Abby Haskell died in April, age nineteen. In October, John Spencer, Amherst '48, principal of Amherst Academy 1848-1849, who had climbed Mt. Holyoke with Emily and Vinnie, died of consumption. Jennie Grout died on October 27 and "merry Martha Kingman" on the thirtieth, both

> about Emily's age. "It cannot be--yet it is so," Emily wrote Austin that day, "--Jennie Grout was buried yesterday--Martha Kingman died at four o' clock this morning--one and another, and another--how we pass away! (2: 435)

A combination of inadequate knowledge about the most appropriate treatments of certain diseases, the outbreaks of fatal communicable and childhood diseases, and unsophisticated childbearing procedures joined to create a relatively high mortality rate (Green 165-166). According to nineteenth-century census data,

> [t]here were major epidemics of cholera in northeastern cities in 1832, 1849, and 1866, and periodic outbreaks of typhoid, typhus, diptheria, and such childhood diseases as scarlet fever, measles, and mumps were common. Diptheria was especially prevalent in 1863 and 1864, between 1874 and 1882, and in 1889; typhoid ravaged the Northeast in the mid-1860's and in 1872. Smallpox claimed fewer lives than either, but was especially virulent in 1872 and 1873, which were also years of exceptionally lethal outbreaks of measles. (Green 165-166)

American women were more likely to meet death in the nineteenth century than their male counterparts. Historian Harvey Green attributes this fact to a natural process exclusive to women, childbearing:

> The lives of nineteenth-century women were threatened first by diseases of childhood, then by an obstacle to survival that was uniquely theirs--childbearing. Women were much more likely than men to die between the ages of twenty-five and fifty-five. . . . (166)

According to Green, in the home state of Emily Dickinson, Massachusetts, when she was just twenty years of age, "Nearly one-third of women . . . died before they were twenty; eighty percent of that group (that is, twenty-four percent of the total female population) never reached the age of five. . . ." (166). Although, as Green claims, "The mortality rate for children and young women steadily declined throughout the late nineteenth century" (166), the

death rate during the time of Dickinson's formative years, as during Puritan days, was astronomically high compared to today's standards. Thus, women of Dickinson's day must have lived in constant fear of death's overtaking them.

Educationally, images of death and Heaven were inculcated into children of the nineteenth century in the home and at school. Not unlike the Puritan child who was instructed to be ever-mindful of death, so too was the Victorian child taught to reflect on death; however, the manner of the Romantics' thinking was quite different from the Puritan child's:

> The child of the Puritan was told to "think how it will be on a deathbed"; to consider the terror of certain separation from, and even betrayal by, parents and loved ones; and to imagine what his well-deserved torments in Hell would be like. The instruction of the nineteenth-century child involved the precise reversal of all this: the child was rarely told to contemplate the physical act of dying, and whenever he was, it was because the transformation thus effected was seen as a peaceful and beautiful deliverance--the releasing of a butterfly from a cocoon; instead of separation from or betrayal by parents and loved ones, eternal and heavenly reunion was stressed; and instead of visions of Hell and damnation, the nineteenth-century child was told to contemplate the sweet glory of salvation. Indeed, in place of death a new life was emphasized--death as a lonely finality or a grim eternity of torment was simply willed out of existence. (Stannard 173-174)

Children of Victorian America were also exposed to death in their educational texts, just as the Puritan child was in the New England Primer and the like. Also like the didactic, propagandist Puritan instructional tools, the reading material for children in the nineteenth century expressed views about and attitudes toward death popular at the time. The following poem, "What is Death?," is a tender dialogue between a nineteenth-century mother and her child. She explains, through the use of the metaphor of the

dying/resurrecting butterfly, the mysteries of death of the child's deceased brother. This poem is an example of the relatively frequent treatment of death appearing in a popular nineteenth-century text, McGuffey's Fourth Eclectic Reader:

> Child. Mother, how still the baby lies!
> I can not hear his breath;
> I can not see his laughing eyes;
> They tell me this is death.
>
> They say that he again will rise,
> More beautiful than now;
> That God will bless him in the skies;
> O Mother, tell me how!
>
> Mother. Daughter, do you remember, dear,
> The cold, dark thing you brought,
> And laid upon the casement here?
> A withered worm, you thought.
>
> Look at that chrysalis, my love;
> An empty shell it lies;
> Now raise your wondering glance above,
> To where yon insect flies!
>
> Child. O mother! now I know full well,
> If God that worm can change,
> And draw it from this broken cell,
> On golden wings to range;
>
> How beautiful will brother be
> When God shall give him wings,
> Above this dying world to flee,
> And live with heavenly things! (109-110)

In this poem and many other pieces--fictional and poetic--death is celebrated as something beautiful and desirable. And Heaven is a real place to aspire to. According to David Stannard, it was not uncommon for death to be characterized as a swarthy suitor coming to woo the dying in the "long historical tradition for viewing death as personified by Harlequin, a dark and mysterious lover" (174). One is not be surprised then to hear intimations of Dickinson's "Because I

could not stop for Death" in this description. Such poetic and prose treatments of death were the possible and likely anthologized reading fare that Emily was exposed to in her formative years in the small "Primary School" in Amherst that she attended from 1835 until 1840, when she and Vinnie entered the remarkably progressive Amherst Academy (Sewall 2: 337).

Children were not the only group in the nineteenth century exposed to such literary treatments of death. A literary romanticization of death emerged at this time for popular consumption. It encouraged the development of a literary genre, consolation literature, that focused exclusively on death, dying, and Heaven. While this vein of literature had existed as long as people could express their reactions and adjustments to death, it had never been such a formalized type of literature before. Not only did this genre become popular, it was "an important phenomenon in nineteenth-century American culture, [that] incessantly stressed the importance of dying and the dead: it encouraged elaborate funerary practices, conspicuous methods of burial and commemoration and microscopic viewing of much inflated afterlife" (Douglas, "Heaven" 49-50).

The causes for this genre's enduring popularity and the new sentimentality about death are varied and complexly interwoven with nineteenth-century social changes and attitudes. In some ways this literary genre is an outgrowth of the new attitude toward death and Heaven; in other ways it is responsible for the growing concentration on dying and the dead. However, the separate interwoven strands of literary genre and social changes are interesting and important to a

study of Emily Dickinson in the unravelling; they give a clear look into the immense popularity and sentimentality concerning death in the nineteenth-century popular mind and that had a hand in shaping Dickinson's beliefs about death and Heaven discovered in her poetry.

One particular social shift directly linked to the development and popularity of this literary genre was changing male and female roles in Victorian America. Prior to industrialization, America had been an agriculturally-based home farm nation with each family producing for its own needs. All family members were under control of the male head of the household and contributed as productive members. Industrialization shifted the center of focus from the home to the city and the factory (Woloch 114). With the paternal authority figures travelling outside the home daily to work, women gained new freedom. As Nancy Woloch in her book Women and the American Experience expresses this idea,

> the woman at home gained an independent realm of her own, one that was no longer constantly under male domination. Domestic life was now under feminine control. . . . Within her own domestic space . . . she had gained both a new degree of autonomy and a new degree of authority over others. (114)

This new female status, termed "a woman's sphere" by Sarah Hale, editor of Ladies Magazine, was quickly seized upon by many serial publications such as Godey's Ladies Book that catered to middle-class female readers. They "celebrated the new status of the middle-class woman, along with her distinctive vocation, values, and character" (Woloch 114).

In her new status, woman's duties included all manner of home maintenance and child care, two areas that had traditionally been held

in low esteem. During the nineteenth century these roles took on a quality akin to reverence due to the unspoken mutual agreement between men and women: the outside world was a masculine proving ground; the domestic world was women's. Women were expected to keep a clean, highly organized and smoothly-running home--no matter how back-breaking the task might prove--for the men in her life to retreat to at the end of their day in the working world.

No stranger to woman's domestic sphere of the nineteenth century and to the womanly art of housekeeping, despite the picture some have painted of her sequestered in her room furiously writing numerous poems and voluminous letters, Emily Dickinson took an active part in the daily keeping of the household. In fact, the housekeeping most likely took most of the Dickinson women's time. Though Emily disliked as boring the routine maintenance tasks such as dusting and cleaning, stuff she called "a prickly art" (Letters 3: 827), in an 1850 letter to Abiah Root she writes that she seemed to enjoy the creative aspects of tending a nineteenth-century home such as gardening and baking. In fact, the preparation of baked goods was solely Emily's province. She writes that she found pleasure in her efforts "to make everything pleasant for father and Austin" (Letters 1: 42-43). Her father expected his home to be managed efficiently, and was quick to detect flaws. As Millicent Todd Bingham recounts:

> Edward Dickinson was quick to notice any lapse of attention on the part of his womenfolks. In his code there was no room for carelessness. . . . One day, sitting down at the dinner table, he inquired whether a certain nicked plate must always be placed before him. Emily took the hint. She carried the plate to the garden and pulverized it on a stone, "just to remind" her, she said, not to give it to her father again. (Home 112)

Women's greatest duties were to tend to and nurture the children. Children, they were taught, were the avenues of a woman's highest fulfillment. Josiah Gilbert Holland, "probably the most popular nonministerial writer about family life in the later half of the nineteenth century" (Green 29), husband to Emily Dickinson's closest friend Elizabeth Holland and consequently a writer whose works Emily made every attempt to read--though at times surely without sympathy (Capps 131)--characterizes the popular nineteenth-century view about women's responsibility in having children:

> [children allowed women] to reach the highest and most harmonious development of which [they] are capable. Without [children], one of the most beautiful regions of [a woman's] nature must forever remain without appropriate and direct culture. . . . (Titcomb 200-201)

Thus, motherhood came into vogue, and the domestic arts and child rearing became the reverenced domain of women who remained in the home. In this view, it must have been greatly disappointing to the Dickinson family and to Vinnie and Emily themselves that neither ever had any children. And in view of this study's hypothesis, that of a possible Dickinson abortion, the aftermath of adjustment most likely would have been made more difficult for her in the awareness that she had blocked the avenue of what her age claimed and touted as a woman's greatest fulfillment.

Not only was a mother responsible for the physical well being of her children, she was also responsible for their spirituality. "Women were sequestered from the so-called evils of commerce and production in homes where they were to be guardians of morality and cultivation" (Green 7). By her very nature a woman was to be an

admirable role model, epitomizing the recognized feminine virtues of piety, purity, morality, affection, and self sacrifice. Simply by being in her "sphere" and being in contact with her family, this woman could "influence" them to virtuous behavior.

Despite the efforts of such reformers as Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who rebelled against the inequality of women, most women of antebellum America accepted their status. Popular writers of the times helped women rationalize their status and keep them in their position, promising them rewards at a later time. Josiah Holland addressed these matters to women as he discusses women's subservient dependence upon men:

> Heaven . . . has given special favors to your sex, through this simple fact or principle of dependence. It is your work to soften and refine men. Men living without you, by themselves, become savage and sinful. The purer you are the more they are restrained, and the more they are elevated. (158, 150-151, 153)

Thus, women, while they were given position and responsibility in the domestic sphere, were given little power or authority outside the sphere of motherhood and the home. Harvey Green aptly characterizes the unique situation into which women were forced:

> Women were supposed to effect changes in the rottenness around them by indirect means--by "influence"--yet at the same time they were not supposed to be able to comprehend that society, either because they were too frail, too burdened with the chores of childcare, or intellectually inferior. . . . (57-58)

Ann Douglas in her sociological study of nineteenth-century America The Feminization of American Culture attributes a calculated reason behind women's special status:

> Just as in certain matriarchal societies males are treated with elaborate and ceremonious deference by their feminine superiors, in the patriarchal middle-class of mid-nineteenth-century America

> the females were apparently being granted special status more as a substitute for power than as an acknowledgment of it. (161)

On the one hand, the changing status for women was a blessing in that a niche was at least being carved out for them, providing a raison d'être in the quickly-industrializing and commercial world where they had no other productive place; on the other hand, this subservient position was no real niche at all. In many respects, women were like the Protestant clergy of the nineteenth century.

Because of the clergy's "diminishing status and weakening authority" (Douglas, "Heaven" 51), subsequent official governmental disestablishment and "sever[ing] from their traditional sources of [state-supported] power" (Douglas, Feminization 23) they were set adrift to make their own positions in a new voluntary democratic system. Where before a man of the cloth obtained power and position from state endorsement, in the nineteenth century after disestablishment a clergyman had to "curry favor" (Douglas, Feminization 24) among a congregation to survive. Women were also "disestablished" members of the new society. As Ann Douglas claims, "Both liberal ministers and literary women had lost practical function within American society" (Feminization 77). Like the clergymen who suffered identity crises and attempted to regain some position, power, and security turned to aggressive favor-currying that "capitalized on the tactics of moral suasion which were their logical means of survival and self-promotion" (Douglas, "Heaven" 51), women of the nineteenth century also found a method of creating some sense of identity, esteem and power, for themselves through the position

delegated to them by men--through Christianity, which allied them even more closely with the Victorian clergy.

Since spirituality was part of a "woman's sphere," it was only natural that women participated in churches where spirituality was a prime concern. In fact, "[w]omen formed the majority of congregants" in the nineteenth century (Woloch 120). In short, both women and ministers had common positions, common purposes; they needed each other. "Both saw themselves as outsiders in a society devoted to the pursuit of wealth, as allies who strove for morality in a competitive world" (Woloch 120). The non-evangelical clergymen needed a supportive, loyal congregation to survive. They assuaged women's disestablished egos by stressing their moral superiority over men, helping women find a viable identity, and, in short, making Christianity over in the female image.

> They opposed those forces antithetical to women's interests--materialism, immorality, intemperance, and licentiousness. They helped to formulate a new definition of female character. Christian virtues--such as humility, submission, piety, and charity--were now, they suggested, primarily female virtues. Most important, ministers confirmed female moral superiority. Women might be the weaker members of society, but they were now assured that they exceeded men in spiritual fervor and moral strength. (Woloch 120)

On the other hand, women needed acknowledgment of their self-worth and supported as their ministers those non-evangelical clergy who would endorse their moral superiority, thus giving them the sense of identity they lacked (Woloch 120).

This coalition of displaced persons was indirectly endorsed and propagated by men as proper. In the words of Josiah Holland addressing the women's proper place in society in regards to religion,

> God meant that you should be dependent upon men, and that in this dependence should exist some of your profoundest and sweetest attractions and your noblest characteristics. Your bodies are smaller then those of men. You were not made to wrestle with the rough forces of nature. You were not made for war, nor commerce, nor agriculture. . . . Man has his sphere--woman hers. . . . Now if you will go with me into a circle of praying Christians, or if you will take up with me a list of members of any church . . . you will find . . . that at least two-thirds of the members of the prayer meeting are women, and that the church register will show a corresponding proportion of female names. Why is this? Is it because women are weaker than men, simply?. . . . It is because a feeling of dependence is native in the female heart . . . . It is because the female mind has to undergo comparatively a small revolution to become religious. (155-157).

What men were meaning to communicate was simply that they had their sphere, the world of commerce, and women had theirs, the world of religion and the household. And according to Harvey Green, this admission further underscored and strengthened the alliance and similarity between women and the clergy.

> In the context of this ideological and economic construct, the family and the home were a special sort of religious sphere, wherein home was the church, woman was the priestess, and the family (especially the children) were the congregation . . . . Leaders of the church (generally male) were called "ministers." Women, leaders of the pious home, were to "minister to the poor and the distressed," as well as to their own familial flock. (174)

As coequals, women and non-evangelical ministers quickly recognized and capitalized upon their similar circumstances in society to provide identity and position for themselves.

> The celebration of feminine emotion, piety, and sentiment allowed the Protestant clergy and the middle class woman to become allies in the promulgation of what were defined as the essentially feminine virtues of nurture, generosity, passivity, and moral stewardship. (Green 175)

Following the Civil War, a large number of patriotic histories and biographies appeared recounting and holding up to emulation the valorous exploits and heroic acts of men. While these stories of role

models appealed to men in the outside world, they had little application to women who could not compete or succeed in the same sphere with men. Recognizing the predominantly middle class female reading public's voracious appetite for imaginitive literature, women and clergymen became the great disseminators of the religious or "good" novel, "[r]eligious stories about insignificant people who maintained or lost their virtue as a lesson to the reading public [that] provided more attainable models for women" (Green 179).

Unlike other contemporary fiction that aroused "potentially dangerous emotions," these novels sought to control these emotions by providing stories of men and women whose lives were made better through religion. These novels followed a basic formula or pattern:

> The basic plot structure of the popular religious novel turned around an individual (or group) whose life was transformed by religion. One genre of the Christian tale was set in the time of Christ; characters (usually unbelievers) came to Judea and actually experienced Christ or a miracle. Ben Hur, Lew Wallace's epic of 1880, was the most popular example of this plot pattern, and in fact the largest-selling religious novel of the nineteenth century. The other major type of religious novel was set in contemporary times, and usually detailed piety and sometimes the martyrdom of men or women surrounded by corruption. (Green 176)

Appealing as approachable role models for women, these novels took insignificant people as their subjects and were amazingly popular with the reading public. In fact, the whole genre of consolation literature, including mourners' manuals, prayer manuals, poetry, hymns, fiction, and biographies (Douglas, "Heaven" 49) was phenomenally popular in nineteenth-century America.

Non-revivalist ministers and disestablished women writers, like many of the nineteenth century, recognized the power of the written word to a middle-class reading public. And at this time

consolation literature came into vogue. Consolation literature's primary purpose, as the term itself implies, was ostensibly to comfort and console the bereaved or the grieving. And the demographics of nineteenth-century America, the million deaths during the Civil War, the many lives lost in the epidemics, and numerous childbirth and children's deaths, would seem to suggest that a literature providing some comfort to its readers was timely and naturally evolving; however, when noted that its authors were liberal clergymen and devout women who "were particularly active in promoting funerary ritual and literature in the North between 1830 and 1880" (Douglas, "Heaven" 51) and that it was written in the "context of clerical and feminine anxieties" (Douglas, "Heaven" 51) of the nineteenth-century societal positions, consolation literature takes on a different tenor and purpose. In this context, this genre becomes a vehicle to spread the message of these "disestablished" members and to strengthen the position and identity they had, of necessity, carved for themselves.

Nineteenth-century fiction also took on a consolatory character. One particular event that fiction writers and others of this century returned to again and again was death. One can note the interest in the subject if one remembers such popular fictional treatments of this subject in Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin, where pages and pages are devoted to the death of Little Eva; or in Charles Dickens' Bleak House, where the author underscores the pitiful death of Little Jo; or in Louisa May Alcott's Little Women, where, preceded by numerous foreshadowings of its impending occurrence, an entire chapter is given to the death of the angelic

sister Beth, and then another chapter is devoted to the family's adjustment to her death. And although Dickinson probably read Alcott, we know that she did read both Uncle Tom's Cabin (Capps 14) and Bleak House (Capps 95) and many other popular and contemporary novels that featured death prominently.

Besides these examples, many more appeared, usually "commemorat[ing] the lives, last words and funeral rites of women and clergymen like themselves, seldom participators in the competitive world, and of small children who perforce had never left the nest" (Douglas, "Heaven" 54). These writers "depicted and emphasized heaven as a continuation and a glorification of the domestic sphere" (Douglas, "Heaven" 55). In short, propagated by women and ministers, Heaven, a place rarely written about or conceptualized before the 1800s, became a reflection of the ideal Victorian home.

> By the middle of the nineteenth century, such nonevangelical ministers as William Ellery Channing, Andrew Peabody, and Austin Phelps described heaven as a place in which families were reunited, homes restored, and nurseries existed to care for children who died before their parents. . . . (Green 167)

Perhaps the most popular and influential treatment of this view of "homey Heaven" was a work of fiction entitled The Gates Ajar (1868) written by Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, the daughter of minister Austin Phelps. In this novel of consolation, May attempts to come to terms with the loss of her brother in the Civil War. She confides her emotional difficulty with the situation to her garrulous, opinionated Aunt Winifred who tells the girl her own impressions about Heaven in terms of "food, courtship, lifestyles, occupations, and the nature of childcare" (Green 167) in an attempt to console her bereaved niece:

"I wonder what it is going to look like," [May] said . . .

"Heaven? Eye has not seen, but I have my fancies. I think I want some mountains, and very many trees" [Winifred] said.

. . . . . .

"Flowers, too. . . . I should like, if I had my choice, to have day-lilies and carnations fresh under my windows all the time."

"Under your windows?"

"Yes. I hope to have a home of my own."

"Not a house?"

"Something not unlike it. In the Father's house are many mansions. Sometimes I fancy that those words have a literal meaning which the simple men who heard them may have understood better than we. . . . "

. . . . . .

"If we have trees and mountains and flowers and books," she went on, smiling, "I don't see why not houses as well. Indeed, they seem to me as supposable as anything can be which is guesswork at best; for what a homeless, desolate sort of sensation it gives one to think of people wandering over the `sweet fields beyond the flood' without a local habitation and a name. What could be done with the millions who from the time of Adam, have been gathering there, unless they lived under the conditions of organized society? Organized society involves homes, not unlike the homes of this world." (Phelps, Gates 138-140)

Although it cannot be documented that Dickinson read this popular work, she may well have in the face of her unrecorded borrowed readings and missing library charge slips (Capps 8). Jack Capps in Emily Dickinson's Reading (1966) writes that Emily did read Phelps' The Last Leaf from Sunnyside, "a collection of sketches and stories presented to her and Lavinia during their Washington visit" (124). So it is possible that Dickinson knew about The Gates Ajar and/or read it as well.

Poetry as a genre was also influenced by the disestablishment of women and ministers and the changing concepts of religion, death, Heaven, and the afterlife. Not only did poems of consolation appear in children's McGuffey schoolbooks, but they were also published in editions, such as Elizabeth Stuart Phelps' Songs of the Silent World

(1885), an anthology of "poems written by supposedly dead people to their living and grieving relatives assuring them of their continued existence" (Douglas, "Heaven" 67). Perhaps the most noted writer of this consolation poetry, who wrote "saccharine elegies for children and verses about infants who awaited their parents in a Heaven that seemed little different from Mother's realm, the ideal home" (Wolff 261), was Madame Sigourney, whose works were being issued in the 1840s by a printing house in Dickinson's own Amherst (Wolff 261).

The monthly woman's magazines such as Godey's, Demorest's, and The Lady's Friend were also full of consolatory poems such as, "My Saint," "Row Me Over," "The Bereaved Mother," "In Memorium," "Dead," "Stricken" (Green 177), "The Eye of the Dead," "Burial of a Motherless Infant," "The Departed," "The Dying Girl," or "The Blind Mother and Her Children" (Woloch 102). These somewhat biographical accounts focused on the common folk,

> ordinary people, undistinguished men, women, or children leading insignificant lives in the patriotic past or the industrial present. For these heroes, death was, ironically, life's greatest event: both a liberator from earthly troubles (an old idea), and the passage to the realm of reunited families and powerful "heavenly homemakers.". . . (Green 178)

The poetry is characterized by cloying sentimentalism and a propagation of the theology behind the domestication of death. A typical piece entitled "Going" by Mary Tucker reads:

> "Good-by! A little while, good-by," he whispered,
> Between his kisses--softly adding then,
> "My little love! be strong, and brave and patient,
> Loving me always, `til I come again."
>
> Long are the years! Alone and unforgetting
> I ponder over all the words he said.
> When will he come again? O Heaven! have pity;
> Not till the grave hath given up its dead! (317)

This genre of poetry was exceedingly popular. According to historian Harvey Green, "[t]he 1870 volumes of Godey's contained seventy-one poems, of which twenty-eight (approximately forty percent) were about death. The percentage remains relatively constant" (178) throughout the century as the following random percentages attest:

1838= 44.7%
1870= 39.4%
1878= 39%
1883= 41.4%
1888= 40.7%
1893= 41.4% (Green 199n)

Not exclusive to ladies' magazines, however, consolation poetry also frequently found its way into such respectable newspapers as The Springfield Republican (Wolff 261), to which the Dickinsons subscribed (Capps 128). Emily was enticed to read this publication not only because of her desire for news but also because her friend Josiah Holland was a regular contributor (Capps 131) and her friend Samuel Bowles was editor.

This poetry became so prevalent that Mark Twain in The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1884) took pains to lampoon it and what he considered to be the artlessness and morbidity of such sentimental stuff. While Huck is visiting the Grangerfords, he recalls going through the dead daughter Emmeline's scrapbook in which she "used to paste obituaries and accidents and cases of patient suffering in it out of the Presbyterian Observer, and write poetry after them out of her own head" (Twain 106). After reading the consolation piece "Ode to Stephen Dowling Bots, Dec'd", Huck, impressed, confides in the reader his impressions while Twain takes a humorous shot at consolation poets and poetry:

> If Emmeline Grangerford could make poetry like that before she was fourteen, there ain't no telling what she could 'a' done by and by. Buck said she could rattle off poetry like nothing. She didn't ever have to stop to think. He said she would slap down a line, and if she couldn't find anything to rhyme with it would just scratch it out and slap down another one, and go ahead. She warn't particular; she could write about anything you choose to give her to write about just so it was sadful. Every time a man died, or a woman died, or a child died, she would be on hand with her "tribute" before he was cold. She called them tributes. The neighbors said it was the doctor first, them Emmeline, then the undertaker--the undertaker never got in ahead of Emmeline but once, and then she hung fire on a rhyme for the dead person's name, which was Whistler. She warn't ever the same after that; she never complained, but she kinder pined away and did not live long. . . . (Twain 106-107)

Though Twain published Huckleberry Finn almost too late for the poet to have enjoyed this humorous attack on consolation poetry and its composers, we cannot be certain that she did not read it or know of it.

Dickinson herself may have participated in this popular culture scrapbook tradition that arose out of the century's absorption in death for similiar purposes as Emmeline Grangerford and her kind, but with vastly superior results than her contemporary poets, according to Barton St. Armand in Emily Dickinson and Her Culture (1984):

> There is ample evidence from her published letters that Emily Dickinson herself kept a scrapbook of clippings from national magazines, local newspapers, and illustrated books, which she used to ornament some of her own manuscripts, turning them into emblem letters and emblem poems. Among the books she scissored were her father's copies of Dickens' Old Curiosity Shop and The New England Primer. . . . Of Dickinson's use of a tombstone illustration cut from the Hampshire and Franklin Express to embellish a copy of "She laid her docile Crescent Down," Thomas H. Johnson writes that Dickinson "enclosed funerary scraps in messages from time to time, and thus suggested clues to the inspiration for certain verses. The disparity in the date of the clipping [1856] and the poem [1877] leads one to conjecture that she kept a scrapbook or a file of items which to her were meaningful." We know that Dickinson actually contributed to a

> scrapbook prepared by the family for the delectation of her nephew Gilbert, who died in 1882, and she may have had a hand in selecting or collecting illustrations for two of the children's scrapbooks made out of old business ledgers now housed at the Evergreens. . . . Any scrapbook made up by Dickinson for her own purposes has like most of her personal library long since disappeared. . . . (26)

Perhaps this, too, went into Vinnie's conflagration of Emily's other personal papers and letters. However, while Dickinson may have depended upon and drawn from this sentimental popular culture tradition, her poetic efforts were immeasurably superior to those of the predictable and saccharine consolation singers.

The acceptance of the afterlife as "homey Heaven" by writers of consolation literature was the ultimate "denial of death." Just as they had remade Christianity over in the female image, imbuing it with feminine virtue, these writers also sought to make the afterlife over in the same image for similar reasons. By claiming death and domestic Heaven as their exclusive domain, disestablished ministers and especially women gained influence and power, making bearable and justifiable their powerlessness and frustration on earth; they were to be rewarded for their earthly forbearance hereafter in a world where they would have ascendency. As their events of glory, death and achieving Heaven were embellished by writers of consolation literature to give them social self-importance. Ann Douglas succinctly states the implications of this literature:

> The authors of consolation literature . . . wished to inflate and complicate its importance. To say this is to imply that they were rightly insecure about their position, that they sought to gain indirect and compensatory social control, and even that they and their readers were in part debased by their effort; it is not to imply that they were insecure, ill-intentioned or simple-minded. It must be remembered how these people saw themselves, and with what good reason: they were in the main genuine and

> sincere Christians reinterpreting their faith as best they could in the needs of their culture. Sentimental as much of their output is in modern eyes, it indisputably served a valid function for those who read it as well as those who produced it. . . . ("Heaven" 55)

Thus, this literature consoled those who read it and those who wrote it. It was "therapeutic self-indulgence" (Douglas, "Heaven" 57) for "in consolation literature we find a slight but crucial transformation of that essential Christian precept `the last shall be first.' The losers shall be the winners, if not of the world's goods and positions, as least of its concern" (Douglas, "Heaven" 57).

In nineteenth-century America, through the religious sentimentalization and domestication of death primarily because of the growing alienation of the individual, the fading sense of community, and the attempt to reconcile the opposing views of death, "Americans sought a return to their lost sense of community in the graveyard and the heavenly world of the dead" (Stannard 185). In doing so, they quite effectively and premeditatedly stifled death. Not only did these people view death as an extension of earthly existence, but "the dead, who inhabited that realm, moreover, were increasingly perceived in the folk culture, if not theology, as never far away. They waited and watched the lives of the living with concern, both groups secure in their expectation of future reunion on life terms. . . ." (Jackson 232). Some Americans were even discontent at passive observation by the dead. Wishing interaction with them, they involved themselves in movements which may be viewed clearly as efforts to draw the afterlife more closely into the living world. One was the vague spiritualism where actual communication was attempted between the dead world and

the living. This movement reached peaks in the 1850s and again in the 1870s. In the unprecedented measure of interaction between the two worlds offered by this movement, there was final proof that `passing on' was almost merely that, a matter of status change" (Jackson 231-232). Thus, in the nineteenth century, the "dying of death" and elimination of the fear of it was achieved and spurred on by consolation literature.

It is this study's contention that Emily Dickinson was a product of the interacting forces of her age's changing cosmology and evolving views of death and Heaven and her own experiences. She viewed death like many of her contemporaries; she perceived it as a status change, a barrier that separated the deceased from loved ones. Despite their physical separation, however, the poet believed that the dead were never very far away spiritually and emotionally from the living. Furthermore, she considered Heaven a place of blissful reunion, where loved ones carried on very much as they had in life. Not surprisingly, the poet's conceptions of death and Heaven filter into her writings, her correspondence--especially the Master Letters that will be examined extensively in Chapter II--and her poetry. Moreover, these views are central to a study of a possible Dickinson abortion experience as it examines whether or not the poet attempts to deny the death of her lost child now in Heaven or to reaffirm mother and child's spiritual and emotional bond despite their physical separation in a personal literature of consolation.

CHAPTER II

THE MASTER LETTERS: INTIMATIONS OF INTIMACY, PREGNANCY, AND DEATH

Writing consolation poetry was not an unfamiliar practice to Dickinson prior to 1861-1862, the time period of this study's examination. Beneath the surface of a large proportion of Emily Dickinson poems runs a grieving tone concerning the loss of, separation from, or betrayal by those she had admitted to her select society. In these poems the poet appears to be seeking solace as she mourns her losses. Paradoxically the woman who hid herself from the world for more than half her lifetime found her friendships with others to be vital to her existence. She considered "each a World" (Letters 3: 816). And for a time in each, she luxuriated in its warmth and security. However, almost inevitably and invariably the relationships that she fostered collapsed, as documented in the surviving correspondence from those friendships. And often Dickinson turned to her poetry to mourn the deaths of these "Worlds," thus accounting for the grieving undercurrent in many of her poems.

Within the course of her friendships, Dickinson established a consistent pattern of behavior. When carefully plotted, this characteristic pattern yields insight not only into the poet herself, but also into her relationships with others, especially that with Master and his possible connection with the grieving undertone of Dickinson's poetry of the 1860s. This chapter will trace and

establish Dickinson's characteristic pattern of behavior within relationships. It will then apply this pattern to her friendship with Master as documented in biographical fact and the Master Letters--the most tangible evidence of Dickinson's friendship with Master--in order to determine whether or not Master was in any way connected with the poetry's grieving tenor.

As biographers indicate, the poet may have enjoyed at an early age having friends and at times playing mischievous pranks on them; however, her friends were certainly not what we would call "her estate." Continuous relationships were problematic for her. Almost as a rule the friendships that she established failed. Richard Sewall perceptively summarizes Emily's curious and unsuccessful liasons:

> Her failures, certainly, were with people. Throughout her life, she never achieved a single, wholly satisfying relationship with anybody she had to be near, or with, for any length of time. Vinnie was the closest, perhaps; but even she spoke of her family as living together like "friendly and absolute monarchs" (Higginson, we recall, likened them to federated states in a commonwealth, where "each member runs his or her own selves"); and to Emily it seemed often as if she and Vinnie had "come up for the first time from two wells where we had hitherto been bred. . . ." As for Emily's correspondents, affectionate as she might have been in her letters, they were always at a safe distance. . . . (2: 517)

It is no secret that Dickinson carried on an avid correspondence with many people throughout her life. In fact, it is estimated that we possess only about a tenth of all the letters Emily wrote and "probably less than a thousandth of those written to her" (Sewall 2: 401), though it takes three bound volumes of 300 pages each to encase the extant correspondence. The physical distance from the recipient that a letter afforded the poet allowed her the control and security she came to demand in her relationships.

Dickinson established a traceable pattern of behavior in her girlhood friendships that she continued into the relationships of her adult life. When she discovered a person who potentially shared her feelings about a certain subject, she responded with surprise, enthusiasm, and selfishness. She wanted to keep her friends all to herself and did not mention one friend's existence to another. As Richard Sewall explains,

> Each [friendship] had its peculiar qualities and ambience, its flavor and meaning. She seems almost to have walled them off in her consciousness and from her friends. In what survives of . . . [some of her more] important correspondences, the letters to Higginson say nothing about Bowles; the letters to Bowles say nothing about Higginson; the letters to Helen Hunt Jackson say nothing about either of them, although Emily knew very well that they were all three active in the contemporary literary world and that at least two of them (Higginson and Mrs. Jackson) were mutually aware of her own literary activity. . . . (2: 617)

In Dickinson's pattern, after initial discovery, the friendship would blossom and grow, fueled by a great profusion of letters sharing confidences, feelings, and ideas. In these letters, she engaged her fertile imagination, savoring the kinship that she perceived between her and the kindred spirit she believed she had found. The friend, at some point following the relationship's blossoming, realized that he or she could not reciprocate with the same ardor, frequency, or depth of feeling as Emily, to meet the poet's intense emotional, spiritual, or intellectual needs. The friend then usually withdrew, withholding contact from her. Dickinson, then perceiving the slackening on the friend's part, sought in letters to renew the friendship through chiding and wheedling. When these attempts failed to secure the desired results, she decided that the slowing of the friendship had occurred because of the friend's disloyalty and betrayal, and she

cooled in her once-passionate feelings for the friend. In most cases, correspondence stopped. And she opened once again the lid to what she called her "box of Phantoms" (Letters 2: 177) and put away another friend. Perhaps Austin Warren (1957) characterizes best Dickinson's predictable reactions to relationships' endings:

> "Goings away," departures, whether to geographic distances or by felt disloyalties, spacial and psychic separations, . . . can be felt, and were, by Emily, as deaths. . . . (582)

And she turned to her art to seek consolation over and mourn these dead friendships, thus fostering a grieving undercurrent in many of her poems.

This pattern can be traced through the correspondence documenting her relationships with such girlhood friends as Abby Root, Abiah Wood, or John Graves--all failed Dickinson friendships. It is not that friendship was unimportant to the poet. On the contrary, it was lifeblood to her. Poem J303 can be read as an encapsulation of her descriminatingly high regard of friendship:

> The Soul selects her own Society--
> Then--shuts the Door--
> + To her divine Majority-- (+ On)
> + Present no more-- (+ ofirnde)???
>
> Unmoved--she notes the Chariots--pausing--
> At her low Gate--
> Unmoved--an Emperor be kneeling
> + Upon her Mat-- (+ On) (+ Rush Mat)
>
> I've known her--from an ample nation--
> Choose One--
> Then--close the + Valves of her attention-- (+ lids)
> Like Stone--
>
> (J303, 1862, F20)[1]

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[1]Over the course of the years, Dickinson used varous methods to include her revisions. This method is one in which she placed a

Here, she strongly intimates that friendship is an unwavering sacred trust for which she is willing to foresake all else and all others. Emily was a needy person, as well as a demanding person, particularly on those special to her. Higginson remarked on the draining effect she had on his sensibilities during his several interviews with her: "I never was with any one who drained my nerve power so much" (Sewall 1: xxiii; 2: 563).

Was Emily's demanding nature a result of the sparse emotional, intellectual, and spiritual sustenance she received from her family? Her relationship with her mother, at best, was strained and distant. Although her father challenged her intellectually and recognized her intellect, their relationship was still awkward and undemonstrative. Vinnie and Emily were fairly close, but no real spiritual or intellectual union existed between them, demonstrated in Vinnie's recognition that she was incapable of editing Emily's poems herself. With Austin, Emily joked and sparred intellectually, but even he could not completely understand or keep pace with her intense, enigmatic intellectualism.

Her demanding nature could possibly be a result of having an overbearing parent as a role model. Even in his daguerreotype Squire Dickinson appears stern, unyielding, authoritative, and managerial,

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plus sign to the left of the word or word group she wished to consider changing (those she accepted as revisions are normally underlined in the original manuscripts); then, usually at the bottom of the manuscript she placed another plus sign, followed by the word(s) she wished to substitute in the original. When citing a manuscript of this kind, this study will follow Dickinson's method, except that the amendments will be placed to the left of the line in which they are to be inserted, preceded by a plus sign.

scowling at the camera from beneath the bushy eyebrows of a seeming autocrat.

Her demanding nature might also have been the result of the sense of the proud "difference" the Dickinsons cultivated in their children (Bingham, Home 407-414). Proud, answerable to none, inviolate, yet dependent upon and aggressively loyal to each other, the Dickinsons fostered in their children the idea that they were a breed apart. This sense of difference caused Emily to inquire of Austin and often of herself, "What makes a few of us so different from others?" (Letters 1: 118).

Most likely Emily's nature was a result of an interaction of all these factors; however, possibly most influential was her own emotional/spiritual/intellectual make-up that set her apart from others. She, as all the Dickinsons, was forced into independence by a stalwart, undemonstrative role model. In such an environment her natural abilities flourished and she creatively directed her energies to her art, but continued to seek out emotional, spiritual, and intellectual fulfillment in her friendships. We normally think of Emily Dickinson as the diminutive, sensitive, gentle soul projected in many of her poems. However, at times, she could be more staunch and rigorous than the Dickinson patriarch. Beneath the surface of many effusive, loving, and love-seeking expressions in her letters, the reader can sense a woman of fierce pride and independence, a woman with an iron will in control of the relationship, its intensity, and its direction. Hers was also a spirit larger than others, evidenced in her poetic genius. She felt deeply, perceived much, and was able

to think keenly both intellectually and emotionally. Moreover, she expected all those close to her to do the same. When they could not, which was often, she felt deeply disappointed and more aware than ever of her aloneness and alienation. When those close to her failed her, she "close[d] the Valves of her attentions" (Sewall 1: 303) more tightly than stone against them and turned to her poetry, grieving over her losses in verse.

Around 1861-1862 many of the poems exhibit a persistent grieving tone and choose as their subjects apparent personal rejection, separation, and loss, suggesting that Dickinson suffered a significant bereavement that she seeks consolation for. Many of these same poems include various veiled references to a mysterious birth, death, burial, and unmarked grave.[2] However, look at the chronology of important documented events in Dickinson's life around these years

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[2]For this study's purposes, information concerning the dating, arrangement, and content of Dickinson's poems predominantly will follow R. W. Franklin's The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson (1981). In these volumes, based on his extensive work with Dickinson's original manuscripts and careful reexamination of the poet's handwriting (the techniques by which Thomas H. Johnson originally dated the poems in 1955 in The Poems of Emily Dickinson), varying stationeries, inks, the perforations holes of the disassembled original fascicles, along with the patterns of age and wear stains on the manuscripts Franklin has provided a newly dated facsimile edition of Dickinson's fascicles, reconstructed and arranged in the poet's original order. Many of Franklin's dates correspond with those of Johnson; however, in certain instances Johnson dated poems which Dickinson made subsequent revisions on according to the handwriting of the revisions rather than that of the actual date of composition. Franklin has remedied this inaccuracy.

For unfascicled poems, which Franklin does not include in his facsimile edition, this study will follow the yet unchallenged dating and content information of Thomas H. Johnson's 1955 edition of the complete poems.

reveals that no births or deaths of monumental import to Dickinson are

recorded. It is true that the poet's favorite aunt Lavinia Norcross died in April of 1860; however, though she was a woman of some closeness with the poet, the letter that Emily wrote upon learning of her death to Vinnie, who had travelled to Boston to be with her ailing relative, can be characterized as reconciled, not mysterious or excessively grieving. Rather it is full of consolation for her surviving cousins and her uncle. Thoughts that end the letter,

> Well, she is safer now than "we know or even think." Tired little aunt sleeping ne'er so peaceful! Tuneful little aunt, singing, as we trust, hymns than which the robins have no sweeter ones[,] (Letters 2: 362)

are rather upbeat and positive, though an undertone of loss predominates these sentences and the whole letter. Very likely then, Emily's aunt's death, one full year before, did not occasion the large number of grieving poems focusing on rejection, separation, death, and loss during this period.

Scrutiny of the Dickinson chronology also reveals that the Reverend Charles Wadsworth, the man with whom Dickinson's name has been coupled by many as the object of her love, figures centrally during the 1861-1862 time span. The story of Dickinson and Wadsworth, based upon fact, conjecture, and surmise and believed by many, is well known. According to the documentable facts upon which the story is predicated, Emily and Vinnie went on an 1855 trip to Washington with Austin and Mrs. Dickinson to visit Edward Dickinson, a member of the 33rd Congress, and made a side trip to Philadelphia to visit Eliza Coleman, a special girlhood friend who had previously resided in Amherst. During this two-week visit with the Colemans, who were Presbyterians, Emily supposedly heard the dynamic and popular Charles

Wadsworth preach in the Arch Street Presbyterian Church and was much impressed. According to the poet's niece, Martha Dickinson Bianchi, who originally attributed the cause of Emily Dickinson's seclusion to an unrequited love affair begun in Philadelphia where she "met the fate she had instinctively shunned" (46), Emily developed more than a Platonic interest in the clergyman, which she reflected in the letters and poems she sent to him. Whether or not aware of Dickinson's interest in him, Wadsworth--husband, father, and prominent minister in the community--apparently did not reciprocate her feelings and distanced himself from the lovelorn Emily by taking a ministry in a parish across the country. Devastated by his removal, the poet supposedly took to wearing white exclusively and withdrew from society, becoming the "madwoman in the attic" that the world has come to believe was Emily Dickinson.

The actual facts about the Dickinson-Wadsworth relationship can be ascertained from the chronology with certainty. It is true that Emily visited Washington in 1855; however, whether she established contact with Wadsworth while in Philadelphia or whether she initiated a correspondence with him sight unseen (as she did with Thomas Wentworth Higginson) in 1858 after she had received a printed copy of one Wadsworth sermon from her friend Eliza Coleman (Sewall 2: 453) is impossible to determine. What is certain is that contact was made. And whether she heard Wadsworth or learned of his preaching abilities through print, Dickinson was drawn to Wadsworth. If the Reverend George Burrow's impressions of Wadsworth's sermonizing in San Francisco reflect Wadsworth's abilities to stir a congregation, it is

no wonder that Emily was attracted to this suffering, articulate, brilliant, charismatic soul:

> You feel that behind all he says there must be lying years of conflict and agony, of trials and sorrows, of deep gloom and despondency, of strong cries and tears, of heavenly fellowship and confidential friendship with God . . . all this blended with deep study and meditation on the Scriptures, and assimilated by the fires of the Holy Spirit . . . finds utterance through the molding control of a brilliant, original, powerful mind, of a soul whose lips have been touched with a coal from Israel's hallowed fire. . . . He preaches consolation like a man who knows how to succor others because he has himself been compassed with suffering. . . . All is sobered by deep penetration and sound common sense. . . . A humility so unfeigned, allied with so much greatness, and mellowed, no less than deepened, by divine grace, throws a great charm around the character. (Bingham, Home 368)

For the sensitive poet who had always experienced difficulty in embracing the tenets of formalized religion and who had recently dropped several friends into her box of phantoms, Wadsworth most certainly would have appealed to her. And despite the missing Dickinson-Wadsworth correspondence, a volley of letters between them is known to have occurred, documented in Emily's own letters following the reverend's death to James and Charles Clark, Wadsworth's friends. She speaks to them of "an intimacy of many years with the beloved Clergyman" (Letters 3: 737). Furthermore, it is known that her friends the Hollands had been addressing and sending missives from Emily to Wadsworth at least from the summer of 1876--if not before--until his death (Sewall 2: 452-453).

Other indisputable facts concerning the Dickinson-Wadsworth relationship exist. On 10 August 1859, possibly at the Dickinson Commencement Tea for the college, Emily met James Clark, Wadsworth's friend. It is likely at this meeting Dickinson and Clark discussed

their mutual friend, making him much more a real man than the disembodied voice in his letters, causing Dickinson to feel even closer to the minister. A short seven months later, following the death of his mother, Wadsworth, obviously comfortable enough in their relationship for an unannounced call, unexpectedly visited Emily in Amherst. In May of 1862 Wadsworth and family set sail for San Francisco, where he had accepted a call from the Calvary Prestyterian Society. In 1869 Wadsworth returned to Philadelphia. Eleven years later in 1880, again with no forewarning, Wadsworth called on Emily in Amherst to tell her, "I am liable at any time to die." In 1882 Emily's "closest earthly friend died in April" (Sewall 1: xix-xxv). What's more, gleaned from her surviving correspondence with the Clark brothers, it is certain that Emily was somewhat acquainted with the darker side of the clergyman's sufferings. In one of her letters to the Clarks, she reveals,

> The Griefs of which you speak were unknown to me, though I knew him a "Man of sorrow," and once when he seemed almost overpowered by a spasm of gloom, I said "You are troubled." Shivering as he spoke, "My life is full of dark secrets," he said. . . . (Letters 3: 744-745)

An obvious friendship had existed between them. However, it seems as if Wadsworth remained something of an enigma to her; Dickinson knew little about him personally. In writing to the Clarks, she had to inquire whether or not he even had a brother or sister (Letters 3: 742). Curiously, in view of her complete withdrawal by 1882, Emily asked both Clark brothers to visit her in Amherst (Sewall 2: 452). Considering that the Clarks were originally "natives of Northhampton but later moved to Brooklyn" (Sewall 2: 448n), this visit was no

small undertaking, Brooklyn being over one hundred miles from Amherst. Clearly, Wadsworth's and Dickinson's relationship was no ordinary one; and Wadsworth's presence in her life was important--so important that she would invite his two friends to visit her in her seclusion, undoubtedly to share with her confidences and intimacies about their beloved dead friend.

Many biographers and critics have attributed the cause of the shattering event in Dickinson's life between 1861-1862 to Charles Wadsworth himself and his breach of their relationship. If we can suspend judgment and preconceptions to consider the possibility of Wadsworth as the focus of the poet's love, some interesting questions are raised. One in particular becomes intriguing: Was Wadsworth in any way responsible for the grieving tone concerning the loss of, separation from, or betrayal by a loved one that begins to surface prominently in the poetry around 1861-1862?

Despite the absence of the Dickinson-Wadsworth correspondence, based on the sketchy facts, we can assume that this friendship began and progressed in the same pattern Emily had already established, beginning with her happy recognition of a kindred spirit and followed up by a blossoming of the friendship through a deluge of letters celebrating and savoring the kinship between her and Wadsworth. If the pattern holds true, Emily would then have let her imagination soar, filling in gaps and smoothing over the problems and frustrations she detected in the friendship. It is possible that she imaginatively created at this point a love greater than friendship between herself and Wadsworth, and communicated her feelings to him through her

letters and poems if she followed her usual pattern of behavior. And Wadsworth, responding in the characteristic fashion of Dickinson's friends, might have realized that he could not respond to her in kind, not only because of her needy, demanding nature, but, even had he wanted to, also because of his precarious position. His existing commitments to wife, children, and church congregation would have made such a response difficult, if not dishonorable. Thus, he might have tried to distance himself from her. Was it his attempt to evade Dickinson that caused him to inform her (Emily's "terror since September"?) that he was departing for San Francisco? Or was there more than the failure of another Dickinson friendship that occasioned this reference? If Wadsworth caused, intentionally or unintentionally, a breach in his and Dickinson's relationship by leaving for the west coast, Dickinson probably would have reacted in much the same way she had when any other friendship of hers was threatened. She would have felt betrayed, her ardor would have cooled, and most likely correspondence would have ceased. But we know that the correspondence continued. However, in the absence of documented fact or the correspondence between this man and woman, these questions are difficult to answer. If we tentatively accept Wadsworth, however, as the object of Dickinson's love who brought about the turmoil in her life between 1861-1862 and who was the intended recipient of three drafts of letters addressed to "Master" discovered by Lavinia after Emily's death, the possibilities become enticing.

The so-called "Master Letters" are three Dickinson letters in

draft form. They take their name from the unidentified addressee referred to in the letters as simply "Master." Throughout her life Dickinson singled out men to whom she claimed to turn for guidance and support, and variously called them "Preceptor" or "Master." The Master of these epistles is no less important for his role as Dickinson's instructor or mentor, but what is significant concerning this Master is that he is the obvious secret sharer with Dickinson of a special relationship--a love relationship--as an examination of these letters' contents will demonstrate.

According to R. W. Franklin in The Master Letters of Emily Dickinson, these three letters

> indicate a long relationship, geographically apart, in which correspondence would have been the primary means of communication. Dickinson did not write letters of a fictional genre, and these were surely part of a much larger correspondence yet unknown to us. . . . (Master Letters 5)

In light of the facts of the Dickinson-Wadsworth relationship, such as the lengthy friendship of at least more than twenty years, the exchange of letters between the poet in Amherst and the clergyman in his various distant locations during this time, and the documented but missing correspondence between them, the existence and the content of these three letters become important. The Master Letters are the only known extant correspondence between Dickinson and the love of her life, and thus the only likely extant correspondence between Wadsworth and the poet--with the exception of one rather impersonal, unsigned letter thought to be from the minister to Emily (bearing the embossed initials "CW" in the upper left corner of the stationery) that Millicent Todd Bingham quotes in Emily Dickinson's Home (370-371).

Thus, these Master Letters merit scrutiny. And their contents yield much information about the nature of this special Dickinson relationship.

No way exists of knowing with any certainty whether or not Dickinson ever sent these letters. It is probable that she did, and these are her working copies. It is unlikely that she would write at least two versions of one letter and not send it, write two versions of the second letter and not send it, and finally draft a third letter. This futility was uncharacteristic of Dickinson. And were she to send such important emotion-packed missives, she would surely keep copies to remind herself of what she had written--especially given her vast correspondence and the possible long duration between letters. Of course, because of Vinnie's conflagration upon Emily's death, we cannot know whether or not the keeping of copies of letters was typical of the poet.

Two of the Master Letters are written in ink, apparently ready to be sent; however, as R. W. Franklin points out, in recopying these versions from previous working drafts, Dickinson made one copying error, another, and then abandoned these copies as final drafts, making even further changes and amendments in pencil. The other letter is written and revised completely in pencil. If she never mailed these letters, she also never made fair copies for herself. On the other hand, if she did make and send fair copies to "Master," she kept these foul copies for herself, in which case she thought them important. Furthermore, they, by their existence, are distinguished from her other correspondence and personal papers that Lavinia found

and indiscriminantly destroyed following Emily's death. Had these letters been among the papers Lavinia discovered, they surely would have gone to the flames. R. W. Franklin discusses the confusion surrounding these letters' existence:

> One hundred years ago, in the week following Dickinson's death on May 15, 1886, Lavinia Dickinson found what she described as a locked box containing seven hundred of her sister's poems. The Master letters may have been among them, for they were clearly not with the correspondence, which Lavinia destroyed upon discovery. It is uncertain, however, how many groups of manuscripts were found. Years later, in the midst of controversy, Lavinia maintained that there had been just one group, described now as having been in two drawers but found at one time, presumably containing not seven hundred but nearly eighteen hundred poems. Mabel Loomis Todd . . . whose notions about [the poems and the Master Letters'] discovery came from [Lavinia], thought that several groups had been found. If so, the Master Letters, and drafts of a few other letters that have similarly survived, may have been in one of the succeeding discoveries, if not the first one. Lavinia, on the other hand, had parcelled out the manuscripts to both her brother's wife and his mistress and may have found it necessary to slant the truth as she told it. (Master Letter 5-6)

The complete content of these letters was at one time as obscure as their origin. Mabel Todd knew they existed and printed a brief six lines of one letter in her 1894 edition of Dickinson letters. But she omitted the salutation to "Master" and knowingly attributed the false date of 1885 to the excerpted letter. In 1931, when she revised her 1894 collection of Dickinson letters, Todd altered nothing about the six lines of the one Master Letter she had released in the first edition. She admitted, however, that the passage was written in Emily's handwriting of the 1860s. In 1955 Millicent Todd Bingham, in possession of Emily's manuscripts, published in Emily Dickinson's Home the texts of all three letters with regularized punctuation, capitalization, and paragraphing, and

content, thus obscuring Dickinson's method of composition and revision (Franklin, Master Letters 6-7).

Thomas Johnson's 1958 edition of the Dickinson letters presented Master Letters that "were more literal and accurate than [Bingham's and] had been checked against the manuscripts"; however, adhering to the same use of symbols to indicate Emily's cancellations and changes, the composition/revision process was equally obscure.

Two years later Jay Leyda attempted a new version. Though it is close to Dickinson's and had been checked against the original manuscripts, Leyda "redacted a single version" that was quite different from Bingham's and Johnson's previous ones. He made editorial choices, even accepting some words and passages Emily had rejected in place of those she had consciously left to produce smooth, cohesive texts in the three letters (Franklin, Master Letters 6-7).

The dating and ordering of the Master Letters have also fluctuated. In a little over thirty-three years since the first complete publication of the letters in Bingham's Emily Dickinson's Home, the dating of each has undergone four major changes, and the ordering of the three letters has shifted three times. The method and manner of the dating and the ordering have varied according to each critic's or biographer's approach to and interpretation of the letters. The three involved in the pioneering work of the dating and ordering these letters are those responsible for their publication and variant readings between 1955 and 1960, Millicent Todd Bingham, Thomas Johnson, and Jay Leyda respectively. Perhaps the simplest method of explaining these shifts in dating and ordering is graphically.

