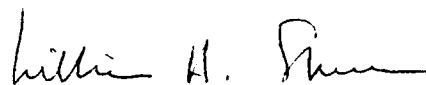


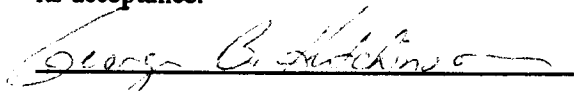
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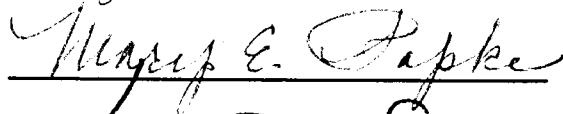
I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Karen Richardson Gee entitled "Kins[wo]men of the Shelf: Emily Dickinson's Reading of Women Writers." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements 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

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"KINS[WO]MEN OF THE SHELF":
EMILY DICKINSON'S READING OF WOMEN WRITERS

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Karen Richardson Gee

December 1990

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DEDICATION

To the people who taught me how, what, and why to read: my parents and my teachers. And to those who read with me now, my family, my friends, and especially my husband. We share a love of literature, but more important to me is his kindness, patience, and good humor. They are the stuff of legends.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The director and the members of my committee, William H. Shurr, Mary Papke, George Hutchinson, and Karen Levy, have generously assisted me in the conception and preparation of this manuscript. Their help has enabled me to realize my vision of this project, and any errors that remain in the text are my responsibility, not theirs.

The University of Tennessee English Department presented me with a John B. Emperor fellowship in the Spring of 1990, which reduced my teaching load and allowed me to make rapid progress on this project.

Like all others who attempt to unravel the mystery Emily Dickinson left behind, I am indebted to a number of scholars who went before me, particularly Thomas H. Johnson, who issued the letters and the poems; Jay Leyda, who accumulated the minutiae of Dickinson's life; and S. P. Rosenbaum, who compiled a concordance to Dickinson's poems.

This project could not have been completed without those who helped me to acquire books. Many have been out of print for decades. My parents bought *The Letters of Emily Dickinson* for me. Librarians at The University of Tennessee, especially those in Interlibrary Loan have been helpful. The Librarians in the Special Collections division went beyond the call of duty in helping me. Librarians all across the country lent me books. Booksellers searched for and found books for me. Thank you again.

ABSTRACT

This study places Emily Dickinson in the midst of a nineteenth-century feminine literary tradition by examining her reading of other women writers. Throughout her life she passionately read women who influenced her life and art in both positive and negative ways. Chapters discuss Dickinson's reading, Dickinson's search for role models in biography and fiction, Dickinson's reading of domestic literature, Dickinson's reading of George Sand and other women she influenced, and Dickinson's reading of literature that preaches a social gospel. Writers discussed include Jane Austen, Mathilde Blind, Charlotte and Emily Brontë, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Frances Hodgson Burnett, Lydia Maria Child, Dinah Mulock Craik, Rebecca Harding Davis, George Eliot, Fanny Fern, Margaret Fuller, Lady Georgiana Fullerton, Elizabeth Gaskell, Julia Ward Howe, Helen Hunt Jackson, Mathilde Ann Mackarness, Anne Manning, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Adelaide Anne Procter, Mary Robinson, George Sand, Catherine Maria Sedgwick, Harriet Prescott Spofford, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Mary Wollstonecraft.

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Introduction

To what extent does reading affect an individual's self-perception? How many of a woman's beliefs about femininity come from her intellectual *milieu*? Does the writing of a woman have a special validity in a woman reader's eyes? My dissertation attempts to answer these questions in a limited way, limited because I am answering them in reference to only one woman, Emily Dickinson. I am exploring Emily Dickinson's reading of other women writers and the effects that reading had on her poetry and herself, an idea first suggested to me by William H. Shurr. I derived a list of Dickinson's reading material from many sources. The most important were Millicent Todd Bingham's *Emily Dickinson's Home*; Jack L. Capps' *Emily Dickinson's Reading 1836-1886*; *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, edited by Thomas H. Johnson; Jay Leyda's *The Years and Hours of Emily Dickinson*; and Richard B. Sewall's *The Life of Emily Dickinson*.

The list of women writers Dickinson read shows that she had a definite interest in women's literature. She herself owned or referred to at least seventy-five specimens of women's writing, and she surely read many more, most of which belonged to friends or relatives or appeared in newspapers and magazines. (For a complete list of the works on which this study is based, please see Appendix.) I read virtually all of the works on Dickinson's reading list, re-read Dickinson's poems and letters, and looked for correlations between Dickinson's reading and writing.

No modern study can completely evaluate the effects of Dickinson's reading. As a nineteenth-century intelligent, shy, emotional woman poet, Emily Dickinson read slightly differently from those others who did (or do) not share all of those characteristics. After all, a woman reads differently from a man, a nineteenth-century person differently from a twentieth-century person. Even so, this study attempts to identify similarities of values, themes, and images between Dickinson and women writers she read.

In recent years, a new interest has emerged in popular nineteenth-century women writers such as Fanny Fern, Catherine Maria Sedgwick, and Dinah Mulock Craik, all of whom Emily Dickinson read, and none of whom has ever been linked with Dickinson before. But, the following study is important not only because it breaks new ground in Dickinson criticism. It is also important because the poet herself had a profound interest in women writers.

Dickinson read an unusual number of books by and about women. Feminist critic Ellen Moers notes Dickinson's interest in literary women:

[Dickinson's] passion for women's literature stands out oddly against the background of the rest of her reading, which was surprisingly skimpy, especially for someone from her sort of prosperous New England family, and for a writer with her sort of long, leisurely life. . . . Instead she read and reread every Anglo-American woman writer of her time: . . . Who but Emily Dickinson cared so much for rating women poets? or cared to read anything by Helen Hunt Jackson other than *Ramona*? or cared for George Eliot's poetry? or took care to call her Mrs. Lewes? (60-61)

While Dickinson did passionately read Shakespeare, Emerson, and Dickens, she showed comparatively little interest in other male writers. Dickinson seemed more interested in reading a variety of women's texts: biographies, poetry, and virtually every variety of the novel known to nineteenth-century readers--sentimental, gothic, realistic, religious, juvenile, exposé, and historical. The one quality these texts have in common is that they are by women or about women.

Previous Studies of Dickinson's Reading

I am hardly the first critic to address Dickinson's reading. Many studies have focused on or touched on this subject, especially early critiques. The purpose of most of the early explorations of Dickinson's reading seems to have been to justify Dickinson's inclusion in the canon. Critics did this by linking her to other canonical authors, finding a branch for her on the family tree of English and American literature.

The earliest and most important of these studies is Jack L. Capps' *Emily Dickinson's Reading 1836-1886*. (Harvard, 1966). Capps discusses Dickinson's reading of the Bible, of British and American literature, and of newspapers and magazines. He also includes an annotated bibliography of the poet's reading as well as a list of her textbooks. Capps' study is a useful beginning for anyone studying Dickinson's reading, but the study is limited because Capps lists only books Dickinson is known to have read. He does not speculate on whether she read books owned by other members of her family, although many references in her letters are to borrowed books. Capps also misses many trends and even some facts. He does not acknowledge that Dickinson extensively read popular literature. He lumps this reading into other categories, and he does not report some of her reading in this field. For example, Capps does not acknowledge that she was familiar with *Fern Leaves from Fanny's Portfolio*, although the evidence that she knew it is irrefutable.

Most other early studies that discuss Dickinson's reading also do so in an attempt to justify her inclusion in the canon; therefore, few critics go beyond Dickinson's reading of major names in literature. Richard Sewall's *The Life of Emily Dickinson* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1974) is, like Capps' study, a valuable source of information. Discussions of Dickinson's reading occur throughout the two volumes and Sewall includes one chapter on "Books and Reading." However, Sewall attempts to position Dickinson in a masculine literary tradition. Despite the number of women writers Dickinson read, in the only chapter devoted to reading, all of Sewall's major examples are male writers.

Many articles and books compare Emily Dickinson's writing with that of canonical authors or suggest that they influenced her. Comparisons abound between Emily Dickinson and the Bible, Barrett Browning, the Brontës, George Eliot, Emerson, Hawthorne, Poe, Shakespeare, Edward Taylor, Thoreau, and the first and second generations of English Romantic poets. A few articles discuss Dickinson and Robert Browning, Donne, Jonathan Edwards, Holmes, Marvell, Milton, Peter Parley, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Francis Quarles, Christina Rossetti, Harriet Prescott

Spofford, Stowe, Swift, and Isaac Watts. Most of these articles and books concern major literary figures. Of those that do discuss minor figures, many more of the minor figures are male than female. While this disparity reflects the composition of the canon, it does not reflect Dickinson's reading.

Of the studies that discuss Dickinson in terms of other canonical writers, the most balanced account is Karl Keller's *The Only Kangaroo Among the Beauty: Emily Dickinson and America* (Johns Hopkins, 1979). It is one of the first studies to attempt to take account of Dickinson's actual literary ancestry. Along with traditionally proposed literary ancestors, Keller also discusses Anne Bradstreet, Edward Taylor, Jonathan Edwards, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and the American bluestockings.

John Evangelist Walsh's *The Hidden Life of Emily Dickinson* (Simon and Schuster, 1971) is unusual because the helpful information it uncovers is clouded by its disturbing assumptions. Walsh finds sources for Dickinson poems in *Aurora Leigh*, *Jane Eyre*, and Lydia Maria Child's *Letters from New York*. However, Walsh believes that these borrowings were plagiarism, Dickinson's dirty secret. Many critics, especially feminist critics, rightly object to this interpretation on the grounds that all writers borrow. We ask, why doesn't Walsh make the same accusations against Shakespeare and T. S. Eliot?

Since the advent of the woman's movement, many studies have considered Dickinson's gender and/or compared her with women writers. Those studies are helpful, but, again, they focus on big names in scholarship, staying as close to the canon as possible. For example, Elizabeth Phillips's *Emily Dickinson: Personae and Performance* (Pennsylvania State, 1988) states that Dickinson's reading (of George Eliot, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and Charlotte Brontë among others) provided her with raw material from which she wrote poetry. While Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (Yale, 1984), for example, differs from Phillips' study in its assumptions, it still focuses on the same women writers. Most feminist studies of Emily Dickinson do the same.

The problem with these studies is not lack of insight or poorly considered arguments; it is that in their own way, they stick as close to the canon as did Capps. Certainly, Emily Dickinson read many canonical authors, but as my list shows she also read a wide variety of popular literature: sensational, domestic, and political works. One of the first studies to explore this important influence is Barton Levi St. Armand's *Emily Dickinson and Her Culture: The Soul's Society* (Cambridge, 1984). St. Armand examines her poetry within the contexts of folk, popular, and elite cultures and compares her with writers such as Lydia Sigourney, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, T. W. Higginson, and John Ruskin.

Recent discussions that consider both the importance of gender and popular literature are David S. Reynolds' *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* (Knopf, 1988) and Joanne Dobson's *Emily Dickinson and the Strategies of Reticence* (Indiana, 1989). Reynolds believes that the climate of popular and sensational women's literature influenced Dickinson. Dobson's study compares Dickinson and her writing to popular nineteenth-century women writers and their writing. As opposed to this study, *Emily Dickinson and the Strategies of Reticence* does not discuss the women writers Dickinson read, but contemporary writers she was probably aware of.

Organization

My first chapter deals with the circumstances and goals of Emily Dickinson's reading, generally. By reading, particularly women's texts, she became a member of a community of readers and of writers. Through reading, she formed important contacts with the outside world, while carefully controlling the degree of intimacy she chose to allow the world.

In the second chapter, I discuss Dickinson's reading of accounts of women artists' lives in fiction and biography. Through this reading she informed herself about the choices that were available to her, and she compared her own life experience with that of other women.

All of the women's literature Dickinson read concerns itself with the roles of nineteenth-century women. All of these women authors believe that women are important and capable of positively molding society. They differ in their beliefs about how women should live their lives, whether they should submit to authority, dominate their personal relationships, or strive for equality with men.

Chapter three evaluates the effects of reading domestic literature, especially the domestic novels. These works call for women to submit to male authority while they also attempt to convert the masculine world into a more humane, more feminine world.

The fourth chapter concerns Dickinson's reading of women writers she called "queens," those who dominated their own circles. This group of women writers was strongly influenced by George Sand, whom Dickinson also read.

The final chapter discusses Dickinson's reading of women who advocated political and social equality for women. These authors often embedded their desire for women's freedom in the stories of other oppressed groups, such as blacks, Indians, and the working poor.

I am indebted to the members of my committee: William H. Shurr, Mary Papke, George Hutchinson, and Karen Levy. They have encouraged and counseled me, believed in me. They have recommended that I read books and articles, which they have often lent me. Each of them thinks clearly and is well-read, so I have received much good advice. I am indebted to them for more than good advice, however. They have given me role models of men and women who are both good scholars and good teachers. I hope I am and will be as responsible and responsive to my students as they have been to me.

Chapter 1

Reading and "Enchantment"

Reading is a dangerous business, at least it was for Emily Dickinson. She did not seem to recognize the danger herself; all she knew was that she enjoyed it, loved it, could not live without it. This chapter explores the components of Dickinson's reading world: the community of readers she was part of, her reading list, and the community of writers she joined as she responded to reading. In reading women's texts, Dickinson entered a risky and exciting inner world.

Emily Dickinson's enjoyment of reading is best illustrated by the agony she felt when, in 1864, a doctor forced her to take a lengthy break from reading. In the early 1860's, she had developed an eye condition, and in April 1864 she went to Boston for treatment of her eyes. (John Cody, in *After Great Pain: The Inner Life of Emily Dickinson* argues that Dickinson's "eye condition" was a deliberate misnomer for a nervous breakdown and that the doctor removed all stimuli to quieten her nerves, as did the doctor in Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper.") Years after the treatment, she described the worst part of it and the joy of her recovery to her friend and distant cousin, Joseph Lyman:

Some years ago I had a woe, the only one that ever made me tremble. It was a shutting out of all the dearest ones of time, the strongest friends of the soul--books[.] The medical man said avaunt ye tormentors [Dickinson originally wrote books, then marked it out.], he also said 'down, thoughts, & plunge into her soul.' He might as well have said, 'Eyes be blind', 'heart be still'. So I had *eight months of Siberia*. . . . Going home I flew to the shelves and devoured the luscious passages. I thought I should tear the leaves out as I turned them. (Sewall. Lyman. 76)

The few letters the doctor allowed Emily Dickinson to write during her "eight months of Siberia" reveal sadness, homesickness, and loneliness, yet in this account of her homecoming, she implies that she profoundly missed her books.

In other letters, Dickinson enlarges upon her months without books. She told her literary perceptor, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, about how she consoled herself when she was not

allowed to read: "When I lost the use of my Eyes it was a comfort to think there were so few real books that I could easily find some one to read me all of them" (#342a. 2: 474).^{*} The anguish she felt at her own loss of vision also amplifies the intensity of a seemingly polite sentiment in an 1883 letter to her friend, Mrs. J. G. Holland. Dickinson writes to Mrs. Holland: "I wish the dear Eyes would so far relent as to let you read 'Emily Brontë' [by A. Mary F. Robinson]--more electric far than anything since 'Jane Eyre.'" (#822. 3: 775).

Six of Dickinson's poems echo this sentiment in that they focus on the experience or the pleasure of reading.^{2**} Many more relate to reading specific books or authors. These poems about books, which I will call *book-poems*, demonstrate an important reason Dickinson read--to foster the growth of her inner world. Communication with a writer through a written text also allowed her to control the extent of her interaction with the exciting issues of the outside world. And, reading allowed her to retreat from the dangerous and unimaginative world outside the successively more intimate spheres of her home, her room, and her mind.

"I think I was enchanted"

A hint of the danger Emily Dickinson was negotiating as she read appears in one of the book-poems, "I think I was enchanted" (#593). Of all of the book-poems, this one best describes how susceptible Dickinson was to emotional reading experiences and their effects. The poem describes Dickinson's first reading of the poetry of one of her favorites--Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Before reading Barrett Browning, Dickinson's speaker was only "a sombre girl," but

^{*}Unless otherwise indicated, all references to Emily Dickinson's letters are from *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*. Ed. Thomas H. Johnson. Parenthetical references include the letter number (#) assigned by Johnson, followed by the volume number, and the page number.

^{**} They are: "A precious--mouldering pleasure--'tis"" #371; "I think I was enchanted" #593; "Unto my Books--so good to turn--" #604; "There is no Frigate like a Book" #1263; "One thing of it we borrow" #1464; and "He ate and drank the precious Words--" #1587.

this reading helped her grow up by leading her to an understanding she calls "Conversion of the Mind" (22. 2: 454),* a kind of madness. Throughout this poem, the speaker describes herself as mad: the phrases *Lunacy of Light* and *Divine Insanity* (7, 25. 2: 454-5) leap out of the poem, and echo #435:

Much Madness is Divinest Sense
 To a discerning Eye--
 Much Sense--the starkest Madness--
 'Tis the Majority
 In this, as All, prevail--
 Assent--and you are sane--
 Demur--you're straightway dangerous--
 And handled with a Chain-- (#435. 1: 337)

Unlike many people who fear society's negative labels--"Eccentric," "Odd," "Crazy,"--in "Much Madness" and in "I think I was enchanted," Dickinson's personae exult in divine insanity.

As Dickinson equates madness and holiness, she makes imaginative connections with many other women writers. For example, John Evangelist Walsh believes that "Much Madness" was influenced by Lydia Maria Child's *Letters from New York* (118). Another parallel occurs in a novel owned by Emily Dickinson's father, a novel she almost certainly read--Catharine Maria Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie*--which presents this belief and attributes it to the Indians, who believe that a mad Indian chief's vacant mind is filled by a divine spirit. In "I think I was enchanted," Dickinson, ever desiring to be a visionary, filled with hunger for divinity, expresses the belief that for herself, for a poet,

The Danger [is] to be Sane
 Should I again experience--
 'Tis Antidote to turn--

To Tomes of solid Witchcraft-- (25-9. 2: 454-5)

She overtly connects madness with Barrett Browning's poetry.

*All quotations from Dickinson's poetry are from *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*. Edited by Thomas H. Johnson. 3 vols. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1955. The parenthetical citations may include line numbers, then poem numbers (#) assigned by Johnson, then the volume number and page number.

Dickinson's use of the words *enchanted*, *Divine insanity*, *Magic*, and *witchcraft* further describes the effect of reading poetry. These words, particularly *witchcraft*, often refer to nature and acts of creation in Dickinson's poetry, linking her reading and writing experiences: as she read women writers, she gained power and creative energy. She learned to see the world in new ways. In the middle of "I think I was Enchanted," Dickinson says that after her reading, nature itself became more beautiful, more august, more joyous. Barrett Browning's inspiration turned Dickinson's darkest night into brightest day.

Dickinson was one of many women strongly affected by other women's writing. In a November 1861 review of George Sand's *Histoire de ma Vie*, Julia Ward Howe remembers how she felt as a girl reading George Sand. Dickinson's "I think I was enchanted" (written about 1862) was probably influenced by the following paragraph from Howe's review. Dickinson's poem reflects Howe's sentiments and language: Howe even uses the word *enchantment*:

Was she not to all of us, in our early years, a name of doubt, dread, and enchantment? Did not all of us feel, in our young admiration for her, something of the world's great struggle between conservative discipline and revolutionary inspiration? . . . we read her at stolen hours, with wanting and still entreated light; and as we read, in a dreary wintry room, with the flickering candle warning us of late hours and confiding expectations, the atmosphere grew warm and glorious about us,--a true human company, a living sympathy crept near us,--the very world seemed not the same world as before. She had given us a real gift; no criticism could take it away. (514)

Howe not only records the feeling of enchantment; she also recalls the same transformation of soul that Dickinson describes. Interestingly, the time of the reading is also the same--at night.

Like other book-poems, "I think I was enchanted" takes place at night, which suggests that this was the time of Dickinson's own reading (as it was her regular time for writing.) Dickinson says that reading Barrett Browning's poetry made "the Dark--[feel] beautiful" (4). Another book-poem, "Unto my Books--so good to turn--" (#604), furnishes more details about the conditions of her reading. As the speaker reads at night inside her room, she knows that

It may be Wilderness--without--
Far feet of failing Men--

But Holiday--excludes the night--
And it is Bells--within-- (9-12. 2: 463)

The speaker also states that she anticipates reading all day long as she fulfills her mundane responsibilities.

For the characters in the book-poems, daytime is full of uninteresting duties, inevitable death, and inhibiting poverty. Dickinson's personae, probably like Dickinson herself and many other readers, read to escape from these "tired Days" (#604. 2. 2: 463). For example, the reader in "He ate and drank the precious Words" (#1587) "danced along the dingy Days" because of the pleasure he took in reading, which made "His Spirit [grow] robust" (5, 2. 3: 1094). The importance of reading for escapism is also evident in this poem: Dickinson exclaims at the end, "What Liberty/ A loosened spirit brings" (7-8). Similarly, in "I think I was enchanted," Dickinson says that because of her reading, "The Homeliest [day was]--adorned/ As if unto a Jubilee" (18-9).

"No Poet's Kinsman"

Emily Dickinson's poetry also reflects the high esteem she felt for the writer's calling: she wrote several poems extolling the virtues and power of both poetry and poets. Oddly enough, Dickinson does not usually write of herself as a poet but as a reader of poetry; the poets are "they," not "we." For instance, in another poem about Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Dickinson's speaker hyperbolically calls herself "No Poet's Kinsman" (16. #312. 1: 234). Similarly, in "I would not paint--a picture--" (#505), Dickinson's speaker says that she prefers the pleasures of observing art to creating it: "I'd rather be the One/ It's bright impossibility/ To dwell--delicious--on" (2-4. 2: 387).

These lines, written about 1862, resemble a paragraph Mary Robinson wrote nearly twenty years later on the power of Emily Brontë's "torturing apprehension of a happiness never quite grasped, always just beyond the verge of realization. . . . which alone connects this world with the

land of dreams" (4). The similarity in sentiment between Emily Dickinson's verse and these lines is the first indication of the admiration that Emily Dickinson and Mary Robinson would share for Emily Brontë, the artist and the woman.

Dickinson admired writers who could look beyond the everyday, whether into the dream world of Emily Brontë or into the realistic world of George Eliot. In "This was a Poet" (#448), Dickinson says that the remarkable gift of a poet

Distills amazing sense
From ordinary Meanings--
And Attar so immense

From the familiar species
That perished by the Door--
We wonder it was not Ourselves
Arrested it--before-- (2-8. 1: 346)

This capacity to see new and extraordinary properties in ordinary things and events is a common definition of genius.

The importance Dickinson attached to the poet's transcendent sense clarifies Emily Dickinson's best-known poem about poets, "I reckon--when I count at all--" (#569), in which she says that poets are the whole world:

I reckon--when I count at all--
First--Poets--Then the Sun--
Then Summer--Then the Heaven of God--
And then--the List is done--

But, looking back--the First so seems
To Comprehend the Whole--
The Others look a needless Show
So I write--Poets--All-- (1-8. 2: 434)

Dickinson believes that the imagination's vision of the world is larger and more important than the actual world. These ideas are echoed in "The Brain--is Wider than the Sky--" (#632), in which she celebrates an imagination which can conceive the inconceivable, even God. She read to partake of the poet's imaginative power, which is why she says in a letter to F. B. Sanborn, the editor of the local paper, that she is "glad there are Books. They are better than Heaven for that is unavoidable while one may miss these" (#402. 2: 516).

Dickinson's celebration of the infinite capacity of the literary imagination also resembles what she said of George Eliot's novels: "The mysteries of human nature surpass the 'mysteries of redemption,' for the infinite we only suppose, while we see the finite" (L. #389. 2: 506). For Dickinson, poetry, even if found in George Eliot's prose, was a glimpse into the strange and mystic world of immortality.

Communities of Readers

Dickinson's book-poems and poems on poetry reveal important information about her pleasure in reading and her reading habits. In these poems, a woman reads alone in her room at the end of the day and finds imaginary companions in her books and their authors. Karl Keller, in *The Only Kangaroo among the Beauty*, says that Dickinson was "Sometimes lonely, perhaps, but not always so very much alone, except in the quite opposite sense of being alone with" (6), alone with the minds of writers, that is. In *Literary Women*, another critic, Ellen Moers, suggests that this sense of friendship Dickinson shared with other writers was part of being a *woman* writer:

The personal give-and-take of the literary life was closed to them [nineteenth-century women writers]. Without it, they studied with a special closeness the works written by their own sex, and developed a sense of easy, almost rude familiarity with the women who wrote them. . . . Emily Dickinson's literary solitude was breached by the incorporeal presence of women writers she knew exclusively but intimately from reading their works and everything she could find about their lives. (43)

The only problem with this reasoning surfaces when the critic succumbs to the temptation of assuming that reading provided Dickinson with virtually her only human contact--an easy notion to fall victim to because Dickinson's seclusion is mythic. While Dickinson did feel closeness to writers and characters, she also felt intimacy with other readers; Dickinson's reading took place in an intimate community of readers, the core of which was her extended family. Jay Leyda, in *The Years and Hours of Emily Dickinson*, painstakingly annotates the

activities of Dickinson's close friends and family throughout her life. He finds that one of her circle's constant pleasures was books.

For the Dickinsons, reading was a public as well as a private activity. While Emily Dickinson read alone, she also participated in family gatherings wherein members read aloud. (There are enough allusions to reading aloud to know that this took place, but there is no way of knowing how frequently.) For this family, reading was in many ways a shared pleasure. They gave each other books for Christmas and on other occasions, as well as recommended books, shared books, and occasionally even dissuaded each other from particular books. This practice began long before Dickinson was born. Her father's letters to his wife-to-be often accompanied books he thought she would find interesting. They attest to his interest in reading, an interest he apparently failed to foster in his wife but which he shared with his children.

The first community in which Dickinson read, then, was her immediate family; later, that community would expand as friends and relatives entered the family circle. Letters written during and around the year she was enrolled in Mount Holyoke Female Seminary, when she was seventeen, illustrate this point. The letters that survive from that period are to Dickinson's girlfriend Abiah Root and to her own brother, Austin. Dickinson and Abiah usually discussed what they were studying in school rather than their reading, though the letters do contain many allusions, most of which are Biblical. Before Dickinson went to Mount Holyoke, she, Abiah, and three other close girlfriends constituted a reading club, a formal community of readers. One of the club members, Emily Fowler Ford, is quoted by Richard Sewall in *The Life of Emily Dickinson*: "Mrs Ford speaks of . . . a Shakespeare Club--'a rare thing in those days'--and 'after we left school,' frequent meetings to discuss books" (370).

During the years Austin was at college, Dickinson often wrote him that their reading club was not the same without him. Dickinson's letters to Austin often contain literary discussions. For instance, in 1847, Dickinson tells him "You are reading Arabian Nights,

according to Viny's [their sister's] statement. I hope you have derived much benefit from their perusal & presume your powers of imagining will vastly increase thereby" (#19. 1: 57).

Later, friends Joseph Lyman and Ben Newton virtually became members of the Dickinson family: among the activities they shared with the family was reading. For instance, Joseph Lyman remembered that Dickinson "used to read German plays with me and sat close beside me so as to look out words from the same dictionary" (Sewall. *Lyman*. 58). Newton was a law student in Mr. Dickinson's office from 1847-49. He died in 1853, after having left Amherst. After Newton's death Dickinson explained the value of his friendship in a letter to his pastor. Among the qualities she names are that he "became to me a gentle, yet grave Preceptor, teaching me what to read, what authors to admire" (Sewall. *Life*. 2: 401).

When Austin became involved with Susan Gilbert, later his wife, Sue also became a member of the Dickinson's literary community. Few literary letters between the two Dickinson households (which were next door to one another) exist after Austin's and Sue's marriage, though discussions of books probably continued. Most of these literary discussions probably occurred in person. The memories of Austin's and Sue's daughter, Martha Dickinson Bianchi, corroborate this idea. She remembers "The poignancy of Aunt Emily's voice as she exclaimed, 'You have been with Maggie and Philip in the Red Deeps, Matty!' [which] made the one sentence an unforgettable appreciation of [George Eliot's] the 'Mill on the Floss'" (Leyda. 2: 414).

After the 1860's Dickinson's circle apparently extended, as evidenced by her frequent literary epistles to her cousins, Louise and Frances Norcross (Loo and Fanny); to Dr. and Mrs. J. G. Holland; and to Samuel Bowles. Dickinson's letters to these correspondents usually contain literary allusions, recommendations of the books she was reading, and discussions of her favorite authors. For example, in the spring of 1881, Dickinson writes Mrs. Holland, saying that

We are making a few simple repairs, what Dickens would call qualifications and aspects-- . . . I can always rely on your little Laugh, which is what the essayist calls 'the immortal Peewee.' Did you know that Father's 'Horace' had died--the

'Cap'n Cuttle' of Amherst? . . . Vinnie is eager to see the face of George Eliot which the doctor promised, and I wince in prospective, lest it be no more sweet. God chooses repellent settings, dont he, for his best Gems? (#692. 3: 692-693)

In addition to overt references to Dickens and Eliot, Thomas H. Johnson, the editor of Dickinson's letters, identifies "the immortal Peewee" as alluding to Thomas Wentworth Higginson's essay "The Life of Birds" and Cap'n Cuttle as a character in Dickens' *Dombey and Son*.

Such reliance on literature and literary allusions for self-expression is not, however, unusual. The Dickinson circle's sharing of books and literary allusions is probably common to many middle-class reading families. It is certainly like that of another literary nineteenth-century family described by Barbara Sicherman in "Sense and Sensibility: A Case Study of Women's Reading in Late-Victorian America." In this essay, Sicherman attempts to evaluate the "intense engagement with books" (202) of the Hamilton women of Fort Wayne, Indiana. The best known women of this family were Edith Hamilton, who wrote popular mythology, and Alice Hamilton, who was a medical doctor and the first woman professor at Harvard.

Sicherman lists several ways that the Hamilton women were engaged in reading, many of which also apply to Emily Dickinson's circle. First of all, books drew the Hamilton women together as a community. Through their common understanding of written texts, the women of the Hamilton family developed and used references to their reading as "a common language and a medium of intellectual and social exchange" (209). Their reading also "gave the Hamiltons a symbolic code and a shorthand for experience that continued throughout their lives. When cousins or sisters were geographically distant, a literary allusion captured experience in relatively few words" (209).

A similar web of allusions clearly tied together Dickinson's community. Members of her circle certainly knew many of the same books, and they often shared works of literature they enjoyed. For instance, in a note of November 1855, Dickinson requests that Dr. Holland "leave the 'maiden and married life of Mary Powell' (a biography of John Milton's first wife by Ann

Manning)" for her (#181. 2: 322). Dickinson materials also indicate that she and Sue shared copies of *The Atlantic Monthly*, Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, and George Eliot's *Adam Bede*, to name a few.

One of the best examples of the literary allusions Dickinson and her circle relied on occurs in an August 1876 letter, to the Norcross cousins. Dickinson tells them that "Vinnie has a new pussy the color of Branwell Brontë's hair" (#471 2: 559). Susan Dickinson had given Dickinson Elizabeth Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* in 1858, and this letter indicates that the Norcrosses knew it as well as Dickinson did.* Most of Dickinson's allusions in letters to the Norcrosses are to Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*, George Eliot's novels (especially *Middlemarch* and *The Mill on the Floss*), Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, and, to a lesser extent, Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*.

Dickinson's letters to the Norcrosses, Hollands, and Bowles reveal, then, a literary circle similar to that of the Hamiltons. Dickinson also wrote literary letters to Higginson and to her friend Helen Hunt Jackson. Sometimes called "Colorado Helen," Jackson was originally from Amherst and one of Dickinson's childhood friends. A popular writer concerned with the plight of the Indians, she wrote and published novels, verse, short stories, and children's books, some under the pseudonym "Saxe Holm." Dickinson, Higginson, and Jackson do not constitute the same kind of reading circle that Dickinson enjoyed with other friends. Although these letters do contain book discussions and recommendations, they are self-consciously literary in a way that Dickinson's other letters are not; they also exhibit less confidence about literary judgments. The difference is probably the result of the kinds of relationships Dickinson enjoyed with these correspondents. The bases of her relationships with Higginson and Jackson were their common interest in writing, and, thus, were unlike the friendships she enjoyed with the Norcrosses and the Hollands, which were based on similar values and shared life experiences.

**Emily Brontë* by A. Mary F. Robinson, which contains similar details, did not come out until 1883 and could not be the source of this information.

Dickinson's Reading

One real difference, however, between Dickinson's reading and that of the Hamiltons is the composition of their reading lists. Dickinson seems to have read few of the books Sicherman discusses. For instance, the Hamiltons avidly read Charlotte Yonge, whom Dickinson never mentions in extant letters. There is also no indication that Dickinson read Susannah Rowson's *Charlotte Temple*, Fanny Fern's *Ruth Hall*, or Maria Cummins' *The Lamplighter*, though all were bestsellers. (Conversely, no proof exists that Dickinson did not read these books.)

Indeed, because her correspondence is fragmentary (much was lost, and much was purposely destroyed after her death) and because she borrowed books, any list is tentative and incomplete. No one can even say for certain that Dickinson read all of the books she owned and all of those mentioned in her letters. For example, did Dickinson actually read Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*? She writes Austin on 2 April 1853 that "Father . . . gave me quite a trimming about 'Uncle Tom' and 'Charles Dickens' and these 'modern Literati'" (#113. 1: 237). This brief reference is the only one to this nineteenth-century giant; Dickinson does not actually say she read the novel, though it would be hard to imagine that she did not. Likewise, she almost certainly read the articles in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*^{*}, *Scribner's Monthly*, and *The Atlantic Monthly*. The only certain assumption is that Dickinson read the books she refers to and those she says she read.

There is no conclusive evidence that Dickinson initially made a conscious choice to read women's texts, but, nevertheless, she did read them throughout her life. She might have enjoyed the stories women writers wrote long before she realized that she was specializing in women writers, but Dickinson probably recognized her concentration on women by the summer of 1861, when Elizabeth Barrett Browning died. Dickinson's friends clearly knew of her interest in

^{*}*Harper's* was also a Hamilton favorite.

Barrett Browning, as is evidenced in her questioning of Higginson in 1862: "Have you the portrait of Mrs Browning? Persons sent me three--If you had none, will you have mine?" (#271. 2: 414).

Almost ten years later, Dickinson again writes Higginson about women's texts, a subject close to his heart:

Mrs Hunt's [Helen Hunt Jackson was also Higginson's friend and protégé] Poems are stronger than any written by Women since Mrs--Browning, with the exception of Mrs Lewes [George Eliot]--but truth like Ancestor's Brocades can stand alone--You speak of 'Men and Women.' That is a broad Book--'Bells and Pomegranates' I never saw but have Mrs. Browning's endorsement. While Shakespeare remains Literature is firm-- (#368. 2: 491)

Dickinson may not have initiated this discussion: after all, Higginson specialized in discovering women writers. The phrase, "You speak of," suggests the possibility that the whole paragraph, not just the reference to "Men and Women," is a reply to a question from Higginson. However, this letter does demonstrate that Dickinson put women's poetry in a discrete class and not necessarily a laudatory one.

Why, then, did Dickinson read so many women writers? Any number of possible reasons for her choice exists. Jane Donahue Eberwein suggests that Dickinson used characters in her reading to test reality (74), and this is a likely possibility. All novels give readers model selves, model plots, and model loves to try on in a world of privacy and impunity--in the imagination. Elvira, a woman reader Dickinson probably encountered in Catherine Maria Sedgwick's *A New England Tale*, habitually read for this reason: this character says "I always fancy, when I read a novel, that I am the heroine, and the hero is one of my favourites; and then I realize it all, and it appears so natural" (67).

Many critics assume that reading, especially reading novels, is more than just a romantic school-girl's imaginative experiment, that it is an experiment that changes the reader's perceptions of the world. Historian and critic Phyllis Rose says that in preparation for her study, entitled *Parallel Lives: Five Victorian Marriages*, she assumed

that certain imaginative patterns--call them mythologies or ideologies--determine the shape of a writer's life as well as his or her work. I therefore look for connections between the two . . . I looked for evidence that what people read helped form their views of their own experience. (6)

I share Rose's assumption about reading, but I also believe that reading can confirm a reader's view of his or her life experience. Many other readers would agree with Rose too, among them George Eliot, who said that the novels she read as a girl had negative effects on her: "I shall carry to my grave the mental diseases with which they have contaminated me" (Brownstein, xiv).

Just as Eliot bore reading scars, critic Vivian R. Pollak would say that Dickinson too bore reading scars for the rest of her life, but Pollak believes that those scars were the result of a woman writer reading about woman writers, not just of a woman reading women. She says that

the examples of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, and other exceptional women posed particular problems for Dickinson. On the one hand, she identified with them; on the other hand, she perceived herself as competing, perhaps ineffectually, against them. (245)

This study does not support that conclusion; the dangers of reading that Dickinson survived left scars, but they seem to be the scars of any reader, not the scars of a writer who believed herself to be unsuccessful. In fact, evidence supports the idea that Dickinson read women writers out of the desire to become a member of a female writing community.

Ellen Moers proposes that Dickinson read as a writer, but that specifically in *women's literature*, she found "a whole family of literary relationships . . . to exploit: patterns to be followed, deficiencies to be made up, abuses to correct, achievements in works by other women to surpass" (43). Even Sewall in *The Life of Emily Dickinson* says that the authors Dickinson read became her friends: "She chatted, or argued, or agreed with these friends, it seems, quite as she did with those of flesh and blood. Many of her poems appear to be her end of conversations struck up with what she found on printed pages" (2: 670).

These friends, writers with whom Dickinson held imaginative discourse, were another community in which Dickinson read and wrote. This ephemeral group was made up of women who admire strong, passionate, intelligent, and able women such as Madame de Staël, George

Sand, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and Harriet Martineau. The readers of nineteenth-century women's fiction believe in the strength and value of these notable women, and their reading of this fiction implies that they believe in their own strength as well.

Interestingly, the pattern in Dickinson's reading of women writers and generally in women's literature, is circular, forming a community both of reading and influence. For example, Emily Dickinson read Margaret Fuller's translation, *Correspondence of Fräulein Günderode and Bettina von Arnim*. In one of Fuller's works that there is no evidence that Dickinson read, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, Fuller names some women writers who influenced her, writers Dickinson also knew: Catharine Maria Sedgwick and Lydia Maria Child. Fuller also refers to Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, which Dickinson had at least read of in *The Atlantic Monthly*. Despite charges that Dickinson was ahistorical and a recluse separated from society's influences, she was clearly a part of the community of nineteenth-century women writers. She made herself a member of that writers' circle by reading their work and by responding to it in her own writing.

Effects of Reading Women

The effects of reading women's literature are visible in Emily Dickinson's own writing.* Even so, in most of Dickinson's reading of women writers, women's issues are, not surprisingly, a central concern. Despite the differences women writers feel about women's roles, they almost always express the belief that women should be doing something important. For example, most authors advocate "lady-like" behavior, but each woman is unequivocally opposed to "ladies."

*I purposely use the term "woman's literature" instead of "feminist literature," which implies a social and political agenda Dickinson and her nineteenth-century woman writers did not necessarily share.

In most of the novels Dickinson read, the heroine meets women who have superficial marriages and who live lives of meaningless luxury. They have accepted society's dictum that they be pleasing and have developed no depth of character. They are often a threat to the heroine's relationship with her own lover. One of Dickinson's poems aptly echoes this distaste for ladies, #401:

What Soft--Cherubic Creatures--
 These Gentlewomen are--
 One would as soon assault a Plush--
 Or violate a Star--

Such Dimity Convictions--
 A Horror so refined
 Of freckled Human Nature--
 Of Deity--ashamed--

It's such a common--Glory--
 A Fisherman's--Degree--
 Redemption--Brittle Lady--
 Be so--ashamed of Thee-- (1: 314)

Dickinson presents the same kind of woman she read about in the novels, a shallow woman who is ashamed of the physical and spiritual nature she shares with other human beings. Because of her snobbishness, this type of woman is unwilling to develop her religious or her human nature.

This scenario constitutes a relatively harmless, if judgmental lesson for Dickinson to have learned about womanhood. One might assume that reading female writers would be harmless to a woman's self-perception compared to reading male writers. I do not attempt to compare relative dangers, but this study does suggest that for Emily Dickinson, reading other women writers was dangerous, as well as beneficial and joyous. She passionately enjoyed exciting reading experiences, and she often gave little thought to the consequences of her reading. If she enjoyed a novel or a story or a poem, she gave her heart and mind to the writer she was reading without reservation, without weighing the premises of arguments and considering the belief structures that the writers were proposing.

Women writers won her confidence by describing the feelings she experienced when confronted with a patriarchal society that always pushed her concerns and needs to the

background. Most of the women's writing Dickinson read includes a heroine who initially (at least) expresses feelings of sexuality, rebellion, and anger. Many of these texts then abandon their heroines' valid feelings to make a didactic point, often to teach women submissive values that may inhibit their ability to succeed and fulfill themselves. An unwary reader may end up accepting ideas and beliefs within the narratives, not even recognizing that she has learned anything about herself or the world. Dickinson was not always that unwary, and this study suggests that her reading was both beneficial and detrimental to her view of herself as a woman.

Sometimes, Emily Dickinson read specifically to learn lessons. Perhaps the genre Emily Dickinson mainly looked to for truth about women's lives was biography. As she read accounts of women artists' lives, she searched for information about how to manage the conflict between her woman's life and her writer's life.

Chapter 2

Women Artists' Lives in Fiction and Biography

One of the most ironic imaginary pictures of Emily Dickinson shows this greatest unrecognized genius of her age reading these words in the July 1870 issue of *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*:

It is probable that she never was in company with any person whose talents . . . equaled her own; so that her powers never could have been sharpened by collision with superior intellects, nor her imagination aided by their casual suggestions. . . . It would scarcely be possible to mention any other author of note, whose personal obscurity was so complete. (225)

This description could be of Dickinson herself, but it actually relates the obscurity of Jane Austen. It comes from the introduction to a biographical essay on that English novelist, which Dickinson probably read. Perhaps Dickinson or a member of her circle noted the relevance of these words to Dickinson. Her friend Samuel Bowles, had he not misunderstood her so completely, would have been the ideal person to point out the similarity. He knew Austen's novels well, occasionally mentioning them in his "Books, Authors and Art" column in the *Springfield Republican*. Bowles might even have encouraged Dickinson to read this essay or Austen's novels.

This chapter focuses on works like "Jane Austen," accounts of women artists' lives--in magazines and in books--within both fictional and biographical narratives. Women read accounts of other women's lives to find role models and to compare experience; however, because of nineteenth-century constraints on woman's biography, Emily Dickinson found few realistic narratives of women artists' lives. The principal problems with these biographies are that women's lives were usually uneventful and that biographers were usually unwilling to reveal most interior events, especially defiance. I will use the examples of Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* and two biographies of George Eliot to illustrate these points. Dickinson responded most strongly to Mary Robinson's *Emily Brontë*, a uniquely affirmative picture of a defiant woman. Finally, this

chapter will address the fiction in which women writers depict women artists: Craik's *Olive*, Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*, Eliot's *Armgarth*, and Spofford's "Circumstance." Because of the lack of interiority in women's biographies, this fiction is often a more reliable expression of women's interior lives than are the biographies.

Dickinson's reading of Biography

As Dickinson read biographies of writers, she may have been looking for a way to handle her own conflicts. All of the narratives she read about women writers attempt to reconcile the demands of nineteenth-century femininity with the egoism of the artistic life. But, the only biography that Emily Dickinson read early enough in her life to influence her is Gaskell's of Charlotte Brontë. It was one of the few biographies Dickinson chose to read. She generally read biographies neither intentionally nor systematically. Like the *Harper's* essay on Jane Austen, most of the biographies Emily Dickinson read fell accidentally into her hands. Examples of such biographies she did not seek out are *The Atlantic Monthly's* "Mary Wollstonecraft" and "George Sand," Washington Irving's *Life of Columbus*, Mary Wilson Gordon's *Christopher North: Memoir of John Wilson*, and Jane Porter's *Thaddeus of Warsaw*.*

However, Dickinson eagerly pursued some other biographies: for example, in the 1880's she zealously wrote to publisher Thomas Niles requesting information on George Eliot biographies. Dickinson had, like many readers, a particular interest in the biographies of her favorite authors; and she read a handful of them: Elizabeth Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1858), Mathilde Blind's *Life of George Eliot* (1883), A. Mary F. Robinson's *Emily Brontë* (1883),

*"Mary Wollstonecraft" appeared in December 1880, "George Sand" in November 1861. *Thaddeus of Warsaw* is a historical novel, in the style of Sir Walter Scott, about the life of a Polish revolutionary general; the inscription reads "E[dward]. Dickinson, 1827" and in pencil added "& Miss E. Dickinson." *Christopher North* is a rather dull, two-volume biography of John Wilson, the biographer's father and the *Blackwoods* editor. Dickinson's only reference to it refers to Wilson's friendship with Thomas DeQuincy.

John Walter Cross' *Life of George Eliot* (1885), and Oliver Wendell Holmes' *Life of Emerson* (1885).^{*} Because Emily Dickinson was herself a writer, she, not surprisingly, probably had a particular interest in reading about other writers.

She also tremendously admired the work of these writers and probably wondered from where the magic, the passion, and the power in their work had come. Perhaps she read Gaskell's biography of Charlotte Brontë in 1858 to find the source of the magic and passion of the Brontë novels, and when she read literary biographies in the 1880's, she wanted to compare experiences. For reasons that will become apparent, Dickinson's reading of the Gaskell biography must have been unsatisfactory, while her reading of the later biographies was more satisfying.

The degree to which the biographies Dickinson read individually interested and affected her may be gauged by references in the letters and poetry. For example, despite her interest in Emerson, an 1885 letter to her Norcross cousins shows that her response to his biography was low-key compared to her interest in other books, among them, Eliot's biography:

Loo asked "what books" we were wooing now--watching like a vulture for Walter Cross's life of his wife [Marian Evans, better known as George Eliot]. A friend sent me *Called Back*. It is a haunting story, as loved Mr. Bowles used to say, "greatly impressive to me." . . . Holmes's *Life of Emerson* is sweetly commended, but you, I know, have tasted that. (#962. 3: 856)

Dickinson enjoyed the Emerson biography enough to recommend it but not enough to exult over it as she did over Robinson's *Emily Brontë*, which she said was "more electric far than anything since 'Jane Eyre'" (L. #822. 3: 775). Dickinson's only poems directly related to the biographies she read of literary people focus on the women writers; none is about a literary man. "All overgrown by cunning moss" (#148) is about Charlotte Brontë, and "Her Losses make our Gains ashamed" (#1562) and "Pass to thy Rendezvous of Light" (#1564) are about George Eliot.

^{*}Gaskell's biography was republished many times in the nineteenth century and is still in print. J. W. Cross was Marian Evans' (George Eliot's) husband. Jack Capps in *Emily Dickinson's Reading 1836-1886*, suggests that Dickinson also read Cross' *Life of Mrs. Cross*; however, the evidence does not support Capps' contention. Capps cites Dickinson's offer to send "Life of Mrs. Cross" to Higginson, but the volume she actually inscribed to him is *The Life of George Eliot*. Blind's and Robinson's biographies are from the Roberts Brothers' Famous Women Series.

In her reading of literary biographies, Emily Dickinson continued to show more interest in female than in male writers. If she read about the lives of women writers for the same reasons that modern women read lives of other women, it was perhaps to find a role model. Carolyn G. Heilbrun suggests in *Writing a Woman's Life* that women cannot find models in the lives of men: "Women must turn to one another for stories; they must share the stories of their lives and their hopes and their unacceptable fantasies" (44).

A probable example of a nineteenth-century woman writer finding a role model occurs in the friendship between Elizabeth Gaskell and Charlotte Brontë. Many accounts suggest that Gaskell both wanted to mother Brontë and to be guided by her. At the time of their first meeting, Brontë was already a famous published author with a great deal of experience in dealing with publishers, and Gaskell was a novice. Gaskell deeply believed in the patriarchal society she was part of and had many doubts about the role of a woman writer. Critic Barbara Weiss suggests that Gaskell's intimate acquaintance with Brontë provided a positive role model:

[H]er admiration for Charlotte Brontë may have inspired her with greater self-assurance about the role of the woman writer, or that the very act of writing the biography (the story of a woman who outwardly had no story) may finally have laid to rest her doubts about the validity of women creating stories out of the reality of feminine lives. (285)

Lives without Stories

Nineteenth-century biographies of women are the stories of those who outwardly have no stories. Dickinson, who was described in the 1870 census as "W[ithou]t occupation" and on her death certificate as "Occupation: At Home" (Leyda. 2: 149 and 2: 474), also lived a life which outwardly had no story. In a nineteenth-century woman's life there were few exterior events for a biographer to chronicle. An endless round of cooking, doing laundry, and cleaning house sounds trivial when compared with the male world of fighting wars, negotiating treaties, and winning elections. The events of women's lives did not make for exciting biography, but these were the

circumstances of most nineteenth-century women's lives. There are often few exterior events to narrate.