Arbitrarily assigning each manuscript a letter (A, B, or C) allows the respective ordering and dating to be shown below at a glance:

Critic/ Biographer	Letter A "I am ill"	Date	Letter B "Oh--did I offend it"	Date	Letter C "If you saw a bullet"	Date
Bingham (1955)	3	none	2	none	1	~1861
Johnson (1958)	1	~1858	3	early 1862?	2	~1861
Leyda (1960)	1	early spr. 1858	3	Feb.? 1861	2	Jan.? 1861

Much obvious uncertainty surrounds the time and sequence of these letters. Even though Johnson and Leyda agree on the order of the three letters, differing with Bingham's sequencing, they all disagree about potential dates. Despite the disagreement, until twenty-six years after Leyda's 1960 published version and sequence, no significant objection was leveled against the ordering and dating of these letters. In fact, Richard B. Sewall in the 1974 Dickinson biography adopts Johnson's and Leyda's orders. However, in 1986, R. W. Franklin challenged the existing order and dating on the basis of his extensive work on the Dickinson manuscripts. Based on close scrutiny of the poet's handwriting, Franklin arranges and dates the Master Letters in the following order:

Letter A ("I am Ill") -- spring 1858
Letter B ("Oh--did I offend it") -- early 1861
Letter C ("If you saw a bullet") -- summer 1861

Maintaining the same order for Letter A as Leyda and Johnson, Franklin

reverses the placement of Letters B and C. Moreover, his dates are offered with more assurance. Given Franklin's order and new, more documented dating, tracing the emotional content and progression in the Master Letters becomes possible and tells much about Dickinson's and Master's relationship.

The first letter, the shortest and lightest in tone--although treating a serious subject--is a response to a letter Dickinson had received from Master, after an obviously long delay on his part. She is surprised and delighted to hear from one she had most likely dropped into her "box of Phantoms" long before. (In providing the texts of these letters, two symbols will be used to indicate cancellations and insertions made by Dickinson on the original manuscripts. Following Franklin's method, the symbols < > will enclose cancellations and the symbols ↑ ↓ will encase inserted readings, written in by Dickinson either above or below the line in which they appear. In several instances, Dickinson has made some corrections that totally obscure reading. In these cases, the empty symbols < > will appear. Finally, Dickinson did not follow the common practice of indentions for paragraphs; therefore, placement of paragraphs will also follow Franklin.)

Dear Master

I am ill--but grieving more that you are ill, I make my stronger hand work long eno' to tell you--I thought perhaps you were in Heaven, and when you spoke again, it seemed quite sweet, and wonderful, and surprised me so--I wish that you were well.

I would that all I love, should be weak no more. The Violets are by my side--the Robin very near--and "Spring"--they say, Who is she--going by the door—

Indeed it is God's house--and these are gates of Heaven, and to and fro, the angels go, with their sweet postillions--I wish that I were great, like Mr--Michael Angelo, and could paint for you.

You ask me what my flowers said--then they were disobedient--I

gave them messages--They said what the lips in the West, say, when the sun goes down, and so says the Dawn--

Listen again, Master--

I did not tell you that today had been the Sabbath Day.

Each Sabbath on the sea, makes me count the Sabbaths, till we meet on the shore--↑will the↓ and whether the hills will look as blue as the sailors say--

I cannot <talk> ↑stay↓ any <more> ↑longer↓ tonight ↑<now>↓, for this pain denies me--

How strong when weak to recollect, and easy quite, to love. Will you tell me, please to tell me, soon as you are well--
(Franklin, Master Letters 12-19)

Emotionally, the letter is a curious mixture of solicitude, love, metaphoric chiding, fantasy, and posing on Dickinson's part. Responding to his overture of a letter in the first paragraph, she writes solicitously of his health--possibly one of the reasons for his delay in answering her letter. Moreover, she downplays her own malady, which she prominently mentions (in a possible attempt at sympathy?) and valiantly ignores her own pain in order to respond to Master's letter. Perhaps this ploy is an encouragement and an instruction for him to do likewise.

Paragraph two reiterates the wish Dickinson utters at the end of the previous paragraph ("I wish that you were well") when she says, "I would that all I love, should be weak no more." More than a get-well wish here, this phrase couches within it a profession of the writer's love. Then, quickly, almost as if embarrassed by this open expression, the next sentence seemingly changes the subject to the season--Spring. But perhaps Dickinson is not really shifting her subject here, but rather is developing the idea of her love more fully by embedding her feelings about the spring in her love for Master,

metaphorically creating with words and images her contiguous feelings about both.

It is interesting, given the nineteenth-century concept about the delights and expectations of domesticated Heaven, that in her poetic flight in the next paragraph she conjures images of the immediate season as Heaven--"God's house." And she over-modestly wishes that she could evoke the heavenly springtime scene for Master, like Michaelangelo in paint, when she has already imaginatively painted it with fantastic heavenly images in this paragraph. Heaven and its wonders certainly take a focal position in this letter, for this is not its first mention. In paragraph one above, she first refers to Heaven when she tells Master that because she had not heard from him, "I thought perhaps you were in Heaven." In her view, then, Heaven is a very real place and has an intimate connection with Master in her mind.

The next paragraph is an interesting one. In answer to an obvious question in Master's letter about what the "flowers" (her poems) included with her letter had been intended to communicate, Dickinson--affronted, annoyed, hurt, and disbelieving--tells him that they carried messages exclusively for him. Then, in an effort to soften her mixed and negative response, she playfully personifies her flowers as naughty children, relieving him of the responsibility for his lack of comprehension; she blames the naughty flowers for not delivering their intended messages. To further smooth over the slight that Master might take from her chiding implications here, she

launches into a puzzling metaphor, claiming that they "said what the lips in the West, say, when the sun goes down, and so says the Dawn."

The one-sentence paragraph that follows continues the same idea. When Dickinson writes, "Listen again, Master--," the reader senses a controlled gentleness mixed with an underlying tone of annoyance because of the phrase's curt and imperative nature. Moreover, her unwillingness to spell out simply what the "flowers" were meant to say expresses a sense of superiority and mild impatience that reminds one of a teacher's unwillingness with the recalcitrant and unhearing student to decipher something for him or herself. Had Master truly not understood what Emily had written? Had he coyly said that he did not in hopes that she would confirm what he suspected she might have said? Upon consideration, both situations are highly plausible. It is possible that Master really did not understand what she was trying to say; Emily's habit of never coming at the truth directly with her allusive, metaphoric, and often unconventional use of language, has baffled her readers and critics for years. Why not Master? It is also possible that in the poems that she had sent Master she had imaginatively created more than a friendship between them--as she was wont to do in her many relationships--and had made veiled but potentially startling allusions to a relationship they shared only in Emily's mind. Which scenario is correct? Again, this is one of those grey areas of Dickinson scholarship that cannot be established with any certainty. However, it becomes clear from the letter's emotional tone and Emily's usual pattern of behavior that the poet suspects Master has consciously chosen not to understand her.

From the emotional tone here, it would seem that the relationship is past the blossoming stage; after Emily has detected a kindred spirit in Master, she has creatively attributed to him special qualities that she has a need of sensing. She has begun to detect a slackening of interest and ardor and an inability to match her intense spiritual, emotional, and intellectual needs on Master's part, indicated by his lengthy delay in answering her letter and his inability (unwillingness?) to understand the messages she meant for him alone. Typical of the poet, she seeks to rekindle the relationship through gentle chiding. Thus, gently, firmly (in imperative voice), she says, "Listen again, Master."

The sentence "I did not tell you that today had been the Sabbath Day" comprises the entirety of the next paragraph. The reader must pause to ask after this factual declaration, "Why is this so important that she would include it?" It is an abrupt shift from the previous chiding and annoyed passage, which is obviously Dickinson's intent. She seeks to soften the impact of her obvious agitation above and thus changes the subject to a less, accusatory volatile one. Perhaps this one phrase also provides one of the strongest clues to the identity of Master. Who would care that the letter had been written on a Sunday? To whom would the Sabbath Day hold significance? The answer, of course, would be a minister. Of the four prominent men whose names have been yoked with Dickinson's as the object of her love, only Charles Wadsworth was an ordained clergyman. Writing to Wadsworth on a Sunday, a day special to all ministers, in Dickinson's mind very likely made her feel an adolescent-like intimacy with him.

Moreover, writing a letter on a Sunday is not something that Dickinson would advertise to just anyone, for according to Millicent Todd Bingham all secular activities were curtailed on Sundays in nineteenth-century Amherst:

> On the Sabbath Day all secular activities were laid aside. Whatever you did contrary to custom was done behind closed doors. If for instance you wrote a letter on Sunday it was dated as of Saturday or Monday. . . . (Home 124)

Consequently, telling Wadsworth that she is writing to him on the Sabbath not only makes her feel close to him, but also communicates how special he is to her, an important message after the irritation of the message above.

Stimulated by her reference to Wadsworth's special day in the previous paragraph, in the next, still threading the idea of the Sabbath through her thoughts, Dickinson resorts to metaphoric fantasy again. In essence, she dreams of their being together. She counts each passing Sabbath Day "on the sea" (of life?) as one less they will have to endure apart before they can be together "on the shore" (of Heaven?). Her image of the restless sea juxtaposed against the restful safety of the shore, a common nineteenth-century coupling of images, suggest in their opposition an allusion to life and afterlife. In the nineteenth century, loved ones reuniting in the afterlife was a common theme in such popular and important works as Wuthering Heights, which Dickinson is known to have read; The Scarlet Letter, which she might have read; and the whole genre of consolation literature that Dickinson was exposed to (Capps) in various forms. Making such a reference to their meeting in homey Heaven would not be culturally unusual and would link this paragraph of the letter thematically with

her other two mentions of Heaven in connection with Wadsworth. These many references would suggest the track of her thinking about this man.

Next she wonders "whether the hills will look as blue as the sailors say." Following her metaphoric line of thought, here she muses about the shore (Heaven) and wonders whether the reality will equal what is said about it. If pursued to its logical conclusion, the sailors that she refers to in this metaphor are those adept at navigating the sea, or life, and might be compared to ministers, to whom people look for help and direction in life. Ministers are also those who tell us what Heaven will be like. Thinking in these terms, Dickinson seems to be wondering whether Heaven really will be as nineteenth-century ministers have described it with its earthly houses, flowers, and mountains, and whether she can look forward to being together there with Wadsworth, also a minister.

Dickinson brings the letter close to termination with a sentence that could have been lifted directly out of a nineteenth-century novel: "I cannot <talk> ↑stay↓ any <more> ↑longer↓ tonight ↑<now>↓, for this pain denies me--." Attesting to the fact that she is as capable of posing as any nineteenth-century Romantic heroine in order to draw attention to herself, this phrase takes on added weight when one considers that this is at least the second copy of the letter--and that she probably went on to write a third copy to send. The sincerity and immediacy of the statement are called into question by this knowledge.

The letter ends with a reaffirmation of her love and, by her

example, an instruction to him in how to love in return: "How strong when weak to recollect, and easy quite, to love." Finally, she concludes with the solicitous tone that opens the letter about his health. The genuineness of her polite imploring question, "Will you tell me, please to tell me, soon as you are well" is touching, indicates the depth of her concern about this man, and nicely rounds the letter off with a loving tone to offset the negative messages and emotions couched in the middle. No signature or date are included in this letter of mixed but serious emotions, demonstrating further that this was one of the letter's working drafts.

The second Master Letter, a preliminary draft entirely in pencil, is markedly different from the first in tone and content:

Oh--did I offend it-- <Did'nt it want me to tell it the truth> ↑,↓ Daisy--Daisy--offend it--who bends her smaller life to his ↑it's↓ ↑,↓ meeker ↑lower↓ every day--who only asks--a task--<who> something to do for love of it--some little way she cannot guess to make that master glad--

A love so big it scares her, rushing among her small heart--pushing aside the blood--and leaving her ↑all↓ faint and white in the gust's arm--

Daisy--who never flinched thro' that awful parting--but held her life so tight he should not see the wound--who would have sheltered him in her childish bosom ↑Heart↓--only it was'nt big eno for a Guest so large--

This Daisy grieve her Lord--and yet it ↑she↓ often blundered--perhaps she grieved ↑grazed↓ his taste--perhaps her odd--Backwoodsman <life> ↑ways↓ <troubled> ↑teased↓ his finer sense ↑nature↓--Daisy <bea> knows all that--but must she go unpardoned--teach her grace--↑preceptor↓ teach her majesty--Slow ↑Dull↓ at patrician things--Even the wren opon [sic] her nest learns ↑knows↓ more than Daisy dares--

Low at the knee that bore her once unto <royal> ↑wordless↓ rest, <now--she> Daisy <stoops a> kneels, a culprit--tell her her <offence--> fault--Master--if it is <not so> small eno to cancel with her life, <Daisy> she is satisfied--but punish--do <not> nt banish her--Shut her in prison--Sir--only pledge that you will forgive--sometime--before the grave, and Daisy will not mind--she will awake in <his> your likeness--

Wonder stings me more than the Bee--who did never sting me--but made gay music < > with his might wherever I <may> <should> did go--Wonder wastes my pound, you said I had no size to spare--

<H> You send the water over the Dam in my brown eyes--
I've got a cough as big as a thimble--but I dont care for that--I've got a Tomahawk in my side but that dont hurt me <h > much, <If you> Her Master stabs her more--
Won't he come to her--or will he let her < > seek him, never minding <whateve> so long wandering ↑,if↓ <out> to him at last--
Oh how the sailor strains, when his boat is filling--Oh how the dying tug till the angel comes. Master--open your life wide, and take <in> me in forever, I will never be tired--I will never be noisy when you want to be still--I will be <glad as the> your best little girl--nobody else will see me, but you--but that is enough--I shall not want any more--and all that Heaven will <prove> ↑only↓ disappoint me--↑because↓ will be it's not so dear (Franklin, Master Letters 22-29)

In this letter, written approximately three years after the previous one, the superiority and the chiding have disappeared. Replacing these are feelings beginning with sarcasm and ranging through defensiveness, incredulity, wonder, desperation, hurt, and finally submission. Written in obvious reply to a letter from Master, occasioned by a previous letter from Dickinson that has greatly upset Master, the present epistle seeks to set things right again between them. The situation eliciting Dickinson's response can be somewhat inferred from the content and shifting tone of this second letter.

Paragraph one opens sarcastically as she asks Master with pretended incredulity if she (Daisy--a third person nickname that she often used for herself with Master) has offended "it." Here Dickinson employs the neuter pronoun in a curious manner. The reader wonders what the antecedent to this pronoun is, and continues to wonder until an addition by Dickinson to the third complete idea is recognized: "Daisy--Daisy--offend it--who bends her smaller life to his ↑it's↓ ↑,↓ meeker ↑lower↓ every day--." The shift from his to it's here suggests that Dickinson is substituting it for the third person singular. Going back and replacing the third person singular for all the its of

paragraph one yields a much clearer meaning:

Oh--did I offend [him]--<Did'nt [he] want me to tell [him] the truth> ↑,↓ Daisy--Daisy--offend [him]--who bends her smaller life to his . . . ↑,↓ meeker ↑lower↓ every day--who only asks--a task--<who> something to do for the love of [him]--some little way she cannot guess to make that master glad--

While this substitution clarifies the meaning here somewhat, the paragraph is still awkward in that Dickinson is writing to Master not in the conventional second person, but in third person; however, this is not unusual for her as she refers to herself here predominantly in the third person as well.

Dickinson reveals here that in her previous letter to him she has responded to an inquiry by Master in a truthful manner, which has obviously offended him. The poet, feeling a breach of her trust and love for him in his offense-taking, especially because she "bends her smaller life to his" and "only asks . . . something to do for the love of [him]," is incredulous that he can have interpreted her truth as anything other than loving. On the defensive, she proceeds in the second paragraph to recapitulate the enormity of her love, "A love so big it scares her," for this man who now doubts her and her loving intentions. Paragraph three continues to catalogue her loyalty and faithfulness as she, in an emotional rush, reminds him of her selfless constancy during his disturbing leavetaking of her. She "never flinched thro' that awful parting--but held her life so tight he should not see the wound--."

Still incredulous of and defensive about his doubt, she asks him in paragraph four if the loyal, selfless Daisy she has described above could "grieve her Lord." Though she admits that "|she| often

blundered" in her dealings with Master and that she might have offended with what she posingly refers to as "her odd--Backwoodsman <life> ↑ways↓," she remains puzzled about why he has taken offense. She desperately inquires, "must [I] go unpardoned"? The intimation here is clear; whatever Dickinson said to Master in her previous letter has caused him to take great offense, so great that he cannot forgive her. Upon this realization, Dickinson begins to relent in her defensiveness and sarcasm and implores Master to "teach her grace." She then flatteringly requests that he "teach her majesty," as if her is royalty. In an effort to assuage him further and to elevate him to a position of authority, reminding him of her innocence and inexperience, she refers to Master with one of her pet titles for men she looked to for guidance and direction: "preceptor." Yet uncomfortable with this begging tone, her sarcasm bites again in the next phrase when she facetiously admits that she, unlike him with his "finer sense," is "Slow ↑Dull↓ at patrician things." She relents again and attempts to soften the tone in metaphor. Still unwilling to acknowledge her fault in a metaphor suggestive of motherhood, "Even the wren opon [sic] her nest learns ↑knows↓ more than Daisy dares--."

Paragraph five begins Dickinson's verbal submission to Master. She admits herself "a culprit" who kneels "at the knee that bore her once unto <royal> ↑wordless↓ rest," again reminding Master of the special trusting association they have shared. Unwilling still to admit her fault, Dickinson once again asks Master to "tell her her <offence--> fault" and "if it is <not so> small eno to cancel with her life." If this can be done, she asks that he not banish her from him

for eternity, "but punish" her during her earthly life ("her life") by denying her his presence, and promise that he "will forgive--sometime--before the grave." With this punishment she will be satisfied because she looks forward to reunion with Master after death when "she will awake in <his> your likeness," an almost God-like likeness here.

Metaphor attempts to cushion her hurt in the next paragraph. She claims that "wonder" at his offense stings her "more than the Bee--who never did sting [her]." Not above using all the ammunition at her disposal to make things right again, Dickinson writes the next sentence to demonstrate the seriousness with which she takes Master's reaction and to cause concern in Master about herself. She claims that her constant worrying and wondering about Master's offense-taking are causing her to lose weight, which she recalls his having very personally observed and once said that she "had no size to spare." Paragraph seven, "You send the water over the Dam in my brown eyes--" is also designed to elicit concern about herself, as Dickinson, like many nineteenth-century Romantic novel heroines, knows the softening effect of a woman's tears on a determined man's heart.

Resorting again to metaphor in the next paragraph, Dickinson attempts to communicate the depth of her hurt in Master's stabbing distrust and disloyalty by minimizing the pain of her "cough as big as a thimble" and the "Tomahawk in [her] side." Then, she directly begs him to "come to her" or to at least "let her < > seek him."

With the concluding paragraph, Dickinson abandons her pride and quite literally implores Master to take her back under any terms

he will set, intimations of which she gives as she promises to behave if he will relent. Beginning with two metaphoric characterizations of her present condition, unforgiven by Master and obviously closed off from contact with him, Dickinson begins this paragraph by returning to the metaphor of the sailor on the sea that she employed in the first Master Letter. Here, instead of making allusions to the symbolic nature of the sailor on the sea, she appears to be referring quite literally to a navigator straining against inevitable death in a capsizing vessel. The second image is also of the dying, struggling to hold onto life; however, she asserts that the dying only struggle until the angel of Death comes, and then they are calm. She implies that this is her present situation with Master. She is battling death until Master, the angel, "open[s] [his] life wide, and take[s] <in> me in forever." To demonstrate her sincerity, she submits herself completely to what seems to have been, or what she perceives to have been, his terms: that she "never be tired," that she "never be noisy when [he] want[s] to be still," that she "be [his] best little girl," and that "nobody else will see [her], but [Master]." All this will be "enough" and she "shall not want any more." Moreover, she returns to her association of reuniting with Master in Heaven presented in the first Master Letter. And she concludes the letter with a desire for an immediate gratification of her needs. She claims that if Master accepts her back into his life, Heaven, with all its implied joys of reunion will only disappoint her because "it's not so dear" at this moment as a reaffirmation of Master's love and trust.

It is interesting to notice in this letter the sweeping range

of emotions. Also of note are Dickinson's unusual beseeching tone and apparent submission. This letter is unlike any other piece of extant correspondence from any other of her relationships. Quite obviously, Master was very important to Dickinson—important enough that she would apparently forego her great spirit and Dickinson pride to grovel and to submit to him. However, given all this, it is imperative to recognize that while she does all these things, she does so without relenting her initial position. She never acknowledges that she has commited an offense. Moreover, she never apologizes for having offended Master. Thus, all her apparent submission is just that--apparent. In actuality, she maintains her pride and the sense of superiority evident in the first Master Letter and in her other correspondence. In essence, she is more offended than Master that he could doubt her love and loyalty; however, in order to keep their relationship going she gives the appearance of submission and apology, but without the substance.

Dated according to Franklin (Master Letters) in early 1861, this craftily-written letter would have been composed only about eleven months or so after it is recorded that Charles Wadsworth called unexpectedly on Emily in Amherst in mid-March 1860 (Sewall 1: xxi). Was this the visit that occasioned the "awful parting" that Dickinson refers to having courageously and silently suffered through in this Master letter? This is entirely possible, especially since the only other of the four important men and possible candidates for Dickinson's love who visited the Homestead around this time--and not necessarily to call exclusively upon Emily--was Judge Otis P. Lord,

who was accompanied by his wife. The Lords were friends of Edward Dickinson. Although the poet in later life established a close relationship with Lord, and then only after several years following his wife's death, it is unlikely that the Lords' call brought about the soul and spirit-wrenching parting Dickinson refers to in this letter.

What is it that Dickinson might have written Wadsworth that would cause him to take such great offense that he would "banish her"? This we can only speculate about. We are left to wonder about whether this letter accomplished its intended purpose of reconciling Dickinson to Master as well. However, the existence and content of the third Master Letter, dated by Franklin (Master Letters) a short six months or so later, seems to indicate at least a continuance of the correspondence if not a reconciliation of the relationship.

In the last and longest Master Letter the dominant tone continues to be incredulous and conciliatory. The overriding superiority and chiding of the first two letters are lessened, almost vanished. The Dickinson writing this letter is trying to locate a point of stasis in a world of conflicting emotions and feelings for and caused by Master. Keeping in mind that this letter has been dated by Franklin (Master Letters) in the summer of 1861, around the time of the shattering event in Dickinson's life and the summer she spent mostly bedridden, it and its contents take on added significance. In some places here Dickinson's deletions are far more telling than the sections she had indicated were to be left for recopying. These

cancellations will also be considered for the import of their content to the letter as a whole.

Master.

If you saw a bullet hit a Bird--and he told you he was'nt shot--you might weep at his courtesy, but you would certainly doubt his word--

One drop more from the gash that stains your Daisy's bosom--then would you believe? Thomas' faith in anatomy--was stronger than his faith in faith. God made me--<Sir>--↑Master--↓ I did'nt be--myself--<He> I dont know how it was done--He built the heart in me--Bye and bye it outgrew me--and like the little mother--with the big child--I got tired holding him--I heard of a thing called "Redemption"--which rested men and women--You remember I asked you for it--you gave me something else--I forgot the Redemption <in the Redeemed--I did'nt tell you for a long time--but I knew you had altered me--I> ↑and↓ was tired--no more ↑+↓ <--so dear did this stranger become, that were it, or my breath--the alternative--I had tossed the fellow away with a smile.>

I am older--tonight Master--but the love is the same--so are the moon and the crescent--If it had been God's will that I might breathe where you breathed--and find the place--myself--at night--if I ↑can↓ never forget that I am not with you--and that sorrow and frost are nearer than I--if I wish with a might I cannot repress--that mine were the Queen's place--the love of the Plantagenet is my only apology--to come nearer than Presbyteries--and nearer than the new coat--that the Tailor made--the prank of the Heart at play on the Heart--in holy Holiday--is forbidden me--

You make me say it over--

I fear you laugh--when I do not see--<but> "Chillon" is not funny. Have you the Heart in your breast--Sir--is it set like mine--a little to the left--has it the misgiving--if it wake in the night--perchance--itself to itself--a timbrel is it--itself to it a tune?

These things are <reverent> ↑holy↓, Sir, I touch them <reverently> ↑hallowed↓, but persons who pray--dare remark <our> "Father!" You say I do not tell you all--Daisy "confessed and denied not."

Vesuvius dont talk--Etna--dont--<They> ↑2↓ said a syllable--↑1↓ one of them--a thousand years ago, and Pompeii heard it, and his forever--She could'nt look the world in the face, afterward--I suppose--Bashful Pompeii!

"Tell you of the want"--you know what a leech is, dont you--and ↑remember that>↓ Daisy's arm is small--and you have felt the Horizon--hav'nt you--and did the sea--↑n↓ ever come so close as to make you dance?

I dont know what you can do for it--thank you--Master--but if I had the Beard on my cheek--↑like you--↓ and you--had Daisy's petals--and you cared so for me--what would become of you? Could you forget ↑me↓ in fight, or flight--or the foreign land?

Could'nt Carlo, and you and I walk in the meadows an hour--and nobody care but the Bobolink--and his--a silver scruple? I used to

think when I died--I could see you--so I died as fast as I could--but the "Corporation" are going ↑too↓--so <Eternity> ↑Heaven↓ wont be sequestered--<at all> ↑now↓--

Say I may wait for you--

Say I need go with no stranger to the to me--untried <country> ↑fold↓--I waited a long time--Master--but I can wait more--wait--till my hazel hair is dappled--and you carry the cane--then I can look at my watch--and if the Day is too far declined--we can take the chances <of> ↑for↓ Heaven--

What would you do with me if I came "in white"?

Have you the little chest--to put the alive--in?

I want to see you more--Sir--than all I wish for in this world--and the wish--altered a little--will be my only one--for the skies--

Could you come to New England--<this summer--could> ↑Would↓ you come to Amherst--Would you like to come--Master?

<Would it do harm--yet we both fear God--> Would Daisy disappoint you--no--she would'nt--Sir--it were comfort forever--just to look in your face, while you looked in mine--then I could play in the woods--till Dark--till you take me where sundown cannot find us--and the true keep coming--till the town is full. <Will you tell me if you will?>

I did'nt think to tell you, you did'nt come to me "in white"--nor ever told me why--

+No Rose, yet felt myself a'bloom, No Bird--yet rode in Ether--
(Franklin, Master Letters 32-45)

The violent image of a bullet's striking a bird that opens the letter carries a clear message for Master in its implications. Here Dickinson seems to be amazed at Master's insensitivity to her feelings. She employs this vivid image that includes Master ("you") as spectator to demonstrate for him the depth of his callousness.

In the second paragraph, the violent imagery and language continues; she asks Master, if "One drop more from the gash that stains your Daisy's bosom," would convince him that her pain--like that of the wounded bird of paragraph one--is real. The language and imagery here are so graphic, so obviously physically anguished, that one wonders if Dickinson is also referring to her own debilitated

physical state following a miscarriage or abortion as well at this time. Continuing in this vein, to bolster her position, Dickinson next draws upon the story of doubting Thomas in the Bible and makes an analogy between Thomas' and Master's lack of faith. For Wadsworth, a minister, this comparison would have had disturbing reverberations. She claims, "Thomas' faith in anatomy—was stronger than his faith in faith." However, by implication, she chides Master for not even having Thomas' faith in anatomy. It is quite possible that Dickinson's use of this biblical reference is more than a stinging accusation against Master's doubting of her love. Remembering that Thomas' faith wavered until Christ proved himself with his physical body, it is quite likely that Dickinson is making an analogy between Christ and herself here. Perhaps she intimates that despite the fact she has proven her love for Master with her body in physical union (and possible pregnancy) that his "faith in faith" like Thomas' is "stronger than his faith" in her love.

Keeping the train of her thought focused on the physical, she proceeds to recount for Master how God created her and the heart within her, in essence absolving herself from all responsibility for its workings and its growth. Then she recalls the inception of their relationship as she writes, "Bye and bye it [the heart] outgrew me." Whether this growth occurred for purely physical reasons or as a result of love is unclear, but eventually her heart with its contingent capacity to love grows too large for her. Employing an intriguing image amidst all of the physical, creation, and growth images that open the letter, Dickinson compares herself and the

overgrown heart she carries to "the little mother--with the big child." And she becomes "tired holding him" (the heart? the child?). But, she hears of a potential remedy for her situation: "I heard of a thing called `Redemption'--which rested men and women." The reader must pause and consider the apparent paradox Dickinson creates here. Why would she seek rest, or redemption, for an overgrown heart? She might seek rest from painful hurts if her heart had grown large enough to accomodate the love of friends she had once possessed but had lost. Moreover, if she had lost these friends, her overgrown heart, capable of great capacity, would have been empty with nothing or no one to fill the void.

According to biographer Richard Sewall, around the time Dickinson is supposed to have met and/or begun a correspondence with Wadsworth, the early to mid 1850s, she had experienced a drifting away of several close friends. Ben Newton, her first "preceptor," died in 1853. John Graves, a distant Dickinson cousin who "was often asked to spend the night in the Dickinson house when Mr. and Mrs. Dickinson were away" (2: 407) and who greatly appreciated Emily's forays on the piano, graduated in 1855. He went on to teach for several years in New Hampshire, and then married in 1858 and moved to Boston in 1860, where he became an ordained pastor of a new Congregational Church. Henry Vaughn Emmons, a friend of Cousin John's, who shared with Emily an interest in literature, graduated a year or so after John, married in 1865, and continued onto a ministerial career. Also around this time (1855) Emily quarrelled seriously with her close friend Susan Gilbert, who would in a year become her sister-in-law. The two future

sisters reconciled, but the friendship was never as strong as it had once been originally (Sewall 2: 400-427). Hence when she began her relationship with Wadsworth, she had very recently placed several of those important to her into her "box of Phantoms" and was very vulnerable.

Consequently, when she senses that Master can provide her a respite from hurt, or what she calls "Redemption," she asks him for it. It is not surprising that Dickinson requests "Redemption" from Master--a minister--who supposedly knew what being redeemed entailed. The reference here alludes to the probability that she established the relationship, at least initially, with Reverend Wadsworth for professional reasons, possibly religious counselling. However, instead of the redemption she sued for, Master "gave [her] something else" and she "forgot the Redemption." Dickinson's cancellation here is telling and provides a clue to the reason she forgot about her original intent in seeking out Master. Forgetting about redemption she obviously found more interest "<in the Redeemed . . .>," the bringer of the redemption, Master himself. And so affecting was his influence upon her, she claims, "<I did'nt tell you for a long time--but I knew you had altered me . . .> ↑and↓ was tired no more." If, indeed, Wadsworth offered himself in friendship to Dickinson at this time, most likely her lonely spirit grabbed desperately at his friendship and found in it euphoric refreshment and a kind of redemption. Moreover, Dickinson's excision of this rather explicit portion of this letter underscores the intimate significance of their relationship to her. Furthermore, in the revision process she implies

by the deletion that Master would have been familiar enough with the circumstances of their relationship to avoid recapitulating them in a letter exclusively written to him.

At this point in the manuscript in her pencilled-in revisions, Dickinson has placed a plus sign, indicating that she wanted to insert an addition she included at the text's end. This addition is meant to be joined to the phrase that portrays how she feels having forgotten the redemption "in the Redeemed." She metaphorically and poetically characterizes her altered state: "No Rose, yet felt myself a'bloom, No Bird--yet rode in Ether." That Dickinson held this relationship in high regard is emphasized by these ecstatic images. Moreover, in another revealing but paradoxical sentence that she ultimately deleted from the letter, she describes her depth of feeling: "<so dear did this stranger become, that were it or my breath--the alternative--I had tossed the fellow away with a smile>." Upon casual reading, because of the awkward noun-pronoun-antecedent relationship here, this sentence seems to be saying that were she faced with a choice between "the stranger" and her life, she would smilingly toss the stranger away. But this does not make sense; why would she throw away someone dear to her? Upon reexamination, it is possible to read the sentence as having her smilingly tossing away her breath, the noun <u>breath</u> being the closest antecedent to the ambiguous <u>fellow</u>. She is obviously personifying her breath her as masculine. Taking on a masculine persona is a technique that Dickinson employs occasionally in her poetry; for example, in poem J986 "A narrow fellow in the grass," she speaks in a masculine persona when she reminisces about encountering a

snake in her youth. The shift in persona in this Master Letter is baffling, but minor. However, this imaginative role exchange technique will become focal to an understanding of Dickinson's vehemence and frustration later in paragraph nine of this letter, as she wishes she might exchange places with Master. This cancelled sentence here continues to cause concern, however, because of her use of the word stranger and a resurfacing, as in the first Master Letter, of the awkward use of the neuter pronoun it as this noun's antecedent. Whom is she referring to here? Above, in the second Master Letter, and in the rest of this letter she addresses Master in the second person. Surely she would not refer to a man with whom she is developing a deep relationship as a stranger! If not Master, then whom could she be alluding to here?

The answer to these questions must be found in the images, content, and tone of the above sentences of this paragraph. The image of a bullet's striking a bird, the "gash that stains . . . Daisy's bosom," and her reference to the doubting apostle Thomas's placing his hands into Christ's wounds to confirm his belief--all wound images associated with violence and destruction--open the letter. Juxtaposed against these, Dickinson's allusions to God's creating her heart, with all contingent connotation of love and capacity for love, her reference to this swollen heart within her bosom, and the manner in which she metaphorically compares her self and this expanded heart she carries as a "little mother--with the big child" are suggestive of procreation, motherhood, and pregnancy. This conflicting and curious admixture of imagery is only resolved later in the paragraph. Into

this jarring mix of imagery, she injects the idea that she went to Master for "Redemption," but that Master gave her "something else" that caused her to forget the redemption "in the Redeemed;" thus she was altered from what she was. Weaving in images of love and ecstasy, Dickinson then refers to a beloved stranger for whom she would sacrifice her life. The poet appears to be alluding to an intimate relationship between Wadsworth and herself as the "something else" that Master gave her. Given the physical, procreative, and maternal imagery in the letter's opening paragraph; the allusion to a physical relationship; and the reference to a dear stranger, it is quite possible that Dickison is referring to a pregnancy that resulted from their union that altered her and caused her to feel ecstatic, like a bird riding "in Ether." This explanation would account for the reference to the stranger, the curious use of it, and the pregnancy/maternal imagery of paragraph one. If the reader considers closely the amended image at the end of the letter to be inserted in this paragraph, the implications are further startling.

When she says that she was "No Rose--yet felt myself a'bloom" the reader cannot help but think of the connotations of the word bloom. Literally, when used as a verb, it means to blossom and grow. As an adjective as it is used here, it signifies being in bloom, flowering. And this line of thought, if followed to its logical termination, leads to a conclusion foreign to the traditional mannner in which Emily Dickinson is held. A flower's being a'bloom or blooming indicates that it is sexually mature because the flower contains the reproductive structures of seed-bearing plants. Given

her knowledge of horticulture and her interest in the raising of her own flowers, Dickinson would surely have realized the implications of this word; more importantly, Dickinson selected her words carefully, as a look at the manuscript drafts of some of her poems, some with five or six word choices considered and carefully eliminated for a word at a particular spot, will attest. Thus the implications implied by this term for the stranger she alludes to here seem to point in one direction. Dickinson seems to be referring to a child--a child she did not know but who altered her physically and emotionally and who grew dear to her as it grew within her womb. A child conceived with Master in love, that she--like any mother--would have traded her life to protect. If so, what happened to this child? And what about the bloody wound images associated with violence and destruction of the first paragraph? These opening images coupled with the bittersweet tone of memory pervading the first two paragraphs, and the use of the past tense of this section, indicate that if there were a child it did not survive and quite possibly met a violent end. That she refers to it as a stranger and it seems to imply that she never was allowed to know it--even its gender.

The phrase "so dear did this stranger become, that were it, or my breath--the alternative--I had tossed the fellow away with a smile," becomes more meaningful at this point as well. She speaks of an absence of choice figuring into this stranger's existence. In essence she says, if there had been (indicated by the subjunctive here) a choice between life for herself or life for the stranger, she would have parted with life herself. The reader wonders, did

Dickinson miscarry? Did she suffer a forced abortion? Was she ever pregnant by Wadsworth? These questions are formidable ones that cannot be answered with a simple yes or no. This study will consider and provide answers for these loaded and involved questions in great depth in subsequent chapters. However, turning back to the Wadsworth-Dickinson relationship around this time, the explanations of an intimate relationship, a pregnancy, and a miscarriage or abortion become a distinct probability.

Around the time of Franklin's date for this letter (summer 1861) occurred the incapacitating event in Dickinson's life that caused her to spend the better part of a summer ill and bedridden that she strongly alludes to in poem J574. "My first well Day--since many ill."[3] Moreover, shortly thereafter in May 1862 Charles Wadsworth unexpectedly, given his monumental success and popularity in Philadelphia, his family's residence in New England, and the relative crudeness of San Francisco at the time as compared to Philadelphia--a thriving and "modern" place by nineteenth-century standards--accepted a call to a church across the country in California, putting a continent's distance between Dickinson and himself. If he and Dickinson shared an intimate union and conceived a child, the situation could have proven difficult and extremely embarrassing for the unmarried Dickinson in the small nineteenth-century New England town of Amherst and for Wordsworth the married man, father, and

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[3]For a book-length treatment of this mystery-surrounded illness, see John F. Cody's <u>After Great Pain</u> (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1971).

established minister in his Philadelphia community. A miscarriage or a forced abortion would have extricated both from the accompanying difficulties associated with such a dilemma. Keeping these ideas in mind, the rest of this final Master Letter takes on even greater significance.

The third paragraph in some respects deepens the reader's understanding of Dickinson's frame of mind about her relationship with Master. It opens with a tone a bit less emotional, more resigned than the letter's opening. Speaking obviously from a perspective of experience she writes, "I am older--tonight Master--but the love is the same." The reader senses a wearied, more mature Dickinson than that of the first and even the second Master Letter; she seems one who has recently weathered a significant storm of some kind in her life. Having survived it, she feels more experienced and older, but her love for Master remains unchanged. She continues by claiming, "the moon and the crescent" are also the same. The reader must pause and ask, "The same as what?" Dickinson here, as in the previous paragraph where she is reliving portions of their relationship, is fondly reminiscing about one special night she and Master spent together. She is recalling the look of the crescent moon; tonight as she writes, the moon is the same as it was then.

Next she muses longingly upon the hopeless fulfillment of several persistent but impossible wishes that she harbors. "If it had been God's will that I might breathe where you breathed--and find the place--myself-at night." The first half of this curious phrase seems to be saying that she wishes that she could be where he is, but the

use of the past tense here suggests otherwise. If she were wishing to be where he now is, the phrase would read: "that I might breathe where you breathe." Dickinson's use of the past tense appears to refer again to that special night of the crescent moon mentioned in the previous sentence. In fact, if these two phrases are joined, they seem to be saying, "The crescent moon is the same tonight as it was that special night, or at least it would be if tonight I could go out and find my way there alone in the dark. I wish that I might breathe the air where you breathed that night." Her reminiscence of that night brings it close through memory, and she fondly savors it. But the intensity of the memory and the obvious accompanying emotions heighten the bitter-sweetness of her memories of him, and she sorrowfully laments, "if I ↑can↓ never forget that I am not with you and that sorrow and frost are nearer than I." The emotional pain and frustration reverberate from the written words. The final wish, "if I wish with a might I cannot repress--that mine were the Queen's place," expresses her desires, though she couches them in a royal metaphor to soften their impact. Very likely this is an envious reference to Wadsworth's wife. With all her heart, though she has unsuccessfully tried to repress the desire, she wishes that <u>she</u>, not his wife, were his Queen. If, as she says, she cannot help wishing all these things, then, "the love of the--Plantagenet is my only apology." What she is saying here is that her undying love for Master is her only apology for these persistent desires. The reference to the <u>Plantagenet</u> is a continuation of the royal metaphor begun above. It refers to "the surname, originally a nickname, of the English royal house of Anjou or

Angevin royal house founded by Goeffrey, Count of Anjou . . . and so named from the badge of a sprig of broom (planta genista) which he wore in his bonnet. . . ." ("Plantagenet" 7113). Her love of the Plantagenet, then, is her love of Master. With an effort, next, her other wishes are verbalized and acknowledged as if by a reluctant child unfeelingly repeating by rote instructions on how to behave. She says she is unable "to come nearer than Presbyteries," unable to visit him not in his official ministerial capacity. She is unable to come "nearer than the new coat--that the Tailor made" to him, unable to be physically close to him. She is furthermore forbidden "the prank of the Heart at play on the Heart--in holy Holiday," an undeniable reference here to a playful and sacred physical joining of two hearts, the act of lovemaking. She enviously implies that while she is forbidden all these pleasures with him, his present Queen enjoys them.

One sentence comprises the entire next paragraph: "You make me say it over--." Reluctant, resentful, resigned, Dickinson here appears to be referring to the previous paragraph. The reader infers that Master has asked her to objectify these impossible wishes in writing. Obviously he hopes that she will begin to believe what she is writing. The situation is easy to read. If Dickinson and Wadsworth shared a special intimate relationship, Wadsworth has obviously realized the impossibility of its continuing and has written to her to terminate it. Unable to accept the relationship's end, however, Dickinson feels betrayed, resentful, hurt and incredulous.

Following her little-girl-like peevishness of the previous

paragraph, in paragraph five her mood shifts as she attempts to predict his reaction to her attitude of the foregoing paragraph. She writes, "I fear you laugh--when I do not see--<but> `Chillon' is not funny." In this sentence, she compares her situation and herself to the prisoner of "Chillon" in Byron's popular fable poem of that title, "The Prisoner of Chillon." According to English Romantic critic Russell Noyes,

> The subject of Byron's poem is the historic prisoner of Chillon, Francois Bonnivard, 1493-1571, prelate to a small monastery near Geneva and patriot leader of the Genevese against the rule of Duke Charles III of Savoy. The Duke twice had Bonnivard cast into prison, the second time in the dungeon of Chillon where he was confined for six years. . . . (Noyes 794)

In this reference to Chillon, Dickinson communicates that she is afraid Master will be insensitive and disparaging of her very real psychic and emotional imprisonment. Why would she think he would respond in this way? Possibly because she realizes her own petulance. Possibly because he has reacted similarly in the past. If we recall, in the second letter, Master apparently unpredictably wanted to dissolve contact with Dickinson because of something she had written to him. Perhaps here Emily dreads a similar unpredictable, unfeeling response. It is also possible that Dickinson expresses her fear outright in order to stave off such a reaction from Master. Obviously based on some experience with him and some knowledge of his general attitudes, Dickinson characterizes what she secretly anticipates will be his response; she hopes that reading it will give him pause and cause him not to react as she anticipates he will. The reader must stop to wonder about Wadsworth's attitude toward and treatment of

Dickinson if she can think he would laugh at her and her predicament, for which, according to her, he is as responsible as she.

From the bits and pieces in the Master Letters so far, the nature of Master's and Dickinson's relationship appears to be taking on the semblance of a classic relationship between a married man and a single woman, in which the married man ultimately returns to wife and family, leaving the smitten other woman bereft, betrayed, and scorned. Was Wadsworth such a cad? Perhaps, yet this remains uncertain, and we must suspend judgment until all avenues are investigated. In the next few paragraphs, Dickinson's attitude toward Master at this time is brought to the fore, beginning with the next sentence of paragraph five. Considering that Master might laugh at her has stung her and caused her to inquire accusingly of him: Do you have a heart at all? If so, is it like mine? Does it ever have a misgiving about what it has done? Or is it self-sufficient, closed, impervious to pain and the pain of others?

She imperiously and indignantly chides him further in the next paragraph as if she already knows that he is laughing at her: "These things are <reverent> |holy|, Sir, I touch them <reverently> |hallowed|." Dickinson claims here that she considers these matters--their relationship, her feelings, his feelings--sacred, by implication suggesting that Master does not consider them with due gravity. Her next thought, "but persons who pray—dare remark <our> `Father!'" seems to continue along the same lines. She scoffs at Master in his ministerial role because of his lack of reverence for things sacred in a relationship. Paraphrased, this thought might read: I hold these

things sacred, but, you, who are a minister, you, who boldly talk about God the Father, do not!

In the next sentence Dickinson obviously refers to a passage in his letter that has occasioned this third Master Letter. She quotes some of his own words back to him in her response: "You say I do not tell you all--Daisy `confessed and denied not'." Just exactly what Dickinson implies that she has confessed is unknown; however, Master obviously has sensed that Dickinson is holding back from him. In terse repetition of his own words back at him, Dickinson not only suggests that she has "confessed and denied not." She also does not say that she has told all. Spurred on by Master's accusation, Dickinson embeds her reply in metaphor in paragraph seven.

Projecting Master and herself into the respective roles of the city of Pompeii and the volcano that destroyed the city in 79 A.D. ("Pompeii" 7172), Dickinson personifies the two and dramatizes the reason behind the historical destruction of the city, in an effort to communicate indirectly to Master why she really has not confessed all to him. Alluding to the actual historical events but ignoring them here, Dickinson, in the role of the usually mute Vesuvius, breaks silence and erupts violently. She downplays the eruption, however, by calling it the saying of a mere "syllable." Master, playing the role of Pompeii in her little drama, hears the eruption and "hid forevermore." Of Pompeii, Dickinson scoffs and sneers, "She could'nt look the world in the face, afterward--I suppose--Bashful Pompeii!" Born out of anger, hurt, and frustration, these veiled comments point to Dickinson's greatest fear and the reason that she most likely has

held back from telling Master all--that he will withdraw from her and hide forevermore, as she suggests he has threatened to do in the second Master Letter above.

Paragraph eight revisits yet more of Master's own words upon him. Wadsworth asks her to "Tell [him] of the want." Here he seems to want to know how deep her desire is about something. Besides him and "the Queen's place" beside him, which she has expressly stated above that she wants, what more could she possibly want so dearly? If, indeed, Master and Dickinson shared an intimate relationship, out of which was conceived a child that she miscarried or lost through forced abortion, she might yearn for her lost child, especially since she knows that Master is lost to her. And these desires may be what she has withheld from Master that he wishes her now to divulge.

In order to explain to Master the depth of her desires, she provides for him a series of rapid unexplained metaphors in question form. She expects him to answer the questions in the affirmative, indicated in their negative posing. She first asks, "you know what a leech is, dont you--and ↑<remember that>↓ Daisy's arm is small." In this metaphor she compares her desire to a parasitic leech on her small arm that is slowly draining her lifeblood. The assumption that Master knows what a leech is, combined with the terse follow-up question "dont you," impatiently challenges him to understand the association. Her second question, "and you have felt the Horizon--have'nt you--," is equally assuming, impatient, and challenging. By comparing her desire to feeling "the Horizon," Dickinson implies that her need is vast, wider than the eye can see. Her last question, "and

did the sea--↑n↓ever come so close as to make you dance?" suggests that fulfillment of her desire has come close enough to make her wildly excited that it was within her grasp, just as the breaking surf will run up to wader's feet, bashfully short of embrace. But just as the surf will always scurry back to the sea, robbing the wader of the excitement of touching it, the object of her desire is vanished. The desire remains, however. Less antagonistic than the previous two, this final question evokes Dickinson's conflicting feelings of helpless finality and deep longing. However, the antagonism and sarcasm build again in the next paragraph, which is perhaps the most direct and vehement section of this emotional whirlwind of a letter.

Many elements require examination here. First, that this paragraph comes on the heels of the previous one in which Master has asked her to tell him of "her want" and that she has accommodated him with a flood of emotional and circumspect metaphors, indicate that this is the next step in her progression of thought. Bereft of answers, though she has obviously wrestled with the problem until she is drained, she is only left with aching desire that without abatement spurs her anger. Dripping with sarcasm, she admits that she does not know "what you can do for it--thank you--Master," taking great offense that he obviously does not know what he can do, or more likely is unwilling to do, to appease her. In the next sentence, reflecting a tone of sarcastic superiority, she strongly suggests that were their positions reversed--if she were the male with the "Beard on [her] cheek," and he were the female with "Daisy's petals"--she would not only know what to do, but out of the love she bears him would pursue

the proper course of action. However, she couches this startling implication in a question, "what would become of you?" that diffuses its impact. Yet the vehemence and the frustration filter through here. Perhaps frustrated in her position as the other woman left alone following a romantic tryst with a married man who has now gone back to his wife and family and is unaware of the consequences of his actions that she alone has had to deal with, Dickinson is here suggesting that Wadsworth leave his wife and family for her as the proper course of action because of their intimate relationship and its consequences. The content and frenzied emotional tone of these lines appear to suggest as much, but, based on such sketchy evidence, this is yet difficult to say with certainty. However, Dickinson recognizes the impotence of her position as a woman in the nineteenth century, and a woman in a relationship with a married man who is unwilling to act upon his supposed love for her. She can only berate him for his cowardice, his inaction, his betrayal. These feelings become even further understandable if a pregnancy figures into the picture. Her next question, "Could you forget ↑me↓ in fight, or flight--or the foreign land?" not only characterizes Master's response to her, but expresses her incredulity that he could forget her after the special relationship that they have shared. From the question's content, Master has attempted to or suggested that he forget her and their relationship by putting distance and silence between them. From the tone of incredulity, however, Dickinson, like any scorned woman who involves herself with a married man, is unable to forget what they have been to each other and all they have shared. The intensity of

emotion here, the depth of the sense of betrayal, and the strong emphasis placed here by Dickinson on distinct male and female roles and behavior, all emphasize that the subject of discussion is more than a friendship based on correspondence.

Were it indeed one of Dickinson's usual friendships, in her usual pattern of behavior, she certainly would have felt betrayed, she would have chided Master, and, if he continued in his standoffishness, she would have dropped him into her box of phantom friends. However, here she more than chides, and the sense of betrayal runs far deeper. Her vehement, accusatory tone tells the reader so. Contact far more personal has occurred between them, encouraging Dickinson boldly to persist. Master, on the other hand, has appeared to respond to Dickinson's protests concerning his behavior prior to this letter as if her objections are an annoyance, apparently wanting to forget about that certain personal aspect of the relationship, though not the correspondence between them, which he obviously continues but may have hoped to end with the previous letter.

Almost as if censured by the realization of the inappropriateness of her unladylike outburst and her tenuous position as the other woman, Dickinson softens in tone and approach in the next paragraph. She inquires, "Could'nt Carlo, and you and I walk in the meadows an hour--and nobody care but the Bobolink--and <u>his</u>--a <u>silver</u> scruple?" Couched in fear of what others might think or say about their relationship, this question provides an inkling about Dickinson's growing resignation to the present situation on Master's terms. Rather than publicize their relationship as Dickinson appears

vehemently to suggest as the appropriate course of action in the previous paragraph, here in one last attempt to hold onto the special relationship with Master, she questioningly proposes that they carry on out of the sight of others, walking in the Amherst meadows behind the Homestead with only Carlo her dog and the Bobolink as witnesses. And the Bobolink, though he may care about propriety, can only publish their violation of his scruples in "silver" song, which none may understand. In this line Dickinson intimates that she is aware that she and Master have violated the nineteenth-century sense of propriety in their relationship and their need for secrecy. The reader can almost hear Dickinson's sigh of resignation and frustration between this question and the next sentence as she imagines what Master's answer might be. Then, apparently shifting subjects, but in actuality reaching out to grasp onto a promise of when they can be together if not openly or covertly in the meadows of Amherst, in the next sentence Dickinson turns to the prospect of the lovers being united in the afterlife.

Tinged with melancholy over her lost innocence and illusions Dickinson writes, "I used to think when I died--I could see you so I died as fast as I could." This statement demonstrates that she is aware of and embraces the nineteenth-century concept of homey Heaven where loved ones are united after death. It also indicates that in her mind Dickinson has for a long time associated Heaven and Master intimately together. However, something has interfered with her once-held belief that she will meet Master in the afterlife. She writes, "but the `Corporation' are going ↑too↓--so <Eternity> ↑Heaven↓ wont be

sequestered--<at all> ⌈now⌋--." Given the connotation of corporation in the industrial nineteenth-century of a group's having "monopoly and control" ("Corporation" 1010), and the context of this letter, it is not far-fetched to suppose that the `Corporation' Dickinson is here referring to is Master's wife and family, who would have rightful familial "monopoly and control" of Wadsworth even in Heaven. According to nineteenth-century belief, members of the Wadsworth family would all be reunited in Heaven, displacing Dickinson. Having realized the depth of Master's commitment to his family, Dickinson has lost her innocent illusions. She has been made aware of his family's importance in his life and the consequences of this commitment to her and Master's future together in Heaven.

In paragraph eleven, Dickinson tries again to salvage some hope of being with Master some time in the future if not now. She implores, "Say I may wait for you--." Does she mean on earth or in Heaven? The next paragraph provides an answer to this question as she refers to them in their old ages. She claims, "I waited a long time--Master--but I can wait more--wait--till my hazel hair is dappled--and you carry the cane." Obviously Dickinson is referring to their earthly existence and appears to be suggesting that she can wait to be with him until he is free of his commitment. In other words she is willing to wait for him until his wife dies, even if it takes until their very old age. Then she asserts, "Then I can look at my watch--and if the Day is too far declined--we can take the chances <of> ↑for↓ Heaven," implying that if they are then too elderly to enjoy an earthly relationship, they can enter Heaven (to Dickinson the "untried

<country> ↑fold↓") not with strangers, but together and hope to be together forever. Contrary to the nineteenth-century conception of the social structure of domesticated Heaven, in Dickinson's mind, if they wait until Wadsworth's wife dies and are then united, this union in effect will negate Master's previous marriage, and she can enjoy his company exclusively in the home of Heaven.

Musing upon the possibility of their relationship continuing, Dickinson in the next paragraph asks an interesting question: "What would you do with me if I came `in white'?" Whether she means at this time or in the future is unclear. Considering that she has in the previous paragraph been contemplating the possibilities of their mutual future together, she seems to be alluding to a future time. But what does she mean if she came to him "in white"?[4] Could she be referring to being dressed for the resurrection? Possibly, but not likely, for above she is talking about death and the afterlife, not the final resurrection at Christ's second coming. The modern reader's natural inclination at hearing this phrase is to associate it with the white habiliment of weddings. This was not an uncommon nineteenth-century association as well. It must be noted, however, that white was not the exclusive color for bridal gowns in Dickinson's day. According to historian Harvey Green,

> White, symbolizing purity and virginity, has become the traditional color for the wedding dress. In the late nineteenth century, however, many women chose colored dresses in which to be married. . . . (25)

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[4]For an alternative discussion about Dickinson's white dresses, the reader should consult Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's Madwoman in the Attic (New Haven, CT: Yale, 1979).