The nine-page biographical essay on Jane Austen can serve as the most extreme example of the problems with nineteenth-century women's biographies--both exterior and interior problems. The exterior problems are most obvious. The author of this essay relates almost no events in Jane Austen's life, because, as Ellen Moers states in *Literary Women*, "with Jane Austen we know quite enough about her life to satisfy our curiosity about her non-literary, non-domestic activities with a single word: none" (215). Probably because Austen's life, like that of Dickinson and those of many other women, was composed of few exterior events and only uncertain interior events, the author of the *Harper's* essay takes the easiest approach and concentrates on the scenery of the countryside and a historic depiction of "[t]he style of living in England when Jane Austen was a child" (229).

Most of the other biographies Emily Dickinson read were not as unrevealing as this essay on Jane Austen, probably because the subjects of the other biographies were less retiring than Austen, but even Gaskell apologizes for the few letters that Charlotte Brontë wrote when she was a girl: "There were no events to chronicle in the Haworth letters. Quiet days, occupied in teaching, and feminine occupations in the house, did not present much to write about" (Ch. 7. 89). Many nineteenth-century women, including Emily Dickinson, led lives that were not considered autonomous lives: like Willy Loman, they were not thought to be heroic and interesting enough to be fit subjects for literature: their problems were too small, and the lives of others did not rest in their hands. However, compared to Jane Austen's biographer, biographers of the Brontës and George Eliot did find exterior events to discuss: travels in Europe, famous literary acquaintances, and interaction with history.

Despite Gaskell's description of the dull life at Haworth and her suppression of distasteful details, her biography does contain some good information. It discusses Brontë's schooling, unusual family circumstances, and work, minutiae in which Dickinson was evidently quite

interested. For instance, in Chapter Seven, Gaskell describes the visit of one of Charlotte Brontë's friends:

The first impression made on the visitor by the sisters of her school-friend was, that Emily was a tall, long-armed girl, more fully grown than her elder sister; extremely reserved in manner. . . . Branwell [the only brother] was rather a handsome boy, with "tawny" hair, to use Miss Brontë's phrase for a more obnoxious colour. (91)

Dickinson recalls much of the information, when she writes of the height of "gigantic Emily Brontë" (L. #742. 3: 721) and when she writes a letter to her Norcross cousins comparing the color of Vinnie's new cat to "the color of Branwell Brontë's hair" (L. #471 2: 559).

Lack of Interiority

When Emily Dickinson first began to read Gaskell's biography of Charlotte Brontë, she probably wondered at the huge gaps between Brontë's passionate fiction and her apparently smooth, domestic life. Many of the issues of Charlotte Brontë's life that would have interested Emily Dickinson were suppressed from Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*. According to one of Gaskell's biographers, Winifred Gérin,* even Brontë's

passionate temperament . . . had to be passed over in silence. The very qualities that had made the novels of Currer Bell open to the strictures of the godly--their profound analyses of the suffering of love and the movements of the human heart which were as much a part of the author's nature as her rectitude and courage--had of necessity to be suppressed. The declared purpose [of the book] . . . sufficiently fixed the lines of the biography in advance. It did not allow for expansion or development--or even a change of interpretation. It did not allow, above all, for any admission of Charlotte's great though unfulfilled love for a married man. The role of M. Heger [the Brontë sisters' teacher in Brussels, whom Charlotte Brontë wooed] in the biography must be reduced to that of mere teacher--though after her meeting with him in Brussels the following year, Mrs. Gaskell came as near knowing the truth as any one of Charlotte's contemporaries. (165)

*Gérin is walking over familiar ground here, having followed in Gaskell's footsteps as a biographer of Charlotte Brontë. In 1967, Gérin published the excellent biography *Charlotte Brontë: The Evolution of Genius*.

Further, Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* is not atypical in its suppression of the truth. Present-day biographers speculate about the amount of information Brontë withheld from Gaskell. However, Gaskell knew enough to speculate about Charlotte Brontë's flourishing interior life. This was an intimacy, ironically enough, she could not or would not permit her readers to share. After all, her goal was to make her readers admire Brontë, and she believed that they would never admire Brontë if a biographer told the truth.

Unfortunately, then, Dickinson would have found few rebellious hopes and fantasies in almost any of the women's biographies that she read--not because the real women did not possess them but because the biographers would not present them. Nineteenth-century biographical narratives generally do not expose the rich inner life of a subject, and they particularly suppress qualities the culture would have thought negative, qualities which for women include anger, rebellion, sexuality, ambition, and power.

Similarly, Dickinson's poetry is the fullest remaining expression of her own struggles, one of which was undoubtedly her attempt to balance the demands of nineteenth-century femininity with the demands of the artist. Her reconciliation of domestic duties and art parallels biographers' treatment of the lives of women artists. Emily Dickinson resolved the situation created by her being a *female artist* in the same way that she saw Elizabeth Gaskell deal with similar problems in *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, for example. As Gaskell did for Brontë, Emily Dickinson separated her own life into discrete compartments.

The contents of one reveal a seemingly domestic, exterior life full of feminine virtues, values, and abilities, such as baking bread, growing flowers, and being kind to children. The subversive contents of the other were known to only a few friends and relations through letters and especially through poetry. That compartment revealed a passionate, conflicted, questioning, fearful, angry, *interior* life. Dickinson apparently did express this life in letters. However, after her death, her friends and relations systematically hid subversive parts of her life by censoring and destroying documents and letters. The character of the subversive information we have lost is

impossible to determine. The letters may have revealed a love affair, atheism, anger, or any other unseemly qualities Dickinson's friends would have thought too private, too negative, too unfeminine for outsiders to know.

Emily Dickinson seems to have recognized the likelihood that in *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* Gaskell was not telling the whole story about Brontë's life. In "All Overgrown with Cunning Moss" (148), Dickinson wonders about Brontë's private anguishes that are known only to God: "Gethsemane can tell/ Thro' what transporting anguish/ She reached the Asphodel!" (14-16. 1: 106). These lines point out Dickinson's recognition that while Gaskell's book is informative, it never gives a complete interior view of its subject and rarely a plausible one.

That fault exists as well in most of the other biographies. Their writers tried to make women subjects angelic by insisting that the least conventional woman fulfilled all of the conventional roles a nineteenth-century woman should have filled: those of daughter, sister, wife, mother, nurse. Carolyn Heilbrun states that these lies about women's lives are common in biographies published up until the 1960's: "[W]hat has been forbidden to women is anger, together with the open admission of the desire for power and control over one's life (which inevitably means accepting some degree of power and control over other lives)" (13). According to Heilbrun, biographers usually presented women's acquisition of power as an accident: "[T]he only script [for a woman's life] insisted that work discover and pursue her, like the conventional romantic lover" (25).

I do not mean to imply that modern biographies of women always provide plausible interior views and good explanations of women's motives. Even as late as 1981, acclaimed biographer Leon Edel called for less emphasis on exterior events and for more on interior events: "A life-myth is hidden within every poet's work, and in the gestures of a politician, the canvases and statues of art and the 'life-styles' of charismatic characters. . . . In this way we can draw larger conclusions about an inner life, of which the outer life is constant expression" (7).

Similarly, Phyllis Rose contends in "Fact and Fiction in Biography," that masculinist assumptions in biography have survived well into this century:

[B]iography is a tool by which the dominant society reinforces its values. . . . And what I hold against Standard Biographies is not that they are unreadable--the best of them are highly readable--but that they are not, as they pretend to be, impartial . . . Both [Quentin] Bell's biography of [Virginia] Woolf and [Gordon S.] Haight's of George Eliot are books about women writers by men whose assumptions about women are so deeply assimilated as to have for them the force of truth, self-evident truth. That George Eliot needed someone to lean on [the thesis of Haight's biography] is supposed to be a neutral observation. But there is no neutrality. (68, 76, 77)

The reader of a biography such as Haight's of George Eliot has to accept the biographer's reading of the woman writer's inner life, or the reader has to propose an alternate reason or meaning for unconventionality, disobedience, and rebellion.

According to Rose, then, when the biographer does present an interior view of a woman's life, he or she usually ignores all qualities but the angelic ones, presenting a masculinist view of motivations of female characters. For instance, the Austen essay suffers seriously from a lack of interiority, and thus the Jane Austen who emerges from its pages bears no resemblance to any human being who has ever lived and breathed. The essay depicts her as absolutely perfect in her domestic life--she amuses her nieces and nephews, plays the piano-forte and sings, plays spilikins, and specializes in embroidery's satin stitch.* One passage in particular presents her as a perfect woman:

She was a humble, believing Christian. Her life had been passed in the performance of home duties and the cultivation of domestic affections, *without any self-seeking or craving after applause*. She had always sought, as it were by instinct, to promote the happiness of all who came within her influence, and doubtless she had her reward in the peace of mind which was granted her in her last days. (Italics mine. 233)

* According to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, spilikins was an eighteenth- and nineteenth-century game somewhat like "pick-up-sticks," in which a player tries to pick up slips or rods of wood off of a heap without disturbing the rest. The satin stitch is a basic embroidery stitch that is easy to learn but difficult to master because of its extraordinary precision. It is not surprising that the exacting Jane Austen should have been good at it.

The woman depicted in the passage above could be *any* good woman in nineteenth-century literature in that the essay's author gives Austen no stamp of individuality. How different from the Jane Austen of contemporary feminist biographies, wherein Austen's family is unsupportive and wherein Austen herself is angry and ambitious.

Jane Austen's life contained no acts of overt defiance, but many nineteenth-century women were disobedient, rebellious, and unconventional. However, few of the biographies Emily Dickinson read present these women's rebellions; in the nineteenth century, biographers skipped over defiance as often as they could and apologized for their subjects when they could not. The most explicit presentation of defiance that Emily Dickinson read occurs in George E. Woodberry's biographical essay on Mary Wollstonecraft, published in *The Atlantic Monthly*. Woodberry dwells on Wollstonecraft's unhappy early life, describes her in sensual terms, and sneers at her illicit relationship with American painter Gilbert Imlay:

[T]his [was a] woman of extraordinary beauty and eyes the most meaning that Southey ever saw, of conversation that delighted Coleridge, of mental vigor rare if not first among women of her day, of a full and refined sensuous endowment, sensitive, responsive, compact of fancy, imagination, sentiment, and passion,—a woman, too, acquainted with the world, and indulging no illusions concerning manly heroism . . . Mary Wollstonecraft accepted him [Imlay] as her lover in the spring of 1793, governed only by affection, as she afterwards wrote, and in the rectitude of her own heart "careless of vulgar precautions," or in more intelligible words, of a marriage ceremony. (841)

Woodberry does present Mary Wollstonecraft as a powerful woman controlling her own destiny, but he does not offer the reader an interior view of his subject. The only interiority in this essay, however, is a view of his own erotic feelings for the subject as he imagines her to have been, not a picture of her own inner life. He gives no indication about how and why Wollstonecraft decided to "accept [Imlay] as her lover" and finishes the essay by predicting that Wollstonecraft will be forgotten except as the mother of Mary Shelley, a prediction that shows how faulty his perception was.

A similar example of presentation of defiance, but one without the voyeurism, comes from Mathilde Blind's *George Eliot*. Because of Marian Evans' (George Eliot's) well-known alliance

with George Lewes, this biography must refer to its subject's unconventional behavior. At the point this must occur, the biography reveals the cracks between the real life of a woman and the life nineteenth-century morality would have liked her to live. After sidestepping for a few pages Marian Evans' choice to live with George Henry Lewes without being married, Blind finally sums up with these words:

Enough that Mr. Lewes appears to have written a letter in which, after a full explanation of his circumstances, he used all his powers of persuasion to win Miss Evans for his life-long companion; that she consented, after having satisfied her conscience that in reality she was not injuring the claims of others; and that henceforth she bore Mr. Lewes's name, and became his wife in every sense but the legal one. (116)

That is Blind's *entire* explanation of how Marian Evans made one of the most difficult and important decisions of her life.

Emily Dickinson must have ached to learn more details about the feelings of her favorite novelist. But the following pages provide none: they merely apologize for Evans' unorthodox decision and try to cast her in the mold of a loving and needy wife to Lewes and a good mother to his sons. The Cross biography is no more explicit in its treatment of Evans' decision to live with Lewes, and like Gaskell's biography of Charlotte Brontë, has been criticized for suppressing evidence; in addition, modern critics castigate Cross for bowdlerizing his wife's letters.

"Gigantic Emily Brontë"

Most of the nineteenth-century biographies of women writers that Emily Dickinson read do not, then, present positive pictures of powerful women. One does, however. And Emily Dickinson loved it. Not surprisingly, this biography to which Dickinson responded most positively was A. Mary F. Robinson's *Emily Brontë*. After its publication in 1883, Dickinson called it "electric" and twice referred to Emily Brontë and her poetry as "marvelous." The particular poem that Emily Dickinson calls marvelous ends this Brontë biography; it also ends many Dickinson

biographies because it was the poem Higginson read at Dickinson's funeral: "No coward soul is mine." According to someone who attended the funeral,

Col T W Higginson read a favorite selection of Emily Bronte [sic] and prefaced his reading (which by the way was very effective) by saying that one friend who had put on immortality, but who really never seemed to have put it off--frequently read this passage to her sister-- (Leyda. 2: 475)

Dickinson had read the Brontës' poems as early as 1864, but never cited any poem in particular until she began to refer to this one after reading Emily Brontë's biography. She always quoted the sixth stanza,

Though earth and man were gone,
And suns and universes ceased to be,
And thou wert left alone,
Every existence would exist in thee. (Robinson. 310)

Undoubtedly, "No coward soul is mine" interested her because it addressed immortality, her own flood subject. However, when she read the poem as an expression of her own feelings, she did not address it to God, as did Brontë. According to a letter to Mrs. Holland, "As Emily Bronte [sic] to her maker, I write to my Lost "Every Existence would exist in thee--" (#873. 3: 802-3). Dickinson responded intensely not just to the poem but to this biography, and for good reason.

Robinson's *Emily Brontë* is unusual among the biographies of literary women that Dickinson read. A real woman emerges from its pages, a woman who might be the heroine of a modern feminist biography. Even the Brontë family is portrayed in feminist terms. While Gaskell presents Mr. Brontë as a loving though distant father and Mrs. Brontë as a nonentity, Robinson exposes Mr. Brontë as cruel and Mrs. Brontë as her daughters' good example of feminine virtues--including virtues such as independence:

Miss Branwell's [later Mrs. Brontë] letters reveal a quiet intensity of devotion, a faculty of judgment, a willingness to forgive passing slights. Under the devotion and quietness there is, however, the note of an independent spirit, . . . with its capability of self-reliance. (16)

Robinson believes, then, that the Brontë sisters inherited their character--including Emily Brontë's independence--from their mother.

Further, whereas Robinson's descriptions of Emily Brontë are not always interior descriptions, they do dwell on Brontë's individual characteristics: her lack of beauty and style, her enjoyment of the moors, with their animals, birds, and flowers. The woman at the center of this biography comes forward as a real woman writer "to whom expression was at once a necessity and a regret. Emily's brain, Emily's locked desk, these and nothing else knew the degree of her passion, her genius, her power. And yet acknowledged power would have been sweet to that dominant spirit" (90). Emily Brontë emerges from Mary Robinson's book as a powerful woman, as a woman too strong, too secure in her identity to be commanded by anyone. The best example of this superiority can be seen in Robinson's description of Emily Brontë's clashes with M. Heger:

Charlotte at once accepted the yoke. . . . Not so with Emily. . . . She was as indomitable, fierce, unappeasable, as Charlotte was ready and submissive. . . . He and she were alike too imperious, too independent, too stubborn. A couple of swords, neither of which could serve to sheathe the other. (108-9)

While the sword image has phallic connotations to generations familiar with Freud, the meaning must have been similar for pre-Freudian readers. The sword was a symbol of male power, power Emily Brontë was not afraid of possessing herself.

Throughout the biography, this portrayal of Emily Brontë as a radical, subversive heroine continues. In fact, near the end of the biography, Robinson recognizes that her portrayal will be unpopular with many of her readers:

Even now, very many will not love a heroine so independent of their esteem. They will resent the frank imperiousness, caring not to please, the unyielding strength, the absence of trivial submissive tendernesses, for which she makes amends by such large humane and generous compassion. (287)

Even so, unlike Gaskell, whose biography Robinson leans on but despises for its paternalism, Robinson presents what she believes to be a true portrait, although she knows it does not conform to popular belief about woman's nature. Emily Dickinson admired it very much.

Another of the biography's facets which would have interested Emily Dickinson is the similarity between the exterior events of her own domestic life and that of Emily Brontë. In Chapter Nine Robinson discusses Brontë's baking bread (Dickinson's special task as well):

She made the bread; and her bread was famous in Haworth for its lightness and excellence. As she kneaded the dough, she would glance now and then at an open book propped up before her. . . . young girls called in to help in the stress of business, remember how she would keep a scrap of paper, a pencil, at her side, and how, when the moment came that she could pause in her cooking or her ironing, she would jot down some impatient thought and then resume her work. (141-2)

Dickinson resolved the conflicts between her literary and domestic lives in much the same way that Emily Brontë did. On the backs of many of Dickinson's manuscripts are recipes,* and she wrote in between and amidst domestic duties as well. Also in Chapter Nine is a description of Brontë that probably made Emily Dickinson chuckle in self-recognition: "of strangers she was exceedingly timid, . . . No easy getting sight of that rare bird" (142). Anyone in Amherst would have reported the same of Dickinson.

No wonder Emily Dickinson enjoyed this biography so much. It presented a woman much like herself but a woman outside the usual myths of nineteenth-century society--neither a saint nor a whore nor a madwoman--but a heroic woman. At the end of *Middlemarch*, George Eliot states that in the nineteenth century women no longer had the opportunity to perform heroic actions. Robinson believes the opposite and gives numerous examples of Brontë's courage. Robinson even compares Brontë to Athena and Brunhilda near the end of her book, and wryly states that "Emily Brontë was born out of date" (288). Perhaps a more accurate assessment would be that she was born into the wrong kind of society--a patriarchal society that allotted few mythic role models for heroic women. Unfortunately, this biography came too late to provide a role model for Emily Dickinson, but she rightly judged it to be a truly exceptional work.

*Perhaps this practice was recommended to her by L. Child's *The Frugal Housewife*. Like Dickinson, Higginson knew it as a child and says that it exhorted its readers to be economical in consumption of paper, "to write on the backs of old letters, like paper-sparing Pope" ("Lydia Maria Child" 45).

Reading Meaning into George Eliot's Life

In contrast, neither of the biographies Emily Dickinson read of Marian Evans (George Eliot) presents a heroic figure. If anything, they take pity on the life Evans was forced (by the marriage laws) to lead. Emily Dickinson also pitied Marian Evans but for different reasons: she read her own meaning into the lives by Cross and Blind. Throughout her life, Dickinson responded intensely to Eliot's writing and to the self Dickinson perceived behind that writing. Further, her reaction to Evans' death is as intense as if Dickinson had personally known the British novelist. In a letter of 28 December 1880, two days after Evans' death, Dickinson compares her grief for Evans to her grief for a personal friend: "Grieving for 'George Eliot'--grieved for Dr Smith, [the family physician] our Family Savior, living Fingers that are left, have a strange warmth-" (#683. 3: 685). Interestingly enough, Marian Evans and Dr. Smith died on the same day, but Dickinson uses the present tense for her feelings for Evans and the past tense for her feelings for Smith. Apparently, Evans' death affected Dickinson more deeply than the death of the family savior.

Early in 1881, Dickinson wrote Sue to acknowledge receipt of some notice of Marian Evans' death: "Thank you, Sue--I was glad to read it-- Perhaps she who Experienced Eternity in Time, may receive Time's omitted Gift as part of the Bounty of Eternity--" (#688. 3: 689). Dickinson narrates what may have been the same incident to the Norcrosses, expressing the same sentiments but revealing much more sadness at Evans' death:

The look of the words [of the obituary] as they lay in the print I shall never forget. Not their face in the casket could have had the eternity to me. Now, *my* George Eliot. The gift of belief which her greatness denied her, I trust she receives in the childhood of the kingdom of heaven. As childhood is earth's confiding time, perhaps having no childhood, she lost her way to the early trust, and no later came. (#710. 3: 700)

Emily Dickinson felt tremendous sympathy for Marian Evans' loss of faith, which Dickinson must have learned about from newspaper or magazine articles, (The biographies came

out after Dickinson wrote these comments, so she could not have learned about Evans' loss of faith in them.) One such article is *The Republican's* 5 August 1873 report on "George Eliot's Religious Views," which stated that

For some years George Eliot has been striving to shape out and definitely adopt a religious faith. With orthodoxy, so called, she has not been able to concur, and the substitute offered by the little faction in which she lives does not satisfy her. A year or two ago she made known her perplexities to an eminent American clergyman, then in England, and the two held many earnest conversations on the subject. Since his return to America a correspondence has been maintained between them, the burden of which is her desire for 'more light.'" (Leyda. 2: 204)

The biographies also discuss Evans' religious quandaries, which Dickinson shared in her own youth, though she never seems to have felt the same intense religiosity that Evans did.

Emily Dickinson was also deeply affected by the information in the Blind and Cross biographies, and she responded to each of them with a poem. When she received Mathilde Blind's *George Eliot* from publisher Thomas Niles, Dickinson responded by sending him a short letter saying that "The Life of Marian Evans had much I never knew--a Doom of Fruit without the Bloom, like the Niger Fig" (#814. 3:769). The image of the Niger Fig may be related to a phrase in Eliot's 1871 verse drama *Armigart*. The main character, an opera singer, has survived a serious illness, but the cure has cost her her voice. Her doctor, thinking she should be grateful to be alive and still holding out hope that her voice will return, says

'T is not such utter loss.

The freshest bloom

Merely, has left the fruit; the fruit itself

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

Away from scorn or pity. (v. 101)*

If Dickinson is responding to this image, she seems to say that an important element in Evans' life has been destroyed, but as the poem enclosed with the letter affirms, Evans' loss of flower--perhaps her childhood--did not destroy her ability to create beauty.

*In parenthetical citations referring to *Armigart*, the small Roman numeral indicates the scene and the Arabic numeral indicates the page number.

The poem "Her losses make our Gains ashamed--" (#1562) expresses pity for Evans' life but admiration for her courage:

Her Losses make our Gains ashamed--
 She bore Life's empty Pack
 As gallantly as if the East
 Were swinging at her Back.
 Life's empty Pack is heaviest,
 As every Porter knows--
 In vain to punish Honey--
 It only sweeter grows. (3: 1076)

Because of Dickinson's perception of Evans' life as revealed in the letters, the "losses" probably refer to Evans' loss of faith and loss of childhood, and the "empty pack" probably refers to a life void of religious meaning. The last two lines are the fruit of Eliot's life. Out of her pain, her empty pack, she has created art, and the more pain she endured, the more beautiful her art became. Dickinson made the same assumption about Charlotte Brontë in "All overgrown by cunning moss." Perhaps in this assumption, she reveals information about her own experience as an artist--that her beautiful and powerful poetry was the result of her pain.

The second poem about Marian Evans was originally written in memory of Dickinson's nephew, Gilbert, who died in 1883. She sent a copy of the poem to Higginson in 1885 with an inscribed copy of Cross' *Life of George Eliot*.

Pass to thy Rendezvous of Light,
 Painless except for us--
 Who slowly ford the Mystery
 Which thou hast leaped across! (#1564 3: 1078)

Dickinson is probably using the royal "we" and means that she alone still aches because of Evans' death. The mourner slowly follows Evans through a river, which she has leaped over in order to meet a heavenly light. There is an echo of Dickinson's feeling about the death of Elizabeth Barrett Browning here. She had made a request of Samuel Bowles, who was going to take an overseas trip: "if you touch her Grave, put one hand on the Head, for me--her unmentioned Mourner--" (L. #266. 2: 410).

Fictional Role Models of Women Artists

Perhaps one of the reasons Emily Dickinson felt so intensely about George Eliot and Elizabeth Barrett Browning was that they excelled so beautifully at her own art. In addition, both provided her with life and literary examples of women artists. After all, writers may write about their artistic lives in genres besides autobiography: many create characters who are artists. Several nineteenth-century women writers used this strategy to avoid some of the strictures against telling the truth about women's lives, clothing their ideas in fiction or poetry. One of the many nineteenth-century women who used this strategy was Fanny Fern. She published *Ruth Hall* anonymously and told the story of her mistreatment at the hands of her relatives. When her identity was exposed, she was denounced as unfeminine and her novel as vengeful (Warren ix). However, most of the women writers who used this strategy were less obviously autobiographical and, thus, less offensive to public standards than was Fanny Fern. Many women artists, such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning and George Eliot, did reveal the struggles of women artists in their fiction.