It is possible, indeed likely, that Dickinson is referring to her coming to Wadsworth in a white bridal gown, especially as she is thinking about being united with him for eternity. She might be alluding to an earthly marriage following Wadsworth's wife's death. On the other hand, since in the nineteenth century Heaven was a glorified mirror-image of life on earth, particularly of middle-class home life, and living together forever on earth--at least until "death do us part"--only occurred in the proper Victorian home after marriage, it is not inconceivable that Dickinson projected a marriage with Master in Heaven preceeding their eternity together. Perhaps Dickinson began wearing white frequently in the mid-1860s and exclusively after 1874 so that in the eventuality of Master's wife's or her own death she would be dressed appropriately to become Master's bride. Perhaps wearing white made her feel closer to him and the time they could be together. Whether or not Dickinson is here referring to the white robes of the resurrection or the white of earthly or heavenly bridal clothes, she obviously associates the color in her mind with her union with Master. This interpretation would account for her second reference to the color in an apparent postscript at the end of this letter, which she might have intended to be slotted in at this point, but gave no indication of its placement on this draft. The postscript remains out of place at the letter's end. In this almost playful added reference she writes, "I did'nt think to tell you, you did'nt come to me `in white'--nor ever told me why." Written in a letter by Dickinson to Master about the state of their relationship, this comment seems appropriate. Furthermore,

underscored here is the idea that the poet associates the color with a state of union with Master.

Paragraph thirteen asks another question--and an odd one at that. Obviously projecting ahead to the time when they can be together in old age or the afterlife and coming to Master in white, she asks, "Have you the little chest to put the alive--in?" Having referred throughout the Master Letters to herself as diminutive and smaller than Master, it appears that Dickinson is not referring to Master's breast when she ask if he has "the little chest." And had she been referring to Master's breast, she most likely would have referred to it shyly and metaphorically as his "heart" or his "bosom" in typical Victorian fashion, as she does in paragraph five of this letter. She must be alluding to a box with a lid and a lock used for storage. "[T]he alive" is one of Dickinson's most puzzling references. By calling it alive, she intimates that it is a living being. By using the specific article <u>the</u>, she refers to a particular living thing that Master is familiar with. But why not give this creature a name? More importantly, why would she want to put a living thing into a box with a lid and lock? Most importantly, why does she ask Master if he possesses the chest? These are questions as baffling as Dickinson's until one considers the context in which Dickinson asks it. Thinking about Master's and her future union in Heaven where earthly families are reunited, Dickinson is here referring to something that she will bring with her when she comes in white. Something without a name, but alive. She is not particularly shy about referring to her heart, as she mentions it in this Master

Letter. And she has straightforwardly referred to her love which remains the same for Master in the opening of this letter. Had she wanted to refer to her heart or to her love here she certainly would have done so as she does in the letter's opening. She could possibly be referring here to a genderless, nameless--because unborn--child who lived for a time in her womb, but died through abortion or miscarriage that she will bring to be reunited with its parents in Heaven. The little chest possibly refers to her conception of a small Heavenly casket for the child with a lid and a lock according to nineteenth-century custom. Furthermore, she might be thinking that the child, because it was never born, would continue to exist in the same state of development in which it left this life. Thus the child would not be interacting with Heavenly society and would therefore require a little casket as Victorian women used to store precious gems in which to treasure it. These are possibilities that will be considered at greater length in Chapters III, IV, and V.

Paragraph fourteen expresses Dickinson's present feelings following the catharsis she has undergone in objectifying her thoughts and emotions in writing this letter to Master. Temporarily purged of her negative feelings as she considers the nature of their present situation, she looks forward to the promise of their future relationship. She decidedly confides, "I want to see you more--Sir--than all I wish for in this world," expressing her rekindled desire to see and be with him. Then she continues, almost as if promising, "and the wish--altered a little--will be my only one—for the skies." It is almost as if she is saying that if she can see him more, she will

live on that memory and the hope of seeing and being with him in later life when they can enter Heaven together.

The next paragraph extends an invitation to Master to come and visit her in New England. In a progressive manner, almost like a child inspired by the excitement of a possible impending treat, Dickinson, breathlessly asks, "Could you . . . ↑Would↓ you . . . Would you like to come--Master?"

As if anticipating Master's objections, in the first phrase of the next paragraph, which Dickinson has tellingly deleted in her revisions, she attempts to persuade him to visit her in Amherst: "<Would it do harm--yet we both fear God-->." While this is an attempt to convince him, the undertones and intimations of this question are farther-reaching. In this one phrase she alludes to both harm and fear of God. These references are interesting. What possible harm could Wadsworth's visiting have upon them or anybody else if they shared a mere Platonic friendship as her family and many critics have suggested? The answer must be "none." However, if Dickinson and Wadsworth shared more than a friendship, an intimate relationship, there was potential harm on both sides. For Dickinson, the harm existed in the potentially painful experience of seeing the man whom she loved but could not have, the possiblity of damage to her reputation, and the possibility of (another?) pregnancy. For Wadsworth, there was not only the possibility of a yet another painful parting, but also the further potential danger of injuring his private reputation as a family man and his public reputation as minister of a prominent congregation.

In the second half of this phrase, Dickinson mentions that they might meet though they "both fear God." Why would her asking him to visit cause her to consider them both as God-fearing people? If their relationship was purely friendship, this reference is out of place; however, if they were lovers and she is alluding not merely to a visit but also a physical reaffirmation of their love during this visit, they would both have reason to fear God and public censure, Wadsworth because he was a married man and a minister before God, and Dickinson because premarital relations were considered inappropriate in God's eyes and nineteenth-century convention.

Moving into her next thought in the subsequent sentence Dickinson seems to continue this line of thinking as she poses and answers an unasked question for Master, still in an attempt to convince him to come and visit her: "Would Daisy disappoint--you--no--she would'nt--it were comfort forever--just to look in your face, while you looked in mine--." Dickinson appears to be attempting to entice Master to Amherst with the promise of one last fulfilling union with him. She promises that she will not "disappoint" him and that this intimacy will sustain her until she can be with him again, this time forever. Moving into metaphor, Dickinson then says, "then I could play in the woods--till Dark," implying that if she can be with him once more she could go solitarily and happily about her earthly business. Returning to her wish for their future together in Heaven, she says she will play child-like by herself "till you take me where sundown cannot find us--and the true keep coming--till the town is full." The destination she metaphorically speaks of here is Heaven,

for the "sundown" supposedly does not reach Heaven, "the true" enter Heaven, and in the nineteenth-century's conception, domesticated Heaven was a town comprised of families of the faithful. And her wish, of course, is for eternity because the town of Heaven can only be full at the end of time when all the faithful have assembled for their Heavenly reward. She then asks, "<Will you tell me if you will?>," a question she deletes, most likely because of the tentative light it throws upon the inviting scenario she has just conjured in her attempt to convince Master to come to her.

The concluding paragraph, possibly intended for insertion in the text above, is an obvious postscript that is interesting in its content: "I did'nt think to tell you, you did'nt come to me `in white'--nor ever told me why--." Above, Dickinson asks Master what he would do if she came to him "in white." Here as an afterthought Dickinson appears to be wondering why Master has never mentioned the afterlife future of their relationship to her. Combined with his apparent wish to "banish" her and put distance between them, this perceptive question on Dickinson's part, though treated in an off-handed manner, casts further serious doubts about Master's intentions toward Dickinson.

Based on the contents of all the Master Letters, one important fact can be inferred: Dickinson's relationship with Master was no ordinary one. It progressed through the various stages of the usual Dickinson relationship, at least for a time. And it survived past the usual point of termination. Had this been a friendship in the tradition of other Dickinson relationships, it probably would not have

lasted much beyond the first Master Letter in which the poet senses Master's standoffishness and severely chides him for his disloyalty. However, it even persists past the second Master Letter in which she seeks to set things right between them after Master has obviously written to terminate the relationship. The proud, superior Dickinson, despite some chiding and sarcasm in this letter, is incredulously caught off guard as Master takes control of the relationship and inverts the usual power structure in her friendships. Dickinson employs all means at her disposal, including sarcasm, defensiveness, incredulity, innocence, begging, pity, sympathy, and submission in order to keep the relationship going. Certainly this is not the Dickinson who would drop a friend into her "box of Phantoms" at the least sign of loss of interest, betrayal, or disloyalty. In Master she has discovered someone with a spirit to match her own. He would not be bullied or overawed by her acute emotional, intellectual, or spiritual powers. In fact, that his spirit is equal to hers is probably the reason Dickinson obviously loves him so deeply and tries to hold on tenaciously to the relationship, even if it means that she must humble her pride and accept what Wadsworth can offer her.

In the third and most telling Master Letter, the reader sees bursts of the wounded Dickinson pride and superiority flash forth in the opening paragraphs of the letter, but the haughty, assured Dickinson of her usual correspondence and the first and second Master Letters has vanished. This is one time that the Soul cannot select her own society. Replacing this usual Dickinson is a child-like innocent, a persona begun in the second Master Letter when she says

that she will be Master's "best little girl" if only he will not "banish" her. This childishness is reflected in tone, often petulant and peevish in her accusations; impatient with his behavior and lack of understanding; and gleefully excited about the prospect of his potential visit. It even filters into the rhythm of her prose, for example when she asks, could he, would he, would he like to come to visit her? Even in the images Dickinson conjures she appears child-like; for example, her fear of entering Heaven unaccompanied or her metaphor of living out her earthly life playing in the woods till Dark advertise Dickinson in this situation as thinking of herself as an innocent child, with Master being the experienced authority figure. Despite her angry, prideful moments, the overall impression she conveys of herself in this letter as a child attests to the position she feels in relation to Master. Unlike her other relationships, he, not she, is in charge. At first a situation Dickinson rails against, she eventually accepts his position of superiority. Therefore, at least as far as the Master Letters can document, the Wadsworth-Dickinson relationship initially progressed along established patterns for Dickinson's friendships, but deviated from that progression.

Whether or not the last Master Letter convinced Master and whetheviated from that progression.

Whether or not the last Master Letter convinced Master and whether he ever visited Dickinson again in Amherst after the summer of 1861 before he took his family to San Francisco cannot be established with certainty. What is obvious here is that by the end of this final Master Letter Dickinson has reconciled herself to her present

relationship with Wadsworth if she can have the promise of some future with him. Wadsworth's response to her proposition would determine the future course of their relationship. However, the foregoing pages contain the complete extant contents of any correspondence between them and do not reveal his reaction. We do know that shortly after the composition of the last letter, Dickinson in writing to Colonel Higginson on 25 April 1862 refers to "a terror--since September--I could tell to none--and so I sing, as the Boy does by the Burying Ground because I am afraid" (Letters 2: 261). Moreover, six days later on 1 May, Wadsworth left for the west coast. We also know that twenty years later in 1880 Wadsworth mysteriously and unexpectedly visited Dickinson to inform her, "I am liable at any time to die," an interesting revelation in view of Dickinson's expressed hopes about Heaven, Wadsworth, and the afterlife in the Masters Letters. We are sure that Dickinson and Wadsworth corresponded until his death. Furthermore, we also know with certainty that in her letter to Wadsworth's friends the Clark brothers following his death in 1882 that she referred to Wadsworth as her "dearest earthly friend." Taking all these factors into consideration, it would appear that Dickinson and Wadsworth carried on a lifetime relationship. We simply do not know the course of that relationship even during the time of the writing of the Master Letters, though they give us some ideas and raise several nagging questions. But we must look beyond the very suggestive Master Letters to discover the nature of this relationship.

The most thought-provoking yet bothersome question that the Master Letters raise remains unexplored and unanswered: Did Dickinson

experience a miscarriage or abortion as a result of an intimate union with Wadsworth? What's more, the reader may ask, is there a connection between the unmistakable grieving tone of the poems around this time and a possible Dickinson miscarriage or abortion? Since the correspondence is limited and biography is sketchy, the only remaining place to pursue answers to these involved questions is in the poetry itself.

It is probably safe to assume, because traditional protective imaging of the poet would not have allowed it, that searching for evidence of a pregnancy and miscarriage or abortion has not been an area of critical concern. Many critics have been yet unable to settle with any certainty whether there is even evidence in the letters, biography, and poetry of the existence of a physical relationship with any of the four prominent men in her life. However, a most recent eloquently argued case for Wadsworth as the object of Dickinson love appears in William H. Shurr's The Marriage of Emily Dickinson (1984). In this work Shurr carefully considers the special nature of the Dickinson-Wadsworth relationship. Prior to the publication of Shurr's book, the word abortion had never been coupled with Dickinson's name; however, Shurr remedies this critical "oversight."

Accepting as starting point R. W. Franklin's recent (1981) reconstruction of the Dickinson original hand-bound manuscript packets that had been disassembled in the 1890s' indexing, transcribing, and editing process, Shurr considers the fascicles as meditations on privately shared events. The poems recall remembered scenes, written to a specific, but unnamed, male addresseee with whom Dickinson shared

an emotional, spiritual, and physical relationship that she came to consider a marriage. Shurr examines in detail specific poems in the fascicles, emerging with a chronologically plausible and well-documented narrative of this "marriage" from its tender inception, to its one central metaphoric "Day" of glory and union, to the subsequent aftermath of separation and distance and consequent pain and suffering of the lovers. Given the apt support for this narrative by numerous suggestive examples from her poetry, he admits "sufficient cause" (Shurr 170) for the range of most emotions captured in the marriage group. "But," Shurr asks, "is there sufficient cause for the rage and guilt, the sense of abandonment?" (170). Suggesting that the theme of pregnancy informs a group of fascicle poems, Shurr, contrary to traditionally protective portrayal of the poet and accepted practices of critical literary analysis, probes further, "Was Emily Dickinson ever pregnant?" (171).

To answer his question, he traces her attitude toward a particular physical relationship through stages of avoidance, resistance, attraction, ultimate sexual surrender, and loss of virginity, while considering pervasive images of pregnancy, a lengthy confinement to bed, a birth, a death, a mysterious haunting burial, and guilt in portions of the poetry and snippets of available biographic information about her relationship with the Reverend Charles Wadsworth, Shurr's prime candidate for the lover/"husband." Consequently, not only does Shurr suggest a possible Dickinson pregnancy, but in view of the vast supporting evidence of vivid imagery, tone, and captured experience of the poetry and the absence

of a living, or record of a living, Wadsworth/Dickinson heir, Shurr also suggests that Dickinson chose the alternative of abortion to extricate herself from her helpless, unwed dilemma.

Did Emily Dickinson have an abortion? The question may be considered indelicate by some because of its perhaps too close scrutiny of the poet's biography. In his investigation of the fascicles, Shurr strongly intimates that this is the case, but his treatment is somewhat brief to answer satisfyingly such an inflammatory question about Dickinson. Perhaps Shurr's intriguing discussion is critically bothersome because it is brief and limited to the fascicles--which comprise only about 900 of the 1775 extant Dickinson poems. Moreover, in his survey, Shurr overlooks many important suggestive poems in the fascicles that are telling when placed and examined within the context of a possible Dickinson/Wadsworth pregnancy, miscarriage or abortion. And what of the other 800? Do any of these poems intimate a Dickinson abortion experience? Surely such potentially significant ideas deserve more thorough consideration for a reasonably certain hypothesis to be made. In order to provide a more definitive answer, this study turns to such an investigation in the following chapters.

CHAPTER III

THE ABORTION SEQUENCE

Before turning to an examination of the poetry to consider the source of Dickinson's pervasive grieving tone around 1861-1862, a possible connection of this tone with Charles Wadsworth, and a possible Dickinson pregnancy and miscarriage or abortion raised in exploring the Master Letters in the previous chapter, a brief historical and biographical framework concerning nineteenth-century premarital pregnancy, miscarriage, and abortion needs to be established as a context for this investigation. The conventions and attitudes discussed within this context are those in which Dickinson would have been fostered.

Piety was one ideal that nineteenth-century women, married and single, strove for in their woman's sphere. Concomitant with piety was purity, especially before marriage. According to Nancy Woloch, social sanctions on premarital sexual behavior frequently made their appearance in the advice-literature aimed at the predominantly female middle class reading public:

> Etiquette manuals, for instance, counseled prudent behavior that would serve to deter male advances. "Sit not with another in a space that is too narrow," warned the Young Ladies Friend. Magazine fiction offered tales about girls who lacked discretion, were consequently victimized by male predators, and ended up ruined, impoverished, ostracized, or dead . . . (123)

A direct correlation existed between society's proscriptions and a

change of dating activities of this time; "the incidence of premarital pregnancy sharply declined--from a high of almost 30 percent of first births in the late eighteenth century to a new low of under 10 percent in the mid-nineteenth century" (Woloch 123). A majority of mid-century young people obviously accepted social standards of premarital behavior. Consequently, whereas pregnancy within marriage was considered proper and in keeping with women's sphere, pregnancy out of wedlock was viewed as impure and inappropriate. Given women's status as procreative role models within the family and the lack of places for unwed mothers within the nineteenth-century social structure, premarital pregnancy violated all the century's ideals about womanhood. It was denounced, oftentimes vehemently. For a respectable woman, unwed motherhood was a state to be avoided.

If Emily Dickinson experienced an intimate relationship with Charles Wadsworth and a child resulted from this union, as close examination of the Master Letters suggests, one can imagine the precarious position in which she might have found herself. In the small New England town of Amherst, the unmarried daughter of one of the community's oldest and most prominent families must have given some thought to her position; however, when one thinks of Emily's staunch flouting of social convention, in her retirement and what to many must have been her very bizarre behavior, the position that she intimates in the Master Letters she might have taken about a possible premaritial pregnancy--that she had been willing to keep the child--is not so untenable or uncharacteristic for Dickinson.

Keeping the ideas of a possible Dickinson pregnancy and her

potential attitude about keeping the child in mind, along with the fact that there exists no record of a Dickinson/Wadsworth heir, we must ask: Did Dickinson miscarry? Did she perhaps suffer a forced abortion?

Miscarriage is a term that refers to expulsion of an incompletable pregnancy. No negative social stigma is attached to this event because miscarriage is a natural bodily process over which a woman has no control. Despite the long history of miscarriage in women's lives, until about twenty years ago, very little was written about the subject. During the nineteenth century, before the formalization and centralization of physicians and when most medical treatment took place in the home, very likely there existed an oral tradition of knowledge that was passed from generation to generation about this particularly female problem. However, the advances in medical knowledge and the open attitudes of more modern times have afforded more knowledge about the causes, the actual event, and the aftermath of miscarriage than was possible in Dickinson's day. And an investigation of Dickinson's case in light of these modern attitudes and advances in knowledge may prove quite profitable. It is possible that Dickinson suffered a miscarriage, which could account for the intriguing veiled references in the Master Letters and the lack of any record of a Dickinson/Wadsworth offspring.

Abortion is another possibility that must be considered here. Like miscarriage, abortion is a subject that until about twenty years ago was commonly known but little written about; however, the criminality that became attached to abortion in the late-nineteenth

century continued into the twentieth until Row vs. Wade (1973), which legalized it in the United States under some circumstances. During the early to mid-nineteenth century, little more than the discussions of abortion's methods, procedures, and complications appeared in medical and midwifery handbooks (Stout; Lusk). The deluge of written attention paid to this subject in the past twenty years can be attributed to advances in medical knowledge and the lessening of modern-day social stigma attached to abortion since its fairly recent legalization. Again, viewing Dickinson through a twentieth-century perspective with an eye to nineteenth-century attitudes and knowledge could yield new information.

Americans of the early to mid-1800s felt less ambivalence than moderns about this subject because of centuries of inherited western beliefs and the legality of abortion. As far back as the Roman Empire, women were openly procuring abortions amidst social concern about the numbers of abortions taking place (as recorded in Ovid, Juvenal, Seneca, and Pliny) but without the charge that abortion constituted murder. Legislation did not exist to protect the fetus' rights. On the contrary, law confirmed that the fetus was not a person and, therefore, had no rights. As Kristin Luker describes in Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood,

> Legal regulation of abortion in the Roman Empire . . . was virtually nonexistent. Roman Law explicitly held that the "child in the belly of its mother" was not a person, and hence abortion was not murder. . . . (12)

With the advent of Christianity, legal regulation of abortion was enacted to protect not the rights of the fetus, but the rights of the father (Luker 12). And what had before been a clear-cut situation

became very cloudy. Though Christians professed themselves to be anti-abortionists on the grounds that abortion was murder, "the legal and moral treatment of . . . abortion . . . was never consistent with the rhetoric" (Luker 12). By 200 A.D. Christians were divided on abortion, particularly early abortion where debate raged as to whether the disposing of the developing embryo could be considered murderous. "Different sources of church teachings and laws simply did not agree on the penalties for abortion or on whether abortion was wrong" (Luker 13).

Not until 1100 A.D. did opinion begin moving toward consensus after one scholar, Ivo of Chartres, laid the groundwork for developing opinion. He, in a typical Church fashion of holding two seemingly contradictory views simultaneously, "condemned abortion but held that abortion of the `unformed' embryo was not homicide" (Luker 13). Reiteration of this stance half a century later by Gratian "in a work which became the basis of canon law for the next seven hundred years" (Luker 13) established the basis for the view that nineteenth-century America had about abortion. In this view, abortions in the first trimester of pregnancy were condoned because "the `formation' of an embryo was held to happen at forty days for a male embryo and at eighty days for a female embryo" (Luker 13). In cases of uncertainty, the embryo was considered female. As Luker points out, one very important gestational fact must be considered here: "all embryos start out morphologically female and remain so until the sixth week of the pregnancy; and they continue to appear female to the naked eye until at least the fourth month of pregnancy" (13). To further

complicate the problem was the inability of establishing the actual moment of conception and beginning of the pregnancy. Thus, while first trimester abortions were condoned, most likely later abortions also occurred without incident or prosecution (Luker 13).

Nineteenth-century America was heir to these moral and legal standards. Therefore, early abortions and some later were tolerated by church and state of the 1800s. The ambivalence about abortion which filters down to today's attitudes occurred in the latter half of the century as a result of many convergent cultural factors and social trends. The changeover from an agriculturally-based society to an industrial society, the drop in the national birthrate, the influx of immigrants into America from eastern European countries, and the beginning of the feminist movement all contributed to the shift from a tolerant attitude toward abortion to a restrictive one (Luker 15). One other crucial contributing factor to this shift was the nineteenth-century "Cult of Motherhood." Social roles for women were greatly limited by the shift from a rural society to an urban one. Hence, the home and motherhood became women's domain and avenues of greatest socially-accepted fulfillment. Thus, given the reverence and esteem that childbearing were afforded, early tolerance of abortion became latter-century condemnation. According to historian Harvey Green, "The domestic advisors, physicians, and other moral reformers who admonished women about their responsibility to bear children became more fervent in the three decades preceding 1900" (30), though these years do not much concern us here. Not only was childbearing considered a woman's responsibility and fulfillment and a combative

measure to offset the increasing birthrate among immigrant women, but it also validated the morality of sex. In a morally self-conscious age, sex for non-procreative purposes was immoral. Mary Wood-Allen, a physician in charge of the Purity Department of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, aptly characterized this stance in 1905: "All attempts to secure the pleasure of a physical relation and escape its legitimate results are a menace to the health and a degradation to the moral nature" (250).

The most influential factor that contributed to the nineteenth-century's decreasing tolerance of abortion was a movement spearheaded by physicians who were striving for social position and status among all the "medical practitioners" of the time. Many physicians became avid anti-abortionists, amidst and primarily because of great uncertainty within the medical community itself, which was neither centralized nor standardized as we know it today. According to Kristin Luker,

> the mobilization of American physicians against abortion took place in the context of a profound dilemma within the medical profession, a dilemma produced by the lack of a traditional guild structure, the proliferating of competing medical sects and dissension within the ranks of the regulars themselves. Physicians wanted to upgrade their profession by obtaining licensing laws that would restrict medical practice to only the best and best-trained among them. But lacking such licensing laws and given the ease with which one could become even a "trained" physician by attending one of the proliferating "proprietary" medical schools, regular physicians had no way of proving that they were any better than their competitors. (28)

The area of abortion provided physicians one proving ground and "gave them a way of demonstrating that they were both more scientifically knowledgeable and more morally rigorous than their competitors" (Luker 27). As a result, licensing laws were realized and abortions were

placed in the hands of physicians. However,

> not until the very last years of the century, at the earliest, was . . . [their] status [heightened] or [their] control [of abortion] very real. Thus, the existence of laws on the books that stated that abortions were illegal unless performed by regular physicians to preserve the life of the woman may not have made much difference in any individual woman's life. . . . (Luker 36)

With physicians exclusively authorized to perform abortions, they were sought out by women, who "constituted a significant portion of the medical clientele, both by themselves and as decision-makers for other members of the family" (Luker 37). And "[r]egular physicians, although their status was rising during the last quarter of the century, still had to compete in a relatively open market for patients" (Luker 37). Consequently, those doctors who turned away all abortion requests stood to lose those patients, their families, and any friends they might refer for medical treatment to a more sympathetic, more accomodating physician who would reap the benefits for his own practice. Within such a context, abortions became quite commonplace. As Harvey Green attests, "ten dollars was the standard rate in New York and Boston; and in 1898 the Michigan Board of Health estimated that one third of all pregnancies were artificially terminated" (30).

Despite the fact that abortion became physicians' legal and moral responsibility in the last decades of the period and that the estimated number of legal abortions was high, there is no way to determine how many abortions occurred illegally at home through the widespread availability of abortion-inducing agents. During the nineteenth century abortifacients and emenagogues "could be purchased

through the mail" (Green 31) for as little as ten dollars a box or a vial, available throughout the country (Green 32). They "were quietly promoted in the magazines and books of the period" (Green 31). Based on a medical model that viewed the body as a processing "input-output" system with "disease as the result of some disturbance in the regular production of secretions" (Luker 18), these agents were the products of a growing medical concern about "blocked" menustration. Their desired effect was to "bring down the courses" or bring about "suppressed menses" (Luker 18) often caused by pregnancy. In addition to these abortion-inducing agents produced and prescribed by the medical community for home use by women, there was also believed to be a female counterculture of knowledge passed on from one generation to the next about various implements, practices, and remedies thought to bring about abortion (Luker 37):

> "Folk remedies" and patent medicines available to women for producing abortion were mostly herbal in nature, consisting of materials such as aloes, apiol (parsley), black hellebore, savin (juniper), tansy, pennyroyal, rue, "Peruvian bark" (quinine), and ergot. Most of these herbs are cathartics and laxatives, and some may have stimulated abortions, perhaps by means of gastric upset. While large-scale pharmacological studies of these herbs are lacking, some of them do appear to have some degree of abortifacient activity, but their effectiveness was undoubtedly far from 100 percent. (Problems about their reliability were compounded by the fact that obtaining exact dosages from plant material is hard to do, and since many of these herbs are poisonous in large doses, it was hard to determine effective but nonlethal doses.) (Luker 37-38)

In short, abortions in the nineteenth century were readily available. Not only were they available, but they were performed in Emily Dickinson's own family.

Between the years of 1856 and 1861, Austin's wife and Emily's friend, Sue, before the birth of Ned, her first child, five years

after her marriage, was regularly having abortions as a birth control measure. During these years it is believed that she had as many as three or four abortions, and possibly another some time later. Whether these were procured covertly from a physician or whether they were home remedy-induced terminations of pregnancy is difficult to say. Mabel Loomis Todd, Austin's confidante and mistress, claims in a journal entry of 1885 that Sue had caused "three or four [children] to be artificially removed"; furthermore, she even attempted unsuccessfully to abort Ned. In another journal entry in 1891, Todd, in speaking of Austin's painful home life, reiterated: "Sue's unnatural, cowardly horror of having any children turned all life dark to him for years--she had four killed before birth" (Sewall 1: 188-189).

The wording of Todd's entries here, especially the phrase, "she had four killed before birth," would suggest that these abortions were not self-induced, but rather performed upon her. However, because this information is third-hand, that Sue sought her abortions from physicians cannot be documented with certainty. As the wife of Austin, who like his father before him had become one of Amherst's most prominent citizens, Sue most likely could have persuaded any local physician concerned about his practice to perform her abortions and could have afforded abortions at almost any price. On the other hand, the very worldly Susan Gilbert Dickinson most likely possessed the knowledge to bring about self-induced abortions as well. In either event, it is possible that Emily turned to Sue for help in her unwed situation.

Although around 1861-1862 Emily's and Sue's relationship was cordial, it was not as strong as their girlhood bond had been previous to their quarrel of 1855. They still corresponded frequently between the houses. One particular note from Sue to Emily in the fall of 1861 is particularly interesting:

> Private I have intended to write you Emily today but the quiet has not been mine--I should send you this, lest I should seem to have turned away from a kiss--
>
> If you have suffered this past summer I am sorry [cut] I Emily bear a sorrow that I never uncover--If a nightengale sings with her breast against a thorn, why not we? [cut] When I can, I shall write--. (Sewall 1: 203)

From the brief contents here, the occasion of the note can be easily discerned. Susan writes to Emily, responding to an obviously loving letter she sweetly compares to a "kiss" from Emily that she would not want to go unacknowledged. The opening sentence of the second paragraph suggests that Emily's letter has referred to her own sufferings resulting apparently from the shattering event in her life that confined her to bed and initiated severe psychic trauma. That Sue knew about Emily's confinement and crisis prior to this note is likely, given the facts that the sisters-in-law lived next door to each other and corresponded often and that Austin made frequent trips to the Homestead to visit his sisters once he began to experience difficulty in his marriage. If Sue had a hand in Emily's suffering by procuring an abortion for her, it is impossible to document, though she writes very knowingly about Emily's sorrow here, equating it with her own. That Emily revealed the circumstances of her sorrow and suffering is also unknown based on the contents here, but given Sue's next statement, it appears unlikely that she burdened Sue with the

details in the letter that occasioned Sue's note. Most likely if Sue knew about Emily's situation, she had foreknowledge of it prior to Emily's letter. In writing "I Emily bear a sorrow that I never uncover--," Sue underscores the "I" as if intimating that she, like Emily, will reveal her secret sorrow to no one. Then, slipping into metaphor, Sue strikes a somewhat romantic novel heroine's stance as she further points out the similarities of their situations with the nightingale who "sings with her breast against a thorn," an evocative image considering that Emily was a poet and did, indeed, sing despite her suffering.

Interesting for the allusiveness alone, this note's contents become even more alluring because the note opens with the underscored word Private, a warning to the message's deliverer and any others with whom it would come into contact that the contents were personal and meant for Emily's eyes alone. More important and intriguing is the fact that the original manuscript exists in three separate purposefully scissored pieces (indicated above by the bracketed "cut"). Apparently made for the purpose of excision, the scissorings occur at strategic places where the reader expects the writer to go into greater detail about Emily's and her own secret sufferings. Very possibly Sue did continue; however, because of the anonymous and apparently purposeful deletions here we may never know what condolences or revelations Sue might have had to offer. The impulse to conjecture here is strong, however.

One might suppose that Sue knew the reason for Emily's suffering. Moreover, it is possible that she had been in part

responsible for it by facilitating an abortion for her sister-in-law. It is also possible that Sue is referring in her note to the secret sorrow she bears over her fear of childbirth and consequent abortions around this time and comparing it to Emily's sufferings.

All conjecture aside, however, whatever has been deleted from this note was quite obviously telling or damaging either to Sue or Emily or both; otherwise, why would someone bother excising the information so completely with a pair of shears? In any event, it is enticing to consider that Susan may have been knowledgable about or a party to Emily's sufferings. It is also interesting to point out the consolatory tone of Sue's note. Sue's purpose in writing is not simply to acknowledge Emily's letter; it is also to soothe Emily over some loss that she has experienced. And by sharing Emily's sorrow and yoking it to her own, Sue makes an admirable attempt here at consolation, at least it appears so from the note's existing fragments.

What could Emily be suffering from and grieving over at this time when the Dickinson chronology affirms no significant loss during these years of a loved one? It is quite possible that Emily has been grieving over the absence of that central figure in her life at this time, the Reverend Charles Wadsworth. The facts of the Dickinson chronology would tend to disprove this conjecture because Wadsworth did not leave for San Francisco until May of 1862, and this note is dated in the fall of 1861. It is possible that Wadsworth responded negatively to the third Master Letter written in spring 1861, wishing to dissolve the friendship. However, we know that the

Dickinson/Wadsworth correspondence spanned the course of his lifetime, attesting to at least a willingness on his part to perpetuate the relationship. What is it that Dickinson suffers over, both physically and mentally, and seeks consolation for? It is indeed possible that, as the Master letters intimate, she suffered a miscarriage or a forced abortion of a precious child she had conceived with Wadsworth.

A letter of condolence Emily penned to her girlhood friend Catherine Scott Anthon several years following the death of Kate's first husband appears to suggest support for this surmise. In this letter Dickinson, like Sue in her note, attempts to make her friend's burden lighter by shouldering and sharing Kate's loss and also by intimating that she, too, is no stranger to the sorrow of death; in this camaraderie of sorrow, Emily obviously wishes to make her friend feel less isolated and alienated:

> I, too went out to meet the "Dust" early in the morning, I too, in the Daisy mounds possess hid treasure--. . . . (Letters 2: 365)

However, while Emily is offering consolation to her friend, she makes a curious reference to a loss through death that she has experienced. This allusion is curious in several ways. First, this letter has been conjecturally dated by Thomas Johnson as summer of 1860; however, whether this date is accurate to the year is impossible to determine through the conventional means of dating Dickinson materials (from the handwriting) because the text of this letter was drawn from a transcription made by Mrs. Anthon for Sue Dickinson. Furthermore, Emily's original copy has disappeared. Therefore, this date may be accurate, or it may be a year or two earlier or a year or two later.

The date of Mr. Anthon's death is of no help in dating here, for he died in 1857, three years before Johnson claims that this letter of consolation to his widow was penned. Given the tentative nature of this letter's date, the curious fact about its contents here is that Dickinson, as has been pointed out several times, experienced no documentably significant losses through death around this time.

The second curious factor about this reference is its covertness. Dickinson says that she went out "early in the morning," intimating before anyone else was stirring or could see. Then she refers to "hid treasure" that she possesses amongst the "Daisy mounds." "Treasure" of course reflects the preciousness of the cargo, but why "hid treasure"? Death was not an event to be hidden and mourned privately in the nineteenth century; it was to be shared communally and openly; it was an event that purposefully brought people together in a society that forced people apart. The reader must wonder in this context why Dickinson cloaks her reference about her dear loss in this covert way. At other times she is quite open about her losses through death, for example as we saw in her letter to Reverend Hale in Boston following Ben Newtons' death, to Lavinia following her Aunt Lavinia Norcross' demise, or to the Clark brothers after Wadsworth's death. What would occasion this uncharacteristic guardedness about a death when Dickinson was usually so open about her losses? Perhaps if the death was one that she did not want others to know about. Perhaps if the loss was one through miscarriage or abortion. Is this the loss Dickinson is referring to here? When one considers that in this reference Dickinson says that she herself "went

out to meet the `Dust´" (a reference to her physical sufferings of a near-fatal miscarriage or abortion?), that the reference is timely in the Dickinson chronology for such an allusion, and that she claims that her treasure is in the "Daisy mounds" (a loving allusion to her pet name for herself with Wadsworth? a reference to the daisies planted on the bulging mound covering a grave?), the possibility becomes a distinct probability.

Turning to an examination of the poetry suggests some certainties amidst all the foregoing raised possibilities and probabilities concerning the reason behind the poetry's predominant grieving tone and a Dickinson abortion or miscarriage around 1861-1862. However, not in all poems from these years are there allusive references to loss and grief. In these two years alone, Dickinson wrote approximately 451 poems of her entire 1775 (Johnson, Complete Poems viii); not all the poems take as their subject the crisis she was undergoing or had very recently undergone. Such whimsical pieces as J219, "She sweeps with many-colored brooms" (1861, F13) or J254, "`Hope´ is the thing with feathers—" (1861, F13) also appear to be dated from around this time. This mixture in the poetry is not surprising when one considers that Dickinson during her convalescence probably did not think solely of her troubles. However, the poems of grief are many. Some contain traces of narrative within them, so much so that they can be arranged and spliced into an order that strongly suggests Dickinson experienced a miscarriage or abortion. They can also narrate the course of the events prior to, during, and following the event. This method of arrangement would appear to be suspect and

manipulative if it violated the chronological dating and arrangment of Dickinson's poetry. However, if, indeed, Dickinson suffered a debilitating miscarriage or abortion of a child conceived in love with Wadsworth and mourned for her loss in poetry, as we have seen she was wont to do when a loved one disappeared from her life, there is no certainty that she would have written poems chronologically capturing, grieving over, and adjusting to the experience. Of course, it must be remembered that the dating of the poems is, at best, conjectural, despite the modern techniques recently applied by Franklin in his reassembly and re-dating of Dickinson's original fascicles;

The traumatic experience of losing a longed-for child can be long-enduring for some parents. Nancy Berezin, author of After a Loss in Pregnancy, argues that contrary to popular belief the convalescence of parents who lose a child in utero can span "not . . . hours or days, but . . . months or years." Moreover, she claims that "even a single miscarriage may leave emotional scars that last a lifetime" (18). Corroborating this contention, Sherry Jiménez, author of The Other Side of Pregnancy, says: "My own mother-in-law lost her firstborn over forty years ago because of a knotted cord. She still remembers him on his birthday and lights a candle for his soul" (46). The experts furthermore argue that a parent dealing with such a situational crisis does not heal emotionally or psychologically in a linear fashion; rather, the healing mirrors the progress of all growth and change. There is progress accompanied by some backsliding or stasis. Consequently, the negative emotional and psychological effects of such a tragedy can be revisited upon a parent in a

reverberatory manner. This pattern of reverberation is one that is especially characteristic of a woman's adjustment to a loss during pregnancy. The two sexes deal differently with such an event. According to Dr. Elisabeth Herz of George Washington University Medical Center, "More frequently, the [male] wants to put the loss behind [the couple] and look to the future, not dwell on it. . . . For the [female] frequently her process of grieving is to go over and over the event, and gradually come to terms with it" (Healy 4D).

Nancy Berezin, a medical writer and editor specializing in obstetrics/gynecology and pediatrics, interviewed hundreds of women who had experienced a loss through pregnancy and substantiates the recursive effect such an experience can have on a woman's life:

> Listening to women recreate their hospital experiences in detail, even years afterward; hearing them describe significant alterations in their relationships with husbands, parents, co-workers, older children; observing them grapple with anger and despair and, later, the innumerable short episodes in which memory comes flooding back, we are . . . struck by the fact that [a loss during pregancy] is a crisis with continuing repercussions. Like an underground ripple in the wake of some massive earthquake, the shock waves generated by a fetal or newborn death stretch far into the future, affecting every aspect of the woman's life from that day forward. (56)

Such a loss not only has repercussions that can last a lifetime, but also forces many grieving women to record their experiences on paper in some form. Whether this writing response is one that allows the mother to work through her grief or to capture the experience, Nancy Berezin asserts that verbalizing it in writing is a very common response to perinatal death. One particular woman Berezin quotes in <u>After a Loss in Pregnancy</u> characterized her need to capture her response to the loss of her child in this way:

> I don't know how I would have made it through the situation without being able to verbalize it in some way. . . . You don't have to be a writer. Anyone can keep a diary. The important thing is to put down your thoughts because there are so many small things that can be forgotten and so many emotional changes. I found the greatest relief in poetry--the discipline of the rhythms clarified my thinking. (50-51)

Very much like the Puritan diaries or any autobiographical literature, these introspective writings allow the writers to explore and work through the nature of the event itself, their reactions to it, and their change in status to the world around them because of it. Berezin asks:

> What do women who have been through a reproductive casualty write about? The intensity of their emotional responses, for one thing . . . what they have learned about themselves and their husbands or lovers . . . their relationship to God, to their friends, to their mothers . . . the terrible loneliness of bereavement . . . and, months and even years after the loss, the lingering memories. (51)

These topics seem surprisingly like many of those Dickinson undertakes in her poetry around 1861-1862 and years following, after the crisis she experienced that changed her life. To determine with reasonable certainty whether such an experience as miscarriage or abortion can account for the grieving undercurrent of Dickinson's poetry around this time, the following pages will focus exclusively on a group of poems from these years of turmoil to be examined in order to determine from textual evidence the specific nature of the crisis that Dickinson suffered.

Given the lasting recursive nature of a loss during pregnancy, along with the undocumentable plotting of the actual progression of adjustment Dickinson might have gone through following such an experience, an order will be imposed upon the poems for discussion.

Although these poems are predominantly products of Dickinson's retrospection, indicated by her use of the past tense throughout, they evocatively and realistically capture the immediacy of the events they describe. Based upon their grieving emotional tenor and the bits of narrative contained therein, the following poems will be arranged into a sequence that will plot the course of the events leading up to Dickinson's loss, the event itself, and the happenings following the event up to and including the burial of Dickinson's child. Furthermore, recurring patterns of imagery and various unifying devices will be examined throughout this progression as they relate to and hold together this group of poems suggesting that Dickinson suffered a fatality in pregnancy.

The first in this group of poems narrating the event is one that documents a physical union between Dickinson and Master. Moreover, it establishes the underlying tone of loss and an imagery pattern that permeates the group:

I gave + myself to Him-- (+ Him all Myself)
And took Himself, for Pay,
The solemn contract of a Life
Was ratified, this way--

The Wealth might disappoint--
Myself a poorer prove
Than this great Purchaser suspect,
The Daily Own--of Love

Depreciate the Vision--
But till the Merchant buy--
+Still fable--in the Isles of Spice-- (+ How--sc--)
The subtle Cargoes--lie--

At least--`tis Mutual--Risk--
Some--found it--Mutual Gain--
Sweet Debt of Life--Each Night to owe--
Insolvent--Every Noon

(J580, 1862, F15)

In this poem Dickinson ponders the physical union between herself and Master, carefully considering the relative position of each in such circumstances. She declares outright in stanza one that she has freely given herself to him, and has taken himself in return. In the reassembled facsimile edition of the fascicles, Dickinson places a plus sign after the word gave of line 1 and at the foot of the manuscript adds an amendment to be inserted here in place of the phrase "myself to Him--." In its stead, she wanted the words "Him all Myself" inserted so that line 1 would read "I gave Him all Myself." This revision, along with the original reading, erases any doubt that Dickinson and Master shared a physical relationship. A fait accompli, indicated by the use of the past tense, this union, characterized in the language of barter or exchange, is said to validate "a solemn contract of a Life," just as conjugal relations between husband and wife validate the marriage vows they speak. However, whether this contract of "a Life" Dickinson mentions refers to their spiritual, emotional, and physical union or to a living manifestation of such a union (i.e., a child) is simultaneously possible and ambiguous. This "solemn contract of a Life" could refer to the sharing of a life between the great merchant and the speaker; however, since Wadsworth was a married man, Dickinson must have sensed that there was little hope of any life together as long as his wife lived.

Stanza two continues to contemplate a daily life of living and

loving together. Where in the beginning stanza she is so definitive because she narrates events that have occurred, here a note of unease creeps into her thoughts as she projects a life for them together. She realistically wonders if they might disappoint one another in a day-to-day relationship. Moreover, she fears herself inadequate to meet the expectations of "this great Purchaser" in "The Daily Own of Love." Mulling over this projected quotidian existence, she frets that daily interaction might "Depreciate the Vision" of a perfect life together.

Stanza three wrests Dickinson from the world of the future back into reality. She asserts that, "till the Merchant buy-- / Still fable--in the Isles of Spice-- / The subtle Cargoes--lie--." Paraphrased, this idea reads, "Until Master is free to marry me, the chance that we discover whether or not daily existence will disappoint us in our love is as unreal and distant an idea as the Spice Islands." The "subtle Cargoes" reference here is a bit more puzzling. What freight might she be referring to here? And why "subtle"? Could she be alluding to herself and a dowry? This is unlikely, though she refers to her dealings with Master using the language of exchange. With the impetus of the growing Women's Rights Movement of the nineteenth century, the first "Married Women's Property Law was enacted in Mississippi in 1839" (Woloch 191) and with the continued pressure applied by women's groups, dowries and the tradition of women becoming their husbands' possessions at marriage, were quickly fading from favor. If she is referring to herself and a dowry, she probably would not call these subtle when they were considered the obvious

gains of marriage for a man from a marriage contract. Considering that the context of this poem is Dickinson's pondering her and Master's physical and spiritual union and the risks and gains involved, it is quite possible that she is here alluding to a child resulting from their union. She considers the "Cargoes" (implying something now dormant to be carried by her) as being "subtle" (as in pregnancy the gestation of the child is unobtrusive). These references are reminiscent of the images of carrying and of heaviness that she employs in the third Master Letter when she mentions the heart that grew too heavy for her and she, "like the little mother--with the big child," "got tired holding him." These "Cargoes she says must remain "fable" until after the Merchant is able to "buy" them and make them legally his own. Taken together these images seem to allude to a terminated pregnancy and the realization that another cannot occur until the poet and Master are together forever to offer each other support and the safety of a legal union.

To conclude, in stanza four Dickinson reflects upon the nature of the spiritual, emotional, and physical union they illicitly share. She claims that at the very least their relationship is a "Mutual--Risk." Coming on the heels of the previous stanza, this acknowledgement of the danger involved to both of them in continuing a physical relationship is appropriate. It would be risky for Wadsworth's reputation as a husband, father, and reputable clergyman to be involved in an extramarital relationship with a single woman; it would also be risky for his heart. The union furthermore would be a gamble for Dickinson's reputation and heart; however, for her the

greater risk of pregnancy resulting from this union is also suggested here. Her next thoughts ease the trepidation that creeps into her mind at the thought of the chances they take as she thinks, some have found that the "Mutual--Risk" is offset by the "Mutual Gain" in the union. Then she blissfully sighs as she ponders how wonderful it would be, as for married lovers, to owe the "Sweet Debt of Life"--in other words, the physical exchange and reaffirmation of love--every night to her beloved. However, given the nature of their deep love for one another and the nature of sex itself, she muses that despite this debt's payment each night she happily anticipates owing the same debt the next night again.

Describing in the poem the coming together of the lover and herself, the poet uses many monetary or value-related terms: "pay," "Wealth," "poorer," "Purchaser," "Daily Own," "Depreciate," "Merchant," "buy," "Cargoes," "Risk," "Gain," "Debt," "owe," and "Insolvent." Dickinson's use of this monetary/merchant imagery and language here serves to evoke the idea of the great value she places on the relationship, to emphasize the relationship's physical nature, and to indicate the risk and its worth to their union. However, underlying these images of great value runs the fear of loss, not only of reputation, but also of the lover himself because of possible pregnancy. The monetary/merchant motif serves furthermore to set forth the terms of the union. He is the "great Purchaser," the unattainable "Merchant." He is in control and is not planning to "buy" and obtain her "Still fable" "subtle Cargoes" soon, perhaps because he is wed to another. Moreover, this merchant/monetary

imagery and language pervades many of the grieving poems around 1861 and following, embodying the sense of loss Dickinson suffers.

The second poem in this group that plots the course of Dickinson's devastating event is quite revealing. In poem J199 a feeling of relief and comfort accompanied by an underlying tension permeates as the speaker acknowledges her loss of innocence:

> I'm "Wife"--I've finished that--
> That other state--
> I'm Czar--I'm "Woman" now--
> Its' safer so--
>
> How odd the Girl's life looks
> Behind this soft Eclipse--
> I think that Earth feels so
> To folks in Heaven--now--
>
> This being comfort--then
> That other kind--was pain--
> But why compare?
> I'm "Wife"! Stop there!
>
> (J199, 1860, F9)

Crossing the threshold from girlhood into "wifehood" and "womanhood," Dickinson rejoices. The exaltation and exhilaration she feels filters through the diction as the reader detects her sense of superiority gained from this passage, characterized by her use of the statement, "I'm Czar"; however, not simply joy is experienced. Despite the obvious sense of joy, the unease that Dickinson expresses in J580 surfaces here as well. The speaker chooses to place quotation marks around both of her new titles of "Wife" and "Woman," as if she is employing them in some guarded special sense, perhaps a metaphoric wife and woman as opposed to a real one. Line 4, "Its' safer so," confirms that more emotion and feelings come into play here than simply joy. Does the ambiguous "Its'" refer to the new state she has

achieved, or does it refer to her safety within this state? And what would this special state of wifehood create a feeling of safety from? Considering that loss of physical innocence accompanies the gaining or feeling of experience or womanhood, as described in the two lovers' union in poem J580, quite possibly she considers her new state as Master's "Wife" a "comfort." Should her physical loss of innocence implied here result in the creation of another kind of innocence--a child--she would be protected, knowing that Master loves her and treats her as a legal wife.

It is curious that in stanza two Dickinson compares her changed status from painful girlhood to comforting woman and wifehood to the feelings of those in Heaven regarding their past earthly lives. Perhaps this is simply a metaphor Dickinson employs to explain the "soft Eclipse" she has undergone. However, as we have seen in the Master Letters, particularly the last one--written in summer 1861, about a year following the composition of this poem--Dickinson often associates Master with Heaven. More likely, then, this metaphor is the beginning of the poetic yoking of her thoughts about the now unattainable Master to the home of Heaven where they can be together forever. This idea is further underscored by the poem's context. Dickinson experiences great comfort in her new role of "Wife." She will not allow herself to think of the pleasures beyond this state of metaphoric wifehood as she breathlessly declares in the poem's last line, "I'm `Wife'!" then decisively commands herself to "Stop there!" She suggests that being Master's "Wife" is enough to content her for <u>now</u>. Her unwillingness to consider the future, however, calls it to

mind more strongly for the reader. Just as in the Master Letters, she appears to be content with the deferment of a complete union with Master until later in life or when they enter Heaven; Dickinson seems to stop just short of suggesting such a future together with Wadsworth here.

The joy and exhilaration of J199 are muted in the next poem. Poem J271 continues to meditate upon her new state and makes perhaps the first concrete reference to the result of that state, a conceived child, and the potential loss of that child[1]:

A solemn thing—it was—I said—
A Woman—white—to be—
And wear—if God should count me fit—
Her blameless mystery—

hallowed[2]
A timid thing—to drop a life
purple
Into the mystic well—

return
Too plummetless—that it come back—
Eternity—until—

I pondered how the bliss would look—
And would it feel as big—
When I could take it in my hand—
As hovering—seen—through fog—glimmering

---

[1]For a more complete discussion of poems that suggest a Dickinson pregnancy, see William H. Shurr's The Marriage of Emily Dickinson, paying particular attention to pages 170-188.

[2]This is an example of another method of revision Dickinson employed. In this code, Dickinson wrote and underscored the change immediately above the word(s) she wished substituted. This study will follow Dickinson when citing poems revised in this manner.

And then--the size of this "small" life--
The Sages--call it small--

Swelled--like Horizons--in my vest/breast--
And I sneered--softly--"small"!

(J271, 1861, F14)

J271 is distinctly divided into two parts. Stanzas 1-3 constitute part one and are a kind of dream fantasy on Dickinson's part as she envisions what it would be like to be a real wife and expectant mother awaiting the joyful birth of her child. Stanza four comprises part two and is the shattering of the illusion Dickinson creates with her imaginings as reality breaks in upon her.

The speaker begins by considering what a "solemn" experience it would be to be "a Woman--white," a bride, and be beyond reproach by wearing a bride's "blameless mystery" in God's eyes. "What a holy ("hallowed") thing," she reverently remarks, to conceive and bear a child ("to drop a life / Into the purple well--"). Though enjoying a moment of fantasy here, Dickinson's tension resulting from her illicit pregnancy can be felt throughout in several ways. Tension is evident in her concern with blamelessness in God's eyes. Why would she worry about being blameworthy unless she has done something only a real blameless bride should do? She furthermore exhibits the tension underlying her fantasy in stanza two where she meditates reverently upon the hallowedness of conceiving a child. Instead of simply remarking on what a miraculous event conception within marriage would be, she implies a direct comparison with and allusion to her own illicitly conceived child, a child that by implication here must be dropped "Into the purple well-- / [So] plummetless--that it return— /

Eternity--until." Alluding to her child's imminent death and its reunion with her in Heaven upon her death, Dickinson expresses the joylessness she feels and tension between her desire to keep this child and the knowledge of its impending fate. A final way in which tension is expressed in this poem occurs in stanza three.

The poet begins thinking about her child in stanza three as any prospective mother does about the child growing under her heart. Amidst evocative images of sight and sense, Dickinson begins to bond with her child as she wonders what the child ("the bliss") would look like. And just as any mother anticipates holding her child safely in her arms, she wonders if the child would feel as big "when I could take it in my hand"; however, she ponders the child (referred to as "it" throughout the poem) "As hovering--seen--through fog--glimmering." Why? Is she referring to the haziness of her fantasy and the improbability of her wonderings coming true? This seems possible because of the conditional tense she employs in her musings. Almost as if sensing these wonderings to be impossible, Dickinson uses "would" and "could" here, not "will" and "can," creating the tension between what might be and what can or will be. The dangling "glimmering" at the end of line 12 further indicates that Dickinson realizes the impossibility of these dreams. It suggests a heavenly kind of glow surrounding the child, characteristic of nineteenth-century artists' frequent depictions of children in Heaven.

Breaking into her fantasy, indicated by the poet's use of the narrative transitional phrase, "And then," signalling a change of subject, Dickinson shifts the tone and the verb tense as she angrily

describes figures of authority ("the Sages"), which she obviously resents coming into the picture. Despite her wishful musings about the child and the looming malevolence of the "Sages," in this stanza she recognizes the tangible reality of the gestating child, "this `small' life" as the authority figures have probably described the fetus to her (indicated by the quotation marks around "small") swelling "like Horizons" within her. Significantly, this reference to the horizon is amazingly like the one that Dickinson makes in the third Master letter when she asks Master if he has never felt the horizon as she attempts to describe, at his urging, the depth of her desire about something very important to her--perhaps her desire to have kept their child.

She also feels secretly superior to these "Sages" in what she thinks she alone knows to be true about the child growing within her. Quite clearly Dickinson indicates her strong desire to keep the child, this growing part of her that the "Sages" (Master? her doctor? her sister-in-law? her family?) as small and insignificant. Her desire is so great that she projects a future for the child and denies the possibility of losing it.

The use and centrality of the word <u>it</u> to the meaning of J271 is not exclusive to this poem. In fact, the word makes an appearance in and informs a large portion of the poems to be discussed in this study. Thus, along with the monetary/merchant imagery and the language of barter and exchange, the images of carrying and heaviness, and the permeating sense of loss underlying these poems, the word <u>it</u> can be seen as a unifying device in this sequence of poems. This

device was first identified and lightly touched upon in Shurr's The Marriage of Emily Dickinson. In several of the poems (namely 935, 1737, and 491) in his speculation about a possible Dickinson pregnancy, Shurr mentions the "mysterious `it'" that is "at the center of the poem's focus" (179). Dickinson's use of the word it not only informs these three poems, but also controls, directs, and drives many--if not most--of the poems in this miscarriage or abortion sequence.