Emily Dickinson read several of these fictional depictions of women artists by women writers, beginning in the 1850's and ending in the 1870's: Dinah Mulock Craik's *Olive* narrates the struggles of a successful woman painter; Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* depicts an eminent woman poet; George Eliot's *Armstrong* sketches out important incidents in the life of a gifted opera singer; and Harriet Prescott Spofford's "Circumstance" tells the story of a woman literally singing for her life. However, none of these depictions of women artists came early enough to help Dickinson choose her vocation. Richard Sewall, in *The Life of Emily Dickinson*, states that Dickinson probably began to write poetry seriously in her late teens (396), the late 1840's, though other critics suggest that decision came much later.

Within a few years of the time that Dickinson saw herself becoming an artist, she read a depiction of a woman artist, Dinah Mulock Craik's three-volume novel *Olive*. In the spring of

1852, Dickinson writes Sue that "I have the promise of 'Alton Lock'-- [and] a certain book, called 'Olive'" (#85. 1: 195). One critic describes *Olive* as "enthusiastically packed full of every catastrophe standard in the Victorian novel, among them deformity, sudden loss of wealth, blindness, illegitimacy, a conflagration, and a severe hemorrhage of the lungs" (R. Woolf. 420). Despite these usual trappings of the Victorian novel, *Olive* also presents a positive picture of a woman who gains independence through her art.

The first volume introduces the heroine, Olive Rothesay, and discusses her childhood and the congenital spinal curvature that initially alienates her from her parents and makes her ineligible for marriage. After the death of her distant and debt-ridden father, she becomes the sole support for her passive, unintellectual mother. In terms of Emily Dickinson's reading, the second volume is most interesting. In it, Olive discovers a talent and a vocation. She and her mother decide to share a house with a painter and his sister, and Olive conceives of the plan to become an artist in order to support herself and her mother and to pay off her father's debts:

[In *Olive*] now awakened a new scheme, by which in time she might be able to redeem her father's memory, and to save her mother from any sacrifice entailed by his debt. And so--though this confession may somewhat lessen the romance of her character--it was from no yearning after fame, no genius-led ambition, but from the mere desire of earning money, that Olive Rothesay first conceived the thought of becoming an artist. (2: 32)

As critic Elaine Showalter points out, "Craik is careful to give her heroine the most heart-rending and humble motives" (16), motives similar to those which many women authors, including Craik, claimed. These motives were foreign to Emily Dickinson, who never attempted to make a living at anything, including writing poetry. If Craik had ended with Olive painting only for monetary gain, Dickinson's pity alone might have been engaged.

However, Olive's painting for money soon yields to her desire to be an artist, a desire which probably gained Dickinson's professional interest. Michael Vanbrugh, Olive's teacher, does not believe that women can be real artists. But, he also sees Olive's devotion to her craft, and she asks him to make her a real artist: "[G]ive me then this inner life which is beyond all! Friend,

counsel me! master, teach me! Woman as I am, I will dare all things--endure all things. Let me be an artist!" (2: 52). To anyone familiar with Emily Dickinson's life and work, the word "master" leaps out of Craik's text, "master" being the mysterious man to whom Dickinson wrote three extant letters and many poems. This novel is not the only source of the word "master" for Dickinson; it seems to have been a fairly common appellation for a nineteenth-century woman to apply to her male teacher, especially when asking that teacher to be Pygmalion in the artist's life. (Other books Dickinson read that include masters are Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Helen Hunt Jackson's *Mercy Philbrick's Choice*.)

Vanbrugh gives Olive invaluable instruction. Art brings meaning to her life, gives her identity, independence, and purpose; it even almost makes up for her deformity and loneliness:

That sense of personal imperfection which she deemed excluded her from a woman's natural destiny, gave her freedom in her own. . . . she scarce felt like a young and timid girl, but as a being--isolated, yet strong in her isolation; who mingles, and must mingle, among men, not as a woman, but as one who, like themselves, pursues her own calling, has her own spirit's aim; and can therefore step aside for no vain fear, nor sink beneath any idle shame. . . . Olive could do many things with an independence that would have been impossible to beautiful and unguarded youth. (2: 58)

Art allows Olive the freedom that only men in her society enjoyed, and yet she also has what Craik calls "perfect womanliness" (2: 58). The calling of art removes the stigma from both Olive's femininity and deformity. As Craik's biographer, Sally Mitchell, acknowledges, Olive's vocation provides consolation: "In a society where women . . . are valued for their beauty alone, the defect that prevents Olive from being 'a woman' [along with her vocation] allows her to be a person" (31). However, Craik stresses Olive's femininity and never presents her as masculine, despite her enjoyment of freedom.

A possible correlation in Emily Dickinson's own life came when she read Higginson's "Letter to a Young Contributor" in the April 1862 *The Atlantic Monthly*. She set aside her shyness, what she called reticence, and found the courage to write a letter to Higginson, which began "Are you too deeply occupied to say if my Verse is alive?" (#260. 2: 403). Dickinson did

not write as a woman, nor did she write as a man (possibly because in the first paragraph of his "Letter," Higginson referred to the number of manuscripts he received with masculine names and feminine handwriting--page 401). Instead of signing her first name to the letter, which would have immediately revealed her gender, she enclosed a card reading "E. Dickinson." In *Olive's* terms, Dickinson wrote "not as a woman, but as one," as a person or a genderless artist.

While *Olive's* second volume shows its heroine reaping the rewards of the artistic life, it also presents art as a consolation for living without love; in the words of the novel, "So she gathered up all her passionate love-impulses into her virgin soul, and married herself unto her art" (2: 124). The third volume describes how Olive falls in love with and eventually marries the man she loves, after making herself his invaluable friend and confessor. She then begins to concentrate less on her art in order to devote time to being a wife and stepmother. Craik says that another character in the novel

often said that Mr. Gwynne [Olive's husband] was trying to make his wife as learned as himself, and that his influence was robbing their Scottish Academy of no one knew how many grand pictures. Perhaps it might be--it was a natural and womanly thing that in her husband's fame Olive should almost forget her own. (357)

Probably because of Olive's "natural and womanly" attitude, Elaine Showalter claims that "Art gets short shrift" in *Olive* (17). Similarly, Shirley Foster believes that Olive's eventual marriage undercuts all of the positive messages about art in the second volume: Foster says *Olive* reflects

the unease of all those early-Victorian women who sought to reconcile traditional and more radical female behavior. They see that aspiring women like Olive, who strive beyond stereotyped female roles, have to adopt qualities of strength, assertiveness, and self-reliance, usually associated with masculinity; they cannot conceive of an alternative womanly voice independent of sexually-biased definitions of achievement. (63)

However, the reconciliation of womanhood and creativity is not only a problem in *Olive*; it is an issue in all of the accounts Emily Dickinson read of women artists.

Women writers such as Craik, Barrett Browning, Eliot, and Spofford all wrote about the conflicts between a woman's life and her art. Each of their women characters attempts to find a way to be feminine and to retain her commitment to art; however, none reaches a completely satisfactory compromise. The artist may have to resign power; or to achieve it, she may have to take it from someone else, often her husband. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar suggest that Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* most successfully mediates between these conflicting desires: *The Madwoman in the Attic* states that *Aurora Leigh* "embodies what may well have been the most reasonable compromise between assertion and submission that a sane and worldly poet could achieve in the nineteenth century" (575).

Because *Aurora Leigh* is important to this study but not part of the canon, and hence not often read, a summary is in order. The title character is the well-educated, orphan daughter of a British father and an Italian mother. She goes to live in England with her aunt, who makes her embroider and perform other feminine activities that do not interest her. On her twentieth birthday, Aurora makes an ivy wreath and crowns herself a poet. On the same day, she also refuses a proposal from her cousin Romney Leigh, who believes that Aurora should devote her energy and talent to social causes, at his side, rather than to useless poetry. Aurora refuses him and goes about her vocation. Romney then prepares to marry a lower-class girl, Marian Erle, in order to prove his democratic principles, but the villain of the story, Lady Valdemar, convinces Marian to leave Romney (because Lady Valdemar wants Romney for herself.) He waits at the altar, but Marian never comes. Aurora eventually finds Marian in Paris and discovers that she has been raped in a Parisian brothel and that the rape has resulted in a son. Aurora, Marian, and the child then remove to Aurora's childhood home in Italy, where Romney reenters the tale. He has lost his sight in a fire which destroyed his socialistic commune. He and Aurora talk and decide to marry.

This verse-novel of education chronicles the story of a young woman artist who believes, as Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi asserts, that to be an artist is to be masculine. Gelpi says that Aurora's belief divides

her sense of a self which is learned, poetic, and masculine from a self that is social, visible, and feminine. . . . [T]he sense of herself as masculine, which she feels she needs in order to think seriously of herself as a poet, becomes the sense also which eats into the flesh of her [feminine] self-esteem. (42)

Finally, Elizabeth Barrett Browning feminizes Aurora and makes her realize that she needs love.

Near the end of book nine, Aurora confesses her feelings for Romney, by saying

Art is much, but love is more.
O Art, my Art, thou'rt much, but Love is more!
Art symbolises heaven, but Love is God
And makes heaven. I, Aurora, fell from mine:
I would not be a woman like the rest,
A simple woman who believes in love,
And owns the right of love because she loves,
And, hearing she's beloved, is satisfied
With what contents God: I must analyse,
Confront, and question. (IX. 341)*

Elizabeth Barrett Browning resolves Aurora's dilemma--she wants to love and to write--by giving Aurora a dependent husband. Like *Jane Eyre's* Rochester, he has lost his sight in a fire and becomes Aurora's muse, inspiring her with grand plans and dreams which she will propose in her poetry. Dickinson's biography is unclear about whether she ever faced such a choice between a man and her work. While much of her poetry is about love, it is almost always disappointed love and she a jilted lover. None of the poems shows her doing what Aurora did, refusing love for the sake of art.

Unlike Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*, which casts its heroine's dilemma in terms of love versus art, for Eliot's *Armstrong*, there is no real question about whether she should marry. Emily Dickinson probably read *Armstrong* in the July 1871 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*. Seeing the name of George Eliot attached, Dickinson immediately would have been interested in this short

*In parenthetical references to *Aurora Leigh*, the Roman numerals refer to the book and the Arabic numerals to the page numbers.

verse drama about a diva, the title character. The major similarity Dickinson might have seen between *Armgar* and *Aurora Leigh* would have been that of the title characters' artistic arrogance. They believe that their artistic callings separate them from the mass of ordinary women. While Aurora says in the passage above, "I would not be a woman like the rest," Armgart's cousin, Walpurga, reports Armgart's opinions of what separates her from all other women:

She often wonders what her life had been
Without that voice for channel to her soul. . . .
"Poor wretch!" she says, of any murderess--
"The world was cruel, and she could not sing:
I carry my revenges in my throat;
I love in singing and am loved again." (i. 94).

About Emily Dickinson, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar say "Like George Eliot's Armgart, she carries her 'revenges in [her] throat'" (610).

Perhaps Armgart is similar to Emily Dickinson in that Armgart believes that being an opera singer is her personal feminine destiny, and, thus, femininity is bound up with her calling, as it is bound up with Dickinson's. In "Notes on Sleeping with Emily Dickinson" Karl Keller states that Dickinson's poetry is more accessible and applicable to women than to men. He reminds his readers that "Aaron Copland set twelve poems of Emily Dickinson's to music. But sopranos must sing them, never a man" (68).

Despite the important similarity between Armgart's and Dickinson's femininity, because of their dissimilar vocations, Dickinson's work differs from Armgart's. In "To Have a Voice: The Politics of the Diva," Susan J. Leonardi says that a nineteenth-century diva held an extraordinarily privileged position that women in other artistic vocations did not hold. She was "a female success in a male world . . . Opera composers and lovers did not, that is, merely tolerate the soprano, they wanted her. A soprano, by the [time of the] nineteenth century, was a legitimate role for a woman and, indeed, a role that *required* a woman" (65). In this sense, Armgart is unlike Aurora, who has to build a niche for herself in a male vocation--and unlike Emily Dickinson, whose vocation does not take place at all in the public male world.

As Armgart negatively responds to a marriage proposal, she expresses her understanding of the difference between her life and that of other women:

Yes, I know

The oft-taught Gospel: "Woman, thy desire
 Shall be that all superlatives on earth
 Belong to men, save the one highest kind,--
 To be a mother. . . .
 Nature has willed it so!" O blessed Nature!
 Let her be arbitress; she gave me voice
 Such as she gives a woman child,
 Best of its kind, gave me ambition too,
 That sense transcendent which can taste the joy
 Of swaying multitudes, of being adored. (iii. 98)

Armgart has what other women do not have: a voice with which to express her illicit anger and ambition--as well as a legitimate outlet for her voice. Like Olive's calling, Armgart's voice gives her access to the treasures of the male world: dominance, applause, power, creativity, and strength. It also keeps her from becoming a murderess, standing between her and the servitude and meaninglessness of a female life devoid of exterior events. Armgart herself sees her voice as nature's gift, a gift withheld from most women: the gift which affords her the ability to fulfill her femininity and creativity at the same time. And the world lauds her for doing so.

A year after refusing the proposal, Armgart becomes sick and is cured, but the cure results in the loss of her singing voice. She considers suicide because she is now subject to the humiliation of being a voiceless woman in a male world. Her cousin, Walpurga, then teaches her that she has not really been human until now, that she has been insensitive to others, and that she should do what all others do who lose their dreams: go on and attempt to serve humanity. Armgart decides to do so by teaching music.

Armgart might be read as a play about a hubristic woman who like Milton's Satan has risen too high above her station and must fall. It is better read, however, as a play of education, in which a young person, whose very success in her profession has made her self-centered, learns that to fail is to be human. Armgart also learns that Walpurga is a failure, as is her teacher, Leo. He consoles his pupil and counsels her to leave the scene of her success:

[C]hange the place

Begin afresh as I did when I left
Vienna with a heart half broken. . . .

I had lost--

No matter! We must bury our dead joys
And live above them with a living world. (v. 105)

While Armgart becomes what she had always feared to be, ordinary and human, Susan Leonardi believes that Armgart's plans to teach make her heroic in a feminist sense: "Armgart's decision to live--in order to pass on her voice--illustrates the final power of the diva . . . the power to change the lives of those who hear her, but especially to change the lives of other women, to give them a voice" (71).

There is no corresponding decision in Emily Dickinson's life: she never became a teacher after losing her ability, although she has functioned as a role model for later generations of women. However, a correlation does exist between the lives of Emily Dickinson and George Eliot at the time of Armgart's publication. Two of George Eliot's biographers, Gordon S. Haight and Jennifer Uglow, concur that *Armgart* came out of Eliot's own fear of losing her voice, her writing ability (Haight 429-30; Uglow 198). Perhaps it struck a similar chord in Emily Dickinson. In 1871, Dickinson was beyond the period of her greatest production and creativity. Though she would continue to write well, she would never again reach the heights of the productive 1860's.

However, for Dickinson, the most frightening story about a woman artist losing her voice was probably Harriet Prescott Spofford's "Circumstance," which was first published in May 1860 in *The Atlantic Monthly*. Dickinson seems to have had two reactions to this story. According to Martha Dickinson Bianchi in *Emily Dickinson Face to Face*,

Sue gave Emily the fantastic and unique story of the Indian Devil by Harriet Prescott Spofford, called "Circumstance," which had just appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly*--and . . . Emily gave it back, saying: "Sue, it is the only thing I ever read in my life that I didn't think I could have imagined myself!"

Later came these two lines--"You stand nearer the world than I do, Susan. Send me everything she writes." (Leyda. 2: 6)

Perhaps Dickinson changed her mind about liking "Circumstance" after sleeping on it a night or two. In 1862, she was probably responding to a question from Higginson about his protégé

Spofford when she told him a different story: "I read Miss Prescott's "Circumstance," but it followed me, in the Dark, so I avoided her--" (#261. 2: 404).*

It is a frightening story, indeed. The main character, an early colonist of Maine, has been nursing a sick friend, and on her way home, she is captured by a panther, an "Indian Devil," who carries her up into a tree.** As she screams for her husband to help her, the animal, which Spofford always represents with masculine pronouns, stops mauling her to listen to the echo of her voice in the forest. She begins to sing in order to stop his attacks, but he refuses to hear a tune twice; each song must be different. At first, she sings lullabies, jigs, and sailor-songs. Then she begins to sing religious songs, and she becomes reconciled to dying and, later, eager to be resurrected to the life after death. But as the sun rises, the woman's husband appears with their sleeping child and a gun. The woman again wants to live. She loses her voice, the beast is just about to carry her to a higher branch of the tree, and her husband shoots and kills the panther, reuniting the family. On their return to their home, they find that it has been burned to the ground by Indians, who have killed all of the whites in the community. This family alone is left alive.

Several parts of "Circumstance" are interesting as they relate to Emily Dickinson. As critic Anne Dalke notes, "The songs become . . . increasingly removed from her own experience, increasingly imaginative. Only such sustained invention can save her from annihilation" (77). The woman becomes "fuller and fuller of dismay . . . [because of] the knowledge that she was only prolonging her anguish and playing with death! How appalling the thought that with her voice ceased her existence!" (163). "Circumstance" is an unusually powerful expression of the fears of a

*Leyda attempts to reconcile these accounts by suggesting that Bianchi is incorrect about which Spofford story Dickinson responded favorably to. He believes that narrative was Spofford's powerful tale, "The Amber Gods" (2: 6).

**The story is not explicit about what kind of beast has captured the woman, though at the end of the first paragraph, Spofford speaks of "stealthy native or deadly panther tribes" (155). According to Judith Fetterly, the story is based on "an incident that actually happened to Spofford's maternal great-grandmother" (264).

woman writer. The fear that loss of voice means loss of life is much more intense than even Armgart's fear that she would become an ordinary woman who could not express her feelings. How frightening is Spofford's suggestion to a reader who is also a woman writer--particularly to the sensitive Dickinson. Even by 1860, Emily Dickinson perceived herself as a poet. By that time, the letters are self-consciously poetic, artful, no longer naive expressions of her feelings and ideas. If she had lost that ability to express herself, who would she have become? She would have had to create herself anew.

Another part of "Circumstance" that particularly appalled Dickinson is probably terrifying to most women readers: Spofford presents the beast in sexual terms--as a rapist. For instance, he pulls at the woman's clothes, she feels as much disgust as fear, he "lay[s] the disengaged paw across her with heavy satisfaction" (160), he "clasp[s] her with invincible pressure to his rough, ravenous breast" (161), and "a half-whine of enjoyment escape[s] him" as he presents her with "savage caresses that hurt like wounds" (163). This is the part of the story that apparently haunted Emily Dickinson. In "A Maternal Muse for Emily Dickinson," Maryanne M. Garbowsky suggests that "The beast must have terrorized Emily Dickinson, lingering in her psyche for months, roaming freely thr[ough] her imagination" (13) menacing Dickinson, who strongly identified with his victim.

Indeed, this story had a tremendous impact on Emily Dickinson. Garbowsky believes that Dickinson's 1862 poem "'Twas like a Maelstrom, with a notch" (#414) was directly influenced by "Circumstance" and cites similarities "in imagery and vocabulary as well as in content and structure, [which suggest] . . . a causal relationship between the two" (17). Both poem and story describe an attack by a devil which tortures its victims. Like Spofford's panther, Dickinson's beast

Toyed coolly 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-- [sic]
 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-- (5-17. 1: 322)

Dickinson's speaker suffers from the same torment as does the woman in Spofford's story: neither knows when her nightmare of agony and helplessness will end.

The major difference between this part of the story and the poem lies in the characters of the attackers. Spofford often portrays her panther as malevolent, but instinctively, not intelligently so. After singing "old Covenanting hymns" (164), the woman even comes momentarily to understand her attacker:

Not once now did she say, "Lord, how long wilt thou look on; rescue my soul from their destructions, my darling from the lions,"--for she knew that the young lions roar after their prey and seek their meat from God. "O Lord, thou preservest man and beast!" she said. (167)

However, in Dickinson's poem, the speaker believes that no accident, no circumstance, could cause her misery. Some malevolent and intelligent force "Toyed coolly" with her, and "a Goblin with a Guage . . . measur[ed] the Hours" of her agony. Her poem probably owes something to the book of Job as well as to "Circumstance" because God allows the fiend to torture her for a time before she is reprieved.

Emily Dickinson also ends her poem differently from the way Spofford ends her story. In "Circumstance," Anne Dalke sees a happy regeneration of life: "This husband and wife have . . . proved mutually restorative. He has saved her; she has saved both him and their child; together they face a family life in which both husband and wife possess a new and shared sense of power" (80). This shared power is even more real than that in *Aurora Leigh* because neither member of the pair has been destroyed. On the other hand, at the end of "'Twas like a Maelstrom," Dickinson's character has been reprieved, yet she cannot go beyond the experience. She asks "Which Anguish was the utterest--then--/ To perish, or to live?" (24-5. 1: 323). The difference between the ending of the story and that of the poem occurs partly because, in Dickinson's poem, there is no man with a gun.

If a woman has no husband, as Spofford (who was then Miss Prescott) and Dickinson did not, to what future should they as women artists look forward? The woman in "Circumstance" realizes that "she could not sing forever; her throat was dry and hard; her very breath was a pain; her mouth was hotter than any desert-worn pilgrim's" (163-4). Her body's inability to sustain her is the mark of her failure, and it is the mark of her humanity. No human being can sing forever without food, water, and rest. Husband, God, or circumstance must intervene and save her. Spofford's God, working through both husband and circumstance, is much more redemptive than is the forgetful God of Emily Dickinson's poem; His reprieve leaves Dickinson's speaker bereft, dismayed, and un comforted.

Women Artists and Failure

The inability of "Circumstance"'s singer to sing forever suggests that her power is limited. The woman artist's failure is a common element in all the accounts of women artists' lives that Dickinson read. In fact, failure was so important to Dickinson that if it were not present in the story or were only a small element, as in the biographies of George Eliot, Dickinson found it or read it in to them. "Circumstance" demonstrates two kinds of failure that generally occur in these accounts of the lives of women artists. The failure of the singer's voice is the failure of her body to keep pace with her spirit, an example of Jesus' truism, "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." This woman artist faces the common failure of all women and men--death, the ultimate failure of the body. Even Emily Brontë, who was greatly successful in Dickinson's eyes, eventually failed. She died. In addition, most of the women about whom Emily Dickinson read were failures because they could not satisfactorily reconcile their femininity and their art. In them, Dickinson discovered the failure of unfulfilled hopes and dreams, the failure to be beautiful, and the failure to be morally acceptable.

Dickinson's interest in failure was not neurotic. She most probably found failure in the lives of women she loved because she identified with them. As a woman artist herself, Dickinson knew that suffering went into creating works of art, in her case, poetry. She believed that a life without incident could not be the genesis of good art. So, when Dickinson found good art, she assumed that there was more to the life of its maker than what she read on the pages of the artist's biography. She knew the restrictions nineteenth-century society placed on a woman's life, and she also knew what could and could not be said in biographies.

Because she herself was a real woman, she knew that any woman whose biography she read could not have lived a happy life atop a pedestal. Dickinson knew that a real woman has an interior life that does not end with marriage and children. She was aware that a married woman whose life should be composed of no more than the birthdates of her children and her own date of death also has her own life and her own story. Dickinson knew those things about other women because she knew them about herself. For Dickinson, to fail not only meant to be human but to be exciting, interesting, and real.

Chapter 3

"They will do one good": Dickinson and Domestic Values

Behind the lies nineteenth-century biographers told about their subjects' lives stands a value system that society and most women endorsed: that of domestic values. That system tremendously influenced Dickinson, through sermons, illustrations, parental teaching, and reading. Like most nineteenth-century people, Emily Dickinson believed that reading "sentimental," "moral," or "domestic" literature was good for her.* In fact, reading domestic literature did help her but not in the ways that the authors might have intended. The lessons she learned did not make her a Christian, but they did help her create herself as a woman artist.