One might ask, "How can such a nebulous word as it be the controlling force here?" This is a valid question. Even S. P. Rosenbaum, who assembled the computer-tabulated Concordance to the Poems of Emily Dickinson (1964) consciously omits a line-by-line listing of the word's occurrences. "The alphabetically arranged index words consist of all the words in Emily Dickinson's poetry except the so called `non-significant' omitted words" (viii). And it would have taken considerably more space to specify all the times it and its derivatives are used because the frequency of occurrence is substantial[3]:

it	--	1256	tis	--	4	twas	--	2
its	--	22	t'is	--	5	t'was	--	1
it's	--	312	`tis	--	161	`twas	--	113
itself	--	104	`tisn't	--	2	`twas'nt	--	6

In the fascicle poems alone it and the word's derivatives are used comparatively as frequently as in the entire canon:

---

[3]This tabulation is a manual one done by the author of this study and is therefore approximate.

it	--	633	`twas´nt	--	1
its	--	139	`twere	--	13
`tis	--	79	`twould	--	7
`twas	--	68	`twill	--	3

A very often colloquially employed word used as an antecedent and an introductory word, it is also used to indicate possession, or can be used as a pronoun standing for some unnamed thing. In her poetry Dickinson incorporates the word in all uses, very often making the antecedent of the pronoun lucidly clear to the reader, though never delineating it. Perhaps in her riddle poems one perceives Dickinson´s most conscious, carefully controlled use of the word it. For example in poem J585, "I Like to See It Lap the Miles," the pronoun it unquestionably represents a train, though the speaker, while characterizing the train´s qualities and movements, never names it. And in J311, "It Sifts from Leaden Sieves," the reader, though never told, knows that it here refers to snow because of the vivid, careful imagery within which the reference is couched.

If Dickinson can be so careful in her use of this word in the riddle poems, why in many of the poems around 1861-1862 is the it so obscure as to be indeterminable, but central to the poems´ meanings? The miscarriage/abortion motif would answer this question for several reasons. In referring to a gestating fetus, an accepted practice is to refer to the child as "it" before sex is known. Also, the severe taboo nature of the subject of premarital pregnancy and of abortion in the maternal-oriented nineteenth century might have caused her to refer to this experience by cloaking it in vague images and in terms such as "it." Could it have been mentioned by name, the experience might have been so traumatic, causing such a serious emotional as well

as physiological upheaveal (we must remember that Dickinson spent a great deal of time bedridden from a prolonged illness at this time), she might not have been able to mention the child or the miscarriage or abortion by name, and, as a defense mechanism, used it as the euphemistic expression as she tried to capture and deal with the experience. Finally, and further compounding the possibility of accepting all the above explanations for her manipulation of the word it, is Dickinson's professed habit of never coming at the truth directly, but telling it "Slant." Turning upon the mysterious it, many of these personal poems of omitted centers deliberately leave the reader baffled and guessing. Considering the clarity and precision of Dickinson's vision of the world and human experiences expressed through her vivid imagery and exact detail, it is difficult to conceive of her being at a loss for words or selecting inexact words to characterize an experience. However, in her own words in poem J581 written in 1862, she considers the difficulty of matching words to an experience as she attempts to capture it poetically. In frustration, she admits an inability to embody and characterize in lyric language one very important life experience:

> I found the + words to every thought (+ phrase)
> I ever had--but One--
> And that--defies me--
> As a Hand did try to chalk the Sun
>
> To Races--nurtured in the Dark--
> How would your own--begin?
> Can Blaze be + shown in Cochineal-- (+ done)
> Or Noon in Mazarin?
>
> (J581, 1862, F15)

Surprised at her own loss of words, she says that to capture this

important, indescribable experience in words is as difficult for her to understand as "a Hand" that would "try to chalk the Sun" or mark the sun's progress through the sky would be "To Races--nurtured in the Dark." This experience was so foreign to her that she cannot understand or capture it. As one traces the use of the word it through selected poems from around 1861-1862 and following, it seems possible that this elusive experience could have been a miscarriage or abortion which was such a trial that Dickinson had great difficulty facing it and coming to terms with it.

The next poem in the miscarriage/abortion narrative features all the unifying devices of this group. It employs merchant/monetary imagery and language; it is permeated by an underpinning sense of loss, and it features the mysterious it prominently throughout:

One Life of so much Consequence
Yet I--for it--would pay--
My Soul's Entire income--
In ceaseless--salary--

One Pearl-- + to me--so signal-- (+ of such
That I would instant dive-- proportion)
Although--I knew--to take it--
Would cost me--just a life!

The Sea is full--I know it!
That--does not blur my Gem!
It burns--distinct from all the row--
Intact--in Diadem!

The life is thick--I know it!
Yet--not so dense a crowd--
But Monarchs--are perceptible--
Far down the dustiest Road!

(J270, 1861, F10)

The situation here is inferable. Dickinson indicates how dear this "One Life of so much Consequence" is to her. Employing monetary

language she says that she would bargain for this life; she "would pay-- / My Soul's Entire income-- / In ceaseless--salary--." Noting the 1861 composition date of this poem, sceptics might question whether Dickinson is grieving here for the unattainable Wadsworth; however, were this the case, it is doubtful that she would employ the neuter pronoun it when in other poems of this kind she openly grieves over an important man, usually referred to as "Sir," "Master," "he," or "him." Moreover the images that Dickinson uses in line 5 calls further into question whether or not the poet is here not referring to a child. She calls this important life a "Pearl." It is possible that she simply draws in this gem imagery, which she continues through to the end, in order to indicate the perfectness and value of this one life to her; however, it is also possible that she could be alluding to Pearl, the love-child born to Hester Prynne and the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale out of wedlock in The Scarlet Letter (1850). Though we do not know for certain, it is likely that Dickinson read the novel (Capps 19). Many parallels between the main characters' situation and this period of her life exist. That she, like Hester Prynne, is willing to deny her own life for the life of her child suggests that she is indeed referring to a child. She claims that this "Pearl" is so dear "That I would instant dive-- / Although--I know--to take it-- / Would cost me--just a life!" These words and this line of thought is hauntingly similar to those she expresses in the third Master Letter, also dated in 1861. Dickinson here seems to be saying, as she does in the Master Letter, that like any mother, she would willingly trade her own life for that of her child. This appears

likely, especially taking into consideration the final two stanzas in which a burst of maternal pride breaks through as Dickinson touts her "Pearl" as worthy of her sacrifice; it outshines a metaphoric sea full of precious gems and is a "Monarch" that is "perceptible-- / Far down the dustiest Road!" In this line, Dickinson not only signals the value of her precious child, but she initiates a use of royal imagery reminiscent of that of the Master Letters that we will see recur throughout the poems documenting the event and following.

Poem J621 is another in which three unifying devices of the miscarriage/abortion sequence coalesce and inform the poem. It, like "One Life of so much Consequence!," is a poem of intercession and supplication on the child's behalf. Only in this poem, Dickinson implores the "Mighty Merchant," who has become increasingly malevolent since poem J580, where he was the "great Purchaser" that she was only worried about disappointing in "The Daily Own--of Love." Here also, the reader's dilemma about whether the event is an abortion or miscarriage is resolved. In this poem, human intervention in her pregnancy is indirectly prescribed by the Merchant, and the reader knows that we are dealing with a forced abortion that she does not desire:

> I asked no other thing--
> No other--was denied--
> I offered Being--for it--
> The Mighty Merchant + sneered-- (+ smiled)
>
> Brazil? He twirled a Button--
> Without a glance my way--
> "But--Madam--is there nothing else--
> That We can show--Today?"
>
> (J621, 1862, F32)

Here Dickinson metaphorically compares her predicament to that of a shopping trip in which she must ask the merchant for a favor. The merchant/monetary imagery indicates quite clearly the position of subservience the speaker feels toward the merchant. She supplicates the "Mighty Merchant" for a favor, the only one she has ever asked. Willing to strike a deal, she offers her life ("Being") in exchange for this favor. However, the haughty, sneering merchant, who will not even acknowledge that she has asked a question by looking at her, finding more interest in the twirling of a button on his coat and answering her rudely, denies her supplication. He parries, "But--Madam--is there nothing else-- / That we can show--Today?" The immediate question that comes to mind is, "What is the speaker asking the merchant for?" The only reference to her request in the poem is the vague it. In line 3 Dickinson willingly offers her life ("Being") in exchange for it; because of this desperately selfless offer, the reader feels intimations of a mother's offering to sacrifice her life for her child's. However, offering "Being" for something can also suggest giving life to something, a feat that only a mother can accomplish. This characteristically unselfish maternal reaction to life-threatening circumstances for a child is a similar reaction to the one expressed in J270, "One Life of so much Consequence!" when she says that to possess her Pearl "Would cost me--just a life!" It becomes possible to see the poem portraying the unwed mother offering to sacrifice her life for the child's as she beseeches the natural father for support. However, here the Merchant sneers and implies that she might as well ask for "Brazil" as for any other solution to

her dilemma than the abortion that he deems appropriate. She offers "Being" for it; he has decreed death for the child. One can picture the scene between the married, prominent preacher Wadsworth and the unwed Dickinson as she turned to him in his greatness for support of her wishes, as impractical as they might be. From the context of the poem, it appears that he indicates an abortion is in order, with no alternative or consideration for her feelings. Although she is selflessly willing to give life to the child by following through with the pregnancy, unfortunately the "Mighty Merchant" disregards her offer as a solution unworthy of consideration. A bitterness underlies this poem as Dickinson contemplates the selfishness and haughtiness of her beloved clergyman. Where before she placed her love and trust in this man, now in his refusal to grant her singular unselfish request, she is unprepared for his uncaring malevolence and disregard, and her attitude turns cold.

After Dickinson faces the shocking realization in poem J621 that Master is unwilling to allow the child's birth, she recognizes the nature of the sacrifice she is being forced to make. Poem J527 records this realization:

> To put this World down, like a Bundle
> And walk steady, away,
> Requires Energy--possibly Agony--
> `Tis the Scarlet way
>
> Trodden with straight renunciation
> By the Son of God--
> Later, his faint Confederates
> Justify the Road--
>
> Flavors of that old Crucifixion--
> Filaments of Bloom, Pontius Pilate sowed--
> Strong Clusters, from Barabbas' Tomb--

Sacrament, Saints + partook before us-- (+ indorsed)
Patent, every drop,
With the + Brand of the Gentile Drinker (+ stamp)
Who + indorsed the Cup-- (+ enforced)

(J527, 1862, F20)

Stanza one recounts Dickinson's rather emotionless assertion that in order to fulfill Master's desires she is the one who must make the sacrifice. In the first line she highlights the idea of her carrying something (as in pregnancy) that she must put down as she muses, "To put this World down." As we have seen in her letter to Higginson, Dickinson considers each of the people special to her "a World" (Letters 3: 816). Thus, in this phrase she appears to be comparing the impending abortion of her precious child to the act of putting someone very important, "this World," down "and walk[ing] steady, away." To indicate what this something is, she includes a curious simile, "like a Bundle," that simultaneously evokes connotations of the warm feelings of cradling a baby, often referred to as a "bundle," and the cold impersonality of a wrapped shopping parcel, also referred to as a "bundle." In this ironic but subtle juxtaposition of the connotations of bundle the speaker's carefully-checked emotions filter through this otherwise apparently objective statement about her realization of Master's desires. We feel a veiled return to the merchant/monetary imagery of poems J580 and J621 as she likens the child to a bundle. And underneath the control of this statement we can sense Dickinson railing against the insensitivity of Master towards both the child and herself in what he has asked her to do. In line 3 she furthermore acknowledges that to obtain the abortion "Requires Energy--possibly Agony-- / `Tis the Scarlet way,"

objectifying the painful physical nature of the abortion she must endure that will fulfill Master's decree.

An elaborate comparison of the sacrifice Master has asked her to make and that of Christ appears in stanzas 2-4. She asserts that "the Scarlet way" Master has commanded her to follow is one and the same as that "Trodden with straight renunciation / By the Son of God--." And just as "Later, his faint Confederates / Justify the Road--," so too has Master, her "faint Confederate," promised that she will look back and feel that it has been worth the risk and the pain.

In stanza 3 she claims that her sacrifice has "Flavors of that old Crucifixion--." It has "Filaments of Bloom, Pontius Pilate sowed--," possible references to her pregnancy and her condemnation by Master in the role of Pilate as sower (as the child's father) and condemner (decreer of the abortion). Moreover, it has "Strong Clusters, from Barabbas' Tomb," a possible allusion to the sense of betrayal by Master, as the innocent Jesus must have felt when the crowd asked for Barabbas' release instead of His own. This phrase may also refer to the fact that Barabbas was a thief, just as Dickinson considers Master a thief for depriving her of her child.

Dickinson ends the poem by calling her "Scarlet" sacrifice a "Sacrament." Obviously in Dickinson's mind, just as God willingly sacrificed His only begotten son, so must she sacrifice her only begotten child. And just as Christ's sacrifice became a sacrament, so too will hers with the endorsement from Jesus himself; however, she claims "every drop" of her sacrifice is "Patent . . . / With the Brand of the Gentile Drinker." In other words, unlike Christ's sacrifice

that was a personal one that eventually became a sacrament that would give grace to anyone who participated in its celebration, Dickinson implies here that the sacrifice she must make is her Sacrament alone, affording her only Christ's patent and ensuing grace. Offended, angry, and hurt, the poet hollowly attempts to salvage some of her pride and reassure herself of her self-worth in this poem. That she would refer to her sacrifice as a personal sacrament is a method of intimating that she is closer to God, elevating herself above Master, God's minister who normally celebrates the sacraments.

At this point it becomes obvious that Dickinson can envision no other way but to comply with Master's command; however, she will not do so willingly, as she indicates in J378. This poem of 1862 captures Dickinson at a moment of monumental impasse. She feels trapped and emphatically alone:

> I saw no Way--The Heavens were stitched--
> I felt the Columns close--
> The Earth reversed her Hemispheres--
> I touched the Universe--
> And back it slid--and--I alone--
> A Speck upon a Ball--
> Went out upon Circumference--
> Beyond the Dip of Bell--
>
> (J378, 1862, F31)

Dickinson considers her predicament. It is true, that none of the unifying devices we have been tracing through the abortion sequence are present in this poem; however, that these lines were composed in 1862 around the time of Dickinson's known crisis and that it does capture a moment of desperate isolation much like the one that Dickinson must have felt after Master indicated to her that he did not want--and did not want her to have--their child, yokes this poem to

the abortion group. Betrayed by her love, husbandless, and the daughter of Amherst's most prominent family, Dickinson, as the poem suggests, is bereft of support and left no option but Master's.

In stanza one the speaker claims, "I saw no Way-- / The Heavens were stitched--," characterizing the severity of the impasse that she has reached. Not only has Master seemingly turned against her, but even God has closed Himself off from her. In fact, the shock is so profound that she feels all withdrawing from her, even the "Earth revers[ing] her Hemispheres." She touches "the Universe" as well "And back it slid," leaving her feeling utterly solitary and a mere "Speck upon a Ball."

Recovering somewhat from her shock at Master's betrayal and her aloneness in wanting to keep the child, but unwillingly resigned to go through with the abortion, Dickinson rallies somewhat if only to savor secretly and defiantly the last moments of union and love with her child as she tries to find some comfort in facing her impending sacrifice in J491:

> While it is alive
> Until Death touches it
> While it and I lap one Air
> Dwell in one Blood
> Under one Sacrament
> Show me Division can split or pare--
>
> Love is like Life--merely longer
> Love is like Death, during the Grave
> Love is the Fellow of the Resurrection
> Scooping up the Dust and chanting "Live"!
>
> (J491, 1862)

The <u>it</u> of lines 1, 2, and 3 of stanza one is clearly a child living and breathing within the poet; she speaks of them both as one

entity. Stanza one is a proud and defiant declaration of the bond between mother and child. She knows that "Death" in the form of the abortion will soon "touch" her child and separate the child and herself who are united "in one Blood/Under one Sacrament," an obvious return to the imagery of J527 in which she considers her sacrifice a sacrament in a similar manner as Christ's; however, she finds the idea of a physical separation difficult but bearable, having formed a bond of love with this child with whom she yet "lap[s] one Air." This love is enduring and strong. It is longer than life and strong enough to outlast death. And at the Resurrection her love will reinfuse life into this child, who will be reunited with its mother to live together forevermore.

The next few poems narrate the course of the abortion's effects upon the child as Dickinson imagines them. This idea may seem foreign to some, who may believe that the child cannot react to an abortion when the fetus presumably has no feelings. The point to remember here is not that the fetus is unaware of what is going on; rather, it is how Dickinson <u>projects</u> that the child will or does feel. According to many doctors, at the outset of pregnancy, the parents fantasize about their expected child. One Boston physician claims that this tendency particularly manifests itself in women:

> As soon as the diagnosis of pregnancy is made, the expectant mother begins to build up hopes and expectations. This sudden manifestation of fertility stimulates her thinking, colors her mental imagery, and ushers in an era of good will. (Elia 101)

One might ask, "But if Dickinson knew of the impending abortion of her child, how would this "era of good will" be affected?" Nancy Berezin addresses the situation in which there may be feelings of ambivalence

that might adversely influence "affectional ties before birth":

> Although feelings of ambivalence may recur off and on . . . by the middle of the second trimester most women are eagerly fantasizing about the baby's sex, asking themselves who it will resemble. . . . For both partners [usually], the growing fetus comes to represent not only a person-to-be who will require love and nurturing, but also evidence of fertility and the embodiment of their aspirations toward immortality. (26)

In Dickinson's case, however, she alone, given Master's attitude and decision about the child, is left to fantasize for a short while and fall in love with her child. And despite its fateful sentence, Dickinson fantasizes lovingly about her baby, bonding with it affectionately as any mother would.

After she has reconciled herself in some degree to Master's decision about the abortion, she begins to feel guilty about her impending complicity in such an act. This guilt manifests itself in several poems where the poet imaginatively attributes volition, corpus, and even the powers of speech and thought to her developing child. In poem J559 Dickinson imagines her child slowly sickening and wasting away:

> It knew no Medicine—
> It was not Sickness--then--
> Nor any need of Surgery—
> And therefore--'twas not Pain--
>
> It moved away the Cheeks--
> A Dimple at a time--
> And left the Profile--plainer--
> And in the + place of Bloom (+ stead)
>
> It left the little Tint
> That never had a Name--
> You've seen it on a Cast's + face-- (+ cheek)
> Was Paradise--to blame--

If + momentarily ajar— (+ Her sweet Door ajar)
Temerity--drew near--
And sickened--ever afterward
For + somewhat that it saw? (+ whatso'er)

(J559, 1862, F27)

The first three stanzas here consist of calm factual narration of how the speaker's child, indicated by the frequent and consistent use of the mysterious it here, is slowy dying; however, as Dickinson attests, in stanza one, the cause is not sickness and the child has no need for "Medicine" or "Surgery." Moreover, the dying is not painful for the child; however, it does cause a whittling away of "the Cheeks-- / A Dimple at a time--," leaving "the Profile--plainer--" than it had been. In the place of the imagined fat, rosy baby cheeks, death leaves "the little Tint/ . . . seen . . . on a Cast's face--" as it invades her child's body. Helplessly faced with this rapid deterioration of what she imagines would be her beautiful child, the mood shifts as the speaker momentarily realizes the impending loss of her child through abortion. Frantically, the guilt becoming too burdensome upon her, she seeks to fix blame elsewhere. She asks, "Was Paradise--to blame"? She imagines that Heaven's gates were possibly left momentarily open and that the child full of "Temerity" "drew near," and saw what Heaven was like. Having glimpsed the blessed, homey splendor of Paradise, the child, no longer wanted to face earthly existence "And sickened—ever afterward / For Somewhat that it saw."

As if still gazing on the pale sickening, emaciated child of J559, in J458 Dickinson guiltily envisions that she watches her child suffer and die as it gazes empathetically but blankly back at her:

Like Eyes that looked on Wastes--
Incredulous of Ought
But Blank--and steady Wilderness--
Diversified by Night--

Just Infinites of Nought--
As far as it could see--
So looked the face I looked upon--
So looked itself--on me--

I offered it no Help--
Because the Cause was Mine--
The Misery a Compact
As hopeless--as divine--

Neither--would be absolved
Neither--would be a Queen--
Without the Other--Therefore--
We perish--tho' We reign--

(J458, 1862, F32)

Plagued by guilt in this poem, Dickinson focuses on the child's eyes, commonly regarded as the windows of the soul. She hopelessly imagines that she looks at the helpless child who only looks "As far as it could see," staring back at its mother with "Eyes that looked on Wastes-- / Incredulous of Ought / But Blank--and steady Wilderness--." Both mother and child can offer the other no hope or comfort; they share a common "Misery," in their knowledge of the inevitability of their separation through death. Yet the speaker recognizes that they also share a bond of love. However, Dickinson feels the greater guilt and can offer her child "no Help-- / Because the Cause [of the child's suffering] was Mine--." She acknowledges that their mutual "Misery" is "a Compact / As hopeless--as divine--." Here Dickinson acknowledges her impotence to do anything about the situation; simultaneously she remembers the divine mother/child communion they share. These ambivalent feelings are developed further in the

concluding stanza as Dickinson realizes that this union is as strong as the mother/child bond she emphasizes in J491, "While it is alive," that supercedes impending death and separation. She admits that neither of them will be free from the obligation she has to the other because of this shared bond, despite the intervention of death. Dickinson here is obviously looking forward to reunion and renewal of the love after death in Heaven. Thus, she can say, "We perish--tho' We reign;" in other words, "we must be separated now, but our love transcends death until we are reunited in Heaven when we will rule our fates together."

Although Dickinson has reconciled herself to an everlasting bond with her child that transcends death in "Like Eyes that Looked on Wastes," in J762 the physical separation of mother and child in the abortion experience is recaptured vividly and graphically, along with Dickinson's murderous feelings:

> The Whole of it came not at once--
> 'Twas Murder by degrees--
> A Thrust--and then for Life a chance--
> +The Bliss to cauterize--(+ The Certain prey to tease)
>
> The Cat reprieves the Mouse
> She eases from her teeth
> Just long enough for Hope to tease--
> Then + mashes it to death-- (+ crushes)
>
> `Tis Life's award--to die--
> Contenteder if once--
> Than dying + half--then rallying (+ past)
> For + Consciouser Eclipse-- (+ Totaller)
>
> (J762, 1862, F23)

In the first stanza, Dickinson characterizes the physical sensations of the abortion. She states that the child was expelled from her womb not all at once, as she seems to have expected, but

slowly and painfully. The reader may be surprised that what Dickinson is here describing is akin to the process of labor. And this observation is not incorrect. A woman undergoing an abortion, at least in the nineteenth century that was without the modern method of vacuum aspiration, would have had to undergo the labor process in order to bring about the expulsion of the fetus. However, with an abortion, not only is this kind of birth joyless because there is no child to help ease or erase the memory of the pain, but also an abortion, in the words of Sherry Jiménez,

> is often more painful than a full-term birth. This may be because abortion is not a healthy function, rather it is a dysfunction. The contractions may be more like severe cramps or spasms than like the rhythmic, wavelike tightening and relaxation that occurs in a healthy labor. Often they are erratic and asymmetric, making it difficult to anticipate when the next will come or how it will feel. The fear that comes naturally when abortion threatens, added to the difficult nature of the labor, increases the woman's tension and pain, and probably draws out the process longer than is necessary in many cases. (16-17)

As the abortion continues in this poem, Dickinson speaks of her murderous feelings. This is not unexpected taking into account that she wants to keep the child, that she has probably experienced the child's movements during her pregnancy, and that the abortion experience is much like the process of labor itself as the fetus moves down the birth canal. Torn between these feelings of birth and the knowledge that death is impending (if indeed it has not already occurred), Dickinson ascribes volition to the child in line 3 by describing it as struggling for life: "A Thrust--and then for Life a Chance." In the next line, reality pulls her back as she realizes that all the child's imaginary struggles are in vain as the abortion's purpose is "The Bliss to cauterize." The reference here to

cauterization seems to suggest that the abortion has been induced by a chemical method. Russell Fisher discusses abortion-inducing agents, giving some insight into the procedure behind the description of line 4:

> Chemical agents taken by mouth are rarely effective unless they be given in toxic doses large enough to cause serious illness to the mother. Local application can vary from simple vaginal douching, with little chance of penetrating the closed cervix, to injection of the chemical under pressure . . . into the cavity of the uterus itself. This latter is in reality an operative procedure, although chemical agents are used to kill the fetus and thus insure onset of labor. They do this largely by escharotic [caustic] action. . . . (7)

Although Fisher's description originates from around 1954, long after the centralization and regulation of the medical world and the occurrence of many advances in practitioners' procedures, his discussion of the cauterizing method holds true for abortions in the nineteenth century performed by physicians. As discussed at this chapter's beginning, various abortion-inducing agents were used in the nineteenth century to initiate the termination of pregnancy. It appears from Dickinson's description here that this is the kind of abortion she experienced. And, of course, the type of chemical agent that was used, some which were poisonous, may have also had an impact upon the pain involved in the abortion itself and the duration of her recovery during the better part of her bedridden summer.

In any event, in line 4 Dickinson returns to calling the child "the Bliss," just as she has in J271, "A solemn thing--it was--I said--," in which she ponders in her state of "wifehood" faced with the threat of loss of her child "how the bliss would look-- / And would it feel as big-- / When I could take it in my hand--."

Stanza four characterizes in metaphor her feelings about the child during the abortion. She compares it to a mouse in a cat's clutches. The cat is cruel to its prey, letting it think that it has hope for escape by loosening its grip, only then to "[mash] it to death." Dickinson imagines that the abortion, occurring in stages, allows the child hope in its struggles for life, though death is inevitable.

Sarcastic and bitter, stanza three provides Dickinson's reflections. She flatly states that the award for having lived is death; however, she claims that it is better to die the first time than to rally and be given hope for life only to have to die again, as she conceives her child has done during the abortion.

Immediately following the abortion, guilt for her participation in the act, unwilling though it has been, begins to haunt her. In J1230 Dickinson faces the child's death and bemoans the fact that it could have been prevented if her and Master's love for the child had been stronger:

> It came at last but prompter Death
> Had occupied the House--
> His pallid Furniture arranged
> And his metallic Peace--
>
> Oh faithful + Frost that kept the Date (+ Sleet)
> Had Love as punctual been
> Delight had aggrandized the Gate
> And blocked the coming in.
>
> (J1230, 1872)

Dickinson begins by describing the culmination of the abortion. Finally the child is "born"; however, perhaps suggesting that she horrifyingly expected it to be born alive, she realizes that already

personified "Death / Had occupied the House." Extending the house metaphor of line 2, the poet describes the child's physical appearance as she imagines it, fueled by her past experience with death. She claims that Death had arranged "his pallid furniture"--a likely reference to rigor mortis setting in--and brought with him "his metallic Peace"--that cold, rigid stillness and release from suffering that is commonly associated with death.

In the second stanza, the impact of her guilt strikes her as she sorrowfully wishes that their love for the child had been as sure as death. Had this been the case, the child would still be alive, it would be assured of it parents' love, and the parents themselves, as any new parents at the birth of their newborn, would be full of "delight."

Dickinson's guilt-ridden thoughts following the abortion about her child continue to torment her. Poem J731 is a self-accusatory reflection upon the wishes she ascribes to the child which she was unable to grant:

> "I want"--it pleaded--All its' life--
> I want--was chief it said
> When Skill entreated it--the last--
> And when so newly dead--
>
> I could not deem it late--to hear
> That single--steadfast sigh--
> The lips had placed as with a "Please"
> Toward Eternity--
>
> (J731, 1863, F38)

Another poem in which Dickinson attributes volition and the ability to speak to her child, this imagines that the child's sole concern was life and that it pleaded with her all of its short life to be allowed

to survive. At the very end, the guilt-ridden Dickinson is not surprised to imagine the child's dying "steadfast sigh" of resignation accompanied by its dying facial expression of supplication as if saying "Please" in an effort to convince her to change her mind.

In this poem verging on self-condemnation, as if she understands the child's feelings and emotions about the abortion experience, Dickinson determines that the child, once realizing that it was not wanted, did not desire to live; thus, it becomes her greatest accuser and source of guilt, expressed in J519:

> 'Twas warm--at first--like Us--
> Until there crept upon
> A Chill--like frost upon a Glass--
> Till all the scene--be gone.
>
> The Forehead copied Stone--
> The Fingers grew too Cold
> To ache--and like a Skater's Brook--
> The busy Eyes--Congealed--
>
> It straightened--that was all--
> It crowded Cold to Cold--
> It multiplied indifference--
> As Pride were all it could--
>
> And even when with Cords--
> 'Twas lowered, like a + Weight-- (+ Freight)
> It made no Signal, nor demurred,
> But dropped like Adamant.
>
> (J519, 1862, F29)

In the first stanza, Dickinson imaginatively asserts that at first the child was as warm in its affection for her as its mother and father had once been for one another; however, just as the parents' relationship has cooled, so have the child's affections in light of the abortion, "Like frost upon a Glass-- / Till all the scene--be gone." Another creeping chill here, of course, is that of death.

Stanza two captures, amidst images of coldness and implacability, the gradual advance of physical death as she envisions her child dying slowly and lingeringly: "The Forehead copied Stone / The Fingers grew too cold to ache" and "The busy eyes--congealed--." Here again she is drawn to the eyes that she focuses on in J458, "Like Eyes that looked on Wastes--"; however, they hold no accusation for her, except that which she guiltily invests in them.

The realm of emotions is revisited in stanza three as "It straightened" physically with the rigor mortis of death and emotionally "crowded Cold to Cold" inside itself in reaction to its parents' rejection. Furthermore, the images of cold and implacability continue as the child feigns "multiplied indifference" "As [if] Pride were all it could" muster to protect itself. Finally in the last stanza, Dickinson imagines that, "even when with Cords-- / 'Twas lowered, like a Weight--" the child did not hesitate or protest at its unjust treatment but made an "Adamant" entrance into the grave.

Another poem that records Dickinson's guilty projections about the child's death is J287, "A Clock stopped--." In this poem Dickinson creates an extended metaphor comparing the child's death to the stopping of a clock, a viable and incisive comparison, given that a clock is our way of measuring the duration of our lives. Still focusing upon the imagined coldness that she projects as the child's reaction to her and its father's rejection, the poem is pervaded by cold physical and emotional images. Moreover, in the terse crisp, unemotional recounting of the facts, Dickinson captures in diction a cool tone that mirrors the content:

A Clock stopped--
Not the Mantel's--
Geneva's farthest skill
Cant put the puppet bowing--
That just now dangled still--

An awe came on the Trinket!
The Figures hunched, with pain--
Then quivered out of Decimals--
Into Degreeless Noon--

It will not stir for Doctors--
The Pendulum of snow--
This Shopman importunes it--
While cool--concernless No--

Stares[4]
Nods from the Gilded pointers--
Nods from the Seconds slim--
Decades of Arrogance between
The Dial life--
And Him--

(J287, 1861, F11)

Although this poem's early date of 1861 would appear to exclude it from any of Dickinson's poems dealing with this tragedy, its content, tone, and unifying devices with all the abortion sequence poems would appear to contradict its exclusion. It is quite possible that this is a poem that Dickinson wrote toward the end of 1861 or at the beginning of 1862, which would account for the similarity of content and tone with the other poems of this sequence. As R. W. Franklin himself admits, his techniques for dating the poems are not flawless and "there is necessarily some imprecision about the beginnings and endings of years" (Manuscripts 1: xv). Thus, because of the indefinitenes of the poems' dating, it is feasible that J287--

[4]In this particular poem, Dickinson added the word Stares to be substituted for Nods; however, she did not indicate by use of a plus sign or underscoring that this is an accepted amendment.

along with other poems in this study that appear to be dated slightly too early or too late--can and does belong to the group of poems under study. Moreover, frequently the internal components of these poems attest to their appropriate inclusion in this group.

Stanzas one and two record the death of the child, just as Dickinson recounts it in the first two stanzas of "'Twas warm--at first--like Us--." Here, however, she metaphorically compares the child's death to the stopping of a clock, which she claims "will not stir for Doctors--" or even herself, "This Shopman" who "importunes it." The child, full of "Decades of Arrogance" refuses to show any signs of life or emotion except the "cool--concernless No--" which "Nods from the Gilded pointers" to its mother. Plagued by guilt here, Dickinson envisions that the arrogant child feels that she has spurned it, and thus rejects her pleas.

In J462, rebuked by the arrogance of the child and simultaneously sensing its masked pain, Dickinson continues guiltily to imagine her child's death as if it were a baby already born, in its crib, and able to sense the situation. This particular poem does not just focus on her own culpability; she yokes her own and the child's sufferings to Master:

Why make it doubt--it hurts it so--
So sick--to guess--
So strong--to know--
So brave--upon its' little Bed
To tell the very last They said
Unto Itself--and smile--And shake--
For that dear-distant--dangerous--Sake--
But--the Instead--the Pinching fear
That Something--it did do--or dare
Offend the Vision--and it flee--
And They no more remember me--
Nor ever turn to tell me why--
Oh, Master, This is Misery--

(J462, 1862, F32)

Speaking directly to Master about the child as if it can understand its father's lack of love and take offense at the decision made about its fate, Dickinson pleads with Master not to make the child doubt their love any longer. Dickinson appears, based upon the nineteenth-century popular belief concerning the correspondences between the living and the dead, to be referring here to the child in Heaven being aware of their feelings. If so, then Dickinson is castigating Master for his continuing lack of love for his own child. Most likely Wadsworth wanted to put the whole experience behind them and forget completely about the child's existence. She intercedes and attempts to elicit some paternal feelings for the child first through guilt and then pity.

In order to evoke guilt, Dickinson attempts to recreate the child's love for his father and trust in Master's decree about his fate. Dickinson says that the child was "so sick—to guess" that his father did not love him. Moreover, it was "So brave--upon it's little Bed" that it was willing, according to those attending its death, to die "Unto Itself--and smile--And shake—" "For that dear--distant--

dangerous--Sake," its father, who would not have been in Amherst at the time of the abortion. However, in Heaven and now aware of its parents' lack of love, the child--in typical child-like fashion of assuming responsibility for the problems between its parents--feels abandoned and uninformed about the reason for its fate as if "the Pinching fear / That something--it did do" "Offend[ed] the Vision" Master and Dickinson had of a perfect life together and sealed its fate.

To compound the guilt she heaps upon Master, she then in lines 11-12 includes a pitiful accusation worded as if it issues from the child itself from Heaven: "And They no more remember me-- / Nor ever turn to tell me why." The final line, "Oh, Master, This is Misery--," expresses all of Dickinson's empathetic frustration about the child and Master's attitude toward it. Quite possibly Dickinson is expressing typical maternal grief as opposed to paternal grief over the loss of their child in this poem. As mentioned above, mothers and fathers grieve differently over losses in pregnancy. Perhaps one of the most significant reasons for the difference is the physical and emotional closeness a woman can feel that a man cannot for the child growing and moving under her heart:

> The father is not as emotionally close to the unborn child as the mother. He was not physically pregnant, and this can make a big difference. Because the woman is aware of the pregnancy twenty-four hours a day--feeling the baby kicking, the anmiotic fluid sloshing, and her belly growing—she adjusts more readily to the reality of the child. To her, the fetus becomes a person sooner than it does for the father. He does not feel pregnant all of the time. He feels pregnant when [the mother] is with him. . . . The father usually spends far less time than [the mother] daydreaming about the baby. . . . He finds it difficult to relate to the child. (Jiménez 31)

Moreover, the father "cannot share [the mother's] additional humiliation over the loss of self" (Berezin 30). Following a loss in pregnancy, the mother suffers "several blows to her self-esteem":

> She has lost (1) the wished-for child, (2) decision-making power over her own body, and (3) decision-making power over the child's body. . . . (Berezin 31)

The father, who is exempt from these experiences, may mourn for his dead child but cannot understand the nature of the mother's profound and continued grief:

> the bereaved father may be baffled by her reluctance to be comforted. As weeks drag into months and she continues to resist his suggestions [of getting their lives back to normal], his demands that she "get over it already" take on a more urgent tone. . . . (Berezin 32)

Given that the previous discussion describes the father's reactions for a desired child and remembering that Master had insisted an abortion was appropriate for his and Dickinson's conceived child, we can imagine the poet's frustration and sorrow at Master's callous attitude toward and lack of support for her and the child he does not want. He simply wants the abortion behind them and not to be reminded about it. On the other hand, Dickinson, as the mourning mother who has wanted the child, must struggle through this experience of loss alone, without the usual comfort or support, and bombarded by his insensitive, insistent demands that she get over it quickly.

What Dickinson perceives as Master's neglectful, forgetful attitude about the child forces her to reflect upon her solitary position. In poem J263 she takes stock of her relationship to Master in view of her feelings for and living memory of her dead child:

A single Screw of Flesh
Is all that pins the Soul
That stands for Deity, to Mine,
Upon my side the Vail--

Once witnessed of the Gauze--
It's name is put away
As far from mine, as if no plight
Had printed yesterday,

In tender--solemn Alphabet,
My Eyes just turned to see,
When it was smuggled by my sight
Into Eternity--

More Hands--to hold--These are but Two--
One more new-mailed Nerve
Just granted, for the Peril's sake--
Some striding--Giant--Love--

So greater than the Gods can show,
They slink before the Clay,
Than not for all their Heaven can boast
Will let it's Keepsake--go

(J263, 1861, F12)

Stanza one considers the ties Dickinson has left with Master now that the child is gone from their lives and Master refuses to remember the child. The "single Screw of Flesh" she mentions in line 1 takes on sexual innuendo, and possibly this connotation is one that Dickinson intended to imply; however, when we remember that in the nineteenth century screw meant a twist, a small package whose ends were twisted or turned to seal the parcel, we can see that Dickinson is here referring to her aborted child. Furthermore, when we recall that in J527, "To put this World down, like a Bundle," Dickinson alludes to the child as a "Bundle" or a package, we see that the imagery is reiterated here, more clearly suggesting the child as reference. Dickinson's "Soul / That stands for Deity" of lines 2-3 obviously refers to Wadsworth. As an ordained minister, Wadsworth was God's

representative on earth; thus, his "Soul" would "stand for Diety." Consequently in lines 1-4 she considers the one bond that she has left with Master. In the present assertion we can hear echoes of Dickinson's earlier consideration of her state of "Wifehood" in J199, "I'm `wife'--I've finished that--." In this poem she laments that even this tie is now gone. All she has left is the child that forever "pins" her soul to his. It is quite possible she is thinking here of the grieving and mourning for this child that should bind them together, just as mutual grief and common mourning practices were intended to draw individuals closer to each other during the nineteenth century. In this instance, however, no mutual mourning or spiritual and emotional closeness exists. The suggestion that Dickinson is contemplating the perpetual afterlife when her and Master's souls would be united in domesticated Heaven with their child is also strong; however, her assertion in line 1 that it is only the child that unites them, in the absence of mutual grief, intimates the reality of Master's distance.

Following the bittersweet realization that she has lost earthly contact with Master but that she will be with him in Heaven, line 4 of the first stanza is curious: "Upon my side the Vail--." Read within the context of Dickinson's considering her lost child as her final link with Master, this line appears to be saying that though she acknowledges this tie, she ("Upon my side") must keep it hidden ("the Vail"), even from Master who does not wish to acknowledge it. One might argue that "the Vail" she refers to her is a wedding veil; however, in the previous three lines she has disavowed her earlier

state of "Wifehood," so this interpretation seems highly unlikely. More likely the "Vail" referred to here implies secrecy and covertness, especially when considered in terms of the next two stanzas.

Stanzas two and three relive the separation of mother and child during the abortion. Dickinson laments in line 5 that once she "witnessed of the Gauze" of "the Vail" that she must maintain, the child's "name is put away / As far from mine, as if no plight / Had printed yesterday, / In tender--solemn Alphabet." She incredulously asserts that she must deny the child's existence as if it never had been. Then, almost as an affirmation of the veil of secrecy Master has forced upon her, she seems to flash back to the past scene of the abortion, her last real contact with her child, when she was even denied sight of the child by those in attendance: "My eyes just turned to see, / When it was smuggled by my sight / Into Eternity--." Perhaps that Dickinson did not see her child causes her the greatest anguish and forces her to return again and again to the actual abortion. According to Emmanuel Lewis, "Memory facilitates mourning" (619). However, with a pregnancy terminating in abortion, there is precious little to remember about the child. Moreover,

> a woman whose baby has died, whether before or after birth, will want to cry, talk about the event, and call forth whatever limited memories exist. Not to do this would be to deny the significance of the death, which only extends the mourner's intense preoccupation with what has been lost. . . . (Berezin 28)

Considering Dickinson's claims that Master, in his refusal to discuss or mourn the child, has denied the significance of her child's death, it is not surprising that she appears to dwell upon her memories of

the child in poems J271, J270, J491, J559, J458, J462, J731, J519, J287, and J462 and to return as if magnetized to her last contact with the child during its final moments in J762, "The Whole of it came not at once," J1230, "It came at last but prompter Death," J731, "`I want´--it pleaded--All its life--," J519, "´Twas warm—at first--like Us--," J287, "A Clock stopped--," and J462, "Why make it doubt--it hurts it so--." In stanzas 2-3 of "A single Screw of Flesh" Dickinson focuses upon never having seen her baby that was "smuggled by my sight / Into Eternity." Ironically enough, authorities claim that "parents who have seen and held their dead babies recover more quickly" (Jiménez 54). Perhaps the reason for this is that seeing and holding the baby acknowledges the child´s existence and gives the parents some memories of the child in place of the empty, aching sense of loss they feel. It is almost as if, as Sherry Jiménez intimates, it is a way of first saying hello before having to say goodbye (43). Unfortunately, Dickinson is denied the chance of seeing and meeting her child, and at this point agitatedly and sorrowfully can only remember the few memories she has, create some that were not, and look forward to meeting her child in Heaven.

Apparently emotionally distraught in stanza four, Dickinson seems to be searching for "More Hands—to hold" because she alone has "but Two." She begs and aches to hold her child´s or Master´s hands, both denied her. This is not an abnormal response for a mother who loses a child during pregnancy; according to Sherry Jiménez, "grieving parents often feel that they will never again be happy or fulfilled. . . . The mothers often talk about feeling like there is

a hole within them that nothing can fill. They say their arms `ache´ to hold a baby" (39). In lines 2-3 of stanza four, Dickinson claims that, instead of the hands she wishes for, "One more new-mailed Nerve" has been "Just granted" her "for the Peril´s sake--"; in other words, she has been given strength (the promise of reunion with Master in Heaven?) to withstand the "Peril" she risks at her silence about the child. She acknowledges the child as the object of her "striding--Giant--Love-- / So greater than the Gods can show" that the Gods "slink before" it. In fact, Dickinson imagines that the child is considered so valuable, so special, and is such a reminder of great love that the gods are so enamored of their prize of earthly "Clay," "That not for all their Heaven can boast / Will let its Keepsake--go."

Poem 482 returns the reader to the plot of events narrating the actual abortion experience. In "We Cover Thee--Sweet Face--" Dickinson imagines preparing the child for burial amidst a flood of personal guilt, self-recriminations, and obvious love for this dear little person:

> We Cover Thee--Sweet Face--
> Not that We tire of Thee--
> But that Thyself fatigue of Us--
> Remember--as Thou go--
> We follow Thee until
> Thou notice Us--no more--
> And then--reluctant--turn away
> To Con Thee o er and o er--
>
> And blame the scanty love
> We were Content to show--
> Augmented--Sweet--a Hundred fold--
> If Thou would´st take it--now--
>
> (J482, 1862, F22)

Imagining that she is preparing the child for burial, Dickinson

addresses the child as if to reassure it. In stanza one, she says that she and Master are burying the child, not because they do not love it, but because the child is tired of them. Given the foregoing argument, this seems an incongruous statement; however, as one reads on into the stanza, Dickinson makes clear that she is speaking through guilt here. She tells the child in lines 4-8 that it should remember that they are following it on its journey until it can no longer see them; then they will reluctantly turn away, only to keep the child forever in memory. Given Master's attitude about the child that Dickinson has voiced in several previously discussed poems, the reader senses that she speaks predominantly for herself, but wishfully for Master as well, maintaining a brave front for the child. She wishes that he, as the child's father, would feel the same toward his child; however, she realizes that he does not. These ambivalent feelings thus account for the awkward statements of lines 1-3. She has not tired of the child, although she perceives that Master has. And she can understand how the child might "fatigue" of its parents' obvious lack of love for it, expressed through the abortion.

Stanza two seems to resolve the conflicting statements of the first stanza even further as she affirms that the "scanty love / We were Content to show" the child has resulted in its death. Furthermore, she claims that this sparse love has grown "a Hundred fold" since the child left them, and she sadly wishes that she could show the depth of her love, "If [the child] would'st take it--now--."

Poem J1712 is obviously another composition of an emotionally distraught Dickinson. The staccato delivery of its phrases stresses

the apparent unconnectedness of its thoughts. In the narrative sequence of the abortion, it brings Dickinson to the time of burial of her child. As the poem opens, Dickinson agitatedly considers the freshly dug open grave, its implications for herself, and her feelings about the impending burial:

> A Pit--but Heaven over it--
> And Heaven beside, and Heaven abroad,
> And yet a Pit--
> With Heaven over it.
>
> To stir would be to slip—
> To look would be to drop--
> To dream—to sap the Prop
> That holds my chances up.
> Ah! Pit! With Heaven over it!
>
> The depth is all my thought--
> I dare not ask my feet--
> 'Twould start us where we sit
> So straight you'd scarce suspect
> It was a pit--with fathoms under it--
> Its Circuit just the same.
> Seed--summer--tomb--
> Whose Doom to whom
>
> 'Twould start them--
> We—could tremble--
> But since we got a Bomb--
> And held it in our Bosom—
> Nay--Hold it—it is Calm--
>
> (J1712, 1862, F24)

Juxtaposing the harsh realities of earthly death with intimations of Heavenly reward, stanza one finds Dickinson contending with the bittersweet emotions over her child's death. The scene can be infered from the content. Obviously Dickinson has arrived at the open grave where the child will be entombed. She realizes with a shock that her beloved child will be lowered into this stark "Pit," as she calls it, where she must leave it. She makes a point of indicating the grave's

solitude and isolation as she says that only Heaven is "over it," "beside" it, and around it ("abroad"). Although this heavenly image serves to characterize this grave's separateness, it also suggests the promise of Heavenly reward for the child.

Stanza two shifts Dickinson's vantage point and tone. Whereas in stanza one she observes the grave from an objective, distanced perspective, as if several feet away, in stanza three she is perched on the grave's edge, afraid of moving or looking directly into it, lest she lose her fearful battle with the sensation of slipping into the open maw of this "Pit" and suffer the same fate as her child: "To stir would be to slip-- / To look would be to drop--," she worries. In these lines, she describes this grave almost as if it has a magnetic effect upon her. If she yields, she will be pulled in. This physical attraction she alludes to reflects the psychological bond she feels for the child she must entomb here. This idea is underscored in lines 7-8: "To dream--to sap the Prop / That holds my chances up." The poet appears to be saying here that if she allows herself to dream about what might have been, her chances of surviving will be destroyed by the knowledge that her dreams will never come true. The reader senses at this point a very tight, brittle control she has on her emotions. Any force, slight though it might be, will cause her to crumble, mentally, physically, and emotionally. But in line 9 she finds some hope and comfort in this dismal ending of her child's life as she thinks of a promise of some future for herself and her child in Heaven. "Ah! Pit! With Heaven over it," she says, finding soothing

solace in the thought of Heaven's closeness and protection of the child.

Dickinson returns to her agitated thoughts about the grave itself in stanza 3, as if she cannot divorce it from her thoughts: "The depth is all my thought." Lines 11-14 present a return of her fear about slipping in and the added fear of live burial: "I dare not ask my feet-- / 'Twould start us where we sit / So straight you'd scarce suspect / It was a Pit--." Not only is this grave "a Pit" now, but it is one "with fathoms under it." Does Dickinson mean here by this reference that this isolated grave is not a normal grave in that it does not just contain her dead child, but "fathoms" of secrecy as well? Whether she intends this interpretation or that underneath this grave dug in the earth there are only fathoms and fathoms of more earth, is unclear. However in the final lines of stanza 4, as if forced by the finality of her thoughts, she turns her attention to the child. As she reminisces about her child, she characterizes "Its Circuit" on earth as being "just the same" as any other person's, only shorter--the mere duration of a "summer": "Seed--summer--tomb," birth, life, and death. But then, the normality evaporates and guilt rushes in upon her as she interrupts her peaceful thoughts and returns to her feelings about the reason for the child's death: "Whose Doom to whom?" she says, an obvious reference to the guilt she feels over her complicity in her child's death. She strongly intimates here that in her participation in the child's death she has not only lost the child, but also a part of herself as well. This is not an uncommon feeling for mothers suffering the death of a child in pregnancy,

according to Sherry Jiménez:

> A pregnant woman subconsciously sees her baby as part of herself. When she loses the unborn child, she mourns not only the potential son or daughter, but also a part of her own self-image. . . . (31-32)

The final stanza of J1712 is interesting in several ways. In Dickinson's fascicles, it is separated from the previous four stanzas by eight pages. It, along with a concluding stanza to J443, is placed on a separate sheet of paper. One wonders if the stanza was too telling for Dickinson to place it near the previous three, for telling it is. Moreover, considering the secrecy that concerns Dickinson within the poem, the circumstances of the poet's original manucript draft of this very revealing poem become interesting also. According to Thomas H. Johnson, there is no known draft of the poem's first three stanzas. The only reason we have a copy is that Dickinson's editor, Mabel Loomis Todd, made a transcript of these lines (Johnson, Poems 1156). The missing leaf containing these lines had obviously been removed from Dickinson's originally bound fascicle (for protective reasons?). However, the last stanza does exist in manuscript form.

Dickinson intertwines three ideas here. First, she unequivocally indicates that she is talking about her child that "we got" and "held . . . in our Bosom," but she refers to it as a "Bomb," indicating the danger involved concerning its conception. Second, she suggests that "we could tremble" at the realization of what they have done, but in the last line she seems to indicate that trembling is unnecessary because the child is now dead and unable to jeopardize them and their relationship. As if to prove it, she says, "Nay--Hold

it--it is Calm--." Finally in this stanza her thoughts turn to others. Above in stanza three of the poem she has worried about herself; here she worries about others' reactions to the situation. She claims, "'Twould start them" to know what we have done; however, she implies that now the child is dead and being secretly buried, there is no need to worry. The secrecy theme is one she will return to again in subsequent poems.

Poem J408 takes Dickinson and the abortion narrative up to the edge of the child's grave. Still battling to accept the idea of burying her child, this poem is less emotional and agitated than J1712; however, her fear concerning the child's secrecy resurfaces here. As she stares into a grave-like structure, Dickinson muses:

> Unit, like Death, for Whom?
> True like the Tomb,
> Who tells no secret
> Told to Him--
> The Grave is strict--
> Tickets admit
> Just two--the Bearer--
> And the Borne--
> And seat--just One--
> The Living--tell--
> The Dying--but a Syllable--
> The Coy Dead--None--
> No Chatter--here--no tea--
> So Babbler, and Bohea--stay there--
> But Gravity--and Expectation--and Fear--
> A tremor just, that All's not sure.
>
> (J408, 1862, F28)

Line 1 begins almost as if Dickinson suddenly encounters this grave-like structure, recognizes its purpose, and asks for whom it is intended. She does not immediately characterize it as a grave, but as a "Unit, like Death." Not the stark open "Pit" of J1712, she says, "This structure is like one used for Death. Who is it for?" Is

Dickinson bewildered here, trying to deny the burial of her child? Possibly, for this experience must have had a sense of unreality for her. But it is also possible that this grave is somewhat familiar and somewhat unfamiliar to her. Living next to the town cemetery for years, Dickinson must have been familiar with gravesites and funerals. However here, the grave's purpose is hazy in Dickinson's mind. Why? The answer may lie in the grave's location and circumstances.

According to Margaret M. Coffin in Death in Early America, approved burial places for the illegitimate were "difficult to find." In some communities,

> A burial ground for the town's indigent and friendless was called Potter's Field. Sometimes this adjoined a regular cemetery; sometimes it was isolated on the outskirts of town. In Lancaster, Pennsylvania, it was 1798 before an illegitimate child could be buried in the yard of the First Reformed Church. Even then the bell could not be tolled, and the church's pastor was not allowed to take part in, or even attend, any sort of ceremony. By 1823 the consistory of this church resolved that "persons who live in open lusts and died without repentence" should not be allowed any tolling of the bells or a minister, but they could be buried in an obscure rear section of the burying grounds. . . . (129-130)

Just a sample of communities' attitudes about the burial of the illegitimate a full forty to sixty years before the death of Dickinson's child, the above citation indicates the early prejudiced reluctance of Americans that to a lesser degree continued into Dickinson's time to allow the illegitimate to rest among other legitimate members of their communities. This strong prejudice and censure more than likely drove many women who were illegitimately or otherwise undesirably pregnant to secretive burial to prevent community knowledge and censure. For Dickinson, given her family's prominence in the Amherst community and Master's desire to keep the

child's existence hidden, it is probable that she too resorted to the covertness of secret burial. Thus, when Dickinson appears concurrently familiar and unfamiliar with the grave, the reason may be that it resembles other graves she has seen, but is also dissimilar to them in its isolation, in probable lack of a headstone, the absence of a minister to reside over the burial ceremony, and the absence of a group of beloved mourners.

The idea of secrecy and fear of discovery permeates this poem and this grave. Lines 2-4 play upon this theme when Dickinson remarks that this grave, like others she is familiar with, is "True, like the Tomb, / Who tells no secret / Told to Him--." She implies that what will be entombed here will carry a secret she wants none but the grave to know. In the next six lines, Dickinson continues to consider the inviolateness of the grave. She says, "The Grave is strict--," as if reassuring herself that it is so. Lines 6-9 present an obvious and interesting image of mother ("The Bearer") and child ("the Borne") together in the grave: "Tickets admit / Just two--the Bearer-- / And the Borne-- / And seat--just One--." Literally here, Dickinson may be referring to the American custom, popular in the nineteenth century, of burying mother and child together if they happened to die within hours or a couple of days of each other; however, Dickinson is here obviously not dead. She may be speaking of her metaphoric death at seeing her child buried before her, something every parent fears. This interpretation seems likely in terms of the sense of lines 6-9 in which she says that tickets "admit / Just two" "And seat--just One--." Dickinson is clearly referring here to the mother's accompanying her

secretive child to the grave. Lines 10-12 continue this idea of secrecy and fear of discovery for the grave. She says that "The Living--tell" all; "The Dying" tell "but a Syllable" before death; but "The Coy Dead--None--." Here, and in the following two lines, 13-14, she seems relieved that the child will not be able to reveal its existence. The strictness of the grave now cemented in her mind, Dickinson almost sighs with relief when she says that her former "Gravity--and Expectation--and Fear" about her secret's discovery is "A tremor just, that All's not sure."