This chapter will evaluate the effects of domestic literature, primarily the novel, on Emily Dickinson. Its authors had a didactic purpose in mind, which they carried out through stereotypical plots and heroines. A good example of these plots and heroines is Anne Manning's *The Maiden and Married Life of Mary Powell*, which highlights many negative qualities of the domestic novel. Dickinson also read many positive depictions of unmarried and independent women in domestic fiction. The most important examples I will use are Catherine Maria Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie* and Menella Bute Smedley's *The Maiden Aunt*. In many domestic novels, Dickinson found models of renunciation but particularly so in novels such as Lady Georgiana Fullerton's *Lady Bird*. In addition, domestic fiction is full of many positive examples of intellectual women, as in Helen Hunt Jackson's *Mercy Philbrick's Choice*. These intelligent heroines gave Dickinson the courage to combat her own father's anti-woman beliefs and to become a woman artist.

*Following the examples of Mary Kelley's *Private Woman, Public Stage* and Nina Baym's *Woman's Fiction*, I will generally not use the term "sentimental." It is not as descriptive as the other terms, and it has been used historically to denote some works as second-rate. My purpose is not to rate works but to describe their effects on Emily Dickinson.

The Nineteenth Century and Domestic Values

Few readers have heard of most of the domestic books Dickinson read, although some examples of nineteenth-century women's literature have become classic works. The majority of this fiction--domestic fiction--is now classified as "sub-literature" or "popular literature." Probably the reason this area of Dickinson's reading has been ignored is that domestic values are repugnant to modern people (along with the fact that most critics do not want to read several nine-hundred-page Victorian potboilers). Many modern critics, recognizing, identifying with, and applauding the skepticism, rebellion, and ambivalence in Dickinson's poetry, prefer to call her a modern.

These modern qualities are unquestionably present, but Emily Dickinson herself would not have accepted that classification. While she shares many concerns and characteristics with modern readers and writers, her world was clearly that of the sentimental nineteenth century. In *The Life of Emily Dickinson*, Richard Sewall almost apologizes for Dickinson's enjoyment of domestic literature. He would like her to be more modern, but he has to admit that

The truth seems to be that what is banal to us was lifeblood to the "advanced" young people of Amherst, who vibrated sympathetically to Ik Marvel's *Reveries* Although Emily's reading sobered considerably as time went on (the allusions to sub-literature diminish rapidly after the mid-1860s), she never lost her taste for sentiment. Her very last letter (to the Norcross cousins) is *in toto*, the title of Hugh Conway's *Called Back* (1883), a novel in the sentimental-melodramatic mode at its worst. (2: 673)

As Sewall asserts, reading sentimental fiction was not merely a stage Dickinson passed through--an easily forgiven youthful fancy--before moving on to "real literature" or "good literature." She read domestic novels from her girlhood to her death. Although Sewall alludes mostly to novels by men, the majority of the domestic novels Dickinson read were non-canonical women's literature--as were most specimens of domestic fiction--perhaps what Sewall means by the term "sub-literature."

Didacticism and Self-Improvement

Emily Dickinson's first recorded opinion on the domestic novel comes in an 1852 letter to Sue Gilbert. Dickinson writes that

I have just read three little books, not great, not thrilling--but sweet and true. "The Light in the Valley," "Only," and A "House upon a Rock"--I know you would love them all--yet they dont *bewitch* me any. There are no walks in the wood--no low and earnest voices, no moonlight, nor stolen love, but pure little lives, loving God, and their parents, and obeying the laws of the land; yet read, if you meet them, Susie, for they will do one good. (#85 1: 195)

Light in the Valley; Or, the Life and Letters of Mrs. Hannah Bocking is a memorial of Miss Annesley's (the editor) aged aunt. The other books Dickinson refers to are by Mathilda Ann Mackarness, and Dickinson's characterization of the three books' heroines as "loving God, and their parents" is much more reminiscent of Mackarness' books than of Annesley's. Dickinson accurately describes these volumes as "little books"; each is approximately four inches wide and six inches tall and contains fewer than 180 pages of text in large print. *Light in the Valley*, *Only* and *House on the Rock* are hardly books at all but moral tracts which describe and prescribe moral conduct for their readers.

These tracts, along with "bewitching" novels such as Lady Georgiana Fullerton's *Lady Bird*, fall into the same broad category of domestic fiction because they teach and support the values of the home instead of the values of the marketplace--the description most feminist critics of domesticism accept (Baym 20). One of the most popular of nineteenth-century women writers whom Dickinson read, Lydia Maria Child, explicitly supports domestic values in her writing. The Dickinson family knew Child's books well, despite what Emily Dickinson told T. W. Higginson at her first meeting with him.

Higginson reported that Dickinson said that when she and her siblings were small, "a student of his [their father] was amazed that they had never heard of Mrs. Child & used to bring them books and hide in a bush by the door" (*Letters* #342b. 2: 475.). This story sounds

suspiciously like prevarication on Dickinson's part because for most of Child's life, she was eminently respectable and one of the Dickinson family's favorite writers.* Her father had owned Child's *The Frugal Housewife* since the time of Dickinson's birth, her mother had received Child's *Isaac T. Hopper* (a biography) as a gift, and in adulthood, Austin had recommended Child's *Letters from New York* to Sue.

One critic, John Evangelist Walsh, discusses Child as a direct influence on Dickinson in *The Hidden Life of Emily Dickinson*. Walsh correctly sees Child's *Letters from New York* as a book that Dickinson likely read,** though Walsh is not interested in the connections Child makes among gender, spheres of influence, and values. In *Letters from New York*, a series of essays that preach a social gospel, Child embraces domestic values, which she equates with femininity, and discourages market values, which she suggests are masculine. For example, Child says

That the feminine ideal approaches much nearer to the gospel standard, than the prevalent idea of manhood, is shown by the universal tendency to represent the Saviour and his most beloved disciple with mild, meek expression, and feminine beauty. None speak of the bravery, the might, or the intellect of Jesus; but the devil is always imagined as a [masculine] being of acute intellect, political cunning, and the fiercest courage. (#34: 234)***

The connection between Jesus' feminine meekness, mildness, and beauty and his perfection, piety, and sacrifice is applicable to the ideal nineteenth-century woman. She was obligated to be good tempered, virtuous, and self-denying--qualities possessed by Jesus, the perfect, and glorified servant, who was willing to sacrifice himself to save the people of the earth. Similarly, the values of domestic fiction called upon a woman to sacrifice herself--her interests,

*Child's best-known work in this century is "Over the river and through the woods to Grandfather's house we go." For most of her life, she enjoyed popularity. But, in 1833 she published *An Appeal in Favor of That Class of Americans called Africans*, and her popularity immediately declined. The Dickinsons believed in abolition, so they may not have been as disturbed by this book as others were.

**Walsh states that "Emily is known to have read" Child's *Letters* (117). He would be more accurate if he said that she "probably" read it.

***References to *Letters* contain the letter number (#) and the page number.

talents, and desires--as Jesus had done so that she could become a moral example to others (uplifting men in particular, who were predisposed to follow the devil), a proselytizer of Christianity, and a refutation of the values of the marketplace.

In Emily Dickinson's early letters, before she developed the self-conscious persona of later letters, she often reports believing in and acting on domestic values. In just such an 1850 letter to a childhood friend, Abiah Root, Dickinson describes a scene that could have come from any domestic novel:

When I am not at work in the kitchen, I sit by the side of [my sick] mother, provide for her little wants--and try to cheer, and encourage her. I ought to be glad, and grateful that I *can* do anything now, but I do feel so very lonely, and so anxious to have her cured. I hav'nt repined but *once*, and you shall know the why. While I washed the dishes at noon . . . I heard a well-known rap, and a friend I love *so* dearly came and asked me to ride in the woods, the sweet-still woods, and I wanted to exceedingly--I told him I could not go, and he said he was disappointed--he wanted me very much . . . [I]t seemed to me unjust. Oh I struggled with temptation, and it cost me much of denial, but I think in the end I conquered, not a glorious victory Abiah, where you hear the rolling drum, but a kind of helpless victory . . . I had read of Christ's temptations, and how they were like our own, only he did'nt sin; I wondered if *one* was like mine, and whether it made him angry. (#36. 1: 97-8)

A later paragraph in this letter tells Abiah that Amherst was experiencing a religious revival: "how the 'still small voice' is calling, and how the people are listening, and believing, and truly obeying . . . *I am one of the lingering bad ones.*"

While these early letters are full of references to people dying, the content of this letter indicates that Dickinson was also thinking of fictional referents. Throughout the letter Emily Dickinson plays the part of an imperfect heroine of domestic fiction. If a fictional heroine's mother were not terribly sick, the heroine would feel the same kind of anger Dickinson felt, but if the girl were not the heroine but the ideal woman, or moral exemplar, she would never resent giving up a date. The moral exemplar would be absolutely devoted despite the lack of severity of the illness. Heroines show that kind of devotion only when they helplessly watch extremely ill

parents (usually passive, ineffective mothers like Mrs. Dickinson) die.* That Emily Dickinson is comparing herself negatively to a moral exemplar is also suggested later in the letter. Dickinson obliquely compares her self-described "badness" to the goodness of her and Abiah's friend, Abby, now "a sweet, girl christian" who has accepted Christ and "is certainly very much changed."

In this letter Dickinson is also defending herself against the aspersions cast on her as an unbeliever by the growing community of believers. According to the letter, Abby had written Abiah and told her about the conversions in Amherst. Dickinson's descriptions of her good behavior--turning down the ride in the woods to stay with her mother and doing housework--may be an attempt to convince Abiah that despite her non-Christian status, she is like a fictional heroine: she is worthy of esteem and still redeemable. Dickinson ends the letter with the suggestion that if Abiah will love her enough and pray for her often, she will become perfected, too: "Remember, and care for me sometimes, . . . by lingering longer in prayer that the Father may bless one more!"--an end Dickinson says may eventually occur somewhere in the dim future (1: 99).

Emily Dickinson would have found support for this self-depiction in the domestic fiction she read. In these novels a young, spirited, intelligent, very imperfect woman meets with a crisis which causes her to change, and she becomes perfect and finds true love. Dickinson probably expected the same thing to happen to her. Perhaps one reason she never underwent a religious conversion was that she was waiting for an emotional upheaval--which she described to her friend as "a glorious victory Abiah, where you hear the rolling drum." These are often the conversions of novels.

Emily Dickinson would have liked to believe that witnessing a heroine's conversion was making her a better person. Like most nineteenth-century people, Dickinson wanted reading to improve her. When she says of Annesley's and Mackarness' tracts, "read, if you meet them, Susie, for they will do one good," she proves herself to be a true citizen of the nineteenth century. In at

*Unlike Mrs. Dickinson's fictional counterparts, she recovered.

least this case, she believed that the purpose of reading was to improve the reader.*

Improvement is a frequent theme in the nineteenth-century. One of the phrases that Dickinson frequently uses in early letters is "to improve the opportunity" or "to improve the time," which seems to mean that she is using her time well by writing. This expression is common in the New England domestic fiction that Dickinson read, such as *Light in the Valley* and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps' novels.

These domestic and moral novels do share common values with classic works of the period, such as *Middlemarch* and *Bleak House*--two Dickinson favorites. While canonical women authors such as Jane Austen and George Eliot also propagate these values, their novels are artistic in a way that most domestic novels are not; the domestic novel's goals are only to teach and to entertain. One of Edward Dickinson's favorite authors, Catharine Maria Sedgwick, wrote in the preface to *A New England Tale* that her "original design . . . was, if possible, even more limited and less ambitious than what has been accomplished. It was simply to produce a very short and simple moral tale of the most humble description" (5-6). Sedgwick's goal was to teach.

Plots, Heroines, and Women Readers

As is illustrated by Edward Dickinson's reading of Sedgwick's novels, a wide audience enjoyed domestic novels, but the authors of the novels--mostly women--seem to aim much of their didacticism at other women. The principal lesson these authors teach is the belief in the Cult of True Womanhood. In *Dimity Convictions*, Barbara Welter defines this common set of beliefs about women, that women should possess "four cardinal virtues--piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. Put them all together and they spelled mother, daughter, sister, wife--woman" (21).

*See letter #380 to Louise Norcross (late 1872) for an opposing opinion. Dickinson speaks of a novelist who "is extricating humanity from some hopeless ditch" (probably Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, *fille*).

In *Woman's Fiction* Nina Baym states that the genre of nineteenth-century domestic fiction was inherently tied to women readers and to women's issues.

If Baym is correct, Dickinson was not unusual in her identification with heroines or in her identification with them instead of moral exemplars. Like most readers of Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, Dickinson identifies with and enjoys the wicked and interesting Becky Sharps of the fictional world more than the goody-goody Amelia Sedleys. Baym believes that nineteenth-century women like Emily Dickinson became indoctrinated in the values of their culture by reading domestic fiction. They learned the novels' lessons by identifying with heroines in domestic novels:

To the extent that readers saw the heroine's dilemma as their own, they had an outlet for their angers and frustrations in detesting her enemies; and to this same extent they could rejoice in her triumph and--here is where the lesson comes in--accept the author's solution to her difficulties as pertinent to their own lives. Her [the heroine's] dilemma, simply, was mistreatment, unfairness, disadvantage, and powerlessness, recurrent injustices occasioned by her status as female and child.
(17)

Specifically in the domestic novels that Dickinson read, the maturing heroine must learn some important lessons. She will mature into an adult who takes responsibility for her own destiny and happiness, making decisions based on her intellect as well as her emotions. She will become capable of positively molding society, rejecting values that do not conform to the ideology of true womanhood. In these novels, there is invariably at least one True Woman, Moral Exemplar, or "angel in the house,"* a woman whose happiness comes from self-sacrifice, whose life is full of religious grace and kindness, and whose only mission is to make life better for those around her, the kind of woman Emily Dickinson believed her friend Abby had become.

The domestic novels Dickinson read also usually have what might be called an adolescent plot, one that attempts to channel adolescent desires for sexuality and independence into socially approved models. In *Woman's Fiction*, Baym states that "In Jungian perspective, her [the

*Dickinson may have read Coventry Patmore's poem *The Angel in the House*. When Emerson visited Austin and Sue in 1857, he complimented Sue on possessing a copy of it. This recommendation by Emerson, whom Dickinson admired, would probably have prompted her to read it.

heroine's] story exemplifies the difficult but successful negotiation of the undifferentiated child through the trials of adolescence into the individuation of sound adulthood" (12). The plot is also adolescent because these novels are uninterested in the lives of adult women. For the most part, the novels never go far beyond the heroine becoming a wife and mother, not allowing for the possibility that a woman might have problems (or even might continue to be interesting) after marrying the man of her dreams, after the "happily ever after" part of the story.

For an intelligent woman like Dickinson, a woman with foresight, this loss of identity after marriage was a reason to fear marriage. After a heroine married, she lost her selfhood. She would become a woman, but as Jane Eyre feared on the eve of her unexecuted wedding to Rochester, she would become a new person, an unknown, no longer herself. For a woman, marriage meant destruction of the self--as did religious conversion.

These novels are, then, mostly concerned with the lives of girls, and the plots are remarkably similar. The heroine is usually intelligent, precocious, and rebellious, and to achieve adulthood, she must usually learn angelic qualities from another young woman, the moral exemplar. But, before she learns them, she will usually commit some kind of youthful indiscretion, such as running away, marrying secretly, engaging in an illicit correspondence, or distrusting her fiancé. At some point she must choose between right and wrong, which often (but not always) are cast in terms of "chastity or passion" or a choice between two men. The author may provide the heroine with a negative example of a fallen woman or of some other woman outside of society who has chosen to gratify momentary desires at the expense of the world's opinion. The heroine chooses "right," accepting the values of her society. Her parents, church, fiancé--whichever representation of the patriarchal hierarchy she has offended--eventually forgive her, and she returns to the fold.

A comment in *Graham's Magazine*, a popular women's monthly, illustrates the values of the time. It praised Edith Kinnaird of Menella Bute Smedley's *The Maiden Aunt*, one of the heroines about whom Dickinson read, for being "neither a saint nor a fool, but a living woman;

her sufferings spring from her errors, and are redeemed by her repentance; all is natural, beautiful, refreshing, and noble" (Baym *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers*. 171). In this novel, as in many others, the heroine becomes an angel. Dickinson literally read dozens of books with this kind of plot. A characteristic example will serve to clarify the plot and character elements of the domestic novel: Anne Manning's *The Maiden and Married Life of Mary Powell, Afterwards Mistress Milton*.

The Maiden and Married Life of Mary Powell, Afterwards Mistress Milton

In terms of plot and values, *Mary Powell* embodies many characteristic qualities of the domestic novel; only its subject--John Milton and his wife--makes this novel unique. The only unusual element in the plot is that the heroine struggles with her husband, not with her fiancé. During most of the novel, she is married. In the beginning of the relationship, Milton is a dreamy-eyed poet, who convinces Mary to marry him. At this point, the Anglican Powell family is in debt to Milton, and the father is willing to ignore Milton's Puritanism and encourages Mary to marry him. Mary's excitement at having a handsome and poetic suitor induces her to say yes to the proposal. However, she soon discovers how different she and Milton are: he enjoys sermons and deep thought, she riding horses and having fun. The marriage begins the section of the book which describes Milton as a rigid and unkind husband and Mary as a suffering and immature wife, who is unwilling or unable to change her temperament and tastes. Milton wants her to be a well-educated, literary woman--not for the sake of her own edification but for his pleasure. For example, when he tries to get Mary to practice music, he says, "you know I love it, and is not that a Motive?" (93). Nineteenth-century women, probably including Emily Dickinson, would have been horrified at the idea that women were to be no more than pleasing objects. Dickinson would have found precedent in despising such an opinion in Lydia Maria Child's *Letters from New York*. In that volume Child objects to a similar attitude of another literary man, Ralph Waldo Emerson:

she says that in a lecture on "Being and Seeming," he told women "to *be*, rather than *seem* . . . [only] that they might become more *pleasing*" (#34: 237).

Through a negative portrayal of Milton's selfishness and narrowness, the author acknowledges the hardships in Mary's life, which in many ways could be any young wife's life, while disapproving of Mary's immaturity and self-indulgence. For instance, Manning has Milton recognize that the time before a wife becomes a mother is the only free time in her life: he tells Mary that "Perhaps in your whole future Life, you will not have such a Season of Leisure as you have now" (93). Later, another woman talks with Mary about marriage. Mary reports that her friend "spoke so wisely and so wholesomelie concerning my Lot, and the Way to make it happy, (she is the first that hath spoken as if 'twere possible it mighte not be soe alreadie,) that I felt for a Season quite heartened" (105). This speech is Manning's acknowledgement that women are not automatically happy in marriage, although she refuses to accept Mary's belief that unhappy wives are victims of a repressive social system.

Mary takes advantage of a familial ruse to take a vacation from Milton, whom her family has also begun to dislike. The Powells find excuses for Mary to stay away from her husband; they wish to supersede Milton's legitimate authority over Mary, and she passively accepts her pleasant life. Then, Mary begins to feel remorse as the separation lengthens. Her happily married cousin Rose (the moral exemplar) and her husband, Milton's friend Roger Agnew, become Milton's advocates and Mary's external conscience. They coddle, conciliate, lecture, and admonish Mary, and finally their entreaties begin to work. She says that "The Effects of my owne Follie, the Losse of Home, Husband, Name, the Opinion of the *Agnews*, the Opinion of the Worlde, rose up agaynst me, and almost drove me mad" (151).

Agnew tells Mary that she is wrong to see herself as a victim of circumstance merely because she is a woman. He shows her how many opportunities she had to change her ways, which eventually leads to her reconciliation with Milton. She weeps and falls at his feet, and he forgives her:

"Much I coulde say to reproach, but will not! Henceforth, let us onlie recall this darke Passage of our deeplie sinfull Lives, to quicken us to *God's* Mercy in affording us this Re-union. Let it deepen our Penitence, enhance our Gratitude." . . . at length he uncovered his Eyes and looked down on me with Goodness and Sweetnesse, 'twas like the Sun's cleare shining after Raine. . . . (248-9).

At the end of the novel, Mary calls herself "most joyfull, happy Wife! to draw Sweete out of Sowre, Delighte out of Sorrowe; . . . how proud, how cherished a Wife!" (270). Manning shows Milton to be a man so generous that he not only forgives his transgressing in-laws but joyfully invites them to live with him and Mary.

While this novel probably held a special attraction for Emily Dickinson that other domestic novels did not share--it discussed poet John Milton--the novel's message is much like that of other domestic novels. *Mary Powell* teaches that a woman is responsible for her own happiness, even if the impediments to her happiness are a repressive social system and her husband's misogyny. A woman must change herself in order to change her husband and her world. Like other nineteenth-century domestic novels, *Mary Powell* teaches submission.

The novel is also a specific apology for Milton, who, even in the nineteenth century, was known for disliking women. For example, in *Letters from New York*, Lydia Maria Child expresses admiration for Milton's poetic power, but she disapproves of his portrayal of Eve: "'*God is thy law, thou mine,*' said Eve to Adam. May Milton be forgiven for sending that thought 'out into everlasting time' in such a jewelled setting" (#34: 237). Like Child, Dickinson may have had conflicting feelings about Milton. She identified with his women characters, especially with Eve in *Paradise Lost*. Jack Capps says that "On two separate occasions she [Dickinson] refers to Eve's reluctant departure from Eden, and both instances seem closer to Milton's description of the expulsion than [that in] . . . Genesis" (71). In the letters Capps refers to, Dickinson actually says that she is like Eve.

The intent of *Mary Powell* was to persuade readers that Milton's negative portrayals of women were the result of Mary's poor treatment of him during their tumultuous relationship, a common belief even today. Dickinson probably did not believe Manning's apology for Milton.

After requesting this book of her friend Dr. Holland, Emily Dickinson never mentions it again, and insofar as anyone knows, she did not read the sequel, *Deborah's Diary*. (According to *A Milton Encyclopedia*, it was another apology for Milton, this time about the daughter who was his best amanuensis and best, though unappreciated, daughter. 102).

The book probably failed in its didactic intent with Emily Dickinson because she seems to have sympathized with Mary's unhappiness in marriage instead of sympathizing with the abandoned Milton. In an 1852 letter to Sue (about three years before reading *Mary Powell*), Dickinson says that unhappy wives are like blossoms that were beautiful and dewy in the early morning, but she sees

those same sweet flowers at noon with their heads bowed in anguish before the mighty sun . . . they know that the man of noon, [is] *mightier* than the morning . . . It does rend me, Susie, the thought of it when it comes, that I tremble lest at sometime I, too, am yielded up. (#93. 1: 210)

Dickinson's convoluted syntax echoes the sentiment of the last line: she does not want to be "yielded up" to the extent that she avoids naming her fear until the end of the sentence.

However, these fears of nineteenth-century marriage should not be equated with a lack of sexuality. Critic Gertrude Reif Hughes agrees that this letter's sense of "danger does not look like fear of passion or fear of men. It looks like fear of wifhood. And the more one considers that institution as the cult of domesticity was establishing it, the less phobic and the more sensible Dickinson's fear seems" (22). These fears were reasonable and not fears for Emily Dickinson alone. In Julia Ward Howe's 1861 biographical essay on George Sand, Emily Dickinson read that when the sensual George Sand was sixteen, she had had some of the same fears of marriage. Because of these fears, she had considered a renunciation of her own:

The convent life became for the time her ideal existence, and she formed the plan . . . of taking the veil herself, when such a step should become possible. . . . fearing the strange world, fearing a conventional marriage. . . . The projects of marriage which had alarmed her were abandoned for the present, and she was left to enjoy, unmolested, the pleasure of [youth] . . . Would that this ideal period could be prolonged for women!--but the exigencies of the race, or perhaps the fears of society, do not permit it. The two-faced spectre of marriage awaits her, for good or ill. (524-25 and 528)

Dickinson's, Sand's, and Howe's fears of marriage were certainly sound, despite the happy submission of wives that society endorsed--submissions like that of Mary Powell. Gertrude Reif Hughes sees Dickinson's poem "Title divine--is mine!" (#1072) as a critique of submissive wives. Hughes believes that when Dickinson says that a wife is

"Born--Bridalled--Shrouded-- / In a Day--" [10-11], the wife compensates for her loss of autonomy with a smugness that Dickinson captures and satirizes in three devastating lines which manage to combine sympathetic understanding with reluctant but distinct disapproval:

"My Husband"--women say--
 Stroking the Melody--
Is this--the way? [12-14]

It is impressive and moving to see how candidly in poems and letters she confided her sense of vulnerability and how shrewdly she identified the dangers that marriage held for women who might not wish to buy love with submissiveness. (22)

While Emily Dickinson's passionate Master letters and marriage poems indicate that she greatly desired a marital union, she also knew that such a marriage would mean the end of her independence and, indeed, the end of her self as a separate person.

An example which is particularly relevant to a discussion of Dickinson's reading of domestic fiction is a poem Dickinson wrote about 1864, "I learned--at least--what Home could be--" (#944), in which the speaker imagines herself settling down to domestic bliss. She conjures conventional pictures of home, pictures which might be found in any domestic novel: "Round our new Fireside," "Mornings in our Garden," "Afternoons--Together spent--/ And Twilight--in the Lanes--" (5, 9, 18-19. 2: 685-6). She imagines the labors she and her husband would perform:

And Task for Both--
 When Play be done--
 Your Problem--of the Brain--
 And mine--some foolisher effect--
 A Ruffle--or a Tune-- . . .
 Some ministry to poorer lives--
 Seen poorest--thro' our gains-- (13-17, 20-21)

The couple in this poem is much like that in *The Sunny Side*, the country minister working on his sermon, his wife working at her sewing or playing on the piano, then the two of them administering charity to unfortunates.*

The imaginary wife in "I learned at least" is merely any wife of a happily-ever-after ending; her individual spark of precocious genius that showed such promise when she was a girl is lost. This poem's speaker is not spending her time writing great poetry. But, in exchange for her lost self, she does have a husband she loves, and they never have problems or fights (which any married person recognizes as an idealization of marriage). Unfortunately for Emily Dickinson's speaker, the golden haze around this picture of married bliss is agonizingly illusory. The speaker says that this "Home . . . Afflicts me--as a Setting Sun--/ Where Dawn--knows how to be--" (28, 30-1). Despite Dickinson's fears of marriage, in this poem, she presents happy, submissive marriage as a domestic ideal. Perhaps if Dickinson had lived out this domestic ideal, she would not have written poetry, although, on some days at least, that might have been a sacrifice she was willing to make.

Proto-feminism

Dickinson's own ideas about marriage were, then, ambivalent: she was terrified of the submersion of herself in another, but she yearned for the friendship, romance, and sexuality that marriage promised. As the synopsis of *Mary Powell* implies, domestic women's novels are equally ambivalent about marriage and the roles of women. Marriage leaves women imprisoned by the society they had previously fled, but it also gives them societal recognition and power. For instance, Ann Manning gave voice to the view that woman's unhappiness is the result of a repressive social system, but Manning also had the representative of that view eventually renounce

*Shurr uses this poem to support his argument that Dickinson's lover was the clergyman Charles Wadsworth. See pages 146-47.

her belief for happy submission. *Mary Powell* is characteristic of other domestic novels in that it asserts woman's power (especially moral power), intellect, and ability. Like other novels, *Mary Powell* also confirms society's patriarchal structure by re-establishing women in the society they were rebelling against. In *Woman's Fiction*, Baym characterizes the attitudes in these novels as "an unspectacular feminism" (19), feminism because despite the acceptance of patriarchy, the novels "involve the heroine's accepting herself as female while rejecting the equation of female with permanent child" (17).

Almost all of the novels in this category acknowledge that women are important in their own right. One excellent example of a celebration of the importance of women is *Fern Leaves from Fanny's Portfolio*, a collection of Sara Parton's writings in newspapers (1853), which Dickinson's sister, Lavinia, read aloud to the family. In a *Legacy* profile, Joyce W. Warren states that "The underlying theme in all her [Parton's] work . . . was the belief that a woman was an important person in her own right, that she was an individual, not an appendage" (56). Woman was valuable despite her marital status. One way that domestic fiction like Fanny Fern's expresses proto-feminist sympathies is by delineating options for women.

An incorrect, though common, assumption about women's options in the nineteenth century is well-illustrated by Cynthia Griffin Wolff in the biography *Emily Dickinson*. She says that

Most women married and became mothers, . . . However, when she rejected woman's traditional resort, Dickinson thereby created the need to discover some other role to play--some sufficient "self" to counter the dark menaces of oblivion. (127)

While "most women" did marry, Dickinson's reading of domestic fiction showed her that women could play a number of roles other than that of wife without stepping outside the boundaries of society. She did not need to "discover" a role. Her reading taught her that true women did not have to marry to possess an identity. (In fact, many women in domestic fiction lose their identities when they marry.)

Indeed, most examples of the domestic fiction Emily Dickinson read showed her she did not have to marry to be an adult. She had other options as well. Perhaps the best example of a book that teaches this lesson belonged to Dickinson's father: Catharine Maria Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie or Early Times in the Massachusetts*. This novel presents five young women who make different choices in their youth, all but one of which are applauded. Three remain single; two marry.

Hope Leslie

As the subtitle indicates, the story is set in Puritan and colonial New England. The title character, Hope Leslie, and her sister, Faith, go to rural Massachusetts after the death of their parents, to live with William Fletcher, who was once in love with their mother. An influential and respected Puritan, he is the head of a large family, which includes his handsome son, Everell, as well as two Indian children: Magawisca (a girl) and Oneco (a boy), the children of a hunted Pequod chief, Mononotto. Hope, whom Sedgwick compares to "a mountain rill," has an "open, fearless, and gay character," and she quickly becomes "the petted lamb of the fold" as well as Mr. Fletcher's favorite (1: 177-179).

She and he are away from the Fletcher home when Mononotto's forces attack. Most of the family is killed, but Everell and Faith are taken prisoner, and Magawisca and Oneco accompany their father back to the forest. Mononotto, angry at the murder of his eldest son by whites, decides to sacrifice Everell. However, Magawisca, whom Sedgwick describes as possessing "a freedom and loftiness . . . tempered with modesty," interferes with the execution, allowing Everell to escape, though she loses her arm in the process (1: 27). Faith, the favorite of Oneco, stays with the Indians.

After a trip to England, Everell goes to Boston and finds Hope living with the family of Governor Winthrop, including the governor's niece, Esther Downing, "the 'godly' or the 'gracious

maiden," the moral exemplar (1: 198). Sedgwick says that Esther "attained the age of nineteen without one truant wish straying beyond the narrow bound of domestic duty and religious exercises" (1: 198). She is in love with Everell, but she has confided that secret to no one. Other passengers on the ship that returns Everell to Massachusetts are the seemingly Protestant Sir Philip Gardiner and his page, Roslin, who is actually his discarded mistress, Rosa, disguised as a boy.

The ensuing action is complicated, with the following results: Sir Philip tries to marry Hope to get her fortune, though he does not succeed. Rosa dies attempting to help Hope escape, and Sir Philip turns out to be a protégé of the imprisoned Thomas Morton, the hedonistic founder of Merrymount. Magawisca and Faith are captured, and Magawisca put on trial. Despite Esther's refusal to help them, Everell and Hope free Magawisca. Faith, unresponsive to the white world, escapes back to the forest with Oneco, now her husband. Hope, believing that Everell loves Esther, engages them to one another--an engagement Esther renounces when she realizes that Everell loves Hope. Finally, Hope and Everell marry.

Throughout the novel, Hope goes against the letter and the spirit of the patriarchal law of the Pilgrims, and her personal characteristics (beauty, intellect, generosity, impetuosity) somehow put her outside those laws, making everyone forgive her trespasses. Sedgwick insists throughout the novel that Hope must transgress because society's laws do not make room for the individual's inviolate conscience. As Sedgwick's biographer, Edward Foster, says, Sedgwick's "heroines are all morally independent; as moral judges, that is, they defer to no one. In some instances, her heroines prove themselves as courageous as men" (23). Hope is one of these heroines: her conscience is her only law. According to Foster,

Hope Leslie is a Christian not because the Puritan doctrines have taught her how a Christian should act; rather, she knows *instinctively* how a Christian should act. As much as she loves Everell Fletcher, Hope would rather see him marry Esther Downing if his doing so would make Esther happier. Hope considers her own happiness to be less important than that of others. (87-88)

She is a true woman then, despite, or perhaps because of, her transgressions against her society's laws. Like most heroines, in the end, she marries Everell and re-enters society. The only other woman who marries in the novel is the metaphorical descendant of the Biblical Ruth, Hope's sister, Faith, who chooses love over her white culture, her language, and her family. With an astounding lack of bigotry for her own time, Sedgwick acknowledges that Faith's decision to marry outside her race is understandable and right. Both sisters' decisions to marry are laudable.

But, these married women are not the only positive role models for readers. In the opinions of some readers, Hope is not, in fact, the most admirable woman in the novel. Suzanne Gossett and Barbara Ann Bardes say that "Sedgwick, however, makes Magawisca if anything more thoughtful and admirable than her heroine Hope" (22). Apparently many contemporary readers were tremendously affected by Magawisca as well. Foster reports that Laurel Hill, or "Sacrifice Rock," where Magawisca lost her arm, was famous and visited by such notables as the Hawthornes, Melville, and Oliver Wendell Holmes. Margaret Fuller also refers to Magawisca in the poem "Governor Everett Receiving the Indian Chiefs, November, 1837": she says that "Uncas and Magawisca please us still--/ Unreal, yet idealized with skill" (251). If Emily Dickinson responded to *Hope Leslie's* characters as did these readers, or as did her father, she would have been most interested in Magawisca. The Indian woman was apparently a most affecting character to Edward Dickinson. In 1827, he sent this book to Mrs. Dickinson, then his fiancée, and said

the characters are drawn in a striking light, and innocence & villainy strongly contrasted. Magawisca, the Indian girl is a noble character--possessing all the nobleness & magnanimity of the finest spirits--for she acts apparently from the most purely disinterested motives. (121)

Edward Dickinson made no comment about the other female characters.

Magawisca was obviously one of *Hope Leslie's* most exciting characters for nineteenth-century readers. Despite fear of death, she remains loyal to her father, to her culture, and to the social mores of both societies, even though she feels strongly about Everell, Hope, and their families. She does not have to be married to achieve recognition in this novel or in nineteenth-

century minds. She only has to be a true woman, capable of self-sacrifice. This self-sacrifice is also what keeps her from being the Indian Savage of other narratives. She proves her humanity by helping Everell, and Sedgwick puts her Indian religion on a par with the best of Christian religions.

Esther Downing makes a similar sacrificial decision to remain single. Like Hope and Magawisca, she is willing to sacrifice her own interests even if it means giving up the man she loves. Esther chooses to give up Everell through a rational decision-making process. She cannot put herself in a marriage based on a lie or marry a man who is marrying her for honor instead of for love. There is reason to believe that Emily Dickinson approved of Esther's decision. About Christmas 1865, Dickinson cut a poem out of the *Springfield Republican* in which a woman made a similar decision. It is a domestic poem by Adelaide Ann Procter, "A Woman's Question," and in it the speaker addresses her lover:

Before I trust my Fate to thee,
Or place my hand in thine,
Before I let thy Future give
Color and form to mine,
Before I peril all for thee, question
thy soul to-night for me. (1-6. 14)

The speaker goes on to ask "Is there one link within the past/ That holds thy spirit yet?" (9-10. 14) and begs the lover to "let no false pity spare the blow,/ but in true mercy tell me so" (23-24. 15).

The speaker is much like Esther Downing, who will never marry a man who does not really love her, but unlike the speaker of Procter's poem, Esther can see into Everell's heart. She does not need to question him. Esther's decision to retain her maidenhood and to renounce earthly love are applauded by Sedgwick. Esther, not Hope, not Magawisca, receives the benediction of the novel:

She illustrated a truth, which, if more generally received by her sex, might save a vast deal of misery: that marriage is not *essential* to the contentment, the dignity, or the happiness of woman. Indeed, those who saw on how wide a sphere her kindness shone, how many were made better and happier by her disinterested devotion, might have rejoiced that she did not
"Give to a party what was meant for mankind." (2: 260)

The final young woman who does not marry is Rosa, a Richardson-like heroine, who has been seduced and betrayed by Sir Philip Gardiner. Throughout the novel, she struggles with her passions and her conscience and ultimately chooses her conscience. Her initial decision to go against her conscience and to become Gardiner's mistress is the only woman's decision Sedgwick condemns. However, Sedgwick redeems Rosa by showing her courage in trying to save Hope from Gardiner: it earns her a "solemn burial. Tears of humility and pity were shed over her grave--a fit tribute from [a] virtuous and tender woman [Hope] to a fallen, unhappy sister" (2: 257). Rosa too is redeemed. These examples from *Hope Leslie* are more numerous than those in most other novels (which usually have only a pair of young women), but they are typical. Many heroines, such as Sedgwick's women of independent conscience, prove that even in the nineteenth-century a woman had options.

Unmarried Women: *The Maiden Aunt*

In light of the facts of Dickinson's biography, one of the most interesting qualities of domestic fiction is its positive emphasis on unmarried women--women such as Magawisca and Esther Downing. Nina Baym writes of "the important background role played by unmarried or widowed women. . . . Few characters in this literature receive the same respect and affection" (*Woman's Fiction* 39). In many of the novels Dickinson read, the author and the characters admire and esteem unmarried women. Nineteenth-century feminist Margaret Fuller offers the same kind of respect to unmarried women in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*: "the business of society has become so complex that it could now scarcely be carried on without the presence of these despised auxiliaries . . . these personages [are] spiritual parents, who have supplied defects in the treatment of the busy or careless actual parents" (97).

While there is no evidence that the Dickinsons read *Woman*, they were certainly familiar with this type of treatment: often, the sketches in *Fern Leaves* show an unmarried woman caring

for children who have been deserted or neglected by their parents. For example, the sketch "Little Charlie, the Child-Angel," begins "I am one of that persecuted class, denominated old maids. By going quietly about the world, taking care not to jostle my neighbors, or hit against any of their rough angles, I manage to be cheerful, contented and happy" (197). The narrator goes on to describe how she befriends a child whose mother cares more for her dress than for him. (The mother is not a true woman because she refuses to sacrifice her own interests even for her child.) The narrator teaches the little boy the Lord's prayer, and when he dies, he is "counted one in the heavenly fold" (201).*

In the fiction on Dickinson's reading list, unmarried women often provide other characters with spiritual, psychological, moral, and sometimes monetary support. Two examples are the pious Miss Cribby in Elizabeth Stuart Phelps' religious tale *The Sunny Side or The Country Minister's Wife* and the comic Miss Belinda Bassett in Francis Hodgson Burnett's humorous novel *A Fair Barbarian*.** In none of the novels that Dickinson read is an unmarried woman treated with disrespect or with pity, as Miss Bates is in Jane Austen's *Emma*.*** In domestic fiction, unmarried women are almost singularly important. A heroine can get along without a father or mother, but she needs an aunt or another woman she can talk to.

*The sentimentality in this sketch from *Fern Leaves* is not characteristic of all of Fanny Fern's writing. *Fern Leaves* and especially the novel, *Ruth Hall*, are full of satire and irony, as well as tenderness and charm.

**Dickinson probably read *The Sunny Side*, published in 1851. She owned and referred to its sequel, *The Last Leaf from Sunny Side*. *A Fair Barbarian* was published in 1881.

***Unfortunately, there is no indication that Dickinson ever read any of Jane Austen's novels. (Austen's keen wit and perception would probably have appealed to Dickinson.) According to Baym, Dickinson's lack of knowledge of Austen is not unusual: "Of Jane Austen . . . there is no trace in American woman's fiction" (*Woman's Fiction* 30). However, through reading in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, Dickinson would have learned of Jane Austen. *Harper's* ran a nine-page, illustrated biography of Austen in July 1870.

This point is well-illustrated by Menella Bute Smedley's *The Maiden Aunt*. Smedley wrote the novel in journal form, as the journal of Miss Margaret Forde, the title character. In the introduction, Smedley describes Margaret or "Aunt Peggy" as

one of a class, which, *fortunately for mankind*, is neither small nor rare. She was a Maiden Aunt, and she possessed that cheerful unselfishness, that indefatigable activity in the service of others, those warm, ready, and expansive affections. (Italics mine. 5)

Smedley goes on to compare the value and importance of Aunt Peggy's life to that of her bachelor brother: "While he was thus drawling and fidgeting through existence, . . . Margaret was *living* in the full sense of the word, . . . doing, suffering, and sympathizing, mourning with those who mourned, and rejoicing with those who rejoiced" (5-6). Even though Aunt Peggy is unmarried, she is not a lonely woman. She enjoys an important role in her intense relationships with family and friends. In each of the novel's three sections (the first two short and the last lengthy), Aunt Peggy describes a visit with a set of mostly youthful relations, heroes and heroines of her tales, whom she aids in their individual quests to become adults.

The most interesting (and the longest) section is entitled "Edith Kinnaird," and in this episode, Aunt Peggy takes a background role to that of her ward, Edith. Smedley has Aunt Peggy reveal that when she was eighteen, she was in love with Edith's father, who thought of her as only a friend. She thought that she would never recover after her disappointment, but she says:

I have found health and happiness for my wounded spirit. . . . I am learning to chasten those exuberant affections, or rather to guide them into a channel where there can be no overflow, and fasten them upon an object where there can be no disappointment. (62-63)

Her objects of affection are Edith and other youthful relations. Unlike the heroines in domestic fiction, who confront living and dying unmarried but eventually do marry the men they love, Aunt Peggy is a positive example of a woman who does not marry. There is an obvious parallel between her case and the case of Emily Dickinson, which is often speculated on. Perhaps this kind of example of a *happily un-married* woman enabled Dickinson to choose not to marry or, if she were

disappointed in love, to get on with her life and to take up a vocation--not arranging the lives of youthful relations, as Aunt Peggy did, but writing poetry.

Lady Bird and Patterns of Renunciation

Biographically speaking, the most interesting and most mysterious part of Dickinson's life is the choice she made--to turn away from the outside world and to devote herself to her art, not to the lover of her passionate poetry. Her reading provided her with several models. Like *The Maiden Aunt's* Edith Kinnaird, the heroines in many domestic novels face a similar choice. Edith must consider and become reconciled to the possibility that she will never marry, but shortly after accepting this likelihood, she discovers that the man she secretly loves loves her too. This pattern may have led Dickinson to expect that she would live happily ever after, just as characters in novels do.

According to critic William Shurr, this is just what happened to Dickinson, but her prince, whom Shurr says was the Reverend Charles Wadsworth, was already married, and all of Dickinson's wooing would not induce him to love her. Whether critics accept Shurr's candidate for lover, propose one of their own, or argue that the lover is irrelevant, all agree that Emily Dickinson's retreat from the world, often called her renunciation, was important. A small percentage of Dickinson's novels actually teaches renunciation.

The idea is introduced in Mackarness' *House on the Rock*. Its heroine, Mabel Raby, to make money for her father and his friend (whom Mabel thinks of as her uncle), runs away to be the maid of a wealthy family. One of the daughters of the family educates Mabel far above her standing in society. A friend of the family, Maurice Leigh, falls in love with her. Although Mabel returns Maurice's feelings, she returns to her family and refuses her lover because she believes that the difference in their stations would stand in the way of their happiness together. She never marries but devotes herself instead to her father and uncle and becomes a teacher.

In Protestant novels such as *House on the Rock*, becoming a teacher is a respectable refuge for unmarried women. However, Dickinson also read some of Lady Georgiana Fullerton's Catholic novels, and in them, the single life is more than a refuge: it is a sacrament, an idea Dickinson sometimes uses in her own poetry about renunciation. The Fullerton novels associated with Dickinson's circle are *Ellen Middleton* (1844), *Grantley Manor* (1847), and *Lady Bird* (1852). All of the novels have typical plot and character elements: pairs of women characters, one a moral exemplar and one a flawed heroine; choices between good and bad men; distant father figures and passive or dead mothers; as well as varied Victorian diseases and tragedies.* One quality that sets these novels apart from other domestic novels is their gentle stress on Catholicism, which, as Robert Wolff points out, is least emphatic in the early novels, written when Fullerton was deciding whether to convert from Anglicanism, and most emphatic in later novels, after her conversion (72-91).

Dickinson's only recorded comments on Fullerton's novels refer to *Ellen Middleton*. In 1852, she reports to her brother, Austin, that "I have read 'Ellen Middleton' and now Mat [short for Martha, Sue's sister] has it" (#90. 1: 205). A month later the novel is still on her mind as she anticipates discussing its characters during a visit from Sue: "You and I will have an hour with 'Edward' and 'Ellen Middleton', sometime when you get home--we must find out if some things contained therein are true, and if they are, what you and me [sic] are coming to!" (#94. 1: 211).

References to the other novels come from Sue or Austin, who seems to have discovered Fullerton's writing and introduced it to his sister and Sue. In a letter of 11 October 1851, about six months before Dickinson's letter to Sue, Austin mentioned that *Grantley Manor* was one of the books that he read again and again. Sue had written him asking for recommendations of books to read (Leyda. 218). Eighteen months later, in the spring of 1853, Austin answers another of Sue's questions:

*Lady Georgiana seems to favor sprained ankles above other forms of bodily disfunction. She subjects characters in *Ellen Middleton* and *Lady Bird* to them.

the question with which you began your last letter--"Why dear Austin have you always said dont read [Fullerton's] 'Lady Bird'? Well Sue just for the same reason that if a dish of fair very fair fruit were set before us--& I had eaten of it & found a foul worm lying concealed beneath it's [sic] tempting skin--I should say it is^{nt} good--dont eat it, Sue . . . I am glad you^{ve} satisfied your curiosity & read it Sue--if it has^{nt} hurt you . . . It seemed to me an unhealthy book--an oppressive, disease laden atmosphere seemed to exhale from it's every page . . . 'Twas a story of deeper suffering than many ever know--that it's [not] best *any should* know till they are obliged to . . . Would you read another book that I should say the same about? (Leyda. 1: 275)

Unfortunately, Sue's answer is not recorded.

The strength of the Dickinsons' responses to Fullerton's novels reflects their intensity, which is caused by both religious and sexual tensions. One resolution of tensions that the women characters identify and sometimes choose is renunciation. In *Ellen Middleton*, the moral exemplar's husband and child die, and she goes about for the rest of her life doing good works, never remarrying, knowing that her "treasure was in Heaven . . . that happiness is not the portion of earth; . . . [finding] in the meantime, that each returning day, even to the deepest mourner, brings new blessings" (3: 254-55).

The moral exemplar in *Grantley Manor* is a married woman, who after a physical and psychological crisis, returns to her husband:

She returned to life--to its duties and its blessings; no smile was sweeter than hers, no serenity deeper, and no tenderness more touching; but a seal had been set on her brow, which nothing could efface. Death had been near her, and had left a message for her soul, and the melodies of earth could not overpower that whisper. This was Edmund Neville's [her husband's] trial in the midst of happiness. He ever felt as if an angel was lingering at his side, . . . as if she had only been restored to him for a while, to save him from despair and to teach him to repent. (3: 255)*

The difference between Austin's response to this novel and his reaction to *Lady Bird* rests in the depth of despair Fullerton plumbs. Only the moral exemplars in *Ellen Middleton* and *Grantley Manor* renounce the world, and, as the behavior of *Hope Leslie's* Esther Downing proves,

*In fact, by the time of *Mrs. Gerald's Niece*, the sequel to *Grantley Manor* (which was a very popular novel), the moral exemplar has died, and her husband has become a Jesuit (Wolff, 86).

renunciation is within the bounds of the behavior of moral exemplars. But in *Lady Bird*, even the heroine renounces the world and in more dramatic fashion than in any novel discussed so far.

The title character* is a willful, intelligent, and beautiful young woman, the daughter of a distant, antagonistic father and a foreign (and Catholic), invalid mother. Her only friends are Mary Grey, the moral exemplar, and Mary's foster brother, Maurice Redmond, who admire and cater to her. Maurice, a composer, falls in love with her, though he and Mary are engaged. After she realizes that Maurice loves Lady Bird, Mary releases him from the engagement. At a party, Lady Bird then meets and falls in love with the mysterious and wise M. Adrien d'Arberg. She also reads his book of religious consolation. He begins to exert a tremendous influence on her: "His slightest word was law, his books her daily meditation, his presence or his absence the regulating cause of her cheerfulness or depression" (2: 124).

Adrien and Lady Bird confess their love to one another, but her father refuses to consent to their marriage. After her mother dies, her father shows her an announcement in a newspaper that convinces her that Adrien has gone into a monastery, and her father tries to force her to marry a man of his choice. Lady Bird, in despair, runs away to Mary's home, where she finds Maurice alone. He takes advantage of her disoriented state and proposes to her. They marry but are miserable because she does not love him. Lady Bird then discovers that d'Arberg did not become a monk. Maurice is arrested for debt, and Lady Bird gives up her small fortune to free him from prison.