The next several poems of the abortion sequence are burial poems that record not only the event but also Dickinson's attitude toward it. Poem J1752 documents Dickinson's guilty feelings about living while her docile child is buried:

> This docile one inter
> While we who dare to live
> Arraign the sunny brevity
> That sparkled to the Grave
>
> On her departing span
> No wilderness remain
> As dauntless in the House of Death
> As if it were her own--
>
> (J1752, 18??)

During the interment of her "docile one," Dickinson considers herself one who "dare[s] to live" and fret guiltily about the incongruity of life's continuing on, represented in nature's image of the sunshine "That sparkled to the Grave / On her departing span," while her child faces a "dauntless" "wilderness" "in the House of Death." This self-accusatory poem by Dickinson about her child's death, according to Thomas H. Johnson, is an "unfinished draft" and like J1712 has no

autograph copy known. The poem exists exclusively through a transcript made by Mrs. Todd (Johnson, Poems 3: 1176).

Poem J1402 exists in two versions. Both record the child's burial. The first version, signed "Emily--" and presumably sent to Susan Dickinson (Johnson, Poems 973), alludes circuitously to the silence and secrecy surrounding the interment as mentioned in J1712, "A Pit--but Heaven over it--":

> To the stanch Dust
> We safe commit thee--
> Tongue if it hath,
> Inviolate to thee--
> Silence--denote--
> And Sanctity--enforce thee--
> Passenger--of Infinity--
>
> (J1402, 1877)

Directly addressing the child, lines 1-2 not only document the burial, but also echo the burial service, an appropriate allusion, especially since the child's illegitimacy would probably have prevented it from having a burial ceremony performed by a minister.

Line 2 states that they are committing the child to "safe[ty]" in interring it in the grave. Why would this be safety, unless for some reason they did not want others knowing about it? Lines 3-6 provide an answer. More specifically, in line 3-4, Dickinson expresses her fear of the child's discovery when she says, "Tongue if [the Dust] hath, / Inviolate to thee." Here she voices the idea that the grave is a secret place. In lines 5-6 Dickinson utters a wish for her child: "Silence--denote / And Sanctity--enforce thee--." In other words, she tells the child, "silence will be your only marker and inviolateness will make you strong on your journey to infinity."

The second version of J1402, a variant reading of the first existing in a transcript by Mrs. Todd, is in several ways concurrently more covert and more open:

> To the unwilling dust
> We soft commit thee.
> Guile if it hath,
> Inviolate to thee
> Breezes caress and firmament salute thee,
> Nothing affront thy secrecy.

In lines 1-2 with tones as soft as a loving mother laying her child gently in its cradle, Dickinson almost prays as she "soft[ly]" commits her child to the, this time, "unwilling dust." Creating a pathetic fallacy, she projects her feelings onto the earth as if it were not ready to take the child from her. In this version, instead of imagining the dust possibly having the "Tongue" of version one, she envisions that if it has "Guile," the child is still inviolate in the grave, again expressing Dickinson's fear of the grave's discovery.

One line shorter than the first version, this version's last two lines utter, as in the first, the mother's wishes for the child: "Breezes caress and firmament salute thee, / Nothing affront thy secrecy." Here, there is more heartfelt softness for the child and greater fear of discovery than expressed in the first version. It also appears that she is hoping for continued secrecy about the child's grave for the child's sake. Why? Perhaps the answer may be discovered in the commonly-held nineteenth-century belief in the correspondences between the world of the living and the dead. Perhaps Dickinson wishes to spare the child, whom she believes has already suffered emotionally and physically at its parents' rejection, from

the knowledge of others' callous, ostracizing reactions towards it if they discovered the grave and the child's illegitimacy.

The intimations here are also strong, as they have been in J270, J621, and J491 already discussed and in the Master Letters, that Dickinson, upon discovery of her pregnancy, wanted to keep the child. After Master's rejection of her request, however, she has decided against advertising the nature of their relationship or that there was a living product of their union because she fears discovery of her secret. In fact, in poems not heretofore discussed, Dickinson deals with this theme of secrecy in conjunction with the abortion.

Perhaps one of the most prominent treatments of the theme of secrecy occurs in J1737, "Rearrange a `Wife's' affection!" In this poem Dickinson returns to consider her relationship to Master as that of "Wife," as she does in J199 and J271 discussed above, after she has gone through a period of loneliness and doubt about Master during which she says that the child is the only link she has left with him in J263, "A Single screw of Flesh." This is not surprising in view of the biographical facts of Wadsworth's and Dickinson's relationship as noted above. Despite the emotional, spiritual, and physical pain they may have caused one another, they continued to correspond with one another throughout their lives. Wadsworth unexpectedly visited Dickinson two years prior to his death, after not having seen her for twenty years, to alert her to the fact that he was "liable at any time to die"; and Dickinson still referred to the man when writing to the Clark brothers as her "dearest earthly friend." Surely these facts attest to a commitment between them!

Written with the same vehemence and incredulity of the third Master Letter of spring 1861, J1737, also dated 1861 by Franklin, is obviously addressed to Master. In the same vein and tone as paragraph two of that letter in which she answers Master's accusatory doubt of her. She refers to doubting Thomas and says, "One drop more from the gash that stains your Daisy's bosom--then would you believe? Thomas' faith in anatomy--was stronger than his faith in faith!" this poem portrays as strongly a similar doubt about her affections for him:

Rearrange a "Wife's" affection!
When they dislocate my Brain!
Amputate my freckled Bosom!
Make me bearded like a man!

Blush, my spirit, in thy Fastness--
Blush, my unacknowledged clay--
Seven years of troth have taught thee
More than Wifehood ever may!

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

Burden--borne so far triumphant--
None suspect me of the crown,
For I wear the "Thorns" til Sunset--
Then--my Diadem put on.

Big my Secret but it's bandaged--
It will never get away
Till the Day its Weary Keeper
Leads it through the Grave to thee.

(J1737, 1861, F11)

In stanza one, as if Master has accused her of changing her affections for him, Dickinson almost shouts at him, "How dare you doubt your `Wife's' constancy!" Still aggravated in lines 2-4, she exclaims that her affections for him can only change if the impossible happens:

"When they dislocate my Brain! / Amputate my freckled Bosom! / Make me bearded like a man!"

Realizing in stanza two that the love and trust they have built for seven years go "unacknowledged" by Master in his accusation, she reddens in anger ("Blush, my spirit") and possible embarrasment ("Blush, my unacknowledged clay!"), recalling the things she has done for him to make him believe in her. Angry and hurt, she hurls at him the accusation of his own stupidity: "Seven years of troth have taught thee / More than Wifehood ever May!"; in other words, she claims that though he does not realize it in their seven-year relationship (beginning around 1855 or so) she has given him more and been more to him than a real wife ever could!

The rage and vehemence peaking in stanza three, Dickinson asserts that her feelings of "Love," "Trust," and "Constancy" of seven years have never changed despite the "narrow pain" (a childbirth reference?) and "Anguish--bare of anodyne!" (Master's lack of support?) she has had to endure. More is referred to here than the pain and anguish of separation. When she asserts her "Constancy thro' fire--awarded," the reader senses that she is alluding to one particular monumental crisis that she has suffered through and Master knows intimately about. She points to that crisis in stanza four. In the first two lines, she refers to this past crisis as a "Burden" that she has "borne." Here Dickinson returns to the imagery that she has employed in J527, "To put this World down, like a Bundle," and J263, "A single Screw of Flesh" in referring to her child as a bundle, parcel, or package that must be carried. Of course, the reference to

a "burden" that must be "borne" also echoes the language of childbirth. Moreover, if she is referring to the abortion and burial of her child, which Master has deemed must be kept to herself, she is also possibly referring here to the secret she carries with her. Dickinson provides a hint to her line of thought in the rest of the stanza. She says that her burden has been "borne so far triumphant." Here she indicates that she is alluding simultaneously to the child, its birth, and its death, which she has so far managed to keep secret. She continues, "None suspect me of the crown, / For I wear the "Thorns" till Sunset," again returning to imagery she has employed earlier in association with the abortion. The "Thorns" she mentions here recall her earlier comparison of the sacrifice of her child in J527, "To put this World down, like a Bundle," to Christ's crucifixion. She claims that she must wear the crown of thorns "til Sunset," an allusion to the final paragraph of the third Master Letter in which she begs to see Master again until they can be together forever in Heaven. By underscoring "Sunset" here, Dickinson intimates that she is using it in a special sense, just as she uses it in the Master Letters:

> Sir—it were comfort forever—just to look in your face, while you looked in mine—then I could play in the woods—till Dark—till you take me where sundown cannot find us. . . .

Further cementing the connection of the allusion of her "burden" to the child, the last line of stanza four provides the glue when Dickinson says at sunset she will take off her "thorns" and "my Diadem put on." The "Diadem" she metaphorically refers to here carries a double meaning. At sunset, the end of her life on earth, she will

enter Heaven, forgetting all of her earthly pain. There she will become Wadsworth's "Queen," put on the crown denoting her royal rank, and finally possess "the Queen's place" that she so enviously writes about in the third Master Letter. Moreover, in Heaven she will be reunited with her child, the child she writes of in J270, "One Life of so much Consequence!" as being a gem so outstanding that "It burns-- distinct from all the row-- / Intact in Diadem!"

Stanza five strongly indicates that the abortion is the crisis she has suffered through. Here we have a return of the mysterious it and the secrecy surrounding the child's birth and burial. The first line of the stanza characterizes the enormity of the secret she keeps. She says it is a "Big . . . Secret." However, she emphatically and sarcastically asserts that it is "bandaged"; in other words her weighty secret has been temporarily taken care of and cannot harm Master. The choice of "bandaged" here as a descriptive term evokes many associations, and the underscoring heightens its importance. Dickinson may be considering the painful, bloody abortion she suffered through and thinking in terms of a wound to be dressed or bandaged. She may also be considering the child as being bandaged in the sense of being covertly covered over in the grave, unable to escape to betray anyone ("It will never get away") until the afterlife when its "Weary Keeper," Dickinson herself, can lead "it through the Grave to thee," its father, for reunion in Heaven. This poem attests to the depth of Dickinson's pain at being doubted by Master. Moreover, it suggests the bitterness and resentment she feels about suffering

through the abortion alone and about her having to keep it and even her memories of her child secret--even from Master.

Significantly, J1737 is another very telling poem whose original manuscript version has disappeared. The poem survives only because Mabel Todd made a copy of Emily's original--as she had for poems J1712, J1752, and both versions of J1402 (Johnson, Poems 3: 1169). The implications concerning these missing poems are suggestive, especially if we consider that all of them concern the covert burial and necessary secrecy concerning the child. Unaware of Todd's transcripts, quite possibly one of Dickinson's family or friends with access to the manuscripts and enough acquaintance with the facts of Dickinson's life to decipher these poems' contents felt these particular poems too revealing and thought to aid Emily in keeping her secret by disposing of them.

Dickinson's rage, resentment, and the theme of secrecy resurfaces in J269:

> Bound--a trouble--
> And lives can bear it!
> Limit--how deep a bleeding go!
> So--many--drops--of vital scarlet--
> Deal with the soul
> As with Algebra
>
> Tell it the Ages--to a cypher--
> And it will ache--contented--on--
> Sing--at its pain--as any Workman--
> Noting the fall of the Even Sun!
>
> (J269, 1860, F9)

A poem that captures Dickinson's upset at Master's impatience and rationality in dealing with her feelings about the loss of her child, J269 is full of sarcasm and resentment. Moreover, it returns to the

bandaging imagery of J1737, "Rearrange a "Wife's" affection!" and includes the mysterious it referring to the child throughout. As if giving advice to an unknown addressee, Dickinson sarcastically quips in lines 1-2 that if one binds "a trouble," other "lives can bear it!" because they do not have to be aware of or deal with the trouble, a reference here to Master. Continuing with the bandaging imagery, Dickinson advises her imagined listener, again sarcastically, to "Limit--how deep a bleeding go!" regardless of the depth of the hurt. Line 4 bites as it invokes the listener to ignore the "So--many--drops--of vital scarlet" and deal with the pain of the soul rationally and calculatingly "As with Algebra." Lines 3-6 are both obvious references to Dickinson's rage at Master's insensitivity and impatience with her pain and grief.

Stanza two continues in the same vein as Dickinson facetiously advises her audience to "Tell it the Ages--to a cypher"; in other words, "Remind oneself how much time has passed since the trouble occurred, and the pain occasioned by the trouble will continue to ache, but contentedly so." She then sarcastically concludes by suggesting that the addressee "Sing--at its pain" and she says "as any Workman" and it will "[notch] the fall of the Even Sun!" only to arise again the next day.

This short piece of sarcasm in J269 is obviously born out of Dickinson's personal pain and experience. Master's impatience, insensitivity, and rationality in dealing with Dickinson's very real and very emotional feelings about the loss of her child and Master's desires to keep the child secret elicits this sneering, sarcastic

response. Moreover, the poem attests to the very real and continuing pain that she experienced and is continuing to experience over the loss of her child, pain that has no real outlet or consolation--except in her poetry.

Dickinson has learned to harbor her "Secret" in J381, another advisory poem:

> A Secret told--
> Ceases to be a Secret--then--
> A Secret--kept--
> That--can appall but One--
>
> Better of it--continual be afraid
> Than it--
> And Whom you told it to--beside
>
> (J381, 1862, F31)

The situation that occasioned this poem can be clearly inferred from the poem's context. The poet has apparently revealed her secret to someone who has been appalled by it. Consequently, given this person's negative reaction, she reasons that it is best to live in continual fear of the secret alone than to live continually afraid of the secret and the one "Whom you told it to—beside." She has reconciled herself somewhat to living with the secret of her dead child until as she says in J1737, that she, as "its Weary Keeper" can lead it and the child "through the Grave" to Master as secret sharer of the secret and the child.

The final burial poem and, indeed, final poem of the abortion sequence is J936. Having secretly buried her child and, in essence, abandoned and denied its existence, Dickinson frets that the child will forget her and outgrow her in the fascinating realm of Heaven:

This Dust, and its´ Feature--
Accredited--Today--
Will in a second + Future-- (+ Being)
Cease to identify--

This Mind, and its´ measure--
A too minute Area
For its´ enlarged inspection´s
Comparison--appear--

This World, and its´ + species (+ Nations--
A too concluded show Fashions--Symbols--
For its absorbed Attention´s Standards)
+ Remotest scrutiny-- (+ Memorial)

(J936, 1864)

Paraphrased, this poem might read this way: "This child ("This Dust") whom I have buried ("Accredited") today, will in Heaven ("a second Future") "identify" my "Mind" and its capabilities ("its´ measure") as too small as compared to those inhabiting Heaven, the area of "its´ enlarged inspection." Earth and "its´ species" will be a show that ended long ago and is much too unimportant "For its´ absorbed Attention´s remotest scrutiny." In this paraphrase we see a mother worrying over her separation from her child. She frets that the child will forget her and grow beyond her meager earthly capabilities as it is nurtured in Heaven. In this poem Dickinson significantly refers to her child here as "This Dust," the same reference she makes in her consolatory note to Kate Anthon over the death of Anthon´s first husband:

> I, too went out to meet the "Dust" early in the morning, I too, in the Daisy mounds possess hid treasure--. . . .

Furthermore, it is not surprising that Dickinson here returns to the monetary imagery of the poems opening this abortion sequence when she says that she has "Accredited--today" her child. Including this

imagery here not only more firmly joins this poem to the sequence, as does the appearance of the mysterious it, but it also brings the sequence full circle.

When this sequence of 28 poems is arranged in the preceding order with traces of narrative, imagery patterns, and recurring linking devices falling carefully and chronologically into place, it is easy to feel the sense of progression in the narrative and in the emotional relationship between Dickinson and Master and Dickinson and her child. Placed within and examined against historical, biographical, psychological, physiological, and sociological contexts of nineteenth-century abortion and twentieth-century knowledge about abortions, and taken in conjunction with the discussion of the Master Letters of Chapter Two, the suggestion of a Dickinson abortion as the cause behind the overriding grieving tone in the poetry around 1861-1862 is strong. Moreover, that Charles Wadsworth had a connection with this tone is also strong. However, we must ask, are the contents of three letters and twenty-eight poems evidence enough to assert the possibility a probability? The evidence points in that direction, and still more evidence can be offered. We must turn to an examination of Dickinson's other poems in the aftermath of the abortion and Dickinson's personal crisis during the 1861-1862 time period for further substantiation of this hypothesis.

CHAPTER IV

DENIAL: "THAT DULL--BENUMBING TIME"

If Emily Dickinson lost her only child through abortion, we would expect that the experience would have been farther reaching than the mention of it in the three Master Letters and twenty-eight poems recapitulating the abortion experience. In fact, given the confessional aura of the abortion sequence poems, it would seem only logical that allusions in subsequent poems, demonstrating the trauma of the abrupt and irrevocable severing of the symbiotic bond between mother and child, would reveal themselves. This chapter's purpose is to begin tracing these allusions in order to document Dickinson's progression through and adjustment to the grief of losing her child. Numerous poems composed around 1861-1862 allude to a psychological crisis, among them the popularly anthologized pieces such as J341, "After great pain, a formal feeling comes--," J430, "It would never be Common--more--I said--," and J414, "'Twas like a Maelstrom, with a notch," all poems of 1862. Many other less well-known poems, equal in emotional upheaval and also dated from around this time, would suggest support for the argument of an adverse psychological abortion reaction for the poet. However, according to Mary K. Zimmerman in her 1981 review article of abortion literature from its beginnings, despite numerous studies investigating the determining factors of women's positive or negative reactions to abortion, "studies continue to find

very few serious negative consequences as a result of abortion" (69). Thus, while negative abortion sequelae might possibly explain many Dickinson poems centering on a mental crisis of some type, they cannot account with accuracy for one predomininating ingredient of these poems--the intense grieving. In fact, given their pervasive grieving tone, the tenor of these poems is that of someone recounting a severe bereavement reaction.

It is relevant here to indicate that many correspondences exist between depressive illness and bereavement. In fact, if one did not know that a person was undergoing a bereavement, the observer might think, because of the similarities in behavior, attitude, and symptoms between these two conditions, that the person was suffering from a depressive illness. In 1917 Sigmund Freud attempted to study the resemblance between these two states in his essay "Mourning and Melancholia." Both depressive illness (Freud's "melancholia") and grief ("mourning") occur because the individual has suffered the loss of some beloved object. Freud concluded on the one hand, that in grieving the bereaved is aware of what has been lost; on the other hand, in depressive illness, the loss is unperceived by the patient, the duration of the condition is greater, and self-esteem declines--all characteristics not true of grieving (Freud). Since Freud's theory, many studies have attempted to affirm or challenge his thesis. Some recent studies have substantiated some aspects of his hypothesis; for example, in 1965 Colin Murray Parkes compared the grief of psychiatric patients and widows to determine the similiarities or differences between the two. Parkes concluded "that pathological

reactions to bereavement are characterized by excessive guilt and self reproach"[1] (Parkes and Weiss 10). Freud encouraged researchers to compare the conditions of the depressed and the bereaved because they are states closely resembling one another.

That Dickinson suffered a bereavement reaction following the abortion of her child, which she recorded in her poetry, would not be an uncommon response for women suffering a loss during pregnancy. According to Constance L. Wall-Haas in "Women's Perceptions of First Trimester Spontaneous Abortion," a loss in pregnancy for many women is "nearly the equivalent of the loss of a real baby" (50). As she explains it,

> Whether planned or not, a pregnancy represents a significant event in a woman's life. Issues of control, self-esteem, mothering and motherhood elicit a myriad of responses laced with deep psychologic implications. When a woman becomes pregnant, she comes to identify with the fetus and begins to view it as an extension of her own ego. Perceiving the infant as part of herself, the woman attaches to it. The pregnancy then becomes "something else that no one else can take from her: she may have half-conscious fantasies of a secret companion that is hers alone." (50)

Furthermore, Wall-Haas suggests that these maternal feelings evolve from a woman's early interaction with her own mother. Accordingly, she posits,

> Motherhood may be an (fantasized) attempt to make amends to one's own mother for (fantasized) wrongs done to the woman's siblings, and/or it may also be a way to get back at one's mother for (fantasized) wrongs done by her mother to her. (50)

Wall-Haas further argues,

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[1]For an overview of the recent studies into the research done on the similarities between depressive illness, see Colin Murray Parkes and Robert S. Weiss' Recovery from Bereavement, 10-14.

> The relationship that arises between a pregnant woman and her mother provides some of the terms for the relationship between the pregnant woman and her expected infant. The potential for the attachment and bonding, then, may be highly influenced by the woman's previous experience and interaction with her own mother. . . . (50)

Bearing in mind these possibilites, Wall-Haas turns her concentration to consider the maternal-infant bond formed in the woman's mind that is jeopardized by spontaneous abortion. In this instance, the severing of the symbiotic union between mother and child can elicit severe emotional trauma and a grieving response, similar to one for a living child who abruptly dies:

> When a miscarriage occurs, this unique relationship comes to an abrupt end. Since the woman may suffer . . . emotional distress . . . as a result of this broken bond, bereavement, mourning, and grieving might very well be anticipated responses of a woman to the loss of her pregnancy. Because of the relative unexpected nature of spontaneous abortion, the woman may not be psychologically ready to give up her pregnancy. (50-51)

Placing Dickinson's case into the context of this information yields interesting results. We must first recall from the discussion of the abortion sequence poems that Dickinson does indeed bond with her child, so much so that she attributes voice, corpus, volition, emotions, and awareness to it. To her, the child was a real person. In some poems she speaks directly to the child; in others she envisions that it speaks to her. Furthermore, recognizing the mutual bond between them that death cannot destroy, she longingly looks forward to reunion with her child in Heaven. Without a doubt Dickinson perceived the child as part of herself, "a secret companion" that belonged to her alone.

Considering next Dickinson's relationship with her own mother as a determinant of her feelings for her child, we must acknowledge

that Dickinson by her own admission did not feel close to her mother.[2] Emily characterized her relationship to her mother to Thomas Wentworth Higginson once in conversation. She alluded to the early aloofness of her own mother in this way: "I never had a mother. I suppose a mother is one to whom you hurry when you are troubled" (Sewall 1: 74). In her 1874 letter to Higginson, she wrote of the early mothering she had received: "I always ran Home to Awe when a child, if anything befell me. He was an awful Mother, but I liked him better than none" (Letters 2: 517-518). It is interesting here that Dickinson refers to "Awe" as a masculine mother. Perhaps in this reference she intimates just how distanced she felt from her namesake, Emily Norcross Dickinson. In an 1862 letter to Higginson, responding to inquiries about her "Companions," Emily encapsulated the continuing

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[2]For an in-depth consideration of Emily's relationship with her mother, see John F. Cody's psychobiography, After Great Pain. According to Richard Sewall's summation of this clinical psychiatrist's interpretation of the relationship, Cody,

> sees Mrs. Dickinson as a lifelong hypochondriac who must have communicated her fears to her children; an abjectly dependent wife; a fussily compulsive housekeeper; a failure as a mother, especially of her most sensitive child, Emily whose "voracious love-hunger" (p. 101) was never satisfied. Emily interpreted this failure (so the theory goes) as a "cruel rejection" (p. 2) and grew up in a repressed bitterness; resented being female; tried to be unlike her mother by defying her father; rebelled against religious submission; read voraciously; and sublimated her "love needs" in her writing. Hence the persistent themes of death, anxiety, suffering in the poems and letters; the withdrawal, self-immolation, and exorbitant concern for every member of her family that became characteristic of her mode of life. All these are interpreted as symptoms of repressed guilt at her deep sense of hostility and alienation, at her unconscious wish to have all her friends and relatives dead, all of whom failed her in one way or another. And the principal failure was her mother's. (1: 75n)

distance between the two women in one sentence: "My Mother does not care for thought" (Letters 2: 404), indicating the intellectual gulf between them. Taken together, these three assessments attest to the shadowy, distant relationship Emily perceived that she and her mother shared, despite what may have been the reality of the matter. Consequently, when faced with her own impending motherhood, Dickinson probably perceived it subconsciously as an attempt to justify the wrongs done her by her own mother's lack of open affection for or attention to her. Thus, in direct contrast to her mother's example, Dickinson desired to hold on tenaciously to her child. And when she realized that she was powerless to prevent their separation, she must have experienced excruciating grief and guilt over failing her child just as she felt her mother had failed her. Hence, she accuses and berates herself in J1230, "It came at last but prompter Death" by saying, "Had love as punctual been as Death," the child would be alive.

Finally we must consider the fact that in Wall-Haas's argument for a bereavement response following abortion she is considering not an elective abortion, as Dickinson's was, but miscarriage or spontaneous abortion. How can there be a correlation between the psychological reactions to each when one involves unpreventable circumstances and the other occurs by the mother's conscious choice? This question can be answered simply: There can be a correlation between the sequelae of the miscarriage and the elective abortion if that abortion is one that is forced upon the mother not ready for it. As all indications have suggested so far, Dickinson desperately wanted

to keep her child; in J621, "I asked no other thing--," J270, "One Life of so much Consequence!" and in the Master Letters she refers to her serious bargaining with Master, offering her own life in exchange for the child's. Moreover, when Dickinson agreed to the abortion, if indeed she ever really "agreed," she most likely did so reluctantly and only because she saw no other way out of her unwed dilemma, as she claims in J378, "I saw no Way--The Heavens were stitched." Given this mind set, Dickinson's experience and post abortion sequelae resemble those of a miscarriage. Like the experience of a miscarriage, her abortion was beyond her control. Consequently, when Dickinson mourns her child, her grief is as genuine as for any woman having lost a much wished-for child. Consequently, the poet's grief can be discussed in terms similar to those concerning an adjustment to an unexpected bereavement.

According to Gilbert Kliman, the prime "situational crisis--a state of emergency characterized by unusal psychological stress"--is bereavement (Berezin 21). While the aftermath of any loss can be difficult, the aftermath of loss in pregnancy of a desired child can be devastating; it conflicts sharply with our life-cycle expectations. The death of a child in utero can be particularly traumatic for the mother, not only because of the mother/child bonding that has taken place or the reality or physical proximity of the child to the mother, but also because of the changes that have occurred within her over the course of her pregnancy. The physiological changes in the mother's body to accommodate the pregnancy, along with the potential physical exhaustion and trauma of the loss, combine to compound the difficulty

of the aftermath experience. Nancy Berezin cogently characterizes a woman's physiological and psychological states of at this time:

> For the woman who experiences a fetal or neonatal death, this loss occurs when she is at her most vulnerable, both physically and psychologically. Physically, she may be weakened by blood loss . . . or exhausted from the strain of labor and delivery. . . .
>
> . . . She is furthermore, still involved in the emotional state of pregnancy, with its rapid shifts of mood, fantasies, crying spells, and sudden attacks of anxiety. (21)

As Miriam Stoppard explains the physiological basis for these changes in The Pregnancy and Birth Book, following an abortion, it is the "[s]udden withdrawal of pregnancy hormones without the reward of having a baby" that can intensify the mother's reaction (149).

To many outsiders a loss in pregnancy does not have the same impact as the loss of a living person. As Berezin characterizes these reactions,

> Because there may be little objective evidence of [the] baby's existence, the episode is easily dismissed from the minds of relatives, friends and co-workers as something to be gotten over as quickly as possible. (40)

And these outsiders, trying to avoid contributing to the mother's pain, misguidedly join in the conspiracy of denial and silence about the event in hopes that the loss will "be gotten over" more quickly. Little do these well-meaning people know that verbalizing the loss is one of the most productive therapies for dealing with such a tragedy. To the parents, and especially the mother, the child was real and the loss is real. Consequently, the mother must mourn the death of the unborn child in the same mannner as the child who has died after birth. In order to come to grips with the reality of her child's death, a woman needs to talk about the child, simultaneously

acknowledging semantically the child's existence and subsequent death. Also in discussing the child, the mother seeks consolation from others.

In Dickinson's case, there were few to turn to for consolation. Few likely knew about the abortion, and, as we have seen, Master disavowed all attachment to the child. Though he was the most appropriate one for her to have discussed the child with, he was also the one denying her vital need to speak in hopes that they could put the experience behind them. Thus, on two counts--acknowledgment of her child and consolation over its death--Master failed her. Had he offered her a sensitive ear to discuss the child and share her grief, no doubt the grief and emotions would have poured forth as they do in the third Master Letter where it seems Master has provided an small opening for her when he asks her to "Tell [him] of the want." Undoubtedly, the torrent of feeling and emotions that ensues in this letter was just a small sampling of what she held inside and had to contend with privately. Furthermore, according to poem J381, "A Secret told" discussed above in which she decides that sharing a confidence can "appall" others and return to haunt the teller, it seems probable that following Master's rebuff she shared neither her secret nor her grief with anyone. Rather, it seems as if she poured both into her poetry where she remembered and mourned her child in an effort to work through her grief. In the words of Erich Lindemann, a bereavement researcher who conducted what is considered the classic study of the symptomatology of acute grief,

> grief work, [is] namely the emancipation from the bondage to the deceased, readjustment to the environment in which the deceased is missing, and the formation of new relationships. (143)

As we saw in Chapter III, in the process of grieving, talking or writing about the situation facilitates mourning as a useful outlet. Nancy Berezin addresses this need for mothers experiencing a loss in pregnancy:

> Details are important. Talking or writing about the event helps to retrieve repressed memories, aiding in the work of mourning. Many women find that keeping a diary, even if it consists of nothing more than jottings in a spiral notebook, gives them a sense of peace, as though by commiting the event to paper they were securing its place in history. "Even with a live birth," says Emmanuel Lewis, "the mother feels a sense of loss, but the consolation of a surviving `outside baby' helps the mother overcome her bewildering sadness at losing her `inside baby.' With a stillbirth [or any fetal loss], however, there is an outer as well as inner void." (41-42)

In Dickinson's grief work following the abortion, writing took on a preeminent role, evidenced in the many poems of grieving around this time.

Keeping in mind Berezin's contention that capturing the event in poetry allowed Dickinson to "secure [her child's] place in history," it is interesting to speculate upon a fact that has bothered critics for years. It is well known that the poet requested all of her personal papers be burned following her death--all of her papers except the poetry. Is it possible that she did not want these destroyed in part because in them she had immortalized her child? It is indeed unlikely that Dickinson or any mother, regardless of the secrecy with which she surrounded herself, would order destroyed the last evidence that her child had existed. Furthermore, Dickinson's 15 April 1862 letter to Thomas Higginson, following her reading of his

"Letter to a Young Contributor" in the Atlantic Monthly in which he offered advice to young writers, takes on added meaning in this context. Having sent four poems to him, she asks, "Are you too deeply occupied to say if my Verse is alive?" and "Should you think it breathed—and had you the leisure to tell me, I should feel quick gratitude--" (Letters 2: 403). Here it appears that Dickinson is asking a noted critic and editor to read her poems to detect whether or not the "life" that she has inspired into them is evident, thus suggesting these poems a living memorial for her dead child. This interpretation supplies one viable reason why Dickinson left her poetic legacy intact.

Considered within the tradition of consolation literature, Dickinson's surviving poetry of the 1861-1862 period seems even further charged with significance. Dickinson's grieving poetry of this time, like the popular consolation literature whose ostensible purpose was to commemorate the dead and console the living, does indeed grieve for and remember her child. In this poetry, she comes gradually to work through her grief and to let go of her child. But also like consolation literature, whose underlying purpose was to deny death and yearn for a reunion with lost loved ones in homey Heaven where they would achieve the sovereignty they were denied on earth, Dickinson's poetry lovingly bridges the gap between Heaven and earth and her dead child and herself as she looks forward to being reunited with her child and Master in Heaven where she will possess "the Queen's place" and achieve her own sovereignty. Consequently, Dickinson's grieving poems from this crisis period of her life are

written within the tradition of the consolation literature of her time. When Dickinson characterized her purpose in writing poetry for Higginson in her letter to 25 April 1862, she says, "I had a terror--since September--I could tell to none--and so I sing, as the Boy does by the Burying Ground--because I am afraid--. . . ." (Letters 2: 404). In these explanations she clearly indicates her self-consolatory intent and her psychological insecurity--both underlying impulses of nineteenth-century consolation poetry. Certainly not predictable or saccharine as most of the consolation poetry of the time, but employing some of the conventionalized images and metaphors of the popular fare and crafted with her poetic genius and vision, Dickinson's unique consolation poems capture more than the denial of death and yearning for life hereafter; they express the essence of her psychic pain as she slowly works through her grief, especially evidenced in the poems recounting the painful aftermath of her bereavement.

Based on the findings of recent thanatological research, it is possible to predict with some accuracy the aftermath of bereavement. Psychiatrist Colin Murray Parkes in Bereavement: Studies of Grief in Adult Life, has arrived at a list of determinants preceding, during, and following a loss that when considered in terms of a specific individual's experiencing a particular loss will suggest the psychological outcome of the bereavement. According to Parkes,

> It is not enough to say that the loss of a love object causes grief, and leave it at that. Grief may be strong or weak, brief or prolonged, immediate or delayed; particular aspects of it may be distorted and symptoms that usually cause little trouble may become major sources of distress. . . . (118)

Parkes continues,

> Those who are concerned with the effects of bereavement have to take into consideration many possible factors when trying to explain the differences between individuals in their response to this event. . . . (118)

Consequently, he offers the following list of factors that must be considered when projecting one's recovery from a certain bereavement:

Determinants of the Outcome of Bereavement

ANTECEDENT
Childhood experiences (especially losses of significant persons)
Later experiences (especially losses of significant persons)
Previous mental illness (especially depressive illness)
Life crises prior to the bereavement
Relationship with the deceased
  Kinship (spouse, child, parent, etc.)
  Strength of attachment
  Security of attachment
  Degree of reliance
  Intensity of ambivalence (love/hate)
Mode of death
  Timeliness
  Previous warnings
  Preparation for bereavement
  Need to hide feelings

CONCURRENT
Sex
Age
Personality
  Grief proneness
  Inhibition of feelings
Socioeconomic status (social class)
Nationality
Religion (faith and rituals)
Cultural and familial factors influencing expression of grief

SUBSEQUENT
Social support or isolation
Secondary stresses
Emergent life opportunities (options open)

(Parkes 121)

In scanning this list, it should become clear to the reader that many of these determinants have already been discussed in connection with Dickinson in this study; however, a brief recapitulation is in order

before we proceed to a discussion of the aftermath of the poet's abortion experience through the five stages of the grieving process in her poems of mourning in the early 1860s and following.

The first item on Parkes' list of antecedent determinants to the outcome of bereavement is "Childhood experiences (especially losses of significant persons)." Two significant early losses from amongst those Dickinson considered her "intimates" (Sewall Life 2: 341) in youth should serve to illustrate adequately the poet's early adverse reactions to death. In 1844, when Emily was 14, she lost her friend Sophia Holland and plunged into (as she herself characterized it two years later in a letter to her friend Abiah Root) "a fixed melancholy" (Letters 1: 32). At the time of her friend's death she confided in Abiah, "I told no one the cause of my grief, though it was gnawing at my very heart strings" (Letters 1: 32). And to document further that this severe grief reaction was not a fabrication of Emily's creative imagination or a kind of posing in her letters, Richard Sewall claims that "[her] worried parents sent her to visit her beloved Aunt Lavinia for a month" to recover from her grief (Life 2: 314). In 1848, when Emily was 18, she lost another dear friend and former teacher, Leonard Humphrey, whom she revered and affectionately called "master." According to Sewall, Humphrey's death "gave her cause for deep and melancholy thought" (Life 2: 314). Clearly Dickinson was vulnerable and sensitive to these early losses. "Often the blow required her utmost resources for recovery" (Life 2: 341),

Parkes' second determinant is "Later experiences (especially losses of significant persons)." As has been discussed extensively in

Chapter II, Dickinson did not react well to deaths, separations (except those she desired), or slackenings of a friendship by those she held dear. When they occurred, she reacted disbelievingly at first, and tried to reestablish ties with the friend. When this proved impossible because of the friend's unwillingness or inability, she angrily reacted as if she had been betrayed, finally turning to her writing to mourn the loss. In short, Dickinson followed the course of an intense grief reaction for each later loss she experienced--and there were many--progressing through the various emotional stages of grief to final acceptance of the loss.

The next determinant on Parkes' list is that of "Previous mental illness (especially depressive illness)." Dickinson had her share of depression over the many failed relationships in her first thirty years up to the time of her abortion. In several cases, Sophia Holland's and Leonard Humphrey's for example, she sustained prolonged bouts of melancholy or depression. If these were not instances of abnormal or pathological grief, they at least suggest that Dickinson exhibited a tendency toward depressive illness. Moreover, given Parkes' next antecedent determinant, that of "Life crises prior to the bereavement," one would be hard put not to say that Dickinson had not experienced a prior crisis. Very likely Dickinson considered the loss of each of her many friends a separate life crisis; she found the love and sustenance of these relationships (even if much of it came from the overworkings of her creative imagination) sustaining and replacements for that nurturing she could not secure at home.

Parkes' next determinant factor, "Relationship with the

deceased," includes subheadings "Kinship," "Strength of attachment," "Security of attachment," "Degree of reliance," and "Intensity of ambivalence (love/hate)" and is easily summarized from the extensive treatment given these factors in the preceding chapter. Of course, Dickinson's "Kinship" with the deceased, which is the focus of this study, was that of mother. And though at the beginning of the pregnancy the "Strength of the attachment" was weak because it was new, as her pregnancy progressed and she bonded with her child, the attachment strengthened significantly. Furthermore, when she realized that an abortion was imminent, the "Security of the [earthly] attachment" became threatened, but was reinforced when Dickinson recognized that even death could not destroy the loving bond between them. The poet's "Degree of reliance" upon the child for the performance of earthly tasks was nil; however, that she viewed the child as an extension of herself and a potential person who would depend upon her as its mother and reciprocate her love comes through clearly in the abortion sequence poems. Any "Intensity of ambivalence" over her love for the child is almost non-existent, except for the culpability she feels in its death, which she guiltily senses is a failure of her love for the child. Moreover, the ambivalence she expresses over the impending abortion demonstrates the intensity of her love for the child.

Parkes' final antecedent determinants are also easily summarized. The "Mode of death" of the child was elective abortion over which Dickinson felt greatly ambivalent. Furthermore, for Dickinson the abortion was physically painful, possibly near fatal.

It was also emotionally and psychologically painful because she felt herself a participant. The determinant of "Timeliness" is problematic. For Master and Dickinson both the death was timely before either was exposed to public view and scorn in their illicit affair. For Dickinson, who by herself wanted the child, the death was untimely. The category of "Previous warnings" is easily characterized; because Dickinson had an elective abortion, she knew when the death would occur. Whether or not Dickinson had much time for "Preparation for bereavement" is more difficult to determine. Considering that time is an important factor in the performance of an abortion, it is likely that she did not have much time to prepare for the coming event after the pregnancy was discovered and an abortion was decided upon. Finally, given the secretive nature surrounding an abortion and the societal sanctions upon premarital sex and illegitimacy, not to mention extramarital sex of the nineteenth century, Dickinson's "Need to hide [her] feelings" about her child's death must have been great. Moreover, in view of Master's reticent attitude about discussing the child, her need to hide her feelings would have been even greater.

In his list of determinants, Parkes next considers those factors concurrent with the death. Emily Dickinson's "Sex" was, of course, female. She was the child's mother and felt closer to it than Master as father possibly could physically and emotionally because of characteristic female reproductive ability and emotions during pregnancy. That she was female is also important because of the characteristically different grieving reactions following a fatality

in pregnancy; unlike males, who have a tendency to put grief behind them quickly, a female will consider and reconsider the death and all of its details until she has come to terms with it, which is just what Dickinson does in her poetry. At the time of her pregnancy Dickinson's "Age" must have been approximately 30-31 years, ten years past the average age women married in Dickinson's time. And without a serious relationship with a marriagable man in her future, the fact that she would probably not bear any other children very likely preyed upon her mind.

Dickinson's "Personality" has already been discussed. To use Shregardus' term in his 1976 study of women's responses to abortions according to their characteristic coping mechanisms, Dickinson was most likely a "sensitizor," a person who does not deny or repress events in her life, but internalizes them. As we have seen, Dickinson exhibited great "Grief proneness" over her losses. Moreover, when it comes to "Inhibition of feeling," we must recognize that she was acutely shy about expressing her feelings verbally to others. However, in her writing--both her poetry and her correspondence--she is more open; even in her writing, however, she couches her meanings in circuitous thought, curious metaphor, or omitted references that have meaning for only one person. On the one hand, this verbal reticence to share her feelings may have hindered her recovery from bereavement; on the other hand, her ability to voice her ideas and sentiments on paper, in poetry and prose, may have been therapeutic.

Dickinson's "Socioeconomic status" would have been upperclass in nineteenth-century Amherst, and, her "Nationality," of course, was

American. She subscribed to no formal "Religion" or religious "doctrines," but she was raised in a church-going family and attended church service fairly regularly until the age of about 24 or 25, when she began sporadic church attendance until approximately age 30, when she ceased attending altogether. Nevertheless, Dickinson demonstrates in her poetry and her correspondence, an underlying belief in the God and Heaven of nineteenth-century Protestant conception. And, as we shall see, these were consoling factors over the child's death as she looked forward to joyful reunion with the child after her death.

The "Cultural and familial factors influencing expression of grief" are more difficult to summarize than previous items in Dr. Parkes' list. Normally cultural mourning customs of the nineteenth century would have encouraged Dickinson to mourn openly and to share her grief; however, given the age's proscriptions concerning and negative attitudes toward premarital sex, illegitimacy, and (in Wadsworth's case) the disruption of the sacredness of the family, Dickinson could not actively express or participate in many of the time's mourning practices. On the other hand, however, the one cultural custom that she could take part in privately was the writing of consolation poetry, which she did much of and which most likely was productive therapy for her. Her family's customs for dealing with death at this time are more difficult to determine. There exists no documentable record suggesting that the family subscribed to customs different from the elaborate funerary practices for their time. In fact, the family burial plot in Amherst is in a rural cemetery, contains gravemarkers characteristic of the period's style, and is

surrounded by a wrought iron picket fence, also in the rural cemetery tradition. However, if Dickinson's own untraditional burial wishes reflect her own feelings about death, with her white casket and her informal funeral cortege on the shoulders of several male friend pall bearers through the back fields of Amherst to the cemetery, then we can assume that like with the consolation poetry she wrote or her withdrawal from society and maintenance of her friendships through correspondence, she subscribed to her century's customs to a certain degree, but made them characteristically her own and consequently comforting to herself. As far as the Dickinson family's grieving traditions, it would most likely be safe to assume that in the absence of documented record, they grieved as they did just about everything else in life--separately and alone.

The final items on Dr. Parkes' list of the determinants for the outcome of bereavement are those "Subsequent" to the death of a loved one. To mention "Social support" with Dickinson's name is to juxtapose ironic opposites, particularly in her abortion situation. It is no secret that Dickinson was a private person, indicated in her retreat from the outside world and her growing reluctance around the time of her abortion experience to meet with even her closest friends. She alone selected her society. Consequently, given the secret nature of this loss in her life and the fact that she shared with those close to her only those things she wanted to share, it is quite likely she received no social support from outsiders. Moreover, as has been pointed out in the Master Letters and the abortion sequence poems, she

received little or no support from Master, the would-be sharer of this tragedy. Consequently, she retreated into "isolation."

"Secondary stresses" most certainly came into play in Dickinson's bereavement. From the poetry of this time, Dickinson indicates that she suffered a painful abortion. Moreover, we know that she spent most of one summer in bed because of an illness around this time. Taking into consideration the abortion procedures of her century, it would not be outlandish to suggest that she experienced a physically debilitating, if not near fatal, chemical abortion. Moreover, in May of 1862 Wadsworth left for the west coast. Combined with his lack of verbal and emotional support, this apparent desertion must have also had a deleterious effect upon her physical and psychological recovery.

The final determinant that Parkes isolates is that of "Emergent life opportunities (options open)." Given the nineteenth-century roles of wife and mother available for women, Dickinson's options were extremely limited. Furthermore, because Dickinson remained devoted to the married Wadsworth, despite his apparent callousness and betrayal, and because she was of the upper class in the small town of Amherst and thus had no need or opportunity to work, her natural options were even fewer. Her seclusion after such a devastating event in her perception was most likely the only choice available to her. This limitation of options did not bode well for quick adjustment to her loss.

Considering all of Parkes' determinants of grief with Dickinson in mind indicates at almost every turn that she exhibited

tendencies of a person likely to experience a severe bereavement reaction over her child's death. However, though the poetry and the Master Letters from these years suggest severe psychological trauma and the documentable facts suggest a profound, prolonged "illness" at this time, we may never know with documentable certainty whether this devastating malady was a pathological grief reaction. As Dr. Parkes suggests,

> A complete explanation for any psychosocial event would be possible only if we knew everything that had preceded it--which can never be the case. We shall never be able fully to understand any piece of human behaviour, nor can we expect to identify major factors that are important to outcome in every cast of bereavement. But we can . . . learn something of the factors that play a part in most cases and a major part in some. (119)

Although, as Parkes claims, we may never know with certainty whether Dickinson's personal crisis of 1861-1862 was that of a severe grief reaction over her child's abortion, a thorough examination of the extant facts, her introspective/biographical poetry, and her veiled yet revealing correspondence can strongly indicate whether or not a pathological bereavement reaction was the cause.

As Dr. Parkes intimates, the grief experience is a complex one, unique for each individual. And each person's experience will vary depending upon the determinants or variables present or absent in the particular bereavement situation. Grief is a progressive experience that evolves out of and builds upon itself. Furthermore, it has definable stages.

One particular researcher, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, who has worked extensively with terminally ill patients, has isolated and examined in her pivotal work On Death and Dying five distinct stages

that the dying and the grieving progress through: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance[3]. As with any developmental progression, although these five stages can be discussed as separate stages for ease of understanding, they are not individual stages that will be experienced always sequentially or chronologically; rather, they may overlap, co-exist, or recur. There simply is no sharp dividing line separating the emotions.

Dickinson's grieving poems from 1861 and following exhibit all of the emotions of a bereavement reaction. Furthermore, they can be examined profitably within the framework of the five stages of death as support for the argument that the crisis the poet endured at this time was a severe bereavement reaction over the abortion death of her only child. If we use Franklin's dating, these poems do not appear to follow in the linear progression of Kübler-Ross's five

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[3]Kübler Ross's model of the five stages of grief is not the only model available that plots the passage through grief. Glen W. Davidson has identified a four-dimensional progression through grief that includes the stages of 1) Shock and Numbness, 2) Searching and Yearning, 3) Disorientation, and 4) Reorganization (Davidson). Gilbert Kliman perceives three phases of grieving: 1) "testing and accepting the reality of the loss," 2) "remembering--working over and reducing the investment in memories concerning the lost object," and 3) "cultivating new object relationships" (Berezin 53-54). Colin Murray Parkes identifies three phases of grief work: 1) "There is preoccupation with thoughts of the lost person, which . . . derives from the urge to search for that person," 2) "There is painful repetitious recollection of the loss experience . . . which must occur if the loss is not fully accepted as irrevocable," 3) "And there is the attempt to make sense of the loss, to fit it into one's set of assumptions about the world. . ." (Parkes 77). The reader may detect that these models strongly resemble Kübler-Ross's, though they tend to be more fluid and flexible, allowing for a progression of grief more closely mirroring the reality of human grief. However, this study, because of the lack of order in Dickinson's written remembered objectifications of her grief experience, needs and will employ the rigidity of Kübler-Ross's clearly defined stages.

stages of grieving. Rather, like a real bereavement reaction, they overlap, coexist, and recur in the same years. According to many thanatologists, the normal minimum time it takes for grief to run its course is approximately one year, with two years not being abnormal. However, if Dickinson's was a severe bereavement reaction, as all indications seem to suggest, adjustment time would have been far longer. Moreover, as has been discussed earlier, the loss during pregnancy of a wished-for child can have a recurrent effect throughout the mother's lifetime, a tendency which accounts for some of Dickinson's abortion poems treating similar themes and accompanying emotions occurring in differing years and being dated as late as 1884, two years before her death.

The poems to be examined are not only held together as a group by their underlying grieving, emotional tone; the mysterious it frequently appears as do certain chains of imagery and references carried over from the abortion sequence poems. New chains of imagery also emerge exclusively to capture these new experiences. Moreover, Dickinson's desire to be reunited with her child in homey Heaven, a yearning which sustained her through the abortion experience, is an idea that pervades the group and increases cohesion.

Although unity exists, a clear, understandable order for easy interpretation does not. Consequently, in the following pages that will examine Dickinson's poems in view of Kübler-Ross' five stages of adjustment to grief, and as with the abortion sequence poems, an artificial order will be imposed to facilitate study. They will be ordered acccording to the narrative content they reveal and the

emotional tenor they emanate. Each poem furthermore will be classified under one of the five stages of bereavement. To prevent confusion, these stages and their corresponding poems will then be discussed in an imposed linear order. Though artificial, this arrangement does not really do violence to Dickinson's original order as Franklin has reassembled them because it plots the emotional course of an important emotion-based event in her life.

The remaining pages of the present chapter will isolate and discuss exclusively Kübler-Ross's first stage of Denial and those Dickinson poems that can be read as poem's reflecting the poet's progression through grief's first stage. The other four stages will be treated in Chapter V. This arbitrary division has been made for two reasons. First, the number of denial poems is larger than any of the other bereavement groups, thus requiring a larger space for interpretation and perhaps suggesting again the intensity of Dickinson's difficulty in accepting her child's death. Second, denial as a stage in the course of grief is quite dissimilar from the other four stages. Distinct from the other stages of grieving in that it protectively blocks the individual's emotions, whereas the other four stages require the person's management of arising emotions, denial is the mind's way of buffering itself against the intrusion of too much shocking reality at one time.

Following the intial shock of the confirmation of death, the bereaved's shocked denials, "No, it can't be true," "This can't be happening," are typical and in may ways necessary. Colin Murray Parkes explains these reactions of denial in clinical terms:

> The theory of psychic defense rests on the assumption that there is a limit to the amount of anxiety an individual can tolerate and that when that limit is reached the individual will defend himself by withdrawing, psychologically, from the situation that evokes the anxiety. (39)

Characteristic of denial is the person's sense of being divorced from life going on around him or her and a feeling of "wander[ing] around in a daze" (Berezin 58). Nothing seems real. And most likely the bereaved will withdraw into isolation. Coupled with this defensive physical and psychological withdrawal response is a process known as reality testing, "which demands that the experience be recollected in minute detail before it can be accepted as fact." According to Berezin, "the conflicting tendencies [of withdrawal and reality testing] alternate throughout the mourning process--the former dominating the first phase, the latter slowly gaining prominence with the passage of time" (57-58).

Nancy Berezin contends that following a loss in pregnancy this first reaction, resembling "shellshock," is almost universal. To underscore her point and to evoke the sensations of this initial reaction for the mother in After a Loss in Pregnancy, she innocently asserts, "Emily Dickinson who never experienced a tragic outcome of pregnancy, described this early phase of grief with stunning accuracy" (58). Then she quotes in entirety Dickinson's poem J341, "After great pain, a formal feeling comes--," one of the poems to be discussed below. What better way for Dickinson to be intimately acquainted with this early phase of grief in a tragically ending pregnancy and be able to capture it "with stunning accuracy" than to have lived it herself!

Turning to Dickinson's poems to trace her progression though

the first stage, we must note that within this denial group Dickinson's focus rests not so heavily upon the tragedy she has just encountered; rather her attention is directed to facing and coping with the enormous shock of this situation. Consequently, these poems deal not so much with her loss as the abortion sequence poems, but with the foreign psychic strangeness and pain she experiences and her physical and psychological reactions to it. The first poem of this group is J1049, "Pain has but one Acquaintance":

> Pain has but one Acquaintance
> And that is Death--
> Each one unto the other
> Society enough.
>
> Pain is the Junior Party
> By just a Second's right--
> Death tenderly assists Him
> And then absconds from Sight.
>
> (J1049, 1865)

Composed in 1865, this poem is here wrenched out of chronological sequence and advanced to head the post-abortion poems for several reasons. First, that J1049 was written in 1865, three to four years following the poet's abortion and at a time when, as we shall see, Dickinson was composing a number of poems reflecting upon the experience and that the poem is obviously written from the perspective of experience suggest it as a poem recounting her past abortion/bereavement experience. Second, this poem, of all others written during this time period, strongly yokes "Death" and "Pain" in a cause-effect "Acquaintence[ship];" the poet alludes in the poem to a specific time when an important death evoked enduring pain for her. These references point strongly toward the death of Dickinson's child

and the residual grief over the death. Although the poem seems to point to the 1861-1862 crisis years and her bereavement over her child, the date of this poem's composition may call into question whether or not it belongs within the group. Is it possible that a subsequent death occasioned this poem? If we look at the Dickinson chronology, the evidence is even stronger that the death and lasting grief the poem discusses concern her child. Her uncle Loring Norcross died in January of 1863, and Professor Edward Hitchcock, an influential reverend, academician, poet, lecturer, and President of Amherst College who "set the educational tone for the whole community" (Sewall 2: 342) and whom Dickinson admired, died in February of 1865. However, these deaths did not cause the same psychological upheaval that Dickinson's crisis of 1861-1862 did. Consequently, this poem would seem to be reflecting upon Dickinson's traumatic death experience of these earlier years.

Why would she recall the event at such a late date? It is possible that this poem is one of those occasioned by the recurrence of memory. However, this poem of 1865 becomes even more interesting, along with the 46 other post-abortion poems dating from 1864-1865, when we remember that around the time of this poem's composition, in April of 1864 and again in April of 1865, Dickinson left the security of her home to travel to Boston to be treated over the course of several months each time for a supposed eye problem. This situation is curious for several reasons. First, the chances that a relapse of her physical eye problem could occur almost exactly one year apart are highly coincidental and doubtful. Second, though it is recorded that

Dickinson did visit Dr. Henry W. Williams, the Ophthalmic Surgeon to the City Hospital of Boston, it is not at all certain that she specifically went for ophtalmologic help. One theory holds that she might have sought out psychological counselling during her two lengthy visits (Cody 415-423).

According to John F. Cody's psychoanalytical look at Dickinson's poetry, biography, correspondence, and secondary sources in After Great Pain, he contends that the poet "was a woman who became disturbed to the point of collapse" (11). The eye problem which Dickinson experienced around 1864-1865, Cody proposes, was a psychosomatic manifestation of a deeper psychological depressive disorder brought about by various influential factors in the first thirty-three years of her life. Cody suggests that the primary factor causing the depression was the rejection and lack of much-needed nurturing by her mother. Cody's ends differ markedly from the present study's; he argues that Emily Dickinson suffered a nervous breakdown during these crisis years, whereas this study contends that she suffered from a prostrating bereavement reaction following the death of her child through abortion. It is provocative, however, to keep in mind Freud's observation that depression (Melancholia) and grief (Mourning) are states closely resembling each other. Though his ends differ, Cody's means are quite similar to this study's as it plots Dickinson's psychological and emotional course through abortion, bereavement, and grief. And as Cody gathers his evidence to argue for belief in a depressive disorder for Dickinson, he provides useful

insights as a professional clinical psychiatrist that this study will draw on.