In order to start life over, they sail to America, and (coincidentally) Adrien is on the same ship. He and Lady Bird meet again, and Maurice overhears their conversation and believes "for me, who stand between them and happiness, [life] is too hard a task,--too dreadful a fate" (3: 195). Maurice then contracts a fever, and Adrien and Lady Bird spend the night watching over him, making a vow that whether Maurice lives or dies, they will part forever. Maurice recovers, and he

*Her real name, Gertrude, demonstrates Fullerton's often unhappy ability at naming characters.

and Lady Bird commit themselves to one another. Then the ship catches on fire, and Maurice dies heroically. Adrien and Lady Bird bury him and then part forever: "with silent blessings and a mute farewell, their tears falling less in sorrow for the dead or for their own parting, than in memory of the past, with its buried affections and its chastened griefs" (3: 246). Robert Wolff believes that guilt drives Adrien's and Lady Bird's renunciation: her "conscience tells her that she has already been unfaithful in thought to her weak and unstable husband during his lifetime" (86). Adrien commits his life to good works, and after Lady Bird's son is born, she becomes a moral exemplar:

she wanted but little, and that only for her child; poverty was her choice, and labour her happiness. . . . she found every kind of suffering to alleviate, of sorrow to console. . . . [All] found a friend in the pale woman in deep mourning who never turned away from their tale of woe. (3: 250)

After some years, Lady Bird returns to England, where her father accepts her for the first time in her life.

In 1852, Dickinson was extremely open to *Lady Bird's* doctrine of good works. In that same year, she herself exhibited an exemplar's behavior. Shortly before reading Fullerton's novels, she reports that behavior to Austin, when she tells him about Mat's contracting influenza:

Poor Mat has been pretty sick, but is recovering now; just a fortnight today since she was taken down. I am down there a great deal, and spend most all my time in going to see her, thinking of something to carry her, or writing letters to Sue, telling her all about Martha. (#71. 1: 170)

This scene demonstrates that the values Fullerton expresses were also Dickinson's concerns. During the year that she read Fullerton's novels, she would have been ready to receive their messages.

Perhaps Dickinson saw her own experience in terms of the narrative structures that renunciation novels present. However, while both Dickinson and Lady Bird renounce earthly love, Dickinson's renunciation differs from Lady Bird's in many respects, all of which relate to the triangle between the lovers and God. Unlike Adrien, Dickinson's lover did not return her feelings, and unlike Lady Bird, Dickinson did not give up her lover out of devotion to God. Further, her

sacrifice did not ease her sexual and religious tensions. Instead, Dickinson characterizes renunciation as

A Triumph--when Temptation's Bribe
Be slowly handed back--
One eye upon the Heaven renounced--
And One--upon the Rack-- (#455. 9-12. 1: 351)

Emily Dickinson never took her eye off the Heaven she renounced, and she felt the pains of the rack. Perhaps she never forgave God for making her live with these tensions all of her life.

Renunciation is much easier for Adrien and Lady Bird, who still share a common adoration of God, in whom they submerge their passion for one another. Dickinson cast aside her devotion to God when her lover became her idol, a fact she lets neither God nor lover forget. *Lady Bird's* message to Dickinson was a lie: no human being whose love is alive can forget him or her so easily. No human being can become a moral exemplar in the way that Lady Bird did.

For Emily Dickinson, the most dangerous issue in these renunciation novels is religious: Fullerton's novels set up a false dilemma about Christianity. They teach that a woman could not be passionate *and* religious. She had to choose. If she chose passion, she lost her soul (along with temporal things like social standing), and if she chose religion, she lost her identity, as Lady Bird does. At the end of the novel, she becomes a name on a page, no longer a flesh-and-blood character with conflicts, concerns, and feelings. The change in her personality as the narrative winds down is more tremendous than in any other woman's novel Dickinson read, although this change occurs in all of Fullerton's novels.

Perhaps this change is what Dickinson refers to when she tells Sue about *Ellen Middleton* that "we must find out if some things contained therein are true, and if they are, what you and me [sic] are coming to!" What she is coming to if she does not renounce her passion is misery and eternal death. This sentiment strikes a familiar chord in readers of canonical nineteenth-century novels--it sounds like *Wuthering Heights'* Cathy and Heathcliff, who cannot give up their passion, even if it destroys them both.

Mercy Philbrick's Choice and The Life of the Mind

While domestic novels taught Dickinson damaging lessons about love and religion, they also provided her with positive lessons as well. Her culture, including the domestic novels, afforded her a rich repository of role models for intellectual women such as herself. Many famous women writers were mentioned in books Dickinson read, women such as Madame De Stael, George Sand, Madame de Sévigné, Fanny Burney, Hannah More, Maria Edgeworth, Felicia Hemans, and Harriett Martineau. She would also have read about them in magazines and probably heard many of them discussed at home. Her father, Edward Dickinson, had strong ideas about women intellectuals.

"Bluestocking" was the pejorative term in Edward Dickinson's youth for non-feminine, intellectually superior women, a type he never liked. Emily Dickinson often represented her father to Higginson as possessing this kind of prejudice against literary women, perhaps to keep Higginson from urging that she publish her poetry. She definitely used such a strategy when her friend Helen Hunt Jackson wanted her to publish a poem in No-Name Series* poetry anthology. In this case, Dickinson tried to get Higginson to tell Jackson that Dickinson should not publish her poetry.

She was probably using her father's dislike of women intellectuals in the same way. In addition to what she told Higginson about not knowing of Lydia Maria Child when a little girl (quoted on page 57), the letters which mention her father to Higginson represent him as a protective patriarch who wants to restrict her non-feminine intellectual activity. For instance, Dickinson writes that "My Mother does not care for thought--and Father, too busy with his [legal] Briefs--to notice what we do--He buys me many Books--but begs me not to read them--because he fears they joggle the Mind" (#261. 2: 404). Despite her father's supposed misgivings about her

*The No-Name Series was a series of (mostly) novels published anonymously by Roberts Brothers. The series was inaugurated by Helen Hunt Jackson's *Mercy Philbrick's Choice*.

reading, Edward Dickinson bought his daughter books throughout his life. In an 1876 letter, two years after her father's death, Dickinson offers to Higginson "The last Books that my Father brought me" because she "felt unwilling to open" them after his death (#449. 2: 546).

Despite the way Dickinson used her father's dislike of women intellectuals, she did not invent that dislike: it was real. One of the few literary women Edward Dickinson speaks of favorably is Catharine Maria Sedgwick, whose work he avidly read and whom he met. In a courtship letter to his future wife, he says

I passed Tuesday Evening of this week, in company with Miss Sedgwick, . . . at a party at Judge Lyman's. She has an interesting countenance--an appearance of much thought, & rather masculine feautres. [sic] And I feel happy at having an opportunity of seeing a female who has done so much to give our works of taste so pure and delicate a character . . . Tho' I should be sorry to see another Madame de Stael--especially if any one wished to make a partner of her for life (#14 35).

If Dickinson's father held up any woman writer as a role model for his literary daughter, it would have been Sedgwick, though he probably would have feared that his daughter might develop the masculine attributes that even a woman writer of much delicacy must necessarily possess. Witness Sedgwick's "rather masculine features."

Edward Dickinson probably felt ambivalent about his daughter's reading because he feared she would become a bluestocking and therefore masculine. This ambivalence about reading translates into his even more uncertain feelings about her writing and his general dislike of literary women. In *Emily Dickinson*, Cynthia Griffin Wolff pieces together Edward Dickinson's ideas about the education of women. Woolf discusses a series of five articles on "Female Education" he wrote in his youth and quotes him as saying:

Should you like to dispute daily upon politics and religion, in your family--and above all, to be edified, at every interval of leisure, when you retire from the bustle of business to spend an hour in your family . . . to relax from severe employment with an interesting disquisition upon some abstruse point in metaphysics, by all means be sure of a *literary* wife . . . Modesty and sweetness of disposition, and patience and forbearance and fortitude, are the cardinal virtues of the female sex. . . . These will atone for the want of brilliant talents, or great attainments (120-21).

Wolff believes that Edward Dickinson's ideas on female education were finally contradictory. While he wanted women to be well-educated, he did not want them to do anything with that education but "entirely commit themselves to providing domestic comfort" (121). Edward Dickinson's ideas on literary women were evidently not unusual. Charles Dickens' Mrs. Jellyby in *Bleak House* is a well-known literary example of such a woman who sacrifices her family to her charitable and literary enterprises.

The reception literary women of the nineteenth century, the "blue-stockings," gained is also obvious from domestic fiction read in the Dickinson household. Two sketches in *Fern Leaves*, "A Practical Blue-Stocking" and "A Chapter on Literary Women," deal explicitly with the prejudices men felt when confronted by a literary woman. In each, the woman rises above all expectations of keeping a disorderly house (also the charge William Wordsworth made against British poet Felicia Hemans) and having a miserable husband. How must Edward Dickinson have reacted to hearing his daughter Lavinia read these pronouncements from *Fern leaves*? And more importantly, what in Emily Dickinson overrode her father's ideas and caused her to become a literary woman?

A partial explanation is her reading of domestic fiction, which allowed its heroines to exemplify domestic virtues while being intellectual as well. On this point, Dickinson and the heroines about whom she read unquestionably have similar experience: they were confined to the standards of the Cult of True Womanhood, while also being extremely literate and literary.

Dickinson must have sympathized with these words she read in Lady Georgiana Fullerton's *Ellen Middleton*:

The most romantic parts of history--all that was most interesting and bewitching in poetry, furnished materials for those hours which we devoted to reading. Reading! that most powerful instrument in the education of the heart!--silently searching into its secrets, rousing its dormant passions, and growing sometimes itself into a passion!" (1: 49)

Fullerton's novels, as well as many others Dickinson read, emphasize intellectual activity and contain numerous literary quotations. Each chapter in these three-volume works has an epigraph,

and in some places the author quotes women's poetry or drama every few pages. Nina Baym recognizes domestic fiction's emphasis on literature in *Woman's Fiction*. She says that

Almost all the heroines of this fiction were devoted to books and hungry for formal education. The women authors saw cultivation of the mind as the great key to freedom, . . . Like Benjamin Franklin before them, and Malcolm X after them, they saw literacy as the foundation of liberation. . . . the novels constantly urged their readers to go beyond fiction. In so urging, the authors were not at all hypocritical; they were using fiction as a rung on the ladder. (31)

One novel which illustrates the intellectual life as a means to gaining freedom is often associated with Emily Dickinson, Helen Hunt Jackson's *Mercy Philbrick's Choice*. During the fall and winter of its publication, 1876-77, some citizens of Amherst even speculated that Emily Dickinson had helped write it. This speculation extended to one of the newspapers the Dickinsons received, the *Springfield Republican*: "two hands are visible in the work, . . . I take one of those hands to belong to 'H.H.' [Helen Hunt Jackson]--the other to a friend and admirer of hers" (Leyda. 2: 257). A letter from an Amherst woman to her son abroad is more explicit: "They all say Mercy Philbrick is written by Helen Hunt, and the scene is laid in Amherst but it is rather stupid, and a very unsatisfactory story--Some pretend to say that Emily Dickinson helped her" (Leyda. 2: 265).

There are obvious reasons that Emily Dickinson's name was attached to this novel, either as an inspiration or as an author. The novel tells the story of Mercy Philbrick, a gifted young poet, who has three options open to her:

--To marry the romantic young man she has promised her heart to, despite his appalling lack of character.

--To marry her mentor, Parson Dorrance, whom she calls her master, a man she respects but does not love. She has to refuse him because of her promise.

--To live her life alone, to become a poet, and to concentrate on her art.

She chooses the third option, becoming an inspiration to other aspiring and intellectual women, improving the world by her life and work. This book may have been inspired by Emily

Dickinson's own choice to become a poet, but it could only have confirmed the validity of choosing to be a woman artist: it came too late to influence that choice.

At least one critic reads this novel in the light of Jackson's biography instead of Dickinson's. In *Helen Hunt Jackson: A Lonely Voice of Conscience*, Antoinette May suggests in a chapter called "Helen's Mentor" that Jackson and Thomas Wentworth Higginson had a long unrequited love affair, and that Dorrance represents Higginson in the novel and Jackson Mercy Philbrick. The novel certainly reflects Jackson's belief that a woman writer should write to be read, far more like herself than Emily Dickinson. If the novel is about Emily Dickinson, it is about the Emily Dickinson her friend Helen Hunt Jackson would have liked her to be, a Dickinson who had yielded to Jackson's often repeated advice:

It is a cruel wrong to your "day & generation" that you will not give them [the poems] light.--If such a thing should happen as that I should outlive you, I wish you would make me your literary legatee & executor. Surely, after you are what is called "dead," you will be willing that the poor ghosts you have left behind, should be cheered and pleased by your verses, will you not?--You ought to be.--I do not think we have a right to with hold from the world a word or a thought any more than a *deed*, which might help a single soul. (*Letters* #937a. 3: 841-2)

Significantly, Jackson uses a rhetorical weapon that would appeal to any woman who subscribed to the precepts of the Cult of True Womanhood, desire to help others, a sentiment Dickinson had proposed about 1864 in one of her own poems:

If I can stop one Heart from breaking
I shall not live in vain
If I can ease one Life the Aching
Or cool one Pain

Or help one fainting Robin
Unto his Nest again
I shall not live in Vain. (#919. 2: 672)

This poem, like much of Dickinson's poetry that would have appealed to nineteenth-century readers is not much commented on by modern critics, but its conventional sentiments may be found in many published verses of the day. Fullerton, for example, begins the last chapter of *Lady Bird* with a similar sentiment from Felicia Hemans' poetry.

Beginning with Richard Sewall, Dickinson critics have lamented that Dickinson did not accede to Jackson's request and that Emily Dickinson had to mourn Jackson's death. In *The Life*, Sewall suggests that if Jackson had outlived Dickinson, "Emily Dickinson's poems might have fared much better in the world. . . . Her genuine and professional regard for the poems would surely have been influential" (590-1). Jackson would have turned Dickinson into a professional and published woman writer much like herself and Mercy Philbrick.

Instead, Dickinson lived the dutiful life of an proper nineteenth-century woman. Gertrude Reif Hughes states that Dickinson

conformed . . . extensively to the canons of domesticity. Dickinson possessed virtually all of the affinities and pursued the activities that the cult prescribed. . . . Dickinson's outer life fulfilled these expectations with almost parodic fidelity. She was an accomplished horticulturist and an indefatigable writer of letters. (17-8)

In addition, Dickinson was quite as famous in her circle for making puddings as she was for writing poetry. For example, Higginson states that Dickinson had told him that her father would only eat her bread: "'& people must have puddings,' this *very* dreamily, as if they were comets--so she makes them" (*Letters* #342a. 2: 474).

Dickinson felt that traditional women's roles and the publication of art were irreconcilable, and that feeling was not extraordinary or neurotic but typical. Most nineteenth-century women writers subscribed to the belief that ambition and owning a public name were ugly and tasteless. An example of what Emily Dickinson would call reticence occurs in the preface to Caroline May's 1848 edition of *The American Female Poets*. May states that she was unable to include all of the poets she would have liked to: some poets refused to have their work published because it violated their privacy, a feeling May admires, despite the fact that her plans for her book were thwarted:

No woman of refinement, however worthy of distinction--and the most worthy are always the most modest--like to have the holy privacy of their movements invaded. . . . [S]everal of our correspondents declared their fancies to be their only facts; others that they had done nothing all their lives; and some,--with a modesty most extreme--that they had not lived at all. (viii)

Emily Dickinson made the same statement to Higginson, that all of her work was fanciful, although most critics do not believe she was telling the truth. The modest women May describes sound like the Emily Dickinson of Joanne Dobson's *Dickinson and the Strategies of Reticence*--an Emily Dickinson who did not seek notoriety or publication, but who avoided it because putting oneself onto the public stage was unacceptable to a dutiful nineteenth-century woman.

Dickinson and the Strategies of Reticence is a comparison of Emily Dickinson's life with those of other nineteenth-century American women writers. Dobson proposes that Dickinson was not a radical, as most feminist critics propose, but a conventional and conservative woman who supported the ideals of domesticity, that she could have published if she had wished to, but that she refused because publishing would have gone against her sense of values:

Whereas other women writers forged satisfactory social and professional lives for themselves, often courageously flouting convention to do so, Dickinson retreated into the home and eschewed--as a refined woman was taught to do--the jostling and strife of the world. In marked contrast with the groundbreaking activities of her contemporaries, this behavior appears conservative, indeed, strongly acquiescent to cultural demands. (48)

Emily Dickinson's life-long reading of domestic fiction supports Dobson's thesis that Dickinson was a conservative and conforming woman who never eschewed domestic values or the cult of true womanhood.

In Dickinson's case, the didactic efforts of domestic literature were partly successful. She lived an outwardly conforming domestic life full of the graces of nineteenth-century womanhood. Dickinson made part of herself those inward qualities that were amenable to her personality: for instance, her personal shyness was compounded and supported by her culture's insistence on modesty and reticence for women. Yet, her art's importance to her and her recognition of her own poetic power was a private denial of domestic values. Domestic literature's didacticism was not successful in Dickinson's spiritual life, precisely because she absorbed its messages.

These novels attempted to convert her to Christianity, but they probably turned her away from it. Like the title character of Katherine Anne Porter's "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall,"

Emily Dickinson waited for an ecstatic, transforming experience that never came, and she blamed God for ignoring her. In addition the novels told her that she could only be a Christian if she were good enough--if she became a moral exemplar. These ideas would have been reinforced by other messages Dickinson received. According to Barton Levi St. Armand's *Emily Dickinson and Her Culture*, sermons from the pulpit and other works of literature taught Dickinson "that the outstanding characteristic of a genuine crisis conversion was its thoroughly permanent nature. It imparted a sixth, supernatural sense, an amazing grace that signaled that the regenerate had somehow become God-like, and so one of the Elect" (88). But, when the novels told this story, they cheated: they did not follow their heroines past marriage and motherhood and did not reveal the imperfection that would have become apparent in their human lives, thus missing their chance to assure Dickinson that she could be a Christian.

Dickinson did well-utilize the space and freedom that the domestic world gave her. Like many other women "imprisoned" by their own domestic values, Dickinson understood that she was held back by her beliefs, but she also loved the chains that bound her--family, friendship, a specific role in the world. For her the compromise between art and domesticity was, if not happy, then convenient. She is much like the women in domestic novels, uneasily compromising but surviving. The public Emily Dickinson is like a domestic heroine in that she conforms to the domestic values. However, there was another Emily Dickinson that the world did not know, a woman influenced by the outrageousness and dominance of George Sand and other women Dickinson called "Queens."

Chapter 4

"How bountiful the Dream--": Reading George Sand, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, George Eliot, and the Brontës

Few Dickinson biographers and critics acknowledge the values in Dickinson's life that the domestic novel reinforced. Even fewer address the opposite type of nineteenth-century woman, typified by the passionate George Sand. This chapter explores the direct and indirect influences Sand had on Dickinson. The Sand works Dickinson knew were *Mauprat* and Julia Ward Howe's abridgement of Sand's biography, *Histoire de ma Vie*. Dickinson's enigmatic poem "Alone and in a Circumstance" is a response to *Mauprat*. After a discussion of these works by Sand, the remainder of this chapter considers Sand's influence on Dickinson's favorite writers: Barrett Browning, George Eliot, and the Brontës. Emily Dickinson's poetry echoes many of their themes and images, which they derived from reading George Sand.

Ignoring Sand in a Dickinson biography seems logical; after all, Emily Dickinson made only two known references to Sand--one in a letter and one in a cryptic poem. However, Sand's influence has been underrated. She influenced Dickinson both directly and indirectly, through a number of women writers Dickinson read. George Sand attracted many nineteenth-century Anglo-Saxon readers, especially women. According to Paul G. Blount's *George Sand and the Victorian World*,

Sand's reputation as a 'female Goethe' created about her an aura of grandeur for independent Victorian women like Elizabeth Barrett Browning, George Eliot, Charlotte Brontë, Jane Carlyle, and her friend Geraldine Jewsbury, who while recognizing Sand's seductive powers insisted upon her greatness. (37)

Throughout all of Dickinson's life, George Sand had been a famous (and infamous) woman, so Dickinson probably grew up hearing her name, as did other nineteenth-century women such as Julia Ward Howe (See Chapter 1, page 10). Dickinson had certainly learned of Sand by

November 1861, when she read Howe's twenty-one-page review and synopsis of Sand's autobiography, *Histoire de ma Vie*, in *The Atlantic Monthly*. While the review hints at Sand's affairs (presuming that the reader had heard the rumors), refers to her dressing in men's clothes, and alludes to her divorce, like the eight-volume work on which it is based, the review discusses mostly Sand's childhood.

"Queens, now!"

The Atlantic Monthly review is a clear source for Emily Dickinson's only epistolary reference to Sand, which occurs in an 1861 letter to her Norcross cousins. She tells them,

That Mrs. Browning fainted, we need not read *Aurora Leigh* [Barrett Browning's nine book verse-novel] to know, when she lived with her English aunt; and George Sand "must make no noise in her grandmother's bedroom." Poor children! Women, now, queens, now! And one in the Eden of God. [Barrett Browning had died in June of 1861.] I guess they both forget that now, so who knows but we, little stars from the same night, stop twinkling at last?* (#234. 2: 376)

Emily Dickinson's letter refers to three elements in Howe's review. First, Howe compared George Sand to Cleopatra as "another woman of royal soul" (513) and whose head wore a crown (531), which may have given rise to Dickinson's calling Sand a queen. Second, Howe described Sand's fear, shyness, and self-restraint in her grandmother's presence, a depiction Dickinson paraphrases. Third, Howe linked the names of Sand and Barrett Browning, as did Dickinson: Howe stated that "Elizabeth Browning's hands were not too pure to soothe that [Sand's] forehead, chiding while they soothed; and these hands, not illustrious as hers, shall soil themselves with no mud flung at a sister's crowned head" (531).

*These lines were extracted by the Norcross sisters from Dickinson's letters, extracts the Norcrosses gave to Mrs. Todd (an early Dickinson editor) before destroying the actual manuscripts. These extracts are dated "Spring 1861," a date Thomas Johnson accepts but which cannot be correct because the information Dickinson refers to comes from the November 1861 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*.

This is perhaps the only epistolary instance in which Dickinson calls a woman besides herself or Elizabeth Barrett Browning a queen. In the three poems Dickinson wrote about Elizabeth Barrett Browning, she often employs royal or deific metaphors. In "I think I was enchanted," Dickinson uses the phrases "Divine Insanity" (l. 25) and "Deity" (l. 32). "Ourselves were wed one summer--dear--" (#631) says that both the speaker and the subject were queens one summer, while "I went to thank Her" (#363) describes a pilgrimage to Barrett Browning's tomb. "Her--'last Poems'-" (#312) states that after Elizabeth Barrett Browning's death, no poetry will ever be written. It is particularly full of royal imagery:

Her--"last Poems"--
 Poets--ended--
 Silver--perished--with her Tongue--
 Not on Record--bubbled other,
 Flute--or Woman--
 So *divine*-- . . .
 Late--the Praise--
 'Tis dull--conferring
 On the Head too High to Crown--
 Diadem--or Ducal Showing--
 Be its Grave--sufficient sign--
 Nought--that We--No Poet's Kinsman--
 suffocate--with easy woe-- (1: 234. l. 1-6, 11-17. Italics mine)

Further, Dickinson does not reserve royal language in the poetry for Elizabeth Barrett Browning; in Dickinson's own poetry, she extends the queenly idiom to herself. Many of her poems incorporate a complex of words related to royal rank: *queen*, *diadem*, *crown*, *divine*, *witchcraft*, *majesty*, *courtier*, *purple*, *gems*, *diamonds*, *midsummer*, *sunset*, and *sunrise*, often even using the word *Aurora*, George Sand's Christian name as well as the name of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's heroine Aurora Leigh.* Theodora Ward, in *The Capsule of the Mind*, contends that this imagery, particularly "The word 'Crown,' which appears in several poems, always implies an honor conferred, and dedication to the one who conferred it" (58). Critic Gary Lee Stonum, in

*Dickinson's use of images is rarely simple. She restricts some to being a queen, while others serve more than one purpose. For example, *purple* may refer to the color of the sunrise or to that of blood. A *crown* may be a queen's crown and/or the crown a saint receives on the day of judgment.

The Dickinson Sublime, claims that the word *aurora* represents a challenge to Dickinson to match its splendors (146) or if *aurora* is a person, a challenge to match her successes. When Dickinson tells the Norcrosses "I guess they both forget that now, so who knows but we, little stars from the same night, stop twinkling at last?" she identifies herself and her cousins with women she and they admired. Like them, Sand and Barrett Browning had once been children and objects of pity but had graduated first to adulthood and then to royalty in her female pantheon.