According to Thomas Johnson's notes appended to the collected Dickinson Letters, the poet "made a [preliminary] trip to Boston on 4 February 1864 to consult Henry W. Williams. . . ." And Johnson, based on the fact that Dickinson did not remain in Boston at this time for extended eye treatment but returned in April and then spent seven months under this physician's care, concludes, that Dr. Williams "must have prescribed a course of treatments requiring his supervision, for late in April she went back to stay, remaining until 21 November" (Letters 3: 429). Challenging Johnson's heretofore accepted conclusion and suggesting that Dickinson suffered from severe psychological depression, Cody questions the professionalism of sending Dickinson home, instructing her to return in three months. Familiar with Dr. Williams' work and regarding him "a highly competent specialist," Cody posits,

> Had a serious eye disorder been apparent, it seems unlikely that [the ophthamologist] would have allowed it to go unattended for three months. Probably he was unable to demonstrate any pathology and advised the poet to return in three months' time if her symptoms continued to trouble her. (417)

During both extended visits to Boston, Dickinson maintained correspondence with her family and friends, though admittedly not to the degree of that when she was not ill and at home. In one letter written to Thomas Higginson in early June of 1864, while she was in Boston for the first time, she alludes to her malady in a curious way: "I wish to see you more than before I failed" (Letters 2: 412). Cody takes issue with this expression as an appropriate reference for

Dickinson to describe her eye trouble because of its tone and the usual way in which she employs the phrase:

> Emily Dickinson frequently used the expression "to fail" in referring either to death or to a state of general physical illness or debility. The tone of this statement does not appear to make the phrase applicable to a self-contained ocular difficulty. But it would be an appropriate way to imply a more generalized condition such as a depressive or obsessive reaction. (417)

In a letter to Vinnie, Dickinson records her emotional state about her condition: "I feel no gayness yet. I suppose I have been discouraged for so long" (Letters 2: 433). Cody argues that instead of being a statement exclusively about the persistance of her eye trouble, these lines indicate "[t]hat the eye disorder was part of an overall depressive picture. . . ." (418).

Cody also questions the odd meeting time that Dickinson alludes to in one letter between the doctor and herself in mid-November, just before she is about to return home for the first time. The poet states, "The Doctor. . . wants to see me Sunday" (Letters 2: 436). To this statement Cody reacts in the following way:

> Sunday seems an unlikely day for a follow-up visit for a chronic eye problem. It suggests that Emily Dickinson was a special patient seen during off hours--a plausible arrangement if treatment sessions were largely taken up with counseling. (418)

After Emily returned home the first time, she did not experience recovery; rather, she found herself wishing to be back in Boston under her doctor's care. In an early 1865 letter to Louise Norcross, one of the cousins she stayed with upon her first extended visit to Boston, Emily writes, "what it would be to see you and have the doctor's care--that cannot be told. . . . I wish I were there, myself. . . . When I dare I shall ask if I may go, but that will not

be now" (Letters 2: 439). Cody diagnoses this longing to be again under her doctor's care in Boston as a "dependency on him" that "was emotional--which is understandable if his primary role regarding her was a psychotherapeutic one. That she would be so eager for further treatments of a physical nature seems doubtful" (419). Furthermore, Cody questions Dickinson's having to wait for an appropriate time to ask to visit the doctor again had her illness truly been a pathological one. Cody argues,

> That Edward Dickinson would set himself above medical authority in the matter of an undoubted eye disorder seems unlikely. That he would be dubious of the value of some type of long drawn out and expensive therapy which was essentially counseling for an emotional problem is more understandable. (419)

In March of 1865, almost a full year after her first lengthy treatment of the previous year, Dickinson writes to her cousin Louise Norcross apologizing for her delay in writing, but, she says, "I cannot write in bed" (Letters 2: 440). Cody questions Dickinson's taking to her bed: "Can this eye ailment, which ultimately vanished without leaving the least residuum, have been so severe as to necessitate her taking to her bed?" (419).

That Cody sees a direct correlation between her eye disorder and her emotional state is shown in his consideration of another letter to her Boston cousins in early 1865. Dickinson writes: "You persuade me to speak of my eyes, which I shunned doing. . . . The eyes are as with you, sometimes easy sometimes sad. . . . The snow-light offends them, and the house is bright" (Letters 2: 438-438). Dickinson then turns to relate her doings in the house and her family's reactions to her since her return:

> They say I am a "help." Partly because it is true, I suppose, and the rest applause. Mother and Margaret [the servant] are so kind, father as gentle as he knows how, and Vinnie good to me, but "cannot see why I don't get well." This makes me think I am long sick, and this takes the ache to my eyes. (Letters 2: 438-439)

To this summation of Dickinson's about her situation, Cody replies,

> Inevitably the relatives of a depressed person lose their patience and become exasperated because she will not cheer up, although they hide their response owing to feelings of guilt. In the light of this line of thought, the phrase, "this makes me think I am long sick" suggests that Emily Dickinson sensed the carefully concealed reproach underlying all the reassurance. It is important to note that her eye pain is directly evoked by her reaction to the words of her family--they are overly solicitous, they covertly rebuke her, and she feels an intensification of her feelings of uselessness and "this takes the ache to my eyes." It would be rare to find such a clear-cut sequence in illnesses that are predominantly organic. (421)

Finally, Cody turns to Dickinson's symptoms: "She complained of photophobia--the discomfort caused by the snow light and the brightness of the house--and she complained of bilateral eye pain." Of these complaints, Cody asserts, "These are the commonest ocular complaints of persons who are suffering from intense emotional conflicts unaccompanied by any physical pathology" (421). In other words, Cody's professional diagnosis of Dickinson's eye disorder is that it is a psychosomatic manifestation of a depressed psychological state that left no aftereffects or visual impairment.

In view of these facts, we must ask, "Was Dickinson still suffering from her particularly severe bereavement reaction two to three years following the event and requiring psychological help?" The answer to this question must be that this is a viable possibility, especially taking into account the large number of poems recapturing her experience in these years and the decline in the number of

grieving poems after 1865, when she would have terminated her psychological counselling. Though it is possible, as this study has pointed out, for memories of a tragic pregnancy to recur throughout the rest of woman's life, the usual period of the normal course of bereavement is one year. That Dickinson would so frequently and vividly recall the bereavement two to three years following suggests a kind of pathological grief. Moreover, considering that this poem and many like it are written in the years 1864-1865 and that she was apparently receiving counselling in these years, during the month of April each time, it seems likely that these might be memories brought on by anniversary reactions, grieving that is occasioned by conscious or sometimes unconscious memory of the event around the time of its occurrence.

The perceptive reader may point out that initially Dickinson visited Boston not in April, but in February 1864, and that it was the ophthamologist who requested that she return in April, seemingly belying this anniversary reaction explanation. However, bereavement specialists claim that it is not simply on the anniversary of the death that the bereaved can have such a response. An anniversary reaction can bring about "a significant change in behavior or feelings on the anniversary of a death" in a normal bereavement, sometimes as much as a month before (Kalish 199). In a bereavement that is more severe, as the grief-prone Dickinson's seems to have been, this "significant change in behavior and feelings" may be so great that it spurs reaction months before the death anniversary, sometimes unexpectedly even years following the bereavement's actual occurrence

if the individual's grief has not been fully expressed or dealt with, or has been sublimated (Kalish 199). In Dickinson's apparently severe case, it is possible that this bereavement reaction began three or four years after the child's death, perhaps around the time of year her pregnancy had commenced. The approaching anniversary triggering subliminally the poet's repressed grief, Dickinson's psyche very likely produced a psychosomatic eye problem, which, in turn, forced her to seek help, each time in April, the first time at the physician's request. It is furthermore possible that the doctor, having already discussed her case with her in February instructed her to return, not in an arbitrary three months, but around the death anniversary when he sensed that her physical manifestations of grief would be greatest. It is also important to note here that in April 1865, when she communicated with her Boston cousin, Dickinson referred to her inability to write because of confinement to bed. It is almost as if just before she requested a second visit Boston, the physical symptoms reflecting her psychological turmoil intensified, suggesting a second occurrence of an anniversary reaction.

Did Dickinson's abortion occur in April? The beginning of poem J574, "My first well Day--since many ill--" suggests as much:

> My first well Day—since many ill—
> I asked to go abroad,
> And take the Sunshine in my hand,
> And see the things in Pod—
>
> A'blossom just when I went in
> To take my Chance with pain—
>
> (J574, 1862, F28)

Here Dickinson indicates the time of her abortion by referring to the

time of the season. When she "went in to take [her] Chance with pain," the things of nature were "A'blossom just." This allusion intimates early spring. And in west central Massachusetts spring normally ushers in around April. Bearing these facts in mind, it seems very likely that Dickinson's abortion occurred in April. The grieving poems of the years following the event commemorate her lost child, especially those from around the 1864-1865 time period. Had she been undergoing psychological counselling during these years, she would of necessity be reliving her experiences in detail in order to work through her grief and put it behind her; consequently, the freshness of the memories and the accompanying emotions quite likely spurred her to capture them vividly in her poetry of this time, the poetry also being cathartic for her.

Returning to poem J1049 written in 1865 then, it seems certain that this poem belongs with these abortion poems. More than suggesting an intimate connection of a particular death with lasting pain, Dickinson also encapsulates in stanza two the enduring aftermath of pain following her abortion. As if annoyed with Death's furtive complicity and elusiveness, leaving pain, "the Junior Party," behind to be dealt with long afterward, she almost scolds: "Death tenderly assists [Pain] / And absconds from Sight." It is this residual aftermath of pain following the abortion that Dickinson documents in the grieving poems of denial of this chapter and those of anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance discussed in Chapter V.

Poem J599, "There is a pain--so utter--," continues the theme of pain discussed in J1049 and begins the denial group. Leaving the

actual event of the child's death behind because she is yet unable to face it, the poet focuses exclusively on her torment here and its devastating effect:

> There is a pain--so utter--
> It swallows + substance up-- (+ Being)
> Then covers the Abyss with Trance--
> So Memory can step
> Around--across--upon it--
> As one within a Swoon--
> Goes + safely--where an open eye-- (+ steady)
> Would drop Him--Bone by Bone. (spill Him--)
>
> (J599, 1862, F24)

Capturing succinctly the defensive withdrawal into denial immediately following loss, this poem written close in time to the abortion experience demonstrates Dickinson's keen awareness and understanding of the nature of her psychological upheaval. She recognizes that the pain of her grief over her child's death is "so utter" that "It swallows substance up--." Here the poet seems to be characterizing the emptiness she feels as a mother who has lost a significant part of herself, her child. In reaction to this loss, she acknowledges that her mind retreats, in order to deal with the situation: "Then covers the Abyss with Trance-- / So Memory can step / Around--across--upon it-- / As one within a Swoon--." Dickinson here summarizes the opposing forces of the defensive retreat and reality testing as she strains to admit the shock of death. From obvious intimate experience, she seems to understand intuitively that the numbness denial allows is a protective measure against the force of shock as her mind slowly and safely, yet determinedly through the workings of her memory, absorbs and begins to recognize the death.

The foggy state of consciousness following the shock of death

is described in vivid detail in J396:

> There is a Languor of the Life
> More imminent than Pain--
> 'Tis Pain's successor--When the Soul
> Has suffered all it can--
>
> A Drowsiness--diffuses--
> A Dimness like a Fog
> Envelopes consciousness--
> As Mists--obliterate a Crag.
>
> The Surgeon--does not blanch at pain--
> His Habit--is severe--
> But tell him that it ceased to feel--
> The Creature lying there--
>
> And he will tell you--skill is late--
> A Mightier than He--
> Has ministered before Him--
> There's no Vitality.
>
> (J396, 1862, F27)

Not only does Dickinson capture the physical sensations of this state, but she also asserts that this sensation is a protective one of the mind that comes on the heels of initial pain. Moreover, that it is a condition about which physicians know little she claims with such conviction that a question mark must form in the reader's mind about how she would know this, unless she had personal knowledge of the situation. It is possible that a "Surgeon" was called in around 1862 to help Dickinson overcome what may have been the foreshadowings of a prolonged grief reaction, for as we shall see in subsequent pages many poems dealing with various incremental phases of this state of denial. They specifically deal with the persistence of this particular state and indicate that the poet may have experienced a prolonged period of numbness because of devastating shock over her child's death. Given the fact that the Dickinson family as a whole was very health

conscious, that they could well afford to call in a physician to assist Emily had this condition persisted too long, and that Emily had exhibited several past severe grief reactions, it is quite probable that a physician was called for consultation. As her memory slowly works to adjust itself to this death, she is stunned by the enormity of the shock's impact upon her. In J937 Dickinson describes her reaction to the realization:

> I felt a Cleaving in my Mind--
> As if my Brain had split--
> I tried to match it--Seam by seam--
> But could not make them fit.
>
> The thought behind, I + strove to join (+ tried)
> Unto the thought before--
> But Sequence ravelled out of + Sound (+ reach)
> Like Balls--upon a Floor.
>
> (J937, 1864)

In these two short stanzas, Dickinson summarizes her disorientation and disintegration in this stupefied state. She characterizes her odd feelings as if her "Brain had split." She cannot think logically. This unfamiliar sensation is not uncharacteristic of the bereaved who oftentimes, according to Erich Lindemann, experience a whole constellation of bodily sensations called "grief pangs," including "an intense subjective distress described as tension or mental pain" (187). This odd sensation is one that Dickinson will pick up and comment on in subsequent poems plotting her progression through the phase of denial. Despite her efforts at connected thought, she claims, "The thought behind, I strove to join / Unto the thought before— / . . . ravelled out of Sound / Like Balls--upon a Floor," as if following the initial shock of her child's death time has been

arrested for her; she can neither go on with her life, nor can she go back. Death is a great interrupter of the continuity of life for the bereaved. Denial is the mind's defense against this tragic interruption. More specifically, denial allows the bereaved to withdraw and test reality slowly until she acknowledges that the death has indeed occurred. In this poem, Dickinson captures an early moment of impasse. Her thoughts are discontinuous and disconnected. However, she indicates that grieving is imminent as she implies that she consciously "strove to join" her disparate thoughts in an attempt to confront the cause of her shock. Unfortunately, before the healing can begin, the pain must run its course. And this numbed response continues to be the subject of the next three poems.

Poem J1046 recounts with metaphoric images of coldness and motionlessness, and the frozen paralysis brought about by her condition of mind:

> I've dropped my Brain--My Soul is numb--
> The Veins that used to run
> Stop palsied--'tis Paralysis
> Done perfecter on stone
>
> Vitality is Carved and cool.
> My nerve in Marble lies--
> A Breathing Woman
> Yesterday--Endowed with Paradise.
>
> Not dumb--I had a sort that moved--
> A Sense that smote and stirred--
> Instincts for Dance--a caper part--
> An Aptitude for Bird--
>
> Who wrought Carrara in me
> And chiselled all my tune
> Were it a Witchcraft--were it Death--
> I've still a chance to strain

To Being somewhere--Motion--Breath--
Though Centuries beyond,
And every limit a Decade--
I'll shiver, satisfied.

(J1046, 1865)

While describing this living death, Dickinson mourns her former state of mobility, eulogized here as, "Instincts for Dance" and "An Aptitide for Bird." Her descriptions of numbness and paralysis are normal for the recently bereaved. According to Richard Kalish,

> In instances in which grief pangs do not occur right away, the bereaved frequently feel numb; that is, they perceive themselves as being without appropriate feelings and sometimes without any feelings at all. (185)

Moreover, it is important to note here that one grief counsellor counts among the most common physical reactions to grief "muscular weakness" and "lack of energy" (Worden 23). Consequently, it is likely that Dickinson experienced not only mental but also physical numbness.

Characterizing the impotence of her paralyzed state in J1046, Dickinson searches for an answer as she says, "Were it Witchcraft-- were it Death-- / I've still a chance to strain / To Being, somewhere . . . / Though Centuries beyond"; however, Dickinson's use of the subjunctive tense here indicates that her situation is not induced by "Witchcraft" or her own "Death." Furthermore, the use of the subjunctive, leaving Dickinson wondering about her strange lack of mobility, reinforces and echoes the numbness that she attempts to describe.

The next two poems of this denial group are variations on this theme of numbness. In J761, Dickinson characterizes the listlessness

and indifference she feels as a result of this lack of sensation:

> From Blank to Blank
> A Threadless + Way
> I pushed Mechanic feet--
> To stop--or perish--or advance--
> Alike indifferent--
>
> If end I gained (+ reached)
> It ends beyond
> Indefinite disclosed--
> I shut my eyes--and groped as well
> 'Twas + lighter--to be Blind (+ firmer)
>
> (J761, 1863, F23)

Despite the seemingly never-ending directionlessness she experiences, the poet indicates that she purposefully plods onward in an effort to move beyond the meaningless void. However, as she moves forward and "gain[s]" an "end," she says, "It ends beyond / Indefinite disclosed." In these lines she alludes to slow reality testing as her mind strives to come to terms with her shock. Her frustration and sense of futility in overcoming this state of numbness are suggested in the poem's final line where she compares her situation to that of a blind person. To paraphrase the final line and its sentiments, it might read, "Compared to my progress in this situation, it would be easier for a blind person to perceive light."

Poem J650 captures the apparent agonizing timelessness and self-perpetuating nature of the numbness and emptiness she experiences:

> Pain--has an Element of Blank--
> It cannot recollect
> When it began--or if there were
> A + time when it was not-- (+ Day)

It has no Future--but itself--
It's Infinite contain
It's Past--enlightenment to perceive
New Periods--of Pain.

(J650, 1862-1863, F34)

Because of its infinite nature, the looking back on the pain that has been merely allows her to deal with "New Periods of Pain" yet to be. Again, as in J761, Dickinson alludes to her mind's continued and persistent reality testing as she veers closer and closer to the realization of the reason for her shock. She is fully aware of her present state. And she desperately wants to move beyond this condition. Though she attempts to extricate herself from it by discovering the shock's cause, it continues to elude her, and to provide the "Element of Blank" that shields her from the still-too-new shocking reality for her mind to grasp.

Between poem J650 and J556, the next poem that continues the narrative of Dickinson's progression through the state of denial, occur poems that objectify Dickinson's release from her benumbed condition and her realization and reliving of her child's death. Poem J762, "The Whole of it came not at once," one of the abortion sequence but fitting into this group as well, captures the moment of the child's death and Dickinson's accompanying trauma and murderous feelings.

Other poems from the abortion sequence can be effectively placed here as well, especially those poems in which Dickinson imagines the death of her child. J519, "'Twas warm--at first--like Us," is one in which the poet envisions the child's slowly chilling body and affections in physical and emotional death. Another death

poem is J1230, "It came at last but prompter Death," where Dickinson confronts and acknowledges her complicity in and possible prevention of the child's death. This accusatory guilt is one further determinant factor that contributed to the extent and duration of Dickinson's grief reaction. According to L. A. Bugen in Human Grief, mourning will be more intense and longer in duration if, first, the bereaved is deprived of important roles and relationships because of the death, and, second, if the bereaved sees himself or herself as having been able to prevent the death (199). These two factors are demonstrably present in Dickinson's situation, especially as verbalized in J1230. Not only was Dickinson deprived of the personally, culturally, and emotionally important roles of mother and caretaker, she was also deprived of the loving relationship with her child by the abortion, which she perceives in retrospect as preventable had she been stronger.

The final death poem belonging to both the abortion and denial sequences is J287, "A Clock stopped," in which Dickinson again imagines the death of her child within the context of an extended metaphor of a clock's stopping and amidst more images of coldness and implacability of the child's body and attitude.

All of these poems, based in fantasy or reality, allow Dickinson to replay the child's death, to come slowly out of her numbed state by protected and gradual reality testing, and to prepare herself to begin the real grieving process.

Following her realization that her child is dead, the buffer that has been protecting her from shocking reality falls away slowly,

and she begins to confront many other aspects about her state of grief and the death. She can now reflect upon her past experience of numbness and can objectify it. In poem J556, Dickinson recognizes the severity of her psychic state, thus signalling a termination of her numb state as she becomes able to face reality. Consequently, she appears to be keenly aware that it will take a profound amount of grief work to return to normal:

> The Brain within its´ Groove
> Runs evenly--and true--
> But let a Splinter swerve--
> ´Twere easier for You--
>
> To put + a Current back-- (+ the Waters)
> When Floods have slit the Hills--
> And scooped a Turnpike for Themselves--
> And + trodden out the Mills-- (+ blotted out shaved away)
>
> (J556, 1862, F27)

After indicating that she is aware of how normally "The Brain within its Groove / Runs evenly--and true," she acknowledges, also from intimate acquaintance, the monumental change in her state of mind she battles. Furthermore, Dickinson recognizes the impossible God-like action it would take to return her to her previously normal state. She compares it to "put[ting] a Current back-- / When Floods have slit the Hills-- / And scooped a Turnpike for Themselves--," surely a God-like task. This assertion attests to the deeply disturbing effect the shock of this death has had upon her, though in the poem she facetiously refers to it as a "a Splinter," as if to indicate an outsider´s perception of her experience.

Poem J341, "After great pain, a formal feeling comes—," relives, as it vividly describes, her reaction upon the impact of the

death's confirmation. Just as Nancy Berezin implies, it succinctly and progressively plots the course of the mind's protective reaction of retreat into numbness:

> After great pain, a formal feeling comes--
> The Nerves sit ceremonious, like Tombs--
> The stiff Heart questions was it He, that bore,
> And Yesterday, or Centuries before?
>
> 1 The Feet, mechanical, go round--
> 3 Of Ground, or Air, or Ought--
> 2 A Wooden way
> 4 Regardless grown,
> A Quartz contentment, like a stone--
>
> This is the Hour of Lead--
> Remembered, if outlived,
> As Freezing persons, recollect the Snow--
> First--Chill--then Stupor--then the letting go--
>
> (J341, 1862, F18)[3]

As Dickinson works her way through this description of this "Hour of Lead," she does so employing images of formality, stiffness, mechanicalness, woodenness, and stoniness in an effort to evoke the frozen sensations she has experienced. These are images that she has used in previous poems of this group, specifically J1046, "I've dropped by Brain--My Soul is numb--," J761, "From Blank to Blank--," J650, "Pain--has an Element of Blank--," and J396, "There is a Languor of the Life," yoking them strongly together. She speaks of "The Feet, mechanical" she has specifically referred to in J761 as "Mechanic feet" in an attempt to characterize the directionlessness of her life and daily activities within this benumbed state. She refers to

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[3]In this poem when Dickinson made her revisions, at the head of the first four lines of stanza two She placed the numbers 1, 3, 2, 4, as if this is the order in which she intended them to be read.

"Quartz contentment, like a stone," which she has spoken of as indifference in J761. A poem of retrospect, J341 recollects the entire process at length, once in the first two stanzas and again in brief in the final line. Comparing it to that which "Freezing persons" who "recollect the Snow" experience, Dickinson encapsulates and isolates the chilling experience following the pain and shock of the child's death: "First--Chill-then Stupor--." But then she also acknowledges the next step, "the letting go," when the bereaved is faced with the horror of intruding reality without the mind's anesthetizing ability to act as a cushion, a chilling experience in itself.

While describing this life-threatening experience, Dickinson gives a further intimation of its severity for her. She asserts, "This is the Hour of Lead-- / Remembered, if outlived." With these few words, she suggests that during this time she felt very near death herself, as if she would not recover to remember the experience. But having survived, she vividly remembers and relives the experience as she attempts to move forward in the stage of denial.

Keeping in mind Dickinson's intimation about death's threatening, the reader perceives that poem J598 is a recounting of Dickinson's near brush with death:

> Three times--we parted--Breath--and I--
> Three times--He would not go--
> But strove to stir the + lifeless Fan (+ flickering fan)
> The Waters--strove to stay.
>
> Three times--the Billows + threw me up-- (+ tossed)
> Then caught me--like a Ball--
> Then made Blue faces in my face--
> And pushed away a sail

That crawled Leagues off--I liked to see--
For thinking--while I die--
How pleasant to behold a Thing
Where Human faces--be--

The + Waves grew sleepy--Breath--did not--(+ The Ocean--
The Winds--like Children--lulled-- tried--
Then Sunrise kissed my Chrysalis-- wearied--)
And I stood up--and lived--

(J598, 1862, F24)

Basically a narrative poem, here Dickinson verbally relives her encounter with death. Employing an extended sea metaphor, the poet asserts that three times she approached death. "Three times--we parted--Breath--and I," she says. This malevolent sea toys with her, tossing her up and catching her "like a Ball" or making "Blue faces in [her] face." For some inexplicable, uncontrollable reason, her desire to live was strong and "Breath . . . / . . . would not go." Using an unimpassioned, factual narrative tone, undercutting any playfulness of the images she creates, Dickinson rounds off the extended sea metaphor by dovetailing it with another. She takes the malevolently playful, toying "Waters" and "Billows" of the sea that pushed a potentially rescuing sail from her drowning view and compares them in stanza four to mischievious, unknowing "Children lulled" and "grown sleepy," tired from their play and unaware of the harm they might have caused. She thus heightens the horror of the situation she describes. Then to conclude the poem, she draws in a metaphor that we have seen before, "Sunrise," only reversed, from the third Master Letter. Whereas in the letter's final paragraphs Dickinson uses "Sundown" as a reference to death as she looks forward to some kind of a future with Master, either late in life or in Heaven, in this poem she turns the

metaphor around to "Sunrise" to imply life. Moreover, she refers to the sun's touching her "Chrysalis" after which she "stood up--and lived." This line is a reaffirmation of life as well as an instance in which Dickinson employs an image of life and resurrection characteristic of her age's consolation poetry. Taken as a whole, this poem not only a documents the severity of her physical and emotional reaction to the child's death, it is also captures an instance of reality testing as the poet remembers and relives segmentally her recent past experience as she works through her grief.

Continuing her adjustment to the numbing phase of denial, in J859 Dickinson again reflects upon her past experience with acceptance and recognition. She recognizes that this state was necessary and has been beneficial to her:

> A Doubt it if be Us
> Assists the staggering Mind
> In an Extremer Anguish
> Until it footing find.
>
> An Unreality is lent,
> A merciful Mirage
> That makes the living possible
> While it suspends the lives.
>
> (J859, 1864-1865)

Here the poet characterizes the mind's necessity for withdrawal from immediately acknowledging an intense shock. She claims that this defensive reaction, which she metaphorically refers to as "A Doubt," "Assists the staggering Mind" undergoing "an Extremer Anguish" as long as is needed "Until it footing find" again in reality. Dickinson characterizes this anesthetizing "A merciful Mirage" that allows the

bereaved to assimilate slowly the details of the tragedy without being overwhelmed.

Although Dickinson is initially grateful to be past the protective benumbing state, she must now face the intensity of her grief. In J410 the poet recaptures her initial reactions to the grief. Not only does she describe her shock and psychological state at this stage of the denial process, but Dickinson also refers to two horrendous events, one terrible--though lesser--shock preceding the larger horror of her bereavement:

> The first Day's Night had come--
> And grateful that a thing
> So terrible--had been endured--
> I told my Soul to sing--
>
> She said her Strings were snapt--
> Her Bow--to Atoms blown--
> And so to mend her--gave me work
> Until another Morn--
>
> And then--a Day as huge
> As Yesterdays in pairs,
> Unrolled its' horror in my face--
> Until it blocked my eyes--
>
> My Brain--begun to laugh--
> I mumbled--like a fool--
> And tho' 'tis Years ago--that Day--
> My Brain keeps giggling--still.
>
> And Something's odd--within--
> That person that I was--
> And this One--so not feel the same--
> Could it be Madness--this?
>
> (J410, 1862, F15)

In stanza one here, Dickinson refers to the coming of "Night" after the "first Day," an ominous, almost death-like portent and a metaphoric signal that the end of something has arrived. During the respite of the "Night" she says that she is "grateful" to have endured

during the "Day," "a thing / So terrible." Whatever this occurrence, it is not the major cause of shock, but a preliminary to the next "Day as huge / As Yesterdays in pairs" that "Unrolled its' horror in [her] face-- / Until it blocked [her] eyes--" with denial's numbness. Grateful to have survived the first shock, Dickinson says, "I told my Soul to sing," alluding to her occupation as a poet. However, this terrible event has so affected her that she cannot. She claims that her Soul's "Strings were snapt-- / Her Bow to Atoms blown." Undaunted, however, in the face of this lesser shock, the resiliant poet is encouraged by her own endurance and sets to work on her broken bow "And so to mend her--gave [her] work," almost as therapy.

The reader must ask, "What terrible event had Dickinson endured prior to her abortion and bereavement that would be cause enough to still her pen?" The answer to this question suggests itself in the abortion sequence poems. Previous to her abortion, Dickinson approached Master to intercede for her child's life, offering hers in exchange, as she recounts in J621, "I asked no other thing." However, Master, cast in J621 as the sneering Mighty Merchant, is cruel and callous, ignoring and consequently denying her request. For Dickinson, who loved and trusted Master and felt that he reciprocated the feelings, her realization of his insensitivity to her needs must have been a stunning blow, one strong enough to be referred to as a "terrible" thing during the "Day" of their love. Further reinforcement of this line of argument is provided if we recall the third Master Letter that begins with the statement, "If you saw a bullet hit a Bird," indicating the grave offense Dickinson has taken

from Master's insensitivity. Moreover, if we remember that within the letter Dickinson rails at Master for being a doubting Thomas and that the rest of the letter is an attempt to reaffirm their love and trust in one another, it seems likely that the lesser terrible event preceding Dickinson's actual bereavement was Master's denial to her only request, that she be able to keep the child. Consequently, when in the first three lines she says, "The first Day's Night had come" but she was grateful that it had been endured, she reminds one of a partner in a love relationship confessing the occurrence of the first major rift in the relationship, but only after it is thankfully over. Though she may be making such an allusion to her relationship with Master, and though she and Master probably reaffirmed their love and trust in one another, this first disagreement was not over something trivial, for it has had a profound, lasting effect upon her. And as she is beginning to recover during the "Night" from the first event, the larger, more horrifying one occurs with the issuing in of a "Day as huge / As Yesterdays in pairs."

Her inital response is uncontrollable, hysterical laughter occasioned by psychic and emotional pain. She claims, "My Brain--began to laugh." Dickinson again recalls her initial numbness and inability to think connectedly when she says, "I mumbled--like a fool." Furthermore, she remembers the seeming timelessness of her benumbed state, as she previously expresses in J650, "Pain--has an Element of Blank," and J761, "From Blank to Blank," and points to the event as being long past when she asserts, "And tho' 'tis Years ago--that Day--." Finally, Dickinson recognizes that even though that

anesthetized state she struggled to overcome is now past, it has wrought a profound change in her; she is not the same person that she was. And to acknowledge this difference, she does not say that her brain is laughing now as it was in the beginning; rather, her reaction has been muted to that of less intense laughter. She states, "My Brain keeps giggling--still," suggesting that though she has weathered the initial state of shock and numbness, she still has many emotions to progress through before complete recovery can occur. In the final stanza, the poet verbalizes recognition of her progressing but still abnormal state and questions whether her altered self could be born of "Madness": "And Something's odd--within-- / That person that I was-- / And this One--do not feel the same-- / Could it be Madness-- this?"

Of a horrific tone similar to that of the previous poem, J414, a commonly anthologized Dickinson poem with a multitude of interpretations, replays her shock and slipping into and emerging from her benumbed state. In this piece, Dickinson steps back to consider the horror of this past experience and whether the living through and remembering of it, only to be confronted with such devastating change afterward, are worth the suffering:

> 'Twas like a Maelstrom, with a notch,
> That nearer, every Day,
> Kept narrowing it's boiling Wheel
> Until the Agony
> Toyed cooly with the final inch
> Of your delirious Hem--
> And you dropt, lost,
> When something broke--
> And let you from a Dream--

As if a Goblin with a Guage--
Kept measuring the Hours--
Until you felt your Second
Weigh, helpless, in his Paws--

And not a Sinew--stirred--could help,
And sense was setting numb--
When God--remembered--and the Fiend
Let go, then, Overcome--

As if your Sentence stood--pronounced--
And you were frozen led
From Dungeon's luxury of Doubt
To Gibbets, and the Dead--

And when the Film had stitched your eyes
A Creature gasped "Reprieve"!
Which Anguish was the utterest--then--
To perish, or to live?

(J414, 1862, F15)

In an effort to come to terms with her recent past, in another instance of reality testing Dickinson replays the past in her mind. She attempts to arrive at appropriate metaphors to describe it, as if describing it will enable her to understand and face the event. First, she compares her past stupor and the reality testing that slowly occurred to allow the full impact of her shock to be assimilated gradually to a malevolent, threatening "Maelstrom, with a notch" and a "boiling Wheel." It veers closer to her "every Day" and "Toy[s]" with her "delirious Hem" until "something broke-- / And let [her] from a Dream" into the reality of her bereavement. Next, she compares the first phase of grief to an equally sinister "Goblin with a Gauge." This ghoul "kept measuring the Hours" when she ultimately felt "helpless, in his Paws" and without a "Sinew" able to stir to help when "sense was setting numb." Finally, and a little bitterly, she says, "God--remembered," characterizing herself as one of God's

afterthoughts. Then, "the Fiend / Let go, then Overcome--." Her last metaphor is one as terrifying. She compares her experience to that of a prisoner whose "Sentence stood--pronounced" and is reconciled to his fate and is then "frozn led / From Dungeon's luxury of Doubt / To Gibbets, and the Dead--." At this point in the poem Dickinson begins to realize the "luxury" her paralyzed consciousness afforded, referred to here as the "Doubt" and reminiscent of that in J859, "A Doubt if it be Us." Upon this realization, the poet questions whether it would have been less painful to continue her state of living death or be "Reprieve[d]" at the last minute, like her metaphoric prisoner, only to have to face the "Anguish" of her tragic reality. She heart-wrenchingly asks, "Which Anguish was the utterest--then-- / To perish, or to live?" This question is similar to an observation that she makes about her child's fate in J762, "The Whole of it came not at once," in which she refers to the child's slow death by cauterization and compares it to a teasing cat with a mouse in its clutches. She muses, "'Tis Life's award--to die-- / Contenteder if once-- / Than dying half--then rallying / For Consciouser Eclipse--." Dickinson here suggests an answer to the question she raises in J414: "Which Anguish was the utterest--then-- / To perish or to live?" She implies here that the living is far more painful.

Poem J948 is another poem of reflection upon Dickinson's first phase of grief and is thus another instance of reality testing. Following J414, which questions whether her survival has been worth the pain and struggle she now faces, this poem presents a Dickinson who, having endured this first phase, is faced with the question of

whether or not she will continue the struggle to count herself among the living:

> 'Twas Crisis--All the length had passed--
> That dull--benumbing time
> There is in Fever or Event--
> And now the Chance had come--
>
> The instant holding in its' claw
> The privilege to live
> Or warrant to + report the Soul (+ present)
> The other side the Grave.
>
> The Muscles + grappled as with leads (+ struggled)
> That would not let the Will--
> The Spirit shook the Adamant
> But could not make it + feel (+ tell)
>
> The Second poised--debated--shot--
> Another had begun--
> And simultaneously, a Soul
> Escaped the House unseen--
>
> (J948, 1864)

Beset with images of time, this poem recounts the aftermath of "That dull--benumbing time" she has just passed through. Now that the protective phase of denial is past, she confronts reality with all of the shock and horror that accompany her child's death. She is faced with a life and death decision. She says that her "Chance had come" in that fleeting "instant" to decide whether to live or die. She conjures an image of Time here as a monster "holding in its' claw" her uncertain fate: "The privilege to live / Or warrant to report the Soul / The other side, the Grave." Faced with this choice, the struggling poet finds herself unable to make a decision, despite her "Muscles" that "grappled as with leads / That would not let the Will" or her "Spirit" that "shook the Adamant / But could not make it feel." Within this inwardly struggling but outwardly catatonic state, the

suspended Dickinson notes the quick passage of time, "The Second poised--debated--shot-- / Another had begun--," when suddenly "And simultaneously" she says that on its own the "Soul / Escaped the House unseen." Here, she intimates that she has unwittingly selected death; however, she appears to allude to a death that is not a final death, the opposite of life, but a death of her old self as she faces the monumental shock and grief of her bereavement. She says as much in poem J1194, the next poem of this group:

> Somehow myself survived the Night
> And entered with the Day--
> That it be saved the Saved suffice
> Without the Formula.
>
> Henceforth I take my living place
> As one commuted led--
> A Candidate for Morning Chance
> But dated with the Dead.
>
> (J1194, 1871)

Returning here to the night imagery and the subject of survival treated in the first stanza of J410, "The first Day's Night had come--," Dickinson describes being "saved" as if it should have been sufficient in itself. However, faced with overwhelming grief, she deems her survival insufficient in stanza two where she says that she "take[s her] living place / As one commuted led." With an allusion to the reprieved prisoner imagery of J414, "'Twas like a Maelstrom, with a notch," Dickinson claims here that hers is still a living death. Though like a prisoner with the commuted sentence, she is supposedly "A Candidate for Morning Chance"; in her own perception she is "dated with the Dead."

After this early reaction of near despair, she rallies

somewhat to face her grief. And as if to reassure herself in the aftermath of her benumbed state that this living death is real and that she, too, is real, in poem J351 Dickinson takes stock of her physical and mental state:

> I felt my life with both my hands
> To see if it was there--
> I held my spirit to the Glass,
> To prove it possibler--
>
> I turned by Being round and round
> And paused at every pound
> To ask the Owner's name--
> For doubt, that I should know the Sound--
>
> I judged my features--jarred my hair--
> I pushed my dimples by, and waited--
> If they--twinkled back--
> Conviction might, of me--
>
> I told myself, "Take Courage, Friend--
> That--was a former time--
> But we might learn to like the Heaven,
> As well as our Old Home!"
>
> (J351, 1862, F17)

Dickinson begins this poem by investigating her corporeal and spiritual self to determine the changes wrought there. She feels her "life with both [her] hands" to see if her old self "was there"; she holds her "spirit to the Glass" as one holds a mirror to the nose of a supposed dead person, to see if there are any vestiges of life present. Obviously, the poet feels strange and tentative about herself.

In the second stanza, feeling very unlike her usual self, Dickinson turns her attention to her entire being, which she says she turned "round and round / And paused at every pound / To ask the

Owner's name." Because she does not recognize herself, she doubts that her present self is in any way related to her former self.

Continuing the idea of the lack of correspondence between and familiarity with the person she was before her tragedy struck and the person she is now, Dickinson focuses on the physical aspects of her being in stanza three. She says, with great hope, that she "judged [her] features," "jarred [her] hair," and "pushed [her] dimples by" and waited for some resemblance between her former and present self to confirm with some "Conviction" that they "might" be "of me." However, she discovers no similarity between the two, and in an effort to console herself, in the final stanza, she rationalizes her new state to herself. She tells herself, "Take Courage, Friend" as she recognizes the pre-bereavement period as "a former time" now gone. And in an effort at conciliation Dickinson says that she "might learn to like" her new state ("the Heaven") "As well as" the old ("our Old Home!"). It is interesting that in these last two lines Dickinson uses the images of "Heaven" as opposed to "Home" to characterize the difference between her former and her present self following her emergence from her shock. Both these terms in nineteenth-century America held very specific connotations. Heaven was a euphemism for death. Home was the usual domain and sphere of women of the time. Dickinson's juxtaposition of these terms here certainly evokes these connotations, but it also conjures up her associations with Master, their plans to be together in the future in homey Heaven, and her one link left with Master, their dead child who has preceded them. A possibly conscious choice of terms by Dickinson to carry all of these

associations? Very likely, given the nature of the poem's subject, Dickinson's bewildering and difficult state of grief following the shock of the child's death.

As Dickinson gradually does further reality testing after emerging from the preliminary shock, she begins to realize more about the stunning reality that has sent her into denial. She becomes increasingly in touch with her altered feelings and the reason for that alteration. Such is the case with poem J1123[4]:

A great Hope fell
You heard no * noise (* crash)
The * Ruin was within (*havoc / damage)
Oh cunning wreck that told no tale
And let no Witness in

The mind was built for mighty Freight
For dread occasion planned
How often foundering at Sea
Ostensibly, on Land

A not admitting of the wound
Until it grew so wide
That all my Life had entered it
And there * were * troughs beside (* was) (* space / room)
A closing of the simple * lid (* Gate)
That opened to the sun
Until the * tender Carpenter (* soverign Carpenter / unsuspecting Carpenters)
Perpetual nail it down--

(J1123, 1868)

In this poem, though in very general terms, Dickinson begins to acknowledge her loss. She asserts in stanza one "A great Hope fell,"

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[4]The only extant copy of this poem is the original manuscript, of which there is not facsimile copy available, is written on both sides of an empty envelope. Consequently, in this study, the placement for changes written in by Dickinson and given by Johnson will be indicated in the poem's text by an asterisk, and the possible changes for each line will appear at the end of that line.

as she begins to realize the loss of her child and an end to her irrational hope that the child might in some way be spared. The poet then considers how this fallen hope has affected her. Speaking to some unknown addressee made known only as "You," Dickinson once again recapitulates the state of her affected mind. She describes the individualness of her shock as she says, "You heard no noise / The ruin was within." She then not only bemoans her previous solitary state, but also alludes to the inviolate secrecy of her condition as she sighs, "Oh cunning wreck that told no tale / And let no Witness in."

Stanza two is a reflection upon the normal mind "that was built for mighty Freight / For dread occasioned planned"; however, returning to the sea imagery of J598, "Three times--we parted--Breath--and I," in which she describes her encounters with death, she claims that the unplanned occasion when the mind founders not at sea, but "on Land" when compounded by a secreting of the wreck, can have devastating effects. In stanza three, she admits that "not admitting of the wound / Until it grew so wide" has caused it to be so all-consuming "That all my Life had entered it / And there were troughs beside." Recapturing the painful aftermath of the experience, Dickinson not only claims that keeping her pain to herself has made her hurt grow so large that it has consumed her, but also suggests a mother's common reaction following the loss of a child during pregnancy. Because the mother has not only lost her child, but also a part of herself, she feels a great void in herself and her life, as if "there is a hole within [her] that nothing can fill" (Jiménez 39).

And as if to characterize the state of living death yet again, in the final stanza Dickinson compares it to being already in the coffin, only awaiting the final nailing down of the lid. She compares the experience of this empty chasm to "A closing of the simple lid / That opened to the sun," and she waits "Until the tender Carpenter / Perpetual nail it down" and free her from this death in life.

The emptiness that consumes her life is also the subject of poem J858:

> This Chasm, Sweet, upon my life
> I mention it to you,
> When Sunrise through a fissure drop
> The Day must follow too.
>
> If we demur, its' gaping sides
> Disclose as 'twere a Tomb
> Ourself am lying straight wherein
> The Favorite of Doom.
>
> When it has just contained a Life
> Then, Darling, it will close
> And yet so bolder every Day
> So turbulent it grows
>
> I'm tempted half to stitch it up
> With a remaining Breath
> I should not miss in yielding, though
> To Him, it would be Death--
>
> And so I bear it big about
> My Burial--before
> A Life quite ready to depart
> Can harrass me no more--
>
> (J858, 1864)

Using the same appellation that she employs in poem J482 of the abortion sequence, "We Cover Thee--Sweet Face--," indicating that she is addressing this poem to her dead child now in Heaven, Dickinson appropriately mentions the "Chasm" that engulfs her life since the child has gone. She claims that this gaping hole is as certain as

"When Sunrise through a fissure drop / The Day must follow too." Resigned to this feeling and aware of the consequences of her denial of her condition (having just experienced such trauma in her state of numbness) the poet acknowledges that "If we demur" against the reality of the situation, the Chasm's "gaping sides" will act as if "'twere a Tomb" where "Ourself am lying straight wherein / The Favorite of Doom"; in other words, denial of her loss, just like her state of numbness, is a fate worse that the living death she must face in her bereavement. Furthermore, here she reiterates an idea she has mentioned in J1123, "A Great Hope fell." In both poems she compares her present condition of facing grief as a state of emptiness to being already in her casket awaiting death.

In the first line of stanza three she makes an allusion to the child she has carried and lost. Almost in a consoling tone to the child, who might worry about her suffering, as if minimizing her pain, she says, "When it [the Chasm she feels] has just contained a Life / Then, Darling, it will close." However, the reality of the pain will not allow her to deny it and she says, "yet so bolder every Day / So turbulent it grows." Such is her discomfort that she says, "I'm tempted half to stitch it up / With a remaining Breath," referring to contemplated suicide here. But the poet realizes that to do so "would be Death" though she would "not miss in yielding." Obviously opposed to suicide, the poet says she will "bear [the pain created by the chasm] big about" until her "Burial," taking small comfort in the realization that her life with which she was willing to part, "A life

quite ready to depart" she calls it, "Can harrass [her] no more--" than the pain she already feels.

It is in this poem, J858, that Dickinson makes her first specific allusion to the child, indicating that she is progressing beyond the all-consuming self-centered grief that early denial elicits. The numbness of defensive withdrawal in early denial allows the bereaved self protection; however, through constant testing, reality begins to break through and the inner-directed individual begins to turn outward to a confrontation and acknowledgement of the tragedy occasioning the bereaved's reactions.

Up until this point, Dickinson has been reliving piecemeal through gradual reality testing bits and pieces of her shock until she can confront it in its entirety and recognize her loss. In J430 Dickinson is finally able to relive the entire experience and realize her loss:

> It would never be Common--more--I said--
> Difference--had begun--
> Many a bitterness--had been--
> But that old sort--was done--
>
> Or--if it sometime--showed--as 'twill--
> Upon the Downiest--Morn--
> Such bliss--had I--for all the years--
> 'Twould give an Easier--pain--
>
> I'd so much joy--I told it--Red--
> Upon my simple Cheek--
> I felt it publish--in my Eye--
> 'Twas needless--any speak--
>
> I walked--as wings--my body bore--
> The feet--I former used--
> Unnecessary--now to me--
> As boots--would be--to Birds--

I put my pleasure all abroad--
I dealt a word of Gold
To every Creature--that I met--
And Dowered--all the World--

When--suddenly--my Riches shrank--
A Goblin--drank my Dew
My Palaces--dropped tenantless--
Myself--was beggared--too--

I clutched at sounds
I groped at shapes--
I touched the tops of Films--
I felt the Wilderness roll back
Along my Golden lines—

The Sackcloth--hangs upon the nail--
The Frock I used to wear--
But where my moment of Brocade--
My--drop--of India?

(J430, 1862, F19)

Dickinson begins this poem with the realization of the change that has been wrought in her because of her bereavement and her suffering through the first stage of denial. As if this painful change is permanent, she asserts, "It would never be Common—more--I said-- / Difference--had begun," sounding very much like a bereaved mother who will carry her loss with her through the days of her life. Acknowledging the passing of her long and painful state of numbness, a relieved Dickinson claims, "Many a bitterness--had been-- / But that old sort--was done--." Upon second thought, however, Dickinson reconsiders her past anguish and says that "if it sometime—showed" as she knows "'twill" in the future, despite "the Downiest--Morn," she rationalizes that "Such bliss--had I--for all the years-- / 'Twould give an Easier--pain." Here Dickinson assumes that she has survived the worst of her grief as she returns to a reference she has used in referring to her child in the abortion sequence poetry. She refers to

her possession of the child as "bliss" in the present poem, reminiscent of her calling the child "the Bliss" in J271, "A solemn thing--it was--I said--," where she wonders "how the Bliss would look-- / And would it feel as big-- / When I could take it in my hand--," and in J762, "The Whole of it came not at once--," in which she acknowledges the purpose of the abortion is "The Bliss to cauterize." Here "the bliss" she alludes to is the child, more specifically her memories of the child that will "give an Easier-- pain."

Not content merely to recognize her time of joy shared with the child, in stanza three she begins to relive it from the moment that she realized the communion between them in pregnancy. Ushered in by the "era of good will" that accompanies diagnosis of pregnancy for a woman, Dickinson expresses such serene contentment in the knowledge of her possession of the child that she almost proclaims it to the world in her flushed, happy face and twinkling eye. She claims that her joy was so great, "I told it--Red-- / Upon my simple Cheek / I felt it publish--in my Eye-- / 'Twas needless--any speak." So happy she is with her new state she could not be held earthbound, but "walked--as wings--my body bore--." And her feet that she "former used" were "Unnecessary--now to [her]-- / As boots--would be to Birds--." This "era of good will" stimulated by her pregnancy is not reserved for herself alone, however; she extends it to all as she "put [her] pleasure all abroad" and "dealt a word of Gold / To every Creature--that [she] met / And Dowered--all the World--."

In stanza eight, however, the joyful, buoyant tone of the

previous three stanzas in which she has been replaying her joy in her pregnancy changes drastically as a malevolent figure abruptly invades her thoughts. Obviously remembering the abortion and returning to the merchant/monetary imagery pervading so many poems of the abortion sequence, Dickinson announces, "Suddenly--my Riches shrank." The cause for this loss she attributes to "A Goblin" who "drank [her] Dew," an obvious allusion to the grisly abortion she has endured and a reference to the malevolent "Goblin with a Gauge" she attributes the cause of her anguish to in J519, "'Twas like a Maelstrom, with a notch." Because of this Goblin, Dickinson's "Palaces--dropped tenantless." With this statement Dickinson makes her first direct reference to the death of her child through abortion since the poems of the abortion sequence. Returning again to the merchant/monetary imagery of the abortion poems to describe the effect this death has upon her, she says that she not only lost the child, but also "Myself--was beggard--too--," characterizing vividly the feelings of a bereaved mother.

Stanza seven recapitulates the dull benumbing early stage of denial as the poet recalls, "I clutched at sounds-- / I groped at shapes-- / I touched the tops of Films--." Then she says, "I felt the Wilderness roll back," indicating an end to her confusion. Having survived that suffering with her "Sackcloth" now put up "upon the nail," in the final stanza Dickinson is left with the reality of her precious loss. Unable yet to face it completely, suggesting that she is still within the state of denial, she asks, "But where my moment of Brocade-- / My--drop--of India?" "Brocade" being a richly-textured and

expensive fabric, and "India" connoting a foreign place famous for its rich teas in the nineteeth century, Dickinson here appears to equate her missing child with lost riches, another subtle return to the merchant/monetary imagery of the abortion sequence poems.

Recognizing the enormity of her loss in J181, the poet seeks to recapture it, attesting to the persistence of the denial stage of her bereavement:

> I lost a World--the other day!
> Has Anybody found?
> You'll now it by the Row of Stars
> Around its' forehead bound.
>
> A Rich man--might not notice it--
> Yet--to my frugal Eye,
> Of more Esteem than Ducats--
> Oh find it--Sir--for me!
>
> (J181, 1860, F12)

Although this poem's early date of 1860 would appear to exclude it from any of Dickinson's poems dealing with this tragedy, its content, tone, unifying devices with all of the bereavement poems, especially this denial groups', would appear to contradict its exclusion. Moreover, this poem is included by Dickinson in a fascicle that includes three other abortion or bereavement poems that are conjecturally dated 1861. Consequently, it is quite possible that this is a poem that Dickinson wrote toward the end of 1860 or at the beginning of 1861. We must also recall, as Franklin himself admits, that his techniques for dating the poems are not flawless. Thus, because of the indefiniteness of the dating of this poem, it is feasible that J181 can and does belong to this group of denial poems.

Moreover, the internal components strongly attest that it does, indeed, belong.

In this poem the poet bemoans the loss of "a World" that she desires to recoup. As we saw in Dickinson's letter to Colonel Higginson she calls each of the people she considers special in her life "a World." Also in poem J527, "To put this World down, like a Bundle—" of the abortion sequence she refers to the child she carries as a "World" that Master asks her to put down "like a Bundle-- / And walk steady away." Dickinson often uses the phrase "a World" to indicate a person precious to her. Here she uses it to refer to the child, attested to by the return of the mysterious it interlaced throughout the poem and in several other ways.

She first implores "Anybody" if they have found what she has lost. In desperation, she turns for assistance to a more definite "Sir," who knows what loss she is talking about as she refers to the missing only as it. After all she has been through with him, is it possible that Dickinson turned to Master for help? It is possible, even likely, if we recall that Dickinson considered him her "dearest earthly friend." In any event, in her impassioned plea, she returns to the monetary/value-related imagery of the abortion sequence poems as she characterizes her loss by incorporating terms associated with value: "Rich," "frugal," "Esteem," and "Ducats." And she echoes her impoverished position in relation to one who is rich like the Mighty Merchant of the abortion sequence poems when she suggests her resultant poverty at the loss of the child. She says, "A Rich man-- might not notice" her small loss amidst his store of wealth; however,

she claims that to her "frugal eye" and limited store, she sorely misses her loss.

To further emphasize this grievous heartfelt loss, Dickinson compares the loss to that which a rich man could not understand. She says, "Of more Esteem than Ducats-- / Oh find it--Sir--for me." Not only does Dickinson make an easily understood comparison here, she also makes a fleeting literary allusion to a famous loss of a child in these lines, indicated by her choice of "Ducats" as the monetary unit employed in line 7. The word is unnecessary to fit the rhyme scheme, as only the second and fourth line of each stanza rhyme. Possibly the word was chosen to maintain the established alternating iambic tetrameter and iambic trimeter rhythm, but "doubloons," "dollars," "drachmas," or another two-syllable monetary unit would serve as well. Therefore, by suggesting a rich man's unawareness of the loss of a valued child, Shakespeare's Shylock in The Merchant of Venice, which was, according to Jack L. Capps, among Dickinson's reading (65), is recalled. This Jewish usurer loses both his child and his ducats when his daughter elopes. Torn between his child and his money, Shylock is confused about which to grieve the most:

> "My daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter!
> Fled with a Christian! O my Christian ducats!
> Justice! The law! My ducats, and my daughter!
> A sealed bag, two sealed bags of ducats,
> O double ducats, stol'n from me by my daughter!
> And jewels--two stones two rich precious stones,
> Stol'n by my daughter! Justice! Find the girl!
> She hath the stones upon her, and the ducats!"
>
> (Merchant 2.8.15-22)

In mentioning ducats frequently and in confusing his daughter and his money, Shylock mourns more for his monetary loss. Moreover, in

Dickinson's allusion to this particular character's loss of his child and the "pound of flesh" he seeks as his revenge and also loses, it is possible that the poet further incorporates a more submerged allusion here to the lost fetus, the "pound of flesh" that was her child. By employing this Shakespearean reference, Dickinson not only emphasizes the value of her loss, but also reinforces her persistent and tenacious denial of this loss. In fact, the searching and yearning that permeate the lines of this poem are characteristic of a bereaved mother following a tragedy during pregnancy (Jiménez 42). In actuality, this seaching behavior is a continuation of reality testing of the denial stage as the mother, compelled to search for her lost little one, slowly realizes that the child is not there.

Less agitated than the previous poem of denial, in J417 Dickinson is still searching and yearning but with less dogged determination than J181:

> It is dead--Find it--
> Out of sound--Out of sight--
> "Happy"? Which is wiser--
> You, or the Wind?
> "Conscious"? Won't you ask that--
> Of the low Ground?
>
> "Homesick"? May met it--
> Even through them--This
> Cannot testify--
> Themself--as dumb--
>
> (J417, 1862, F15)

Tinged with melancholy and verging upon anger, this poem, like the last, is apparently addressed to Master. In the first line, Dickinson juxtaposes two contradictory statements: "It is dead--Find it." The first statement issued in a nonplussed, unemotional manner, like the

rest of the poem, acknowledges that the child is dead; however, immediately following this assertion, she orders Master to "Find it." The contradictory nature of these two ideas suggests Dickinson's confusion as she struggles to come to terms with her child's death by letting go of her denial. It is not easy for her to let go of a child that is "Out of sound--Out of sight" and furthermore one she has never seen or held, except in her imagination.

Battling her confusion and her emotions, in line 3 Dickinson includes an incongruous word in the context and tone of this poem. The word is "Happy" and it is enclosed in quotation marks and followed curiously by a question mark, as if she is questioning the logic of someone else's word. Is it possible that as she realizes the death of her child Dickinson calls into question Master's intended consolatory remarks to her over her situation? It is entirely possible that he has written to her telling her that she can once again be happy once she puts this situation behind her. As if this is indeed the case, she asks immediately following her questioning the possibility of her ever being "`Happy'" again, she asks, questioning his facile wisdom, "Which is wiser-- / You, or the wind?"

Line 5 reproduces another of Master's offered words of sympathy, "`Conscious'." Has Master attempted to tell her that in time she will no longer be conscious of her pain and loss? Again, as if in answer, she says, "Won't you ask that / Of the low Ground?" as if directing him to the child buried in "the low Ground" that she can never forget.

In the last stanza, Dickinson questions Master's last piece of

proffered consolation as she questions his term "`Homesick´." Has Master suggested that she will in time get over her homesickness for the child? As if to answer, she implies that though, "Many met" the child and have since forgotten it, she will not. And "This" supposed proof of getting over homesickness by others "Cannot testify" herself "as dumb" as they or as Master for offering such supposed wisdom. Her anger toward Master here both for his role in the abortion and for his insensitive attempts at consolation is blossoming and will build as she progresses onto the next stage of Anger.

The final poem of the denial stage is J965. It is a poem born of Dickinson´s final acknowledgement of the child´s death and her looking back upon and objectification of the stage she has just passed through:

> Denial--is the only fact
> Perceived by the Denied--
> Whose Will-- a + numb significance-- (+ Blank
> The Day the Heaven died-- intelligence)
>
> And all the Earth strove common round--
> Without Delight, or + Beam (+ Aim)
> What Comfort was it Wisdom--was--
> The spoiler of Our Home?
>
> (J965, 1864, F40)

The recognition of the situation is clear here in the first stanza as she looks back upon her previous state and realizes its all-consuming nature upon her life: "Denial--is the only fact / Perceived by the Denied." Furthermore, she acknowledges that previously her "Will" was "a numb significance--" at the time of her bereavement--"The Day the Heaven died."

Stanza two captures her feelings at the time about this state

as she perceives the world around her, as sharing her pain and consequently being without joy or sunshine: "And all the Earth strove common round-- / Without Delight, or Beam--." However, with the poem's final two lines, the narrative quality of the poem changes as Dickinson, no longer relating the past but rather taking stock of the present, injects a question: "What Comfort was it Wisdom--was-- / The spoiler of Our Home?" Here the poet appears to be questioning the "Comfort" that Master offered her in the guise of "Wisdom," wisdom that turned out to be "The spoiler of Our Home." Not only does the narrative technique change here, but the tone shifts to one verging upon anger as she appears to be questioning Master's decision about the abortion that would have been offered as wisdom and comfort, but for Dickinson turned out to be disastrous. Implying sneeringly that Master's decision was neither wise nor comforting, Dickinson's anger becomes even more apparent than in the previous J417, "It is dead-- Find it--," indicating that she has progressed from the denial stage to the next stage of anger, where Master will become the target of her blame and her vehemence over her child's death. With the progression to the stage of anger, Dickinson has finally acknowledged her child's death and the real grieving process, one that has been delayed through the numbness and denial of the death, begins.

CHAPTER V

'TIS GOOD--THE LOOKING BACK ON GRIEF

Grief's denial stage is characterized by the absence of emotion and feeling as the bereaved's mind and body attempt to adjust slowly to death's shocking reality; however, the remaining four stages of anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance elicit overwhelming emotions and sensations evoked by the bereaved's recognition of the loss' reality; the mind and body must both attempt to deal with and assimilate these emotions to return the individual to a sense of normality without the lost loved one. In the evolution of her grief, after surviving the initial pain of the child's death, the numbing, isolated sensations of denial--which for Dickinson was a prolonged and anguished period because of the nature of her bereavement and the compounding of her shock by Master's abandonment--and the painful acknowledgment of her child's death in all its horrifying and grisly detail, the poet is left to manage the consequent emotions arising from her loss. The following pages will plot sequentially and progressively the four remaining stages of Kübler-Ross's model of the grief experience over the course of Dickinson's bereavement as captured in her poetry.

The mother of a child who has died during pregnancy, after she is able to acknowledge the death, normally experiences some guilt over whether she was in any way responsible for this tragedy, even if she

has had a model pregnancy. In Dickinson's case, as we saw in the abortion sequence poems, she felt more than the usual guilt over her child's death because of what she rightly or wrongly felt was her complicity in the abortion. Consequently, her guilt must have been oppressive as she became angry with herself at first because of her impotence in preventing the abortion, despite her love for her child; however, she was not the only one responsible for her loss. Master was involved as well. And when Dickinson becomes aware enough to realize that this guilt must be shared, her sense of inward guilt shifts to outwardly-directed indignant anger, with Master receiving the brunt of it.

Anger in grieving is a continuation of the denial stage because it allows the mind's anesthetizing protection to persist. As Nancy Berezin explains the constructive purpose of anger,

> [it] direct[s] some of the aggressive energy released by the tragedy away from the mourner at the time when it is most intense, and therefore most likely to be harmful. . . . (60)

Colin Murray Parkes echoes the idea that anger continues the protective stage of denial. Furthermore, he argues, anger is a control mechanism which the bereaved embraces to still the dizzying world of her emotions:

> If we can find someone to blame or some explanation that will enable death to be evaded, then we have a chance of controlling things. It is easier to believe that fate is indifferent, or rather positively malevolent, than to acknowledge our helplessness in the face of events. . . . Railing against God or Fate is, of course, only another way of trying to control the order of things. It is not so much an expression of helplessness as an attempt to influence events by browbeating their author. (Bereavement 85)

In her anger poems, Dickinson does not actually rail at Fate or God;

she knows that neither God nor Fate had a hand in her present trouble. Rather, she projects all blame upon Master as the author of her loss. She rages at him with the same vehemence she vents in the third Master Letter, suggesting that these poems and that particular Master Letter originate from around the same time and are occasioned by the same feelings.

Dickinson wrote only a few poems of anger, suggesting that this stage, unlike Dickinson's denial stage, was one that she worked through quickly. After all, we do know that regardless of how angry she became in blaming Master for her bereavement and suffering at this time, until his death she continued to think of him as her "dearest earthly friend." However, though there are relatively few anger poems (four), compared to those of denial, those that exist fairly seeth with anger and drip with sarcasm; they share the harsh tone of the Master Letters.

Prefiguring the anger poems of her bereavement are two that we have seen in the abortion sequence. Both deal with Master's decision about aborting the child; furthermore, both proceed from a sublimated anger directed at Master about his decision. The first one is J621, "I asked no other thing." In this bitter poem, Dickinson embeds in an extended shopping-trip metaphor a recounting of Master's refusing her selfless offer to exchange her life for the child's. The second poem that foreshadows anger at Master as the exclusive and direct cause of her loss is J527, "To put this World down, like a Bundle." Here again, employing the shopping metaphor in referring to the child as "a Bundle," Dickinson considers the sacrifice that she alone must suffer.

She is angered that despite Master's focal part in the child's conception and the decision about its fate, he escapes unscathed and is unjustly absolved from suffering.

The first bereavement anger poem presents Dickinson at her sarcastic best, vividly reminiscent of the vehemence she explodes with in the third Master Letter. In fact, many strong connections between poem J861 and the third Master Letter exist:

> Split the Lark--and you'll find the Music
> Bulb after bulb, in Silver rolled--
> Scantily dealt to the Summer Morning
> Saved for your Ears when Lutes be old--
>
> Loose the Flood--you shall find it patent--
> Gush after Gush, reserved for you--
> Scarlet Experiment! Sceptic Thomas!
> Now, do you doubt that your Bird was true?
>
> (J861, 1864-1865)

The violent image that opens this poem is reminiscent of the equally violent image that initiates the third Master Letter. Whether she says, "Split the Lark" or "If you saw a bullet hit a Bird," as she does in the Master Letter, in both instances the poet evokes brutal images of suffering and death. Moreover, in both cases, Dickinson is writing metaphorically about herself as a bird, a likely reference to her abilities to sing poetically. In both poem and letter, the speaker accusatorially and sarcastically implies that the bird has suffered injury at Master's hands. Furthermore, just as the letter is written in second person addressed to Master, so too is the poem written in second person, obviously intended for Master's eyes.

In lines 1-2 here, Dickinson spits, "Split the Lark--and you'll find the Music / Bulb after bulb, in Silver rolled--." The

poet almost hisses at Master as she conjures this graphic image of slicing in halves a lovely lark capable of beautiful "Silver" song. The use of the term bulb is interesting here. A "bulb," when used in its gardening denotation, refers to the generative portion of a plant containing the food supply and the shoots that when planted and allowed to grow produce a new plant, in a process resembling the gestating of a human fetus. Furthermore, bulb may also be used to refer to any "rounded, enlarged, or bulb-shaped structure in the body" ("Bulb" 138). In either of these two connotations here, Dickinson appears to allude to the germinating life within her that has been destroyed by the abortion. She claims that in gutting the emblematic bird one will indeed be able to "find the Music" or see how the lovely music is made. But she also implies such action will also destroy the singer and her precious child, the stimulus to her beautiful singing. We can see Dickinson angrily envisioning herself behind these images. Imagining herself the bird, she vehemently accuses Master of metaphorically gutting her or destroying that vital, sensitive part of her that allowed her to sing. In terms of the foregoing argument, Dickinson intimates that this violence has been done her by Master's seduction, abandonment, and decision about the child's fate, which she alone has physically and mentally suffered through and is still suffering from.

Line 3 refers to the "Music," or her poetry, which she says was "Scantily dealt to the Summer Morning." It is likely that Dickinson alludes here to the poetry she has painstakingly written during the summer of her confinement after the abortion. This poetry

carefully captures her feelings and the abortion experience itself, which she says has been "Saved for [Master's] Ear when Lutes be old." Taken as a whole, then, this first stanza captures Dickinson agitatedly pondering Master's injustice to her. She feels that he has done violence to her body, her mind, and her poetic ability, which as she says have been reserved for him alone, even until "Lutes be old." This idea strongly echoes the last paragraphs of the third Master Letter where Dickinson voices her willingness to wait for Master even "till my hazel hair is dappled—and you carry the cane." Unlike the willingness of the Master Letter, however, here Dickinson's anger builds as she vividly remembers the bloody, painful abortion of their child in stanza two.

The first two lines of the second stanza, "Loose the Flood—you shall find it patent-- / Gush after Gush, reserved for you--," find Dickinson recalling the physical sensations of the ghastly abortion. Just as she has said in the first stanza that to "Split the Lark" enables one to discover yet destroy the source of the bird's music, in these lines she implies that the abortion, "the Flood," has revealed and threatened the depth of her love for Master. She sarcastically asserts that in loosing "the Flood" of the abortion, he should discover it "patent"; in other words, she claims that the child can only be his. The caustic nature of this comment intimates that Master has wounded Dickinson spiritually and emotionally by questioning the possibility of his having fathered the child. Her trust in him is shaken as she discovers his lack of trust in her. Not only was she willing to risk the possibility of pregnancy to

demonstrate her love for him, but she also suffered the excruciating abortion and loss of her child to accede to his wishes. However, following his abandonment and betrayal, these once-loving sacrifices have become painfully bitter regrets, and she lashes out at Master in her anguish. As if to demonstrate proof of her love once again, she graphically captures and hurls at him the gory details of the abortion when she describes the actual sensation of the fetus's expulsion with the phrase, "Gush after Gush, reserved for you." To further underscore her fidelity and love, Dickinson employs the same idea she has used in abortion sequence poem, J527, "To put this World down, like a Bundle," where in comparing the sacrifice that Master has directed her to make to Christ's and the Saints's before her, she says that her sacrifice is "Patent, every drop."

Her anger builds in the poem's final two lines: "Scarlet Experiment! Sceptic Thomas! / Now, do you doubt that your bird was true?" After all demonstrations of her love for him and all the suffering she has endured for him, and spurred by his betrayal and abandonment when she needed him most, she implies that he has had the audacity to question her fidelity. As if reasoning that he could only ask her such a question if he has been toying with her all along, she furiously accuses him of the conception and destruction of their child--the supposed product of their love--as a "Scarlet Experiment!" And she condemns him as a "Sceptic Thomas!" Infuriated by his expressed doubt of her and following her reiteration of the proofs she has given him of her love and fidelity, she incredulously demands of him, "Now," after all this, "do you doubt that your bird was true?"

This situation and its reference to Master as a doubting "Thomas" mirrors the one that Dickinson addresses in the opening paragraphs of the third Master Letter. There, too, the poet implies that Master has doubted her, even after she took the "something else" he offered her in the place of the "Redemption" she requests. In the Master Letter she also refers to Master as a doubting Thomas and uses graphic and violent physical images similar to those she employs in this poem. She says,

> One drop more from the gash that stains your Daisy's bosom—then would you <u>believe</u>? Thomas' faith in anatomy—was stronger than his faith in faith. . . .

The many parallels and connections between this poem and the third Master Letter lead the reader to feel that Dickinson's subject and occasion for both are the same; however, we must consider that the third Master Letter has been dated by Franklin as the summer of 1861, very likely close to the abortion experience itself that Dickinson alludes to in the poem. This poem, however, is dated by Franklin between 1864-1865, almost three or four years following the experience. How is it possible for the poet to capture so vividly the emotions that she experienced so long before? It is possible because of the revisitations of memory. It is also possible that if Dickinson did indeed visit Boston in April of 1864 and again in April of 1865 for extended psychological counselling for a pathological grief reaction, she would be reliving her experience in detail in order to come to terms with it. If such was the case, all contingent emotions associated with the experience must also have been relived and worked through, thus enabling her to recapture them with the sharpness of the

initial experience. Consequently the anger at Master comes through as being as real and as forceful as her original ire.

The building anger born of Master's betrayal and doubt of J821, turns to intense bitterness in the next anger poem, J1059:

> Sang from the Heart, Sire,
> Dipped my Beak in it,
> If the Tune drip too much
> Have a tint too Red
>
> Pardon the Cochineal—
> Suffer the Vermillion--
> Death is the Wealth
> Of the Poorest Bird.
>
> Bear with the Ballad—
> Awkward—faltering--
> Death twists the strings—
> 'Twas'nt my blame--
>
> Pause in you Liturgies—
> Wait your Chorals--
> While I + repeat your (+ recite)
> Hallowed name--
>
> (J1050, 1865)

Carrying over the bird and song metaphors and the direct address from J861, Dickinson's bitterness emanates throughout as each line is punctuated with sarcasm. She addresses the poem not directly to Master, but to "Sire," a royal appellation like "Master" that echoes the royaly imagery of the abortion and bereavement poems and expresses Dickinson's pretense of lower status or attitude of inferiority or subservience to her addressee.

In the first stanza, Dickinson assumes the metaphoric guise of a bird and tells Master that in her poetry she openly revealed her true feelings to him. She claims that she "Sang from the Heart, Sire, / Dipped [her] Beak in it." Obviously, from the indication of

the next several lines, Master has complained—perhaps guiltily so—to her about the pain emanating from the poems she has sent him. Reminiscent of the "Music" she says that she "Scantily dealt to the Summer Morning" of J861, she sarcastically sneers, "If the Tune drip too much / Have a tint too Red / Pardon the Cochineal— / Suffer the Vermillion." Here, amidst a flood of bloody red imagery, from the "Heart" she claims she sings in line 1, to her having "dipped [her] beak in it," to the tune that "drip[s] to much" or has "a tint too Red," and finally to the "Cochineal" or "Vermillion" in the first two lines of the second stanza, Dickinson transfuses her anger at Master into this bitter poem. With all these references, she echoes the suffering she has endured because of the bloody abortion but also because of Master's cavalier treatment of her. Were these lines to be paraphrased, they might read, "My poems revealed my true feelings about the heart-rending death of our child. If the poems bleed too much and reveal too much of my anguish to you, I am sorry, but this is the suffering and anguish that you have caused me, and you will just have to `Suffer the Vermillion' as well."

The last two lines of stanza two allude to the reason for all of the poet's anguish. Returning to the monetary imagery of the abortion sequence poems, Dickinson quips, "Death is the Wealth / Of the Poorest Bird." In these lines she not only states that the reason for her suffering is the "Death" of her child, but also claims that it is her "Wealth," referring to the preciousness of the child she has lost but will recoup in Heaven.

The third stanza turns accusatory. An antagonistic Dickinson

orders Master to "Bear with the Ballad" as the very least that he can do; she alone has borne this bloody anguish he has had a part in. She claims that her song is "Awkward—faltering" because "Death twists the strings" of the Lute she plays in J861, in other words her poetry. This death is one that she claims "'Twas'nt my blame." The reader must ask, "If it was not her blame, whose was it?" In the noticeable absence of a person to blame here, the reader suspects the addressee. He obviously knows whom to blame since Dickinson does not trouble to mention fault here. This hint, taken in conjunction with the final bitter stanza, confirms the reader's suspicions that Dickinson is laying responsibility upon Master, who continues his unaffected life as if nothing has happened. Further alluding to the fact that Master was indeed Charles Wadsworth, a minister, Dickinson sneers, "Pause in your Liturgies-- / Wait you Chorals-- / While I repeat your / Hallowed name--." In other words, she is saying here, "My painful, anguishing verse captures suffering for which you are responsible. This suffering has disrupted my entire life. However, you complain that my suffering has given you momentary pause and misgiving in your ongoing liturgical life. We cannot have your important life interrupted, but just pause in your ministerial duties, while I repeat your revered name. Then, you can move on with your holy life as God's representative and minister." In essence, here, Dickinson is not only berating and blaming Master for his callous treatment and abandonment, but she also is calling him a ministerial hypocrite. He pretends to preach Christ's message of love, yet in reality he is in no way Christ-like in his own behavior. This slur is not the first time we

have seen Dickinson impugn Master's unministerial conduct. We recall that in the third Master Letter she makes a similar reference as she worries that he laughs at her and does not consider their loving relationship with the same gravity as she. She accuses: "These things are <reverent> ↑holy↓, Sir, I touch them <reverently> ↑hallowed↓, but persons who pray--dare remark <our> `Father!'. . . ." This allusion more firmly yokes the subject dealt with in this third Master Letter with that of this poem, despite the distance of four years from the writing of the poem to the letter.

In the next anger poem,[1] Dickinson's bitterness in blaming Master has shifted to anger with herself for allowing him to treat her so poorly:

> It dropped so low--in my Regard--
> I heard it hit the Ground--
> And go to pieces * on the Stones (* in the Ditch--)
> At the bottom of my Mind--
>
> Yet blamed the Fate that * fractured--less (* flung it)
> Than I * denied Myself, (* denounced)
> For entertaining Plated Wares
> Upon my Silver Shelf--
>
> (J747, 1863, F37)

Significantly, in this poem there is a very strong return to the use of the vague it that we have noticed usually as a reference to

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[1]In this poem, Dickinson provided alternatives in the margins for certain words and phrases; however, unlike other poems in which she places a plus sign in the poem's text to indicate placement of the revisions, no such indications are provided in the manuscript. Consequently, for this study, asterisks have been positioned in this poem's text at the appropriate places for such revisions.

In making her revisions of J747, the poet underscored the alternatives for lines 5 and 6, suggesting that she accepted these revisions over the lines's original wording.

Dickinson's child through the abortion sequence poems and some of the bereavement poems as well. However, in this particular poem, the it does not seem to be referring to her beloved child as she says that "It dropped so low--in my Regard" and uses the antecedent "Plated Wares" to refer to the it she employs here. Although Dickinson was upset over the abortion, she never blamed the child, and thus would never have expressed anger at it. In this particular instance, she seems to be using this it in the same circuitous manner that she has in the second Master Letter when she is actually asking Master if she has offended him in her previous letter. She couches the question in the neuter third person rather than the masculine third person:

> Oh--did I offend it-- <Did 'nt it want me to tell it the truth> ↑,↓ Daisy--Daisy--offend it--who bends her smaller life to his ↑it's↓. . . .

If this is Dickinson's tack in this particular anger poem, meaning becomes much more decipherable than trying to read the it as a reference to her lost child.

In stanza one, Dickinson appears to consider sadly her relationship with Master. She claims that he has greatly disappointed her. The relationship "dropped so low--in [her] Regard--" that it has "hit the Ground" and "go[ne] to pieces on the Stones / At the bottom of [her] Mind--." At this point, she feels that the broken relationship is irrevocable.

Dickinson's emotional state filters through more strongly in stanza two. She claims, "I blamed the Fate that flung it--less / Than I denounced Myself." In this declaration we see Dickinson, who, having angrily considered Master's role in the "Fate" of the

relationship and her child, and determined that despite his callousness and cruelty, he was not really primarily responsible, turns her anger upon herself for her trusting innocence. And she assumes personal responsibility for her actions. This step is one that indicates she is slowly emerging from intense anger. Though still somewhat vexed with herself "For entertaining Plated Wares / Upon [her] Silver Shelf," she has not lost her self-esteem, nor has she resolved all of her anger or guilt in blaming Master, whom she sees as still sharing in the responsibility of the relationship's fate.

The final poem of this brief group finds Dickinson's anger has softened substantially. In J724 her anger has mellowed and she is left with the slightly bitter realization that despite her child's death, life goes on according to God's plan:

> It's easy to invent a Life--
> God does it--every Day--
> Creation--but the Gambol
> Of His Authority--
>
> It's easy to efface it--
> The thrifty Deity
> Could scarce afford Eternity
> To Spontaneity--
>
> The Perished Patterns murmur--
> But his Perturbless Plan
> Proceed--inserting Here--a Sun--
> There--leaving out a Man--
>
> (J724, 1863, F36)

Dickinson begins this poem obviously harking back to the intimate relationship that she and Master have shared and remarking upon the simplicity of conception. She observes that "God does it--every Day" and that such ease of creation is that which his "Authority" affords

Him. Still somewhat bitter here, Dickinson, having blamed first Master and then herself, turns her bitterness to God. Her resentment at God's lack of intervention in the child's death is indicated here in the image of God as an all-powerful gambler who willingly puts his creation at risk.

Obviously reflecting upon her abortion, in stanza two Dickinson observes that, just as it is easy to invent a life, it is also "easy to efface it." God, the gambler of stanza one, now becomes, with a brief return of the merchant/monetary imagery of the abortion sequence poems, "the thrifty Deity" who could scarce afford Eternity / To spontaniety." In these lines we see Dickinson blaming God for the conscious removal of her child. At this event, however, Dickinson imagines that those who have died, "The Perished Patterns," respond sorrowfully and "murmur." Regardless of this guarded response, God's "Perturbless Plan / Proceed[s]" at its usual pace, "inserting Here—a Sun-- / There--leaving out a Man—." In these thoughts the poet voices her resentment for God's callous and conscious lack of intercession in her child's death.

Dickinson's passage through the emotions of rage, bitterness, and resentment signals an end to anger and a beginning of the third stage of grief, bargaining. As the label suggests, this is the stage at which the bereaved attempts to make deals or bargains with God. In the anger stage she realizes that God is not universally just. Because she can find no reasonable explanation for this tragedy and because her maternal guilt over the child's death is still strong, the bereaved wonders if God's will can be changed. Even the most adjusted

mother finds herself playing games of pretending that if she had done something differently or if she is good now, then God will magically give her child back to her. In essence, these games of pretense are a kind of continued hopeful denial into which the mother fleetingly retreats, yearning that when she emerges the death will have been a dream. This pretense is also a kind of wishful reality testing into which the mother withdraws, also hoping that reality will magically disappear. Berezin cogently explains the psychological rationale behind the bereaved mother's forays into the world of wishful thinking and bargains:

> Psychologically, the crisis of an unsuccessful pregnancy induces a sense of powerlessness which relegates its victims to the status of dependent children. When a child first learns that the universe, far from being the warm, secure blanket suggested by infancy, is in fact threatening and capricious, he defends himself the only way he can--by pretending an omnipotence, a magical ability to deal with the forces that he senses far outweigh his own. These complex mental mechanisms, or narcissistic defenses, are not unique to childhood; any profound loss or threat of loss may call them into play. (62)

Dickinson's passage through this stage of bargaining must have been a quick one, as there is only one poem that belongs to this group, although we have already seen two pre-abortion poems of bargaining. In J621, "I asked no other thing," and J270, "One Life of so much Consequence," Dickinson attempts to bargain for the child's life as its death is impending.

The one bargaining poem of this bereavement group is J840, a poem in which Dickinson indulges in one of these flights into the world of "if wishing could make it so":

I cannot buy it--'tis not sold--
There is no other in the World--
Mine was the only one

I was so happy I forgot
To shut the Door And it went out
And I am all alone--

If I could find it Anywhere
I would not mind the journey there
Though it took all my store

But just to look it in the Eye--
"Did'st thou?" "Thou did'st not mean" to say,
Then, turn my Face away.

(J840, 1864)

Stanza one signals the return of two familiar unifying devices that we have been tracing throughout the poems of this study. First, the mysterious it alluding to Dickinson's child appears and pervades the poem. Second, Dickinson returns to the merchant/monetary imagery of the abortion sequence poems as she ventures into the world of make-believe.

Alluding to the pricelessness and uniqueness of her lost child in stanza one and couching her sorrow in merchant/monetary terms, she laments: "I cannot buy it--'tis not sold-- / There is no other in the World-- / Mine was the only one."

Dickinson recapitulates the contentedness she felt in her pregnancy and union with the child when she claims in line 4, "I was so happy." Expression of this sentiment echoes a similar one in J430, "It would never be Common--more--I said--" of the denial group. In J430 the poet replays the events leading up to, including, and following the abortion experience in reality testing as she attempts to break through her denial and to acknowledge the child's death. As

guilt would be more than she could bear. She claims that she would be content to see the child, ask her questions, receive her answers and "Then, turn my Face away." The if that prefaces this flight of make-believe, along with the downcast tone, alerts the reader that Dickinson knows as she writes this situation can never be. Obviously, Dickinson is aware of the reality and finality of the child's demise and realizes bargaining's futility. This very awareness may account for the dearth of bargaining poems among the bereavement poetry.

When the bereaved recognizes that bargaining is not going to accomplish its intended desires, the individual enters the next stage of grief, depression. This stage only occurs after "[d]enial is no longer possible to sustain; anger has dissipated; bargaining has failed" (Kalish 133). For Dickinson at this point, all three of these events have occurred.

Depressive grief reactions are as unique as the individuals undergoing them; however, the depression stage of grief is usually a time for the bereaved to be self-absorbed as she expresses her own disappointment. She privately mourns the loss and the future once connected in the mind with the loss. As Harriet Sarnoff Schiff points out in The Bereaved Parent, "Grieving is a time of selfness" (21), the depression stage especially so as the bereaved begins to learn to let go. Once letting go begins, healing also begins, and the bereaved can progress toward acceptance and integration of the loss into her life. However, while the bereaved experiences depression, feelings of sadness, gloominess, pessimism, guilt, and personal worthlessness may also be present (Kalish 133). And for those mothers undergoing

depression following a fatality in pregnancy, they "often feel that they will never again be happy or fulfilled" or they "may isolate themselves from friends and family" (Jiménez 39), an interesting possibility to consider in terms of Dickinson's subsequent complete withdrawal from society.

Dickinson's verses capturing this stage of depression are permeated by a sad sense of loss, loneliness, and unfulfillment. The first depression poem is the poet's recognition of the uniqueness and finality of the lost child:

> It bloomed and dropt, A Single Noon--
> The Flower--distinct and Red--
> I, passing, thought another Noon
> Another in its' stead
>
> Will equal glow, and thought no More
> But came another Day
> To find the Species disappeared
> The Same Locality
>
> The Sun in place--no other fraud
> On Nature's + perfect Sum-- (+ General Sum)
> Had I but lingered Yesterday--
> Was my retrieveless blame--
>
> Much Flowers of this and further Zones
> Have perished in my Hands
> For seeking its' + Resemblance-- (+ Similitude)
> But unapproached it stands--
>
> The single Flower of the Earth
> That I, in passing by
> + Unconscious was--Great Nature's Face (+ Was ignorant
> + Passed infinite by Me-- that Nature
> had closed my
> opportunity)
> (+ Went infinite
> by Me.)
>
> (J987, 1864)

Not only does Dickinson's mysterious it alluding to her child pervade this poem, but the poet also refers lovingly to the child as a flower

that all too quickly bloomed and faded. Considering the poet's interest in gardens and flowers, this reference is not unusual. When used in connection with her loss in pregnancy, this metaphor is appropriate. In fact the images of dying flowers and the unproductive garden are characteristically employed by women having suffered a tragedy in pregnancy to express their feelings of barrenness about the loss. According to Nancy Berezin, who interviewed hundreds of bereaved mothers following pregnancy trauma, "The analogy of a barren and unprofitable garden is frequently used by bereaved mothers to express the sense of unworthiness that stems from an unsuccessful outcome of pregnancy" (66). Consequently, Dickinson's use of the fading flower metaphor throughout this poem and later ones signals to the reader her inner sense of loss.

In referring to this precious flower in stanza one, Dickinson calls it "distinct and Red." The specific mention of the striking color red cannot help but remind the reader of "The Scarlet Experiment" or the shades of "red," "Vermillion," and "Cochineal" of J1059 or the "Gush after Gush" of J861 that she associates with the child and its manner of death; therefore, in alluding to this vivid color while describing her flower's blooming and dropping in "a Single Noon," the poet evokes images of her bloody abortion in the reader's mind.

The rest of the poem is animated by a curious idea brought up in lines 3-4 of stanza one. She claims, "I, passing, thought another Noon / Another in its stead / Will equal glow. . . . " Is Dickinson here saying that she has tried to assuage her grief by thinking that

someday she will have another child to replace her lost child? This idea is not so surprising if we recall that in the third Master Letter Dickinson says that she wishes to possess the "Queen's place" and rails at Master for not doing his moral duty by her:

> I dont know what you can do for it--thank you--Master-but if I had the Beard on my cheek--↑like you--↓ and you--had Daisy's petals--and you cared so for me—what would become of you? Could you forget ↑Me↓ in fight, or flight--or the foreign land?

It seems likely that at one point Dickinson held out hope of Master's leaving his wife for her, in which case it would have been entirely possible for her to have conceived and borne another child to replace her lost one. However, she says, "But came another Day / To find the species disappeared / The Same Locality," as if she means that she has realized that there will be no other flower like the one she has lost because "The Species disappeared" despite the fact that she inhabits "The Same Locality" with the "Sun in [its] place." Dickinson's words here remind one of a mourner who finds herself in a place a lost one has visited and attempts to comprehend the forces that have removed that beloved person from the picture. The mourner recognizes the physical surroundings as the same, but the absence of the person from that once-shared locality reinforces the loss. As she tries to come to terms with her sadness, Dickinson once again remembers that there will be no other child, "no other fraud" to be perpetrated "On Nature's perfect Sum--." And, momentarily lapsing back into the world of make-believe bargaining, she laments and thinks that if she had acted differently and sooner, things would now be different and she would not blame herself. She sighs, "Had I but lingered Yesterday— / Was by retrieveless blame."

Acknowledging the loss's finality she must learn to live with, Dickinson says that in "this and further Zones" "Much flowers" "Have perished in my Hands" as she was "seeking [her lost flower's] Resemblance." Searching and yearning are common responses for a woman experiencing the depressing loss of a child. According to Sherry Jiménez, "This is a time when the physical loss is felt deeply. A woman will talk about how her arms ache to hold her baby. . . . " (43). Although Dickinson does not talk here about her arms aching, she does allude to a number of flowers that have perished in her hands. Richard Sewall in his biography of Dickinson, Barton St. Armand in Emily Dickinson and Her Culture, and Martha Dickinson Bianchi in her writings about her aunt, all recount that Emily Dickinson had a genuine fondness for children, early and late in her life. Sewall records the poet's early (the 1860's) visits to Austin's house next door to visit particularly his and Sue's first child, Gilbert. Sewall notes that on the news of his birth, Aunt Emily immediately penned poem J218, "Is it true, dear Sue?" communicating her feelings of joy at the child's birth. The biographer also documents the various missives, often accompanied by small gifts--sometimes flowers from her garden or an empty cocoon she thought might interest her nephew--sent to the Evergreens to Gilbert from Aunt Emily over the years. As mentioned in Chapter I, St. Armand indicates that Emily even engaged in the popular cultural activity of putting together of a scrapbook of clippings for Gilbert's interest. Furthermore, on the night of this particular nephew's death in 1883--three years prior to her own death and a time when Emily's seclusion

she does so, she savors her feelings of joy: "I'd so much joy--I told it--Red-- / Upon my simple Cheek--." But in this denial poem and in J840, her happiness is short-lived. In fact, her joy was so all-consuming that she claims the child escaped her when her defenses were down: "I forgot / To shut the Door And it went out / And I am all alone." Obviously, Dickinson's maternal guilt preys upon her as she imagines that the child wandered away of its own accord. However, this is not the first such reference she has made. J559, "It knew no Medicine," an abortion sequence poem, discussed above makes a similar allusion. As Dickinson envisions her child sickening and wasting away before her helpless eyes, she seeks to know why. She wonders, "Was Paradise--to blame-- / If momentarily ajar-- / Temerity--drew near-- / And sickened--ever afterward / For somewhat that it saw?" In other words, she wonders if the child glimpsed Paradise and then pined away for it until the child died.

After considering that the child has left her of its own accord, stanza three of J840 begins Dickinson's wishing. She claims that <u>if</u> she "could find it Anywhere," she "would not mind the journey there / Though it took all my store." Not only is this resurfacing of the merchant/monetary imagery, but Dickinson also offers once again all she possesses "just to look [the child] in the Eye." Previously she offered all, even her own life, in exchange for the child's; now she would sacrifice everything she owns if it were possible to face the child and ask it, "`Did'st thou' leave of thy own accord?" and "`Thou did'st not mean to do so,' did'st thou?" The poet does not want to believe that the child has left her of its own volition; this

was complete, Sewall records that Emily left the Homestead for the first time in about twenty years and traversed the 150 yards between the houses to visit her nephew and offer consolation to his grieving parents. Dickinson's niece, Martha Dickinson Bianchi, remembers her benevolent Aunt Emily having had a special relationship with children. She recalls that as a child the poet occasionally invited her and other neighborhood children into the Homestead, offering some freshly-baked treat from her own hands and engaging them in a bit of conversation about children's concerns. Clearly, we see that the poet had an interest in, if a somewhat distant relationship with, the children with whom she came in contact. But these contacts were relaltively few, particularly after her seclusion. Thus, in poem J987, when Dickinson alludes to the flowers that "Have perished in my Hands," we can imagine that she is not referring to children but to failed relationships she has had since the child, none of them equalling the special nature of the one she shared with her child, as she indicates her child "stands" yet "unapproached."

As we see also in poem J987, locality is important as one of the stimulators of Dickinson's remembrance. Jiménez acknowledges the bereaved's sensitivity to locality in this state of depression: "Searching and yearning is characterized by increased sensitivity to the environment, anger, guilt, restlessness, impatience, and mixed emotions" (42).

The last stanza is a recognition of the uniqueness of the child, "The single flower of the Earth," now vanished. The concluding lines furthermore sadly lament that because the poet did not recognize

its worth, because she "Unconscious was," her child is now gone, "Great Nature's Face / Passed infinite by Me--."

The next depression poem picks up and pursues the sense of sadness and loss Dickinson expresses in J978 over the child's death:

> A loss of something ever felt I--
> The first that I could recollect
> Bereft I was--of what I knew not
> Too young that any should suspect
>
> A Mourner + walked among the children (+ lurked)
> I notwithstanding + went about (+ stole)
> As one bemoaning a Dominion
> Itself the only Prince cast out--
>
> Elder, Today, a session wiser
> And fainter, too, as Wiseness is--
> I find myself still softly searching
> For my Delinquent Palaces--
>
> And a Suspicion, like a Finger
> Touches my Forehead now and then
> That I am looking oppositely
> For the site of the Kingdom of Heaven--
>
> (J959, 1864)

Vagueness and uncertainty about her loss permeate the first stanza of this poem. As Dickinson attempts to describe it in irregular meter unlike the fairly regular common meter she usually employs, it is "A loss of something ever felt I-- / The first that I could recollect." She is unsure about exactly what she has lost, the uncertainty reflected in this poem's faltering rhythm, and she regards it as the first profound loss that she can remember. In these lines the poet appears to mourn not only the child, but also all the contingent experiences that go along with having a child; the growth, the warmth, the love, the fulfillment, the assurance of one's immortality, the selfless doing for another--all of these experiences, which Dickinson

appears to be vaguely aware of here, she mourns in conjunction with this monumental loss. Not only does she acknowledge that she is "Bereft" "of what I knew not," but she also recognizes that her youth and apparent innocence protect her from suspicion about the reason she mourns. After having progressed through the first four stages of grief where she has been totally self-absorbed, we see a fleeting glimmer of awareness about her position as if viewed from an outsider's perspective. This objective view Dickinson attains of herself here will grow as she adjusts, accepts her child's death, and redirects her attention to outer concerns. For the time being, however, she seems relieved when she recognizes that she is "Too young that any should suspect / A Mourner walked among the children." Though at the time of this poem's composition Dickinson was thirty-four years old, it is not uncharacteristic for her to perceive and to refer to herself as an innocent, a child. We have seen in both the second and third Master Letters Dickinson imply that she is child-like.

In the second Master Letter, as Dickinson implores Master not to "banish" her for an offense he perceives she has committed and she goes to great lengths to deny, the poet takes on a child's persona and begs,

> Master—open your life wide, and take <in> me in forever, I will never be tired--I will never be noisy when you want me to be still—I will be <glad as the> your best little girl--. . .

Again in the third Master Letter, Dickinson refers to herself as a child when she expresses her hopes for her and Master's future together:

> Sir--it were comfort forever--just to look in your face, while you looked in mine--then I could play in the woods--till Dark--. . . .

Consequently, it is clear that despite Dickinson's having shared a physical relationship with Master, having conceived a child, and having suffered through a debilitating abortion, she can still view herself as child-like. Thus when she claims in J959 that she can fit in, an undetected mourner, amongst a group of children, it is not a surprising or uncharacteristic reference.

Following the objective view of herself in the first stanza, in line 2 of stanza two, she returns to self-absorption. Despite her appearance of being an innocent among children, she claims that she openly and solitarily mourned her child "As one bemoaning a Dominion / Itself the only Prince cast out--." This metaphoric allusion to royalty in connection with the child is one that we have encountered in several places, the first of which is the third Master Letter that is replete with allusions to the child and in which Dickinson wishes that she might possess the "Queen's place" next to Master. We have seen the child referred to as royalty in J270, "One Life of so much Consequence," where Dickinson calls the child a "Monarch" that is "perceptible-- / Far down the dustiest road!" and in J458, "Like Eyes that looked on Wastes," in which the child is referred to as "a Queen." The poet's allusion to feeling as if she has lost "a Dominion" and "Itself the only Prince cast out" is in keeping with her mind's association of royalty and her child.

Stanza three finds Dickinson reflecting on her present state because of her loss. She claims that she is "Elder" and "wiser,"

reminiscent of the way in which she describes herself to Master in the third Master Letter; the reader can almost audibly hear the sigh and the weight of the experience that has prompted her to write in this letter, "I am older--tonight Master. . . ." Though she feels "wiser," she is still bereft. She "find[s] [herself] still softly searching / For [her] Delinquent Palaces--." Like the images of royalty that we have seen in other places, this reference to uninhabited Palaces is one that we have encountered before in denial poem, J430, "It would never be Common--more--I said," where she relives her entire pregnancy and abortion experience. At the point of describing the abortion, she employs the same metaphor of the palaces that she uses in J959 when she says, "My Palaces--dropped tenantless." The "Delinquent Palaces" that she refers to in J959 echo the vacant palaces of J430 and perpetuate the royalty metaphor.

Not only does Dickinson attempt to deal with her loss in this poem, but also as she says in stanza four, "a Suspicion" that as she searches for and yearns for her lost child "That [she is] looking oppositely / For the site of the Kingdom of Heaven." Here the royalty and palace imagery come together in a meaningful way as we consider Dickinson's coupling them with Heaven. What Dickinson is "looking oppositely" for is her child, who now resides in the "Kingdom of Heaven," the opposite habitation from earth. If she is to discover the child, she must go to the nineteenth-century's homey Heaven where she, as a woman who could not "reign" on earth, will achieve sovereignty.

In J784, the memory of her child's loss and grave relentlessly

haunt and pursue her as she tries to move beyond her loss. Firmly ensconced in the grieving stage of depression, however, she cannot:

> Bereaved of all, I went abroad—
> No less bereaved was I
> Upon a New Peninsula—
> The Grave preceded me—
>
> + Obtained my Lodging, ere myself— (+ Engrossed)
> And when I sought my Bed—
> The Grave it was reposed upon
> The Pillow for my Head—
>
> I waked to find it first awake—
> I rose—It followed me—
> I tried to + drop it in the Crowd— (+ shift)
> To lose it in the Sea—
>
> In Cups of artificial Drowse
> To steep it shape away—
> The Grave—was finished—but the Spade
> Remained in Memory—
>
> (J784, 1863, F39)

Guilt underpins this poem. The speaker feels bereft and haunted by her participation in the death, the manifestation of which is the child's grave that seems to follow her. Although the poet is known to have sequestered herself in the Homestead after the 1860's, she here refers to going abroad. This seems an unlikely reference until we remember that she has used the phrase "to go abroad" in J574 to refer to going outdoors: "My first well Day—since many ill— / I asked to go abroad." Consequently, in J784, when she claims that she went "abroad," she is probably referring to one of her forays outside in an effort to evade momentarily her haunting memories; however, the grave is ever-present in waking and sleeping moments. Moreover, despite her unsuccessful attempts "to drop it in the Crowd," "To lose it in the Sea," or to forget it "In Cups of artificial Drowse," the grave hounds

her. In dogging her, it reminds her of her grief, the child, and especially her guilt about the manner in which it died, indicated in the final two lines when she says, "The Grave--was finished--but the Spade-- / Remained in Memory"; here her emphasis is not on the death, but upon separation from her child in the actual burial.

Picking up this idea of separation from the child by the grave in J784, poem J876 captures Dickinson visiting the grave and facing and lamenting the fact that she will never have the chance to know what her child would have been like:

> It was a Grave, yet bore no Stone
> Enclosed 'twas not of Rail
> A Consciousness its' Acre, And
> It held a Human Soul--
>
> Entombed by whom, for what offence
> If Home or foreign--born--
> Had I the Curiosity
> 'Twere not appeased of Man
>
> Till Resurrection, I must guess
> Denied the small desire
> A Rose upon its' Ridge to sow
> Or + Sacrificial Flower-- (+ palliate a Briar)
>
> (J876, 1863, F38)

The poem opens with the poet visiting the child's unmarked burial spot which has the appearances of a grave. Dickinson herself recognizes that "It was a Grave." However, it is atypical of nineteenth-century graves for "it bore no Stone," as a memorial marker as was common, and "Enclosed 'twas not of Rail," as were family plots in rural cemeteries. Although the usual accouterments of a burial spot are absent, Dickinson emphatically asserts that "It was a Grave" and that "It held a Human Soul." The perceptive reader must ask, "If no indications are present, how could the poet know that `a Human Soul'

is entombed there?" The answer: She knows because she is the one who has laid this human soul to rest. This line of thought is strengthened when we recall that the only graves without markers and outside the limits of a rural cemetery were those secret burial places for the indigent or illegitimate of the nineteenth century. And how would Dickinson know where an indigent was buried? It seems highly unlikely that the daughter of one of Amherst's wealthiest families would have occasion to become acquainted enough with such a person to know where he or she was entombed, especially since by 1864 when this poem was composed Dickinson hardly ventured outside her father's house, much less off the grounds of the Homestead. The indications here seem to point to her child's grave. This child, conceived out of marriage, would have been illegitimate and surrounded by secrecy and thus was probably entombed in an unmarked grave not far from the Dickinson home, perhaps even on Dickinson grounds.

Stanza two introduces the questions Dickinson ponders as she stands at the grave. She asks, "Entombed by whom, for what offense / If Home or foreign born--." Obviously, if this is her child, she would know "by whom" the child was "entombed." She would also know "what offence" had caused the child to be buried. Furthermore, she would be aware that the child was born at "Home." Why does she ask these superfluous questions that she already has answers to if she really knows the grave's occupant? The answer: She is not really asking. Lines 7-8 of the second stanza suggest these as rhetorical questions. She claims, "Had I the Curiosity / 'Twere not appeased of Man." The poet's use of the subjunctive here indicates that she does

not have the curiosity about the "Human Soul" in this grave. She already knows the answers to the obvious questions one might ask upon encountering the grave unaware of its occupant. The answers to the less obvious questions about the grave's occupant, such as, "What kind of person would this child have been?" "What did this child's future hold?" are the questions she "must guess" the answers to "Till Resurrection" when she will join her child, the "Rose upon its Ridge" that was the "small desire" she was "Denied." The loss of her child, the "Sacrificial Flower," is made more difficult to bear because she has no memories of the child itself to sustain her in her loneliness. This is not uncommon for a parent who loses a child in pregnancy. As Sherry Jiménez attests,

> Perhaps the greatest obstacle to recovery for the couple whose baby died before they had a chance to really know him is that there is no personality to mourn and miss. There are no memories. (46)

Poem J935 continues the theme of loss dominating the previous three depression poems. The guilt of J784 has disappeared or shifted to loneliness or, as the poet refers to it, "homesick[ness]." And instead of going abroad to elude the child's memory, as she has unsuccessfully done in the previous depression poem, she is compelled by homesickness to pursue it actively in familiar places:

> Death leaves Us homesick, who behind,
> Except that it is gone
> Are ignorant of its' Concern
> As if it were not born.
>
> Through all + their former Places, we (+ its')
> Like Individuals go
> Who something + lost, the + seeking for (+ dropt)
> Is all that's left them, now (+ looking)
>
> (J935, 1864)

Several aspects of this poem are compelling. Dickinson alludes to the child's continuing "Concern" in its celestial domain for its "homesick" parents, a curious allusion given the supposed "homeyness" of the nineteenth-century domesticated Heaven. Of this "Concern" she implies that the "homesick" who are left behind are only aware of the loss "As if [the child] were not born," an appropriate allusion to Dickinson's case. She says that they have little immediate understanding of the correspondences between Heaven and earth. Rather the "homesick" can only search out all the "former Places" that they and the lost one used to go to together. This searching of familiar places is quite normal bereavement behavior, particularly for mothers experiencing a bereavement in pregnancy. As Nancy Berezin explains,

> Rather than avoiding locations in which the dead might otherwise be found, the mourner purposely seeks them out. Although on a conscious level she realizes that such hopes are irrational, a mother may follow carriages in the park or peer into another shopper's cart at the supermarket, looking for her dead baby. . . . (41)

Dickinson, whose physical world was relatively limited and who carried her child within her every waking moment of her day during her pregnancy, must have been aware of the former places she and the child would go together, constant reminders of the child and her grief.

The loneliness or "homesickness" Dickinson feels for her child builds to monumental proportions in J777. Whereas in the previous three poems her loneliness has been persistent and sorrowful, in J777 it becomes all-consuming as a grief pang, an instance of concentrated grieving in which a constellation of bodily and cognitive reactions to the loss coalesce and become totally absorbing:

The Loneliness One dare not sound--
And would as soon surmise
As in its' Grave go + plumbing (+ measuring to
To ascertain the size-- register)

The Loneliness whose worst alarm
Is lest itself should see--
And perish from before itself
For + just a scrutiny-- (+ simple scrutiny)

The + Horror not to be surveyed-- (+ Chasm)
But skirted in the Dark--
With Consciousness suspended--
And Being under Lock--

I fear me this--is Loneliness--
The Maker of the Soul
Its' Caverns and its' Corridors
+ Illuminate--or seal-- (+ Make populate--manifest)

(J777, 1863, F39)

In the first three stanzas, Dickinson attempts to describe the depth and horror of her loneliness. First, she asserts that hers is a kind of loneliness that one dares not give voice to and that one would just as soon guess at as one would dig up a grave to know its size. Next, she claims that her loneliness is the type that desperately eludes any knowledge of itself so that it not perish from "The horror" of its own appearance. She finally declares that her loneliness is so horrible as not to be "surveyed," but avoided "With Consciousness suspended / And Being under lock." This awful loneliness that she claims should not be voiced, guessed at, seen or "surveyed," she fears as the future "Maker" of her "Soul." She worries that this emotion is so intense that it can either "Illuminate--or seal" the "Caverns" and "Corridors" of her soul. Obviously, Dickinson feels helplessly and fearfully caught in the grips of this powerful and horrifying depression that

can determine her future. This poem evocatively captures the poet's fear that she will never be happy again.

Bereft and deeply depressed, Dickinson reaches out for help to the only source she can in J217. The underlying sadness and sense of loss characteristic of depression pervade the poem:

> Savior! I've no one else to tell--
> And so I trouble thee.
> I am the one forgot thee so--
> Dost thou remember me?
> Nor, for myself, I can so far--
> That were the little load--
> I brought thee the imperial Heart
> I had not strength to hold--
> The Heart I carried in my own--
> Till mine too heavy grew--
> Yet--strangest--heavier since it went--
> Is it too large for you?
>
> (J217, 1861, F12)

Although this poem is dated earlier than the period from which most of the depression poems originate (1863-1865), the poem's content suggests expression of a moment of deep depression for Dickinson. Remembering that grieving is a process and that Kübler-Ross' model of the five stages of grief is just that, a suggestive rather than rigid model, makes more acceptable the placement of this early poem evoking Dickinson's feeling of depression amongst those later poems. Furthermore, if we recall that as with any progression, stages may occur out of order, recur, overlap, and co-exist, it is easier to visualize this poem placed with these later ones. Moreover, we must consider that this particular variant of the poem is one made by the poet from another verison also written in 1861:

Father--I bring thee--not Myself--
That were the little load--
I bring thee the + departed Heart (+ imperial)
I had not + strength to hold-- (+ power)

The Heart I cherished in my own
Till mine--too heavy grew--
Yet--strangest--heavier--since it went--
Is it too large for you?

The changes between the two poems are significant. The shorter version above does not contain some elements. The longer version emphasizes the secrecy surrounding the subject she has brought to "trouble" her savior with, whereas in the other version there is no mention of Christ's being her only confidant--in fact, in the shorter version, it is not Christ that she speaks to, but God the Father. The longer version also offers an apology to Christ for having forgotten Him for so long and now coming to Him with a request. The shorter version offers no apology. Moreover, the longer variant is written in the past tense as opposed to the shorter version's present tense. Consequently, in the longer poem, Dickinson refers to having already "brought" Christ the "Heart" that she "had not strength to hold" in the distant past, and the shorter poem captures the immediacy of "bring[ing]" the Father the "Heart." The final difference between the two versions involves the imagery added to the longer version markedly absent from the short. In describing the "Heart" that she brings to the Father of the shorter poem, on the one hand, Dickinson refers to it as the "departed Heart," alluding to her loss. On the other hand, in the longer, revised version, Dickinson refers to it as the "imperial Heart," harking back to the royal imagery that the poet employs in the third Master Letter, in the abortion sequence poems

J270, "One Life of so much Consequence," J458, "Like Eyes that looked on Wastes," and in J959, "A loss of something ever felt I," a depression poem. These changes from the shorter to the longer version--the secrecy, the apology, the verb tenses, and the royal imagery connected with one of the central images of the poem, the heart, in reference to the child--suggest that this poem, though dated in 1861, captures one of Dickinson's moments of deep depression and belongs in this depression group.

Turning to the content of the poem, it is easy to detect that Dickinson here importunes Christ's help. She implores His assistance, "Nor for myself" she excuses her intrusion but "the little load," "the imperial Heart" that she was not strong enough "to hold." These two references strongly intimate that she is referring to the child, "The Heart I carried in my own," she has entrusted to Him. Throughout lines 6-12 the poet interweaves images of weightiness and of carrying a heavy burden, suggestive of the child borne during pregnancy. Simultaneously, these images subtly indicate the heavy burden she brings to share with her savior. Images such as "the little load," the "Heart" she carried "Till [hers] too heavy grew," and her heart that is even "heavier since it went" allude to both the child and her grief over her loss. Moreover, these images of weightiness and carrying are not only reminiscent of J527, "To put this World down, like a Bundle," in which she refers to her carrying the child that Master has asked her to put down "And walk Steady away," but they also echo the second paragraph of the third Master Letter, where Dickinson rages at Master over his expressed doubt in her. After she has called

him a doubting Thomas, amidst images of creation, conception, growth, and motherhood, she employs all these images as she spits at him:

> God made me-- <Sir>--⌈Master--⌋ I did'nt be--myself-- <He> I dont know how it was done--He built the heart in me--Bye and bye it outgrew me--and like the little mother--with the big child--I got tired holding him--. . . .

Clearly the content of poem and letter are connected in Dickinson's mind even more strongly when we recall that Franklin dates this letter in 1861, the same year as poem J217.

When Dickinson asks in the final line of the poem, "Is it too large for you?" not only does the mysterious it reappear, pointing to her lost child, but she also implies again that the child is with Christ in Heaven, which is how Dickinson thinks of her departed child. Moreover, by asking Christ whether or not her child is too big a burden to bear, the poet suggests the enormity of her depressed condition as she shares her problem with the Almighty.

Dickinson furthermore suggests in this poem a manifestation of a typical physical grief symptom in the depression stage. The poem's final two lines refer to Dickinson's experiencing a heavy heart since her child's death. Very possibly her heart feels weighty not only because of her sorrow over the loss, but also because of the guilt she feels in the death. She seeks to alleviate this guilt by placing her cares with Christ, for whom no burden is too heavy. The sensation Dickinson describes resembles the "tight feeling in [the] chest" that Worden (23) categorizes as a common physical response to grief.

Significantly this poem captures Dickinson's turning to God for comfort. Though she did have an underlying belief in God, this instance of supplication to God is a fairly rare occurrence in

Dickinson's poetry. However, turning to God for comfort is a common response to bereavement resulting from a pregnancy fatality. As Sherry Jiménez contends, during a grief experience, especially in the later stages, many bereaved parents' faiths have a positive effect upon the outcome of their grief (44).

With the next poem in this fourth stage of grief, the poet reaches the bottom of her plummet into depression. In J744 Dickinson recognizes and objectifies her remorse, characteristic of her depressed state. She realizes that not even God can help her:

Remorse--is Memory--awake--
Her + Parties all astir-- (+ Companies)
A Presence of Departed Acts--
At window--and at Door--

Its' Past--set down before the Soul
And lighted with a Match--
Perusal--to facilitate--
+ And help Belief to + stretch-- (+of its' condensed Despatch)(+ reach)

Remorse is cureless--the Disease
Not even God--can heal--
For 'tis His institution--and
The + Adequate of Hell-- (+ Complement)

(J744, 1863, F37)

Reflecting upon her fairly recent past, in this 1863 poem Dickinson agonizes regretfully over the events that have brought her to this point. She has progressed far enough into the depression that she can step back and regard the past experiences objectively. She calls her "remorse" "Memory--awake-- / Her Parties all astir." And she characterizes this state in two ways. She first describes her remorse as "A Presence of Departed Acts-- / At window and at Door." Next she claims that "Remorse's" "Past" is "set down before the Soul / And lighted with a Match-- / Perusal--to facilitate-- / And help Belief to

stretch." In both descriptions here, Dickinson conveys an almost unwilling participation. In the first she says that the "Departed Acts" appear unbidden at window and door. The second characterization is of some unknown force without request "set[ting] [the Past] with a Match" so that she can easily view it. What Dickinson is uncannily describing here is the naturally-occurring process of reality testing as she attempts to come to terms with her child's death and her moral anguish over her complicity in it. The subtle expression of her unwillingness to participate in the workings of her awakened memory suggests the pain involved as she reviews the events of her pregnancy, her shaken faith in Master, and the abortion itself. However, she also intimates that she innately understands this process as being necessary in the poem's final five lines.

In line 8 she not only alludes to pain but also to the relief her memory facilitates when she says that the unknown force attempts to "help Belief to stretch." The idea suggested behind these words is that Dickinson recognizes that only in remembering and finally accepting (or "Belie[ving]" in) her loss will she come to terms with it. Despite this sophisticated recognition, indicating with it that the poet has progressed to the upward side of depression, she acknowledges depression's pain. She says "Remorse is cureless" and a "Disease" that is "The Adequate of Hell" on earth. With the same breath, however, she reiterates that her grief is a natural healing progression that "Not even God," whom she has called upon in J217, "Savior! I've no one else to tell," "can heal" because "'tis [God's] institution."

On the upward side of her spiral into depression, indicated by her recognition in the previous poem of her depressed state and the reason for it, Dickinson is now more able to direct her attentions outward. In J1759 the poet ponders the degree of her conditon:

> Which misses most,
> The hand that tends,
> Or the heart so gently borne,
> 'Tis twice as heavy as it was
> Because the hand is gone?
>
> Which blesses most,
> The lip that can,
> Or that that went to sleep
> With "if I could" endeavoring
> Without the strength to shape?
>
> (J1759, 18??)

Although the poet is more able to turn her attentions outside herself in this poem, we see that depression is still upon her as the theme of loneliness for her child, discussed in connection with all of the depression group poems, reappears. Here Dickinson wonders if her loneliness outweighs the child's. She begins with the question she will consider in the following four lines: "Which misses most," she asks. Then she weighs both sides. She wonders, is it "The hand that tends," an allusion to herself as the child's mother, that "misses most"? Or is it the "heart so gently borne, / 'Tis twice as heavy as it was / Because the hand is gone?" Here she alludes to the child, indicated by her careful choice of and play on the word <u>borne</u>, suggesting images of pregnancy and carrying and birth. Moreover, along with these images that echo those she also employs in J217, "Savior! I've no one else to tell," Dickinson refers to the child as

the "heart so gently borne." Dickinson makes similar references in J217 and the third Master Letter, strengthening the link.

Without providing an answer to her first question, in the second stanza, the poet turns to consider, "Which blesses most." Again she wonders, is it "The lip that can," in other words her lip? Or is it the child's, "that that went to sleep / With `if I could' endeavoring / Without the strength to shape?" This is not the first time Dickinson has envisioned her child as attempting to speak to her if it could; in the abortion sequence poem J731, "`I want'--it pleaded--All its life," the poet, after the child's death, guiltily imagines the child implored her to be allowed to live:

> I could not deem it late--to hear
> That single--steadfast sigh--
> The lips had placed as with a "Please"
> Toward eternity--

The tone of Dickinson's imaginings in J1759 differs vastly from that of J731, which is permeated with guilt. J1759, while perhaps containing some guilt, is a poem born of sadness, longing, and reconciliation as the poet finally moves outside her self-absorbed grief to consider the child's feelings. That she provides no answers here is fitting, for these are questions that cannot be answered, both because the child is now gone, but because loneliness and blessing, like grief, are intensely private and cannot be measured. That Dickinson considers these questions indicates that she has moved beyond her private concerns. It furthermore suggests that she is moving toward acceptance of her child's death.

As the bereaved works through depression, she becomes less self-absorbed, and her attentions begin to turn outward as she makes

her way toward the fifth and final stage of grief, acceptance. It is not at all uncommon at this point for women to recognize that they are not alone in their grief. As Nancy Berezin explains this recognition in bereaved mothers,

> Gradually . . . the mother discovers that other women echo her concerns; that, although the details of her experience are unique, the fears and guilts and frustrations are not; and that women throughout the ages--and many of her contemporaries--have shared in this common heritage of maternal grief. . . . (67)

Poem J561 captures Dickinson's attentions turning outward to discover if anyone shares maternal grief like her own:

I measure every Grief I meet
With + narrow, probing, Eyes-- (+ Analytic eyes--)
I wonder if It weighs like Mine--
Or has an Easier size.

I wonder if They bore it long--
Or did it just begin--
I could not tell the Date of Mine--
It feels so old a pain--

I wonder if it hurts to live--
And if They have to try--
And whether--could They choose between--
It would not be--to die--

I note that Some--gone patient long--
At length--renew their smile--
And imitation of a Light
That has so little Oil--

I wonder if when Years have piled--
Some Thousands--on the Harm--
That hurt them early--such a lapse
Could give them any Balm--

Or would they go on aching still
Through Centuries of Nerve--
Enlightened to a Larger Pain--
In Contrast with the Love--

The Grieved--are many--I am told--
There is a various Cause--
Death--is but one--and comes but once--
And only nails the Eyes--

There's Grief of Want--and Grief of Cold--
A sort they call "Despair"--
There's Banishment from native Eyes--
In sight of Native Air--

And though I may not guess the kind--
Correctly--yet to me
A piercing Comfort it affords
In passing Calvary--

To note the fashions--of the Cross--
And how they're mostly worn--
Still fascinated to presume
That Some--are like My Own--

(J561, 1862, F27)

This is easily one of Dickinson's longest and most readily-understood poems; thus a synopsis of the major ideas of stanzas 1-8 will suffice, for it is the final stanzas that concern us here. Dickinson begins by saying that she observes every grief-stricken person she meets and wonders if his or her grief is as heavy or as large as her own. She wonders: Did this person bear the grief long? or "Did it just begin?" She then compares the other's grief with her own, "so old a pain." She speculates if grief hurts the bereaved or if this person must make an attempt "to try" to live as she. Furthermore, the poet is curious whether, like her, this grieving person has had to choose between life and death. And she marvels as she notes that "some" even "renew their smile." In stanzas 5-6 Dickinson wonders if the passage of "Some Thousand" years "Could give them any Balm," or would the grieving "go on aching still," more aware of a "larger Pain," "In Contrast with the Love" of the deceased. Dickinson recognizes in stanza seven that the causes of grief are "various." In stanza eight, she enumerates them, but acknowledges

that "Death," the cause of her grief, "is but one--and comes but once--."

The final two stanzas interest us here. Still referring to her habit of measuring "every Grief [she] meet[s]," she says that though "[she] may not guess the kind / Correctly--yet" in someone else, she finds "a piercing Comfort" in noting the various kinds of grief, or as she refers to them, "the fashions--of the Cross," another reference comparing her abortion with Christ's sacrifice as she does in abortion sequence poem J527, "To put this World down, like a Bundle." Moreover, she is "still fascinated to presume / That Some--are like My Own." In these lines Dickinson finds consolation in recognizing that she is not alone in her grief--a typical nineteenth-century concept as well.

In the final two depression poems, Dickinson continues her progress toward acceptance of the child's death as she is no longer so concerned with herself and her emotions but becomes more aware of the child. J1013 shows a Dickinson resigned to living without the child because of her enduring love for it:

> Too scanty 'twas to die for you,
> The merest Greek could that.
> The living, Sweet, is costlier--
> I offer even that--
>
> The Dying, is a trifle, past,
> But living, this include
> The dying multifold--without
> The Respite to be dead,
>
> (J1013, 1865)

This poem is still slightly tinged with melancholy characteristic of

depression. However, the sentiments expressed herein intimate a growing selflessness that is common to bereavement's final acceptance.

Directly addressing the child here, Dickinson claims that it would have been "Too scanty" had she died in the child's place. She scoffs, "The merest Greek could that," alluding to Euripides' Greek character Alcestis, who selflessly offers to die in her selfish husband's stead to appease the gods' desire for a human life. In this sense, Dickinson seems to have come to terms with her guilt over participation in her child's death after she has offered to exchange her life for the child's in J621, "I asked no other thing," J270, "One Life of so much Consequence," and in the third Master Letter when she claims that she is willing to die for her child:

> so dear did this stranger become, that were it, or my breath--the alternative--I had tossed the fellow away with a smile.>

She reasons here that "The living . . . is costlier," calling the child by the same appellation ("Sweet") she has used in the abortion sequence poem J482, "We Cover Thee--Sweet Face."

Stanza two offers an explanation of why Dickinson claims that her living instead of the child's is costlier. She asserts that "The Dying is a trifle, past." Here the poet implies that death is too quick and not painful enough. "But living," she claims as she alludes to her painful bereavement, "The dying multifold--without / The Respite to be dead." In these lines she refers to the many painful small deaths that she has endured over the course of her bereavement without being able to die and end her torment. Though tinged with sadness here, the reader senses that these thoughts are expressed in an altruistic sense. Like any mother who loves her child and would

willingly spare that child any suffering, Dickinson appears to be saying that she is almost glad that the child died instead of surviving without her and being forced to adjust to her death as she has had to survive the child's loss.

The final poem of depression shows Dickinson moving even further outside herself and toward acceptance of the child's death as she ponders the nature of her parental love for the child:

> Love--is that later Thing than Death--
> More previous--than Life--
> Confirms it at its' entrance--And
> Usurps it--of itself--
>
> Tastes Death--the first--to hand the sting
> The Second--to its' friend--
> Disarms the little interval--
> Deposits Him with God--
>
> Then hovers--an inferior Guard--
> Lest this Beloved Charge
> Need--once in an Eternity--
> A smaller than the Large--
>
> (J924, 1864)

In stanza one, Dickinson describes the parental love she has for the child. The first two lines, "Love--is that later thing than Death-- / More previous than Life," evoke the timelessness of her love; it exists before life or birth and withstands death. Line 3 is focal here; it emphasizes that the love Dickinson is discussing here is that of parental love that is confirmed at the child's birth, "its' entrance," and "Tastes Death--the first" when death "usurps it." Love furthermore "Disarms" "the sting" of the pain and separation from the child during "the little interval" between life and death for the parent. Love "Deposits [the child] with God" and "Then hovers" over

it in Heaven as a small guard, "an inferior guard," protecting it until the parent, "the Large" guard, arrives.

Dickinson's selflessness is amply demonstrated in this poem. She no longer bemoans her emotional state but objectively realizes the love she bears the child and does not rail against, feel guilty or sad about its fate. Her attitude looks forward to final acceptance of the child's death, the final stage of grief, which Dickinson must move through in order to put her bereavement behind her.

Depression cannot last forever. Inevitably it ends after the bereaved "works through the acute sense of loss [and] finishes mourning" (Kalish 133). Once the fourth stage of grief has been passed through, the bereaved arrives at the final stage, acceptance, which is the desired goal, whether conscious or unconscious, of the bereaved and grief itself. Despite what the label implies, "Acceptance need not be a happy stage" (Kalish 133). Though it suggests a return to normality, it is also a time in which the bereaved must cope with her inner sense of betrayal and abandonment of the deceased by the return of lighter moods and normal routines. At this point in the progression of grief the bereaved must learn to relinquish the dead. Furthermore, she must recognize that letting go is not betrayal or abandonment, but survival. This recognition undoubtedly occurs amidst feelings of guilt, but inevitably, it occurs. Nancy Berezin addresses the manner in which acceptance comes about for the mother following a loss in pregnancy:

> The transition between depression and acceptance is often so gradual that the woman is aware of it only by the absence of previous symptoms. . . . (70)

Dickinson's poem J574 is the first poem strongly intimating the poet's recognition of progress through her grief experience only to emerge from it stronger and bolstered with a sense of renewal at having defeated her pain. This is the first poem of a group of eleven acceptance poems in which Dickinson discusses and records her gradual letting go of the child. It is likely that this was one of the most difficult phases for the poet, indicated by the comparatively large number documenting this stage. This first poem suggests Dickinson's acknowledgment of her survival and her first questioning of her loss as a possible gain of some kind:

My first well Day--since many ill--
I asked to go abroad,
And take the sunshine in my hands,
And see the thing in Pod--

A blossom just when I went in
To take my + Chance with pain-- (+ Risk)
Uncertain if myself, or He,
Should prove the + strongest One. (+ supplest--lithest--stoutest)
The Summer deepened, while we strove--
She put some flowers away--
And Redder cheeked Ones--in their + stead-- (+ place)
A fond--illusive way--

To cheat Herself, it seemed she tried--
As if before a child
To + fade--Tomorrow--Rainbows + held (+ die) (+ trust)
The Sepulchre, could hide,

She dealt + a fashion to the Nut-- (+ the)
She tied the Hoods to Seeds--
She dropped bright scraps of Tint, about--
And left Brazilian Threads

On every shoulder + that she met-- (+ she could reach)
Then both her Hands of Haze
Put up--to + hide her parting Grace (+ hold)
From our + unfitted eyes. (+ unfinished)

My loss, by sickness--Was it Loss?
Or that + Ethereal Gain (+ Seraphic Gain, One gets')
One earns by measuring the Grave--
Then--measuring the Sun--

(J574, 1962, F28)

The occasion of the poem is clearly indicated in the introductory stanza. The speaker has obviously just passed through an illness. "My first well Day--since many ill," she says. Now well, she feels claustrophobic from being confined and asks "to go abroad." Although the poet claims that she is "well," because she must ask to go abroad, it is still quite likely that she is not completely well though somewhat ambulatory; she still requires assistance to move about. Despite the fact that she needs help, she yearns to venture outside on this fall day, not to perform any strenuous activity, but to "take the Sunshine in [her] hands, / And see the things in Pod--." It is not surprising that Dickinson would want to go outside and luxuriate in the warmth and the teeming life of nature that she loved and had been denied during the course of her long confinement. Moreover, that Dickinson would want to be amidst the pregnant things of nature in the wake of her loss in pregnancy is not suprising or unusual. Quite likely in this setting the poet found herself feeling concurrently closer to the child and yet distanced from it as she recognized that despite death life does go on. This experience is not unusual for bereaved mothers. One young mother, who suffered a pregnancy fatality around the same seasonal time of April as Dickinson's, recorded in her diary an experience similar to the one the poet describes in J574:

Throughout pregnancy, I had identified with nature. Everything

> blossoms in the spring, I thought, and our baby will be born in the spring. Now on my down days, it seemed like a mocking joke.
>
> Still, on Sunday, April 23, we arranged to have flowers on the altar at church in memory of our little boy. And the next weekend we planted trees and shrubs in our own back yard. It was our way of affirming that life goes on, it cannot be kept down . . . although we only half believed it at the time. (Berezin 68)

Dickinson indicates in lines 5-6 that the things of Nature she desires now to see "in Pod" were "A´blossom just when I went in / To take my Chance with pain--." Consequently, the duration of this nameless sickness has been about six or seven months, a curiously long time for an unrecorded Dickinson illness. However, taking into account the facts that within this poem Dickinson records the occasion as her "first well Day" (and not completely well if she must ask for help to make a trip outdoors), and that later in this poem Dickinson comes to question whether or not her sickness brought about a "loss" or a "gain," the poet suggests that though she may be healing, she still has much progress to make before she is entirely well.

Returning to the poem, in stanza two, the poet claims that when she "went in / To take [her] Chance with pain," she was "Uncertain if [herself], or [Pain], / Should prove the strongest One." From her initial uncertainty, Dickinson has emerged victorious, adding to her feeling of well-being and initial recovery and reiterating the seriousness of the pain she has suffered over her child´s death. Strengthened in the knowledge that she has survived and vanquished pain, in an instance of reality testing, Dickinson faces and replays her sickness in her mind.

While the poet grapples with the pain over her child´s death, outside "The Summer deepened" and she "put some flowers away." "[I]n

their stead" the fading summer left some "Redder cheeked Ones" in her old "fond--illusive way." Quite literally these lines describe the passing of the summer season, though Dickinson personifies it with the female qualities of Mother Nature. However, if placed within the context of the abortion-bereavement argument pursued in this study, these lines take on new meaning. When the poet says in line 10 that the summer "put some flowers away," very likely she is simultaneously alluding to the seasonal dying of annuals and the death of her child. As we have seen in J987, "It bloomed and dropt, a Single Noon," toward the later stages of grief Dickinson begins to refer to her lost child metaphorically as a flower. Thus, when she says that the summer put away some flowers, quite likely she is also referring to her child's death and burial. Furthermore, the "Redder cheeked Ones" that Dickinson says the summer leaves in the departed flowers' place could certainly quite literally refer to a late-blooming red flower of summer indigenous to west central Massachusetts. However, given the connections in the poet's mind of red with the abortion that we have seen and the shame and guilt she feels over her child's death, her reference to the "Redder cheeked Ones" left in the stead of the departed flower may be read as a reference to herself and her feelings following the child's death.

Stanza four is curious. The syntax is gnarled and baffling. If carefully pulled apart, however, Dickinson claims that the Summer has seemingly tried "To cheat Herself" by attempting "To fade" the "Tomorrow" that "Rainbows held." In these lines the poet appears to compare the trust Nature's flowers have in their Mother, which is

ultimately destroyed by the changing seasons, to what she imagines has been her child's trust in her, which has also been violated by death in the abortion. To heighten this parental trust and bond she refers to, she draws in the biblical image of the "Rainbow," the symbol of God's covenant with His people never to destroy the world again by water. As if to evoke metaphorically the breaking of this sacred trust by Summer and herself, she juxtaposes it with God's unbreakable bond with His children. She then compares Summer's imagined attempt at elusiveness to a "sepulchre" that cannot be hidden from a child. "As if before a child," she says, "The sepulchre, could hide." Here the poet suggests that only God is perfect and capable of maintaining his children's trust. Earthly parents are not perfect. In these lines Dickinson furthermore not only alludes to her child for whom death was inevitable, but she also comments upon the inevitability of life and the natural progression of the seasons. This juxtaposition of death and life suggests that the poet is slowly coming to terms with the child's death as she gradually begins to accept it.

In the next two stanzas, Dickinson metaphorically recounts the outer passing of the summer season into autumn. The summer "dealt a fashion to the Nut" or prepared nuts to be used for food or regeneration the following spring, "tied Hood to Seeds" to prepare them to withstand the cold winter to germinate the next season, and "dropped bright scraps of Tint" and "Brazilian Threads"— in other words the changing leaves—"On every shoulder that she met." The references in these lines to the "bright scraps of Tint" and "Brazilian Threads" metaphorically evoke images of the exotic colors

of the New England autumn leaves, and further underscore the seasonal time as fall in this poem. Then spent, "Summer" "Put up" "both her hands of Haze" in order "to hide her parting Grace / From our unfitted eyes." Dickinson's allusion to unfitness in these lines suggests that her prolonged continuing illness prevented her from witnessing the change of seasons she has only just vividly imagined from her recollection of past summers.

After the poet has sadly reflected upon missing summer's passing because of her mysterious prolonged illness, the final stanza turns to consider a loss that Dickinson feels. Superficially read, this final stanza appears to mourn her loss of the change of seasons. And for Dickinson who felt such an affinity with nature the loss of an entire summer season of beauty and life would have been substantial. However, the rumblings of curious death imagery here combined with the seriousness of tone, the questioning of whether her loss was really a loss or a gain, and the return to the merchant/monetary language of the abortion sequence poems must cause us to question whether Dickinson grieves over merely a season's passing or a much more important passing. The poet ponders, "My loss, by sickness." Then abruptly she reconsiders and asks herself, "Was it loss? / Or that Ethereal Gain / One earns by measuring the Grave-- / Then--measuring the Sun--." In these lines the poet appears to be lamenting having missed the passing of summer; however, upon reconsideration, especially taking into account the phrase "Ethereal Gain," it seems that much more is being implied here. If put into the abortion/bereavement context in which we have been examining

Dickinson's poetry, the "Ethereal Gain" she mentions is readily explainable, whereas it is not easily explained if the poem is considered merely a lament over the speaker's loss of the summer, though it is indeed that. Within the abortion/bereavement context, the "loss" that Dickinson reconsiders an "Ethereal Gain" here is her child, whom she has lost on earth to the grave, but can count as heavenly or "Ethereal" gain that she has deposited with God in Heaven. This "Ethereal Gain" is one that she has "earn[ed] by measuring the Grave," an obvious reference to her painful abortion/bereavement experience during which she marked time by measuring her adjustment to the child's "Grave." She has furthermore earned this gain by "measuring the Sun," an allusion to her survival and reemergence into the world of normality, where time is measured by the sun's progress.

The poem's ambiguity provides both richness and circumspection as Dickinson simultaneously mourns both the passing of one of her favorite seasons and that of her dear child. Furthermore, that Dickinson can now look back upon the child's loss as a potential gain suggests adjustment and mending in her grieving soul.

To put her grief behind her, however, Dickinson instinctively recognizes that reflecting on grief, a form of reality testing, is essential. In J660, the poet acknowledges the necessity of remembering and adjusting to past pain before proceeding with the future:

'Tis + good--the looking back on Grief-- (+ well)
To re-endure a Day-
We thought the + Mighty Funeral-- (+ monstrous)
Of All conceived Joy--
To recollect how Busy Grass
Did + meddle--one by one-- (+ tamper)
Till all the Grief with Summer-- + wave (+ blew)
And none could see the stone.

And though the Woe you have Today
Be larger--As the Sea
Exceeds its * Unremembered Drop-- (* undeveloped)
* They're Water--equally-- (* They prove One Chemistry--)

(J660, 1862, F22)

"'Tis good," Dickinson says, "the looking back on Grief." The poet asserts the benefits of reflection upon the pain of losing her child, suggested here in the next three lines: "To re-endure a Day-- / We thought the Mighty Funeral-- / Of All Conceived Joy--." In the same breath Dickinson couples images of death and funerals and conception and joy, an obvious reference to her child's death.

Stanza two perpetuates her recollection as she ponders the child's burial and the way in which the "Busy Grass / Did meddle" between her and her child, slowly growing blade by blade, "one by one," over the burial plot until "none could see the [grave] stone" and "all the Grief with Summer" waved to her in parting.

The final stanza, spoken from the perspective of approaching acceptance, explains that despite the initial passing of and the beneficial review of intense grief over her child's death, the residual "Woe" that she has "Today" is larger than the original. However, she takes some solace in the fact that just "As the Sea / Exceeds it Unremembered Drop-- / They're Water--equally," so too is this new pain, though larger, of the same kind as the former and as

manageable. It is interesting that Dickinson refers to a "drop" of water here as she refers to her child's death. Throughout Dickinson's writings the word drop has appeared repeatedly--sometimes as noun, sometimes as verb--as the poet alludes to the child, the abortion, and her bereavement. In the opening paragraphs of that very important third Master Letter in which Dickinson fumes at Master for doubting her, the poet refers to the wound Master has made in her heart by his doubt, referring to the latest drop of blood he has drawn; "One drop more from the gash that stains your Daisy's bosom--then would you believe?. . . ." Considering the frequency with which Dickinson refers to her abortion with images of red and bleeding, it is likely that she is here referring to the loss of her child as a drop of blood oozing from her heart. In one of the denial poems, J430, "It would never be Common--more--I said--," Dickinson again refers to her lost child in replaying her entire pregnancy/abortion experiences as she tries to come to terms with it. Sorely feeling the child's loss, she painfully asks: "But where my moment of Brocade-- / My--drop--of India?"

The word drop used as a verb is also one that Dickinson associates with the child. In certain instances she employs the verb to refer to the child's conception, as she does in J271, "A solemn thing--it was--I said--" when she discusses what a "hallowed" experience it was "to drop a life / Into the purple well--." In other instances, the poet associates the verb drop with the child's death and burial. In the abortion sequence poem J519, "'Twas warm--at first--like Us--" she envisions the child's realizing that it is not

wanted and that it "dropped like Adament" into its grave. Poem J1712, "A Pit--but Heaven over it--," finds Dickinson on the edge of the child's grave and fearing that "To look would be to drop--" into the grave and death along with the child. Dickinson again employs drop in association with the child's death in J430, "It would never be Common--more--I said--" when in recalling her pregnancy/abortion experience, she characterizes the abortion in this way: "A Goblin--drank my Dew / My Palaces--dropped tenantless--." In the depression poem J987, Dickinson uses the verb to allude to the child's death when she says, "It bloomed and dropt, a Single Noon--."

Another use Dickinson makes of this important verb drop in association with the child occurs when she attempts to describe the effect the child's death has had on her mind as she does in the denial poems J1046, "I've dropped my Brain--My Soul is numb--," and in J414, "'Twas like a Maelstrom, with a notch," where she describes the maelstrom toying with her "delious Hem--" until "you dropt, lost, / When something broke." Poem J747 also employs drop to characterize her reaction to the child's death as "It dropped so low--in my Regard." And finally in the depression poem J784, Dickinson has gone abroad to evade her bereavement before she realizes that she must face it. The grave haunts and follows her and she "tried to drop it in the Crowd--" to elude her fate. These many applications of the word drop, like Dickinson's use of the word it or the merchant/monetary imagery or the heaviness, pregnancy or carrying imagery, or royal imagery, thus emerge as a unifying device for all of Dickinson's writings concerning this pregnancy/abortion/bereavement experience.

The next poem, J584, of the acceptance group documents Dickinson's gradual progress toward acceptance of her grief:

> It ceased to hurt me, though so slow
> I could not + see the + trouble go--(+ feel) (+ Anguish)
> But only knew by looking back--
> That something--had + obscured the Track-- (+ benumbed)
>
> Nor when it altered, I could say,
> For I had worn it, every day,
> As constant as the Childish frock--
> I hung upon the Peg, at night.
>
> But not the Grief--that nestled close
> As needles--ladies softly press
> To Cushion Cheeks--
> To keep their place--
>
> Nor what consoled it, I could trace--
> Except, whereas 'twas Wilderness--
> Its' better--almost Peace--
>
> (J584, 1862, F14)

The first two stanzas of this poem, like so many grieving poems before it, replay Dickinson's painful bereavement experiences; however, here the poet recounts not her suffering but the pace at which the pain subsides. She claims that "It ceased to hurt me, though so slow / I could not feel the Anguish go." The surreptitiousness of the pain's disappearance is a normal experience in adjusting to a bereavement. As Berezin contends, often it is only the mother's realization of the absent pain that allows her to recognize that acceptance is occurring. One bereaved mother that Berezin interviewed described this gradual sensation of absence in this way:

> Mornings used to be the worst. I would think: When I can get through a whole morning without crying, I'll be on my way. And then somehow, it happens, so slowly that you aren't even sure of it at the time. The memory doesn't fade--only the intensity of it. (Berezin 70)

This gradual, elusive, but remembered experience is the one Dickinson spends the rest of stanza one and stanza two describing. She claims that she only remembers that "something--had obscured (+ benumbed) the Track," an obvious reference to the denial stage of grief. Furthermore the numbing pain of denial continued so relentlessly that she feels she "had worn it, every day" but could not say exactly "when it altered." However, the numbness has vanished to be replaced by the pain following denial--grief. The grief she claims "nestled close" and was as painful "As needles--ladies softly press / To Cushions Cheeks-- / To keep their place." But the grief too eventually fades, and the poet is as bereft to explain "What consoled it" as she has been to pinpoint how the numbness of denial has disappeared. Regardless of what caused the grief, Dickinson is content that the pain of grief she claims "'twas Wilderness" is gone. And she marvels at the difference between the two states. Well on her way to acceptance, Dickinson claims that "Its' better--almost Peace--" now. However, the qualifier "almost" in this thought indicates Dickinson's awareness of more progress that she needs to make to attain complete acceptance and regain peace in her life.

Poem J973 finds Dickinson admitting the child's absence and remembering what few memories she has of it as she attempts to accept the death, both necessary actions in overcoming bereavement.

'Twas awkward, but it fitted me--
An Ancient fashioned Heart--
Its' only lore--its' Steadfastness
In Change--unerudite--

It only + moved as do the Suns-- (+ swerved)
For merit of Return--
Or Birds--confirmed perpetual
By Alternating Zone--

I only have it not Tonight
In its´ established place--
For technicality of Death--
Omitted in the Lease--

(J973, 1864)

The poet recalls here her initial awkwardness in identifying with the stranger that she carried beneath her heart; however, sensing a kinship between them as she bonds with the child, she recognizes that the child bore "An Ancient fashioned Heart" like her own. Dickinson claims the child's Heart "fitted me." "Its´ only lore," she claims, was "its´ Steadfastness" in its love for her. "In Change" the child was "unerudite." For Dickinson, who experienced so many failed relationships, this child of her own who would possess these qualities that she regarded as important in relationships would have been special in her mind.

In stanza two she compares what she remembers as the child's constancy, another quality in a relationship the poet valued, to the circular movement of "the Suns" who only move "For merit of Return" and to "Birds" who move "perpetual[ly]" "By Alternating Zone."

Couched in a legal metaphor of signed contracts, stanza three is a melancholy recognition of this beloved child's absence from "its´ established" rightful place with its mother, "For technicality of Death-- / Omitted in the Lease." While the tone here is that of sadness and loneliness, it is not as strong as the loneliness that she expresses for the child in the depression poems. This lightening of

sadness, along with her ability to remember the child and its death, intimates that Dickinson is gradually moving toward final acceptance.

Another poem that portrays the poet as attempting to come to terms with the fact that she no longer possesses her precious child is J1093:

> Because 'twas Riches I could own,
> Myself had earned it--Me,
> I knew the Dollars by their names--
> It feels like Poverty
>
> An Earldom out of sight to hold,
> An Income in the Air,
> Possession--has a sweeter chink
> Unto a Miser's Ear
>
> (J1093, 1866)

Returning to the merchant/monetary imagery of the abortion sequence poems, Dickinson characterizes her bereavement over the child's loss. The poem's first two lines recognize the child's value and the mother's right to possess it (the "Riches") she asserts she "had earned." In the next two lines, continuing the merchant/monetary imagery, Dickinson expresses her closeness with the child, "I knew the Dollars by their names," and her bereavement over its loss, "It feels like Poverty."

Drawing in the royal imagery that has pervaded Dickinson's writings about the abortion and her bereavement to combine with the merchant/monetary imagery, stanza two describes the poet's continuing sense of loss. She characterizes the loss as "An Earldom out of sight to hold" as she does in denial poem J430, "It would never be Common--more--I Said," where in recalling the abortion she says that her "Palaces--dropped tenantless," and in depression poem J959, "A loss of

something ever felt I," where she describes herself in mourning the child "As one bemoaning a dominion / Itself the only Prince cast out," and her loss as "Delinquent Palaces." She furthermore characterizes the child in monetary terms as "An income in the Air," an obvious reference to and recognition of the child's residence in Heaven. Despite this deferred "income" that awaits her in Heaven, Dickinson sighs, employing monetary imagery as she realizes, that immediate "Possession--has a sweeter chink / Unto [her] Miser's Ear--."

The next acceptance poem is another in which Dickinson recounts how she learned the child preciousness only after it has gone:

> I had a daily Bliss
> I half indifferent viewed
> Till sudden I perceived it stir--
> It grew as I pursued.
>
> Till when around a Hight
> It wasted from my sight
> + Increased beyond my utmost scope (+ Enlarged)
> I learned to estimate.
>
> (J1057, 1865)

Referring to the child as "Bliss" as she has done throughout the abortion sequence poems J271, "A solemn thing--it was--I said," and J762, "The Whole of it came not at once," and the denial poem 430, "It would never be Common--more--I said," Dickinson recalls the child and her initial attitude about it in the first two lines: "I had a daily Bliss / I half indifferent viewed." She seems to contradict herself here as she refers to the child as "a daily Bliss" but one that she viewed "half indifferent[ly]." How is it possible to possess supreme happiness and regard it half indifferently? Dickinson suggests an

answer to this paradox in the poem's third line: "Till sudden I perceived it stir." In this and the previous two lines the poet recalls her pregnancy. From the perspective of hindsight, Dickinson refers to the child now as a "daily Bliss," but intimates that at first she only viewed it "half indifferently." In these sentiments, she suggests that she responded ambivalently to the child's existence. On the one hand, before any physical manifestations of the child's presence were apparent, except those first signs of pregnancy that indicate a child has been conceived, it is likely that though the poet was aware that she had conceived a child in love with Master, it was yet unreal to her; thus she refers to viewing it "half indifferently." On the other hand, however, after she has felt the growing life within her "stir" in her womb, not only does her pregnancy become something that cannot be viewed indifferently, but the child suddenly becomes a real person to her. In this context, then Dickinson could have a "daily Bliss" that she viewed only "half indifferent[ly]" until she felt the child grow and move within her.

Once aware of the child as a living being, she says, "It grew as I pursued / Till when around a Height / It wasted from my sight." In these lines Dickinson recalls the bonding (her pursuit) of mother with child as it grew within her until the abortion, at which time "It wasted from my sight" as she also imagines the child wasting away before her eyes in abortion sequence poems J559, "It knew no Medicine," and J519, "'Twas warm—at first—like Us." Once the child is gone, Dickinson learns its value and in the final lines, returning to the merchant/monetary imagery, the poet resignedly and sorrowfully

admits that the child's preciousness "Increased beyond my utmost scope / I learned to estimate."

She continues to miss the child, but accepts with resignation that it is indeed gone. However, to reestablish the sense of closeness with the child that she experienced during pregnancy, Dickinson visits the burial place, as was the nineteenth-century mourning custom. The brief poem J899 records Dickinson's thoughts during such a visit:

> Herein a Blossom lies--
> A Sepulchre, between
> Cross it, and overcome the Bee--
> Remain--'tis but a Rind
>
> (J899, 1864)

In these captured thoughts as she stands at the grave, Dickinson acknowledges, using the flower imagery that she has employed to refer to the child in depression poem J987, "It bloomed and dropt, a Single noon," and acceptance poem J574, "My first well Day--since many ill," that within this sepulchre lies her child, "a Blossom." In contemplating the contents, Dickinson claims that to "Cross" the grave would "overcome the Bee," which seems to be an allusion to the custom of rural New Englanders that John Greenleaf Whittier captures in his poem "Telling the Bees." This custom involved informing the bees upon a family member's death of the event and draping the hives in mourning crepe, all in an effort to prevent them from seeking out a new home. Thus when Dickinson says that to "Cross" the grave would "overcome the Bee" she appears to be saying that in leaving the grave behind, she overcomes the insect that is, according to legend, acutely sensitive to death; here she suggests that by facing the child's death she can

overcome it. Then, almost as if she has been momentarily influenced by the nineteenth-century sublime view of death that is concerned with the more gruesome aspects of death such as the decay of the body in the tomb espoused by writers such as Edgar Allan Poe, she appears to assert that to "Remain" by the grave will force her to acknowledge that the remains in the grave are not really her child, who is now in Heaven, "but a Rind," the outer shell, of the child's physical being. In either event, Dickinson implies in this poem that she is putting the death behind her.

Poem J1037 records another visit to the child's resting place. In this poem, though Dickinson continues the flower imagery associated with her child, she is not as concerned with location as she is with the burial site; rather, it is a place she can feel spiritually and emotionally close to the child:

> Here, where the Daisies fit my Head
> 'Tis easiest to lie
> And every Grass that plays outside
> Is sorry, some, for me.
>
> Where I am not afraid to go
> I may confide my Flower--
> Who was not Enemy of Me
> Will gentle be, to Her.
>
> Nor separate, Herself and Me
> By distances become--
> A single Bloom we constitute
> Departed, or at Home--
>
> (J1037, 1865)

In stanza one, Dickinson appears to be alluding to the child's burial place when she claims that "Here, where the Daisies fit my Head / 'Tis easiest to lie." The poet seems to derive some comfort in knowing her child's earthly remains are near and that "every Grass

that plays outside / Is sorry, some, for me" in her loss. She says that this is a place, "Where I am not afraid to go," as burial places of the nineteenth century were not places to be shunned but to be visited in order to commune simultaneously with the dead, God and nature. Dickinson has gone to the grave to commune with or "confide" in her "Flower," whom she claims, "was not Enemy of Me," an obvious allusion to the abortion. In these and the following lines, Dickinson refers again to her child as a flower as she has done in the depression poem J987, "It bloomed and dropt, a Single Noon."

While at the grave, the poet reflects upon the union she feels with her child in Heaven. She asserts that despite the "Distances" between them they have become and "constitute" a "single Bloom" whether apart on earth or together "at Home" in Heaven.

Dickinson's recognition of the everlasting bond between the child and herself allows her to let go emotionally and psychologically of the child. The very brief poem J1179 crystallizes a moment of letting go for the poet:

> Of so divine a loss
> We enter but the Gain
> Indemnity for loneliness
> That such a Bliss has been--
>
> (J1179, 1871)

Couched in the merchant/monetary imagery of the abortion sequence poems, these lines show Dickinson moving from the resignation of poems J1093, "Because 'twas Riches I could own" and J1057, "I had a daily Bliss," to reconciliation over what she calls now her "divine" loss, an obvious reference to the child's residence in Heaven. In line 2 the poet characterizes superficially and paradoxically the terms of

the exchange that she has made to reach this stage verging upon final acceptance. As an accountant juggling to balance debits and credits in a ledger, she says, "We enter but the Gain," a reference to her belief of the child's existence in Heaven, which is "Indemnity for Loneliness / That Such a Bliss has been," in other words, compensation for the "homesickness" for her child. Here again Dickinson's calls the child a "Bliss."

Once the poet has truly let go of the beloved dead and noticed the onset of acceptance, it is time for new decisions. Before this point, she has wondered whether or not a future existed for her; however, after the mind and the emotions take an unbidden step toward the future in putting the death of the past behind, she must face the future and the challenges it brings. Poem J1010 shows Dickinson making this decision:

> Up Life's Hill with my little Bundle
> If I prove it steep--
> If a Discouragement withhold me--
> If my newest step
>
> Older feel than the Hope that prompted--
> Spotless be from blame
> Heart that proposed as Heart that accepted--
> Homelessness, for Home--
>
> (J1010, 1865)

With all the determination of an individual preparing to climb a real hill, Dickinson voices her desire here to go on with life. Employing the imagery that she has used in the abortion sequence poem J527, "To put this World down, like a Bundle," where Master has asked her to abort the child, Dickinson implies here that she will shoulder her "Bundle," her knowledge of the child's death, and go "Up Life's Hill."

With renewed hope and confidence she claims that if "Life's Hill" proves "steep," "If a Discouragement withhold me--" or If my newest step" seems "Older" than her new-found Hope," then neither Master (the "Heart that proposed") nor she (the "Heart that accepted") will be absolved from blame concerning the decision about the child's fate. No longer blaming only Master or feeling exclusively guilty herself about the child's death, the poet recognizes both parents' mutual responsibility for the child's fate and looks forward to the challenges she may encounter. In this poem Dickinson demonstrates that she has fully reached acceptance and is ready to move past the bereavement and on with her life.

This acceptance, however, does not indicate the bereaved's recognition of the justice or fairness of the child's death. It merely denotes an acceptance of an event over which she had no control. Nancy Berezin addresses the subject of acceptance of a bereavement in pregnancy in this way:

> Accepting a tragic outcome of pregnancy does not mean that the mother will ever perceive her loss as being reasonable, fair, or just. It is a bow to the inevitable, a recognition that life can be painful and paradoxical--yet life goes on. (71)

Dickinson displays a new resolve and commitment to life in J1010 that signals a close of the five stages of grieving. In this poem she indicates that not only has she accepted her child's death, but she also no longer blames Master as the sole conspirator against the child. Final acceptance, however, does not guarantee that she will not experience moments throughout the rest of her life in which she misses the child or moments when all the bitterness and anguish momentarily return with all the force of the original emotion.

Acceptance furthermore does not assure that she ever completely comprehends her loss. But the fact that she probably never understood it did not deter her from trying. And like all of the pregnancy/abortion/bereavement experiences and emotions, Dickinson recorded some of these moments of recurrence in her poetry. Two such examples should serve to illustrate here.

The first example of a moment of recurrence takes place in poem J1197. Dated around 1871, it is quite probable that the feelings she records here are those stimulated by the passing of the tenth anniversary of the child's death, a time often marked by a revisitation of emotions associated with the death:

> I should not dare to be so sad
> So many Years again--
> A Load is first impossible
> When we have put it down--
>
> The Superhuman then withdraws
> And we who never saw
> The Giant at the other side
> Begin to perish now
>
> (J1197, 1871)

In stanza one, Dickinson sorrowfully acknowledges that after so many years following her bereavement she "should not dare to be so sad" again. Then, returning to the imagery of carrying a heavy load and pregnancy that she establishes in the third Master Letter and carries through the abortion sequence poem J527, "To put this World down, like a Bundle," depression poem J217, "Savior! I've no one else to tell," and acceptance poem J1010, "Up Life's Hill with my little Bundle," Dickinson recalls the "impossible" aftermath of the abortion when she says, "A Load is first impossible / When we have put it down." She

seems amazed that the memory of the pain she has lived through and survived can return with the immediacy of the original.

Reflecting upon the pain's revisitation, she remembers the child's loss in stanza two. The child, after ten years, has become idealized into a "Superhuman," who has "withdraw[n]" from her. She recalls that she "never saw" the child, "The Giant" now "at the other side" in Heaven. And feeling unequal to the challenge of battling that anguish again, the poet feels, despite having survived it before, that she "Begin[s] to perish now."

Another poem, three years later in 1874, captures a moment of resurgent sarcasm and bitterness about the abortion. Though she has long since forgiven Master for his role in the child's death, her initial bitterness over his decision about the child's fate returns to goad her in J1317:

> Abraham to kill him
> Was distinctly told--
> Isaac was an Urchin--
> Abraham was old--
>
> Not a hesitation--
> Abraham complied--
> Flattered by Obeisance
> Tyranny demurred--
>
> Isaac to his children
> Lived to tell the tale--
> Moral--with a Mastiff
> Manners may prevail.
>
> (J1317, 1874)

Not only does Dickinson select the story of a famous parent's aborted attempt to kill his child to convey her bitterness, but she also chooses a biblical tale, an obvious jibe at Master, who was a minister.

The first two stanzas here recount the story of God's command to Abraham to slay the only child of his old age. Abraham, with "Not a hesitation," "complied" with God's command. "Flattered by Obeisance," God, whom she sarcastically characterizes here as "Tyranny"--a marked slur against Master--"demurred" and allowed the child to live. The perceptive reader can see Dickinson behind the lines here, comparing Abraham and Isaac's situation with her own. In her mind she sees herself as Abraham, her child as Isaac, and Master as God. But there are several divergences between her own and the Bible story. She did hesitate and implored Master to allow the child to live. Master, unflattered by her lack of obeisance, did not demur. And her child did not "[Live] to tell the tale" "to [its] children." All of these remembered facts and considered comparisons embitter the poet and cause her to tag a venomous, if curious, "Moral" on at the poem's end: "with a Mastiff / Manners may prevail." The term Mastiff, refers to a large breed of dog that is used primarily as a watchdog and "is noted . . . for its courage" ("Mastiff" 5905). Dickinson seems to suggest here that had she exhibited the same qualities of courage and obedience as Abraham and this watchdog in deferring to one's judgment greater than her own, her child might be alive today; "Manners may [have] prevail[ed]" and Master, like God in his tyranny in Abraham's case, might have relented. In short, almost thirteen years following her child's death, Dickinson relives in this poem a moment of bargaining in which she enters the world of make-believe and conjectures that if she had behaved differently and if Master had reacted differently, her child, as Isaac, would also have lived and

have been able to tell its children the tale of its close brush with death. But this poem also expresses anger at Master for his "Tyranny" and allowing the abortion to occur, what Dickinson might bitterly refer to as a gross violation of the code of "Manners."

The two foregoing poems are just two examples of moments of recurring memory about her pregnancy/abortion/bereavement experience that must have followed and haunted her throughout her life, despite her looking forward to reunion with the child and Master in Heaven. Given the intensity of all aspects of this experience as we have seen in the Master Letters and the poetry, not to mention the (at least) four-to-five-year duration of her intensive grief, it is not surprising that Dickinson's gradual withdrawal from the outside world, begun before this experience, became a permanent way of life for the poet. For this sensitive woman to deal with such a monumental loss as that of her child through a painful, debilitating abortion and nearly five years of intense grieving, not to mention the revisitations of memory about the event throughout the rest of her life, and to do so in secret as well, is enough to send the strongest, most adjusted person into retirement from the outside world. In one final poem that is not really an abortion sequence or bereavement poem, Dickinson, in writing to her friend Kate Scott Anthon to explain why she could not see her when she visited Amherst in 1877 (Johnson, Poems 3: 979-980), alludes circuitously to her secretive abortion and bereavement as explanation for her retreat from the world:

I shall not murmur if at last
The ones I loved below
Permission have to understand
For what I shunned them so--
Divulging it would rest my Heart
But it would ravage theirs--
Why, Katie, Treason has a Voice--
But mine--dispels--in Tears.

(J1410, 1877)

In this poem's first six lines, Dickinson attempts to explain that her retirement is not one that she has consciously chosen; rather, it has been thrust upon her as a burden to be borne--one that she would rather not have. Paraphrased, this first six lines might read: "I will not object if in Heaven my loved ones are told why I could not see them on earth. Telling the reason now, however, would ease the pain in my heart, but it would cause my loved ones greater pain than that which I now endure." Paramount in this explanation is the mysterious it that we have traced through the Master Letters and the abortion sequence and bereavement poems as an informing reference to her child. In line 5 Dickinson claims that "Divulging it (italics mine) would rest my Heart." And in line 6 she says, "But it (italics mine) would ravage theirs." In both instances Dickinson refers to the secretive reason she has "shunned" her friends. What could be more secretive in the poet's life than her conception of, abortion of, and bereavement of intense and prolonged duration over an illegitimate child with a married minister of God?

In the poem's final two lines, Dickinson makes a stronger allusion to the reason for her retreat--treason. She sighs, "Why, Katie, Treason has a Voice-- / But mine--dispels--in Tears." The reader must ask, "Whom has Dickinson betrayed?" The answer to this

question must be her child. She has violated the most sacred trust that a child places in its mother. Recalling that she allowed the abortion causes her guilt to resurface to haunt her again in this poem. Thus, when she says that "Treason" usually "has a Voice," she implies that betrayal is usually discovered by the one betrayed; however, her treason, because she has sentenced to the grave the one innocent who might expose her, will never be revealed, except perhaps in homey Heaven. Consequently, Dickinson's betrayal of her child, her "Treason," "dispels--in Tears" of grief and guilt that she can never share with anyone on earth but can only pour into her poetry of personal consolation. Thus, when we reflect on the poet's explanation to Higginson about why she writes poetry, "I sing, as the Boy does by the Burying Ground--because I am afraid," we can understand her fear, her grieving, and the reasons she embedded them privately in poetry. They are all explained by "The Scarlet Experiment," her abortion experience.

CONCLUSION

Many critics, scholars, and lovers of Emily Dickinson's poetry have attempted to uncover the nature of the devastating experience in the poet's life around 1861-1862 whose stimulus triggered a veritable deluge of poems replete with obscure and curious references. Unfortunately, some of these theories and explanations have been skewed by the inherited and perpetuated protective glossing of the poet's life and work, initiated by the poet herself. This study has sought to peel away this prejudicial protective coating and view the poet and her work from an unprotected, unglossed vantage point. It has striven to look at Emily Dickinson first as a woman, one with the same feelings, emotions, needs, and longings as any other woman of any time. Second, this study has looked at Dickinson as a woman apart from other women, a woman writer and artist who crystallizes and distills the essence of her experiences onto the printed page with such exploding compactness that the reader marvels at the poet's incisive insight and acuity to freeze in metaphor or image an emotion or sensation particular to a situation the reader thought belonged to him or her alone. By placing what little historical and biographical knowledge we have about the poet and her encapsulating poems into the sociological, cultural, and literary contexts from which her poetry originated, this study has attempted to probe to the emotional and factual depths of the poetry to determine the nature of the traumatic

event that left the poet physically ill and emotionally bereft and generated a noticeable number of grieving poems around 1861-1862 and following.

Did Emily Dickinson have an abortion around 1861-1682? This compelling question that has been the focus of the forgoing study's scrutiny must now be answered. Taking into consideration the following: the historical and biographical data concering the status of abortion in the nineteenth century, Master's visits to Amherst, Dickinson's extended illness, and the absence of any significant deaths for Dickinson during this time period; the nineteenth-century cultural and religious conventions and beliefs Dickinson subscribed to, such as the writing of consolation poetry, her view and attitude toward death and "homey Heaven," and her view of herself as an impotent woman caught in a man's world; the established pattern of Dickinson's failed friendships, except where Master is concerned; the unifying devices of repeated words such as the mysterious it, the word drop in various forms and applications, the meaningful words bliss or bundle recurring throughout the grieving poetry of 1861-1862 and following; the interlocking merchant/monetary, pregnancy/carring/load, heart, red, and mother/child, royal, and flower imagery recurring throughout the grieving poetry and Master Letters; the underlying tone of loss pervading and informing the grieving poetry and Master Letters; the ability to arrange according to emotional tone and narrative content a group of the grieving poems of this period into an abortion sequence with most composition dates clustering around 1862; the striking similarity of the sensations and emotions Dickinson

captures in her poetry and those of mothers experiencing fetal loss; the possibility of tracing Kübler-Ross' five stage of grief--denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance--through a group of grieving poems composed predominantly around 1863-1865; the correlation of ideas, emotions, repeated unifying devices and patterns of imagery expressed in the grieving poetry and in the very suggestive Master Letters, the only known extant correspondence to Master; and the content and emotional tenor of the poems themselves; it seems highly probable that Dickinson suffered a bereavement following an abortion and that she consoled herself through her poetry.

It is hardly surprising that an event of this nature and magnitude would have stirred poetic efforts in the poet. Dickinson recorded many of the events of her life in poetry, some as apparently inconsequential as observing a bird hop down a walk and gobble up a worm or encountering a snake unawares. Furthermore, experts in the field of maternal bereavement are convinced that, if a mother is to recover from such a bereavement, she must be able to share her thoughts, sorrows, and devastated hopes with someone. In light of the secrecy surrounding this particular loss for this particular woman at this particular time, it is unlikely, as Dickinson verbalizes in several poems discussed in this study, that she could or would have afforded herself such a luxury. Consequently, she turned to her poetry concomitantly to vent her grief, to discover consolation, and to memorialize her beloved lost child. By no means does this trivialize Dickinson's talent or suggest that this abortion experience was the primary impetus or inspiration behind her poetry. We know

that Dickinson aspired to become a poet and indeed tried her hand at many more than the "one or two" verses she originally told Higginson she had attempted until the winter of 1861 (Letters 2: 404); however, having discovered a natural proclivity toward and an outlet of natural expression through poetic medium, Dickinson naturally turned to poetry to record, objectify, and work through the various and often conflicting and turbulent emotions accompanying this abortion experience, all the time permeated by a sense of painful loss of the one extension of herself in the world--her child. However, it seems that whereas another less talented woman undergoing a similar experience might create jottings in a diary to help her work through the grief, Dickinson created art, born of psychic pain.

While some may balk at this study's uncharacteristic interpretation of the traditional nun-like Emily Dickinson, her poetry, and letters, it seems rather naive and staid to deny Dickinson's humanity and knowledge of humanity based on selective and protective facts concerning her apparently cloistered life. Given her incisive perception concerning the human condition and human emotions in her poetry, underneath that apparent outer nun-like exterior flourished a thinking, breathing woman, capable--and it appears experienced as well--of not only the highest flights of fancy and love, but also capable of and experienced in excruciating despair and seething, violent rage. To dismiss the possibility that this intensely aware and alive woman was not capable of such an experience as treated in this study is, at best, as protective as those who would continue sheltering the poet, especially considering all of the

missing facts about Dickinson's life and art. At worst, a summary dismissal of this nature, after considering all the evidence marshalled and presented in this study to the contrary, exhibits a real insensitivity or blindness to the woman behind the art and to the art itself. Dickinson, as all writers, wrote from what she knew best--her personal experience of the world. In this sense, her poetry is autobiographical. Therefore, reading these grieving poems of 1861-1862 and following and the Master Letters in an holistic sense as this study has done, taking biographical, historical, cultural, sociological, psychological, and emotional factors into account, not only affords a more lucid reading of these poems and letters, but also fills in the "omitted centers" of her obtuse and baffling poetry and recreates for the open reader a sensitive and intensely alive crystallized experience of the world as Dickinson perceived it. Furthermore, such a reading allows for a fuller experience of Emily Dickinson the woman and the artist. To deny oneself such an unprotected, dynamic perception of life, infused with such delicate sensitivity and masterful artistry that only Dickinson can capture, is loss to be mourned, indeed!

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VITA

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