This pattern of development resembles the growth of many of Dickinson's queens--often speakers of her poems and women who suddenly experience adulthood and coronation. One example is #508, "I'm ceded--I've stopped being Their's--". In it Dickinson discusses a choice she has made, a decision to adopt a new name and to take a crown. She says this event is a new baptism for her, one she compares to her rural infant baptism, rejecting her old name, along with the baubles of her childhood

I'm ceded--I've stopped being Their's--
 The name They dropped upon my face
 With water, in the country church
 Is finished using, now,
 And They can put it with my Dolls,
 My childhood, and the string of spools,
 I've finished threading--too--

Baptized, before, without the choice,
 But this time, consciously, of Grace--
 Unto supremest name--
 Called to my Full--The Crescent dropped--
 Existence's whole Arc, filled up,
 With one small Diadem.

My second Rank--too small the first--
 Crowned--Crowing--on my Father's breast--
 A half unconscious Queen--
 But this time--Adequate--Erect,
 With Will to choose, or to reject,
 And I choose, just a Crown. (2: 389-90)

Dickinson does not identify the crown she has chosen,* but her pride in her "adequacy" and ability is unmistakable. She has grown up, matured, developed, chosen. Part of her choice is to reject the paternalistic world of childhood for a world in which an adult female identity is possible. The paternal symbols in "I'm ceded"--the father and the name she inherited from him--demand a feminine interpretation of the poem, which Vivian R. Pollak supplies in *Dickinson: The Anxiety of Gender*. Pollak states that as Dickinson

Leav[es] behind her childhood . . . she also abandons the name, emblematic of an inherited identity, imposed upon her when her status and her comfort depended on her relationship to her father and the larger society he represents. The contrast between the baptism conferred upon her and the baptism she confers upon herself, . . . rings with the confidence of unconflicted self-definition. The essential difference Dickinson posits between childhood and maturity is an awareness of competing systems of value and an ability to choose decisively between them. (120)

She has thrown off the chains that have bound her all her life by rejecting the paternalistic world. Part of the awareness Pollak describes resulted from Dickinson's reading of (or about) proto-feminists Sand and Barrett Browning.

Another inheritance Dickinson may have gained from Elizabeth Barrett Browning is the use of crown imagery. Many critics conjecture that this imagery was derived from her 1856 reading of *Aurora Leigh*, wherein crowns are a frequent trope. The most extreme of these critics is John Evangelist Walsh, who in *The Hidden Life of Emily Dickinson*** documents Dickinson's debts to Elizabeth Barrett Browning and who sees Dickinson's poetry as a plagiarism of *Aurora Leigh*. Walsh and others also note Dickinson's use of the word *Aurora*, but they only connect it to *Aurora Leigh*, never to Aurora Dupin, George Sand.

*In *The Hidden Life of Emily Dickinson*, John Evangelist Walsh states that the crown is fame (134), while Theodora Ward in *The Capsule of the Mind* believes that it is love (57).

**See pages 90-109 and 257-261.

"Alone and in a Circumstance" with *Mauprat*

Dickinson's other reference to Sand occurs in the poem "Alone and in a Circumstance" (#1167). Thomas H. Johnson describes the poem's unusual manuscript, wherein the only direct reference to Sand's novel *Mauprat* occurs:

Pasted onto the center of the front half of the half-sheet of notepaper on which the poem is written there is an unused three-cent postage stamp of the issue of 1869. Beneath one side of the stamp are two small strips clipped from *Harper's Magazine* for May 1870. One bears the name "George Sand" and the other "Mauprat"--the title of the novel by George Sand published in 1836 [and reissued in translation in the 1870's]. The poem was written after the stamp and strips were pasted onto the sheet, for the lines accommodate themselves to the occupied space. (Note to #1167. 2: 816)

No one can be certain about whether Dickinson actually read *Mauprat* or not, though if "Alone and in a Circumstance" is any indication, she at least felt some emphatic connection with the novel. Dickinson apparently connected *Mauprat* with an intense personal experience in her past. The poem's speaker says that when she was

Alone and in a Circumstance
Reluctant to be told
A spider on my reticence
Assiduously crawled (1-4. 2: 815)

The spider makes itself more at home than she, even bringing in some of its friends, which she calls "inmates of the Air," so she leaves her "abode" (14, 9). When she returns "with articles of claim" and wishes to regain her property (10), she concludes that the law could help her if someone had stolen her property but that it is powerless to help her against this kind of intangible crime. Using legal jargon* to tell this story, Dickinson asks

But what redress can be
For an offense nor here nor there
So not in Equity--
That Larceny of time and mind
The marrow of the Day
By spider, or forbid it Lord

*She would have had access to this jargon because her father and brother were both lawyers.

That I should specify. (22-28)

In *The Years and Hours of Emily Dickinson*, Jay Leyda suggests that Emily Dickinson never even read George Sand's *Mauprat*: in May of 1870, "ED snips 3 reminders from the *May Harper's*: George Sand, *Mauprat*, . . . it will prove a dangerous book.*--but changes her mind before ordering it" (2: 148). However, the strength of the passion Dickinson reveals in "Alone and in a Circumstance" coupled with the words *Mauprat* and *George Sand* indicate that Dickinson had at least some knowledge of the book--far more than she could have learned from the short review in *Harper's*. (The review's synopsis is only three sentences long.) Johnson, in his notes to the poem, speculates that "in a circumstance reluctant to be told' ED had been guided to *Mauprat* and had found the book 'a larceny of time and mind'" (Note to #1167. 2: 816). Johnson's explanation is more likely than Leyda's, but it is just as inadequate.**

In Johnson's explication the poem's spider is the novel and "the inmates of the Air" *Mauprat's* characters. They have stolen the time and energy Dickinson spent in reading *Mauprat*. However, this explanation is not completely satisfactory because all novels commit that larceny, a larceny Dickinson generally enjoyed. Johnson's interpretation is also unsatisfying because the force of Dickinson's language and the intensity of her feelings suggest the thief has stolen a great deal more than time, though she is deliberately mysterious about exactly what was stolen. The robber has committed larceny by stealing her property, her time, and her mind, as well as "the marrow of the Day." In the few poems in which Dickinson uses the word *marrow*, it means the center, the life, or the core.*** One implication is, then, that the thief has stolen her life or her life's story. The poem's last lines hint that the spider was not the real thief, or at least not the

*Why Dickinson cut out "it will be a dangerous book" is unknown, as well as why she did not include it in the manuscript of the poem.

**Neither Johnson nor Leyda make any attempt to gauge the importance of the enigmatic postage stamp.

***See for example, #1274, "The Bone that has no Marrow."

only thief, that someone else actually stole her time and mind. And, that thief she is unwilling to name: "By spider, or forbid it Lord/ That I should specify." This phrase and "Reluctant to be told" are Dickinson's admission that she is intentionally avoiding naming some unspoken truth. Perhaps she connects the novel with an event in her own life, during which a thief stole something valuable from her.

Mauprat, which many critics say is Sand's finest novel, suggests some solutions to the poem's mysteries. Like Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, *Mauprat* is a story of eternal passion. In the preface to an 1857 edition of *Mauprat*, George Sand said that "I conceived the idea of portraying an exclusive and undying love, before, during, and after marriage. Thus I drew the hero of my book proclaiming, at the age of eighty, his fidelity to the one woman he had ever loved" (xxi). The aged narrator, Bernard Mauprat, tells his own story: how, as an orphan, he was reared by his immoral and cruel paternal grandfather and eight uncles. One evening when Bernard was fifteen and little more than a wild animal, his uncles tormented him for his lack of experience with women. He took up a challenge to "be bolder and more successful with the first woman brought to [the castle] Roche-Mauprat than any of my uncles" (54). The first woman to enter was not the prostitute Bernard expected but a cultured and lovely young woman who had gotten separated from her father's hunting party. (Only Bernard's uncles knew that the young lady was Edmée Mauprat, Bernard's third cousin from the wealthy and refined side of the family.) Bernard instantly desired and (to as great an extent as his barbaric nature was capable of) fell in love with Edmée. After his uncles left the room to fend off an attack on the castle, Bernard attempted to force himself on Edmée, but she told him who she was and convinced him that they should escape the castle together. Bernard agreed not to rape his cousin but only after exacting a promise from her that she would have intercourse with no one before him. They escaped, and the sheriffs conquered Roche Mauprat, damaging it by fire and killing most members of the family, though the bodies of two of the uncles were not found.

Edmée and her father took Bernard home with them and attempted to educate him in the areas of morality and rationality--adding them to his innate strength, goodness, and passion. She, however, showed no signs of softening toward Bernard, despite his constant and rapid increase in cultural and intellectual directions. Bernard then describes Edmée's refusal of his advances and her rejection of him, which broke his heart. He did not know that she was as much in love with him as he with her and that she would not allow herself to marry him until his development was complete. He wondered, instead, whether she loved him at all, and finally, deciding to distress her no more, left France to fight in the American revolutionary war. Upon his return, he was reunited with Edmée, but they married only after Bernard was nearly executed for supposedly attempting to murder her. (One of his renegade uncles was the guilty one.) At the time Bernard tells his story, he is eighty-four years old, and Edmée has been dead for ten years.

In *Mauprat's* romantic story, no larceny occurs; the only loss is the seven years Bernard and Edmée live apart, a loss offset by their eventual marriage. However, the seven years during which Bernard holds Edmée to her promise resemble the "Seven years of troth" in Dickinson's poem "Rearrange a 'Wife's' affection!" In this poem, Dickinson tells a story much like that of Edmée and Bernard. Her speaker says her "'Wife's' affection" will be altered only

When they dislocate my Brain!
Amputate my freckled Bosom!
Make me bearded like a man! (#1737. 2-4. 3: 1168)

Such descriptions strongly associate her femininity and sense of individuality with her passion. Then she describes her spirit's "Fastness," probably meaning loyalty as well as abstinence (5). Abstinence is likely because of her further description of "my unacknowledged clay" (6), loyalty because of the lines that say her "Love . . . never leaped its socket-" and "Constancy thro' fire--awarded--" (9, 11). She refers to a "burden" that is a "secret" (13, 17), which will never escape her "Till the Day its Weary Keeper/ Leads it through the Grave to thee" (19-20).

In this work and in other marriage poems, Dickinson hopes that her romance with her lover will be renewed beyond the grave, the same hope that the aged Bernard Mauprat expresses of his future life with his dead Edmée:

You must forgive me for not speaking further of this loss, which I suffered only ten years ago. I feel it now as keenly as on the first day, and I do not seek to find consolation for it, but to make myself worthy of rejoining the holy comrade of my life in a better world after I have completed my period of probation in this. She was the only woman I ever loved; never did any other win a glance from me or know the pressure of my hand. Such is my nature; what I love I love eternally, in the past, in the present, in the future. (411-12)

Bernard's lack of consolation in this passage also resembles that in "Rearrange a 'Wife's' affection!" wherein Dickinson speaks of "Anguish--bare of anodyne!" (12). Like Bernard, in the poetry Emily Dickinson claims that her love is undying and exclusive, that she has never loved anyone else. *Mauprat's* plot is also remarkably similar to the plot described by William Shurr in *The Marriage of Emily Dickinson*, in which he traces the marriage poems' narrative, except that in *Mauprat*, the lovers end up happily married, though death eventually separates them, while in Dickinson's case, she and her lover never lived a life together. For Dickinson *Mauprat* was a retelling of her own life story, how her lover had stolen her love and stolen her ability to live her life. Like Bernard, she was victimized by love, but unlike him, she never had the fulfillment Sand gave her hero.

The Brontës, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and George Eliot

Calling Sand a queen and coupling her with Dickinson's own elusive experience in the unusually cryptic and passionate "Alone and in a Circumstance" indicates the strength of Emily Dickinson's feelings about Sand. Sand's influence was more than casual, and it extended far beyond *Histoire de ma Vie* and *Mauprat*. Sand also influenced Dickinson through the works of Dickinson's favorite writers: Charlotte and Emily Brontë, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and George Eliot. Dickinson's interest in these women is well-documented through her letters.

Emily Dickinson's first reading of this group of women occurred in 1849, when she was nineteen. She had borrowed a copy of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* from Elbridge Bowdoin (who worked in her father's law office) and returned it to him with a note that read, "If all these leaves were altars, and on every one a prayer that Currer Bell [Charlotte Brontë's pseudonym] might be saved--and you were God--would you answer it?" (#28 1: 77). According to Johnson's dating, around 1859 Dickinson wrote "All overgrown by cunning moss," a poem which discusses the effect of reading *Jane Eyre*. The poem ends with the lines: "Oh what an afternoon for Heaven,/ When "Bronte" entered there!" (19-20. #148. 1: 106). Many scholars have studied and found allusions to *Jane Eyre* in Dickinson's life and work. The most interesting is Dickinson's use of eclipse imagery, which she probably borrowed from *Jane Eyre*; the most mundane is the name of her dog, Carlo, the name of St. John Rivers' dog in Charlotte Brontë's novel.* Dickinson's reading almost exhausted the Brontës' body of work. Along with *Jane Eyre*, she read Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* and, probably, *Shirley* (which Austin enjoyed); Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*; the Brontë sisters' poetry; and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. In the letters, often a gauge of Dickinson's enjoyment, are many references to *Jane Eyre*, to *Wuthering Heights*, and to the Brontës' poetry.

Emily Dickinson also read almost all of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poetry: *Aurora Leigh*, "Catarina to Camoens," *Earlier Poems*, *Last Poems*, *Poems*, *Prometheus Bound*, and "A Vision of Poets." A reflection of Dickinson's sentimentality and humor is that her most frequent

*Dickinson, a dog-lover, once rhapsodized "The Dog is the noblest work of Art, sir. I may safely say the noblest" (*Letters* #34. 1: 92). She would have noted that dogs figure prominently (and unpleasantly) in *Wuthering Heights* and (always pleasantly) in many of George Eliot's novels. She might also have heard of Barrett Browning's famous dog, Flush, given to her by her friend, correspondent, and fellow writer Mary Russell Mitford. Flush was in the news when he was kidnapped and finally ransomed by his distraught owners. (A charming biography is *Flush: A Biography*, by Virginia Woolf, 1933.)

epistolary allusion to Barrett Browning is not to Aurora's poetic aspirations, nor to the sonnets to George Sand,* but to the convalescence of Marian Erle.

Dickinson read George Eliot with great passion as well. She read almost all of the novels,** but her epistolary references usually refer to *Middlemarch* and *The Mill on the Floss*. For example, in one letter, she playfully adopts for Louise Norcross the moniker "Mrs. [Dorothea] Ladislaw," *Middlemarch's* heroine (#401. 2: 515). Dickinson also read Eliot's *Armgarth, Jubal and Other Poems, Poems, Scenes of Clerical Life, The Spanish Gypsy: A Poem*, and she probably borrowed Sue's copy of "How Lisa Loved the King." Perhaps the comment most illustrative of Dickinson's feeling for George Eliot's writing occurs in an 1873 letter to the Norcrosses. She says,

"What do I think of *Middlemarch*?" What do I think of glory--except that in a few instances this "mortal has already put on immortality."

George Eliot is one. The mysteries of human nature surpass the "mysteries of redemption," for the infinite we only suppose, while we see the finite. (#389. 2: 506).

In this rare critical comment, Emily Dickinson pinpointed the principal element in George Eliot's novels, the realistic depiction of human nature.

Dickinson was not interested, however, in these writers as authors alone: she was also interested in them as women. She conducted lengthy correspondence with publisher Thomas Niles in order to obtain biographies of Eliot, which she read with great interest: J. W. Cross' (Marian Evan's husband's) *George Eliot's Life as Related in her Letters and Journals*, and Mathilde Blind's *Life of George Eliot*. And she pursued Brontë biographies just as eagerly--Mrs. Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* and A. Mary F. Robinson's *Emily Brontë*. Only in the Eliot biographies would

*They are "To George Sand: A Desire" and "A Recognition." Neither is very good, but they well express Elizabeth Barrett Browning's conflicting feelings about Sand. While they voice admiration, they also embody Barrett Browning's desire that Sand would become a more conventional woman. The opening lines of the first are fairly well-known: "Thou large-brained woman and large-hearted man,/ Self-called George Sand!" (2: 122).

**The only novels she left no record of reading are *Silas Marner* and *Felix Holt*.

Dickinson have found a hint of George Sand's influence on George Eliot. Cross quotes a long discussion of Sand in one of Eliot's letters to her friend Sara Hennell:

[T]he fire of his [Rousseau's] genius has so fused together old thoughts and prejudices, that I have been ready to make new combinations. It is thus with George Sand. I should never dream of going to her writing as a moral code or text-book. I don't care whether I agree with her about marriage or not--whether I think the design of her plot correct, or that she had no precise design at all . . . It is sufficient for me, as a reason for bowing before her in eternal gratitude to that "great power of God manifested in her," that I cannot read six pages of hers without feeling that it is given to her to delineate human passion and its results and . . . some of the moral instincts and their tendencies, with such truthfulness, such nicety of discrimination, such tragic power, and with, such loving, gentle humour, that one might live a century with nothing but one's own dull faculties, and not know so much as those six pages will suggest. (108)

Mathilde Blind's biography of Eliot also discusses the influence of Sand. Throughout this work Blind refers to Sand, and the "Introductory" is an explicit comparison of Sand and Eliot (See pages 1-11). Dickinson also knew that George Sand and Elizabeth Barrett Browning had met, though Dickinson probably did not know the circumstances or that Barrett Browning had looked forward to that meeting with as much eagerness and anxiety as Dickinson herself would have anticipated a meeting with Barrett Browning.

Sand's Indirect Influence

In an intelligent and thoughtful study entitled *George Sand and the Victorians: Her Influence and Reputation in Nineteenth-Century England*, Patricia Thomson traces George Sand's influence on Emily and Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and George Eliot, as well as other eminent Victorians. She traces Sand's influence on these British writers' art and lives, finding sources for their novels and poetry in Sand and her body of work, finding inspiration for their own behavior in Sand's life. A similar study by Paul G. Blount entitled *George Sand and the Victorian World* concentrates on the lives of Victorians interested in Sand rather than on their work.

According to Blount, one of the qualities the Victorians most appreciated in Sand was her writing skill:

Although Sand's fame among the Victorians rested on many bases, the firmest one of all was their appreciation of her literary talent. Victorians admired her as a stylist; they had a high regard for her characterizations and reveled in her nature descriptions; many preferred her brand of romanticism to the rising realism of the day. (67)

Many of the Sand reviews Emily Dickinson had access to express this admiration Blount notes for Sand's writing skill, but they are also suspicious of it. They suspect Sand of seducing readers with her beautiful prose into accepting her shady values and arguments. For example, the *Harper's* review Dickinson read attests to *Mauprat's* quality, while also expressing serious concerns about the morality of the novel:

We are not ignorant of the defense of this kind of literature: "Evil to him who evil thinks." Unfortunately there are a great many who "evil think," and to all such it will prove a dangerous book.* . . . The aim is admirable, the moral excellent. But the bitter conflict between base passion and the nobler nature is described with so great power, and the incidents which provoke the fiery temper within are wrought up with such consummate skill, that the youthful reader will be apt to find the devil in him more effectually raised than exorcised, the passion fired rather than extinguished, the effect of the story, in a word, more potent than the effect of its moral. (May 1870: 926)

This reviewer and many others find Sand's writing absorbing and bewitching, but they are also deeply disturbed by the morality espoused in it. For example, Thomas Sergeant Perry, who wrote Sand's obituary in *The Atlantic Monthly*, considers Sand's eloquence and rhetorical skill dangerous:

[I]t is easy to see how the reader who took up her novels, asking only for amusement, yielded to the charm of her eloquence and found himself an enthusiastic supporter of her crusades against the marriage-laws, the possession of property on the part of the rich, or whatever institution of society she saw good to attack. (444)

Dickinson, however, is less likely than others to have shared these concerns. She was rarely censorious of other's behavior, and she expressed no extant concerns about the arguments within other novels, such as *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*, which share ideological similarities with

*This is an interesting though mysterious context for the sentence Dickinson cut out of *Harper's*.

Sand's novels. Dickinson did not even censure Marian Evans for living with George Henry Lewes without being married but, instead, expressed her approval by calling Evans "Mrs. Lewes" (Letter #368. 2: 491).

Indeed, George Eliot shared a distinction with George Sand that no other woman writer possessed. In her writing, she presented herself as a moralist, espousing the values of her society, yet she also espoused Lewes, living a life considered immoral by the very values she upheld. George Sand does not seem to have felt the same tension, probably because of the different marriage laws in France (a point English and American reviewers continuously pride themselves on). Choosing how to live one's life despite society's demands--as Sand, Eliot, and Barrett Browning did--seems to have been Dickinson's qualification for being a queen, not writing ability. That is certainly present too, and it is one of the obvious differences between the writers of this group of literature and those of other types, the domestic novels, for instance. Writing skill was probably one reason Dickinson read these novelists with such dedication and devotion. They share two qualities that others do not share to the same extent: evocation of a mood and a personal atmosphere. Dickinson shares these qualities with them.

Stylistic Qualities

According to Patricia Thomson, one of the most important stylistic qualities these women writers admired and imitated in George Sand's novels was her ability to evoke a mood (75-79).

For example, when *Mauprat's* aged narrator relates his and Edmée's first meeting, he says that he can remember every detail because

so much was I struck by it amid the tumult that was raging within me and without; amid the din of shots striking the ramparts, the lightning flashes ripping the sky, and the violent palpitations which sent my blood surging from my heart to my brain, and from my head to my breast. (69)

A different kind of description, but an equally powerful one, occurs in the second chapter of *Jane Eyre*. Jane's tyrannous aunt has locked her in the cold, quiet, and cheerless red-room:

The bed rose before me; to my right hand there was the high, dark wardrobe with subdued, broken reflections varying the gloss of its panels; to my left were the muffled windows; a great looking-glass between them repeated the vacant majesty of the bed and room. . . . All looked colder and darker in that visionary hollow than in reality. (I: 12)

Patricia Thomson recognizes this important resemblance between the two novelists: "[T]he similarity lies in the ability of both authors to evoke the mood of happiness or desolation or hope rather than in any exact imitation" (76). Much of the power in these descriptions is the result of word choice, one of the most striking elements in Dickinson's own poetry. Like her mentors she had the ability to evoke a mood but did so in poems of the strictest economy. In #101, "Will there really be a 'Morning'?" Dickinson describes the desperate need to discover morning. She sounds like someone who has awakened from a nightmare only to find that the nightmare is real. In the poem, the speaker catechizes herself:

Will there really be a "Morning"?
Is there such a thing as "Day"?
Could I see it from the mountains
If I were as tall as they?

Has it feet like Water lilies?
Has it feathers like a Bird?
Is it brought from famous countries
Of which I have never heard? (1: 78. 1-8)

The speaker's despair seems all the more real because there is no answer to her questions. Religion and philosophy offer no explanations, though in the last stanza, Dickinson requests help from a scholar, a sailor, and a wise man.

Upon reading "Will there really be a 'Morning'?" the reader wonders about the cause of Dickinson's despair. Perhaps it was death or abandonment. Such a reader response is the result of another unusual characteristic in Dickinson's poetry: the unparalleled intimacy in her verse. By turns her poetry is tender, passionate, bitter, gentle, joyous, happy, angry, loving--demonstrating fully the breadth of her emotions. Because many of the poems reveal the feelings of their maker

but not the cause of these feelings (as in "Will there really be a 'Morning?"), each reader interprets Dickinson's poetry slightly differently: each reads his or her own concerns and interests into the poetry. One Dickinson biographer, Cynthia Griffin Woolf, expresses her astonishment at "how many of her audience feel that somehow they know her personally. . . . Hundreds of thousands of readers have responded not merely to her superb verbal artistry, but to a felt presence, her 'self'" (163).

Dickinson's poetry is also intimate in the sense that it is secret; sometimes it seems like private correspondence addressed to a few people or to an individual. The poetry is often full of the personal references usually found in letters--private jokes and implications that perhaps only the original readers would have understood. For modern readers these oblique allusions to events, people, and places are often incomprehensible. While some of Dickinson's referents can be discovered, much of her work steadfastly refuses to betray the secrets of its maker (the postage stamp on the manuscript of "Alone and in a Circumstance," for example), despite the fact that many critics see Dickinson's poetry as a mysterious key, which if properly assembled, could unlock her entire existence. Sand, Eliot, and Brontë scholars exhibit the same tendency. As many studies have been written about George Sand's romantic liaisons as about Emily Dickinson's. As Ellen Moers says in *Literary Women*, the only mystery left about Sand's romantic life is her birth control device (11).

The personal atmosphere, enhanced by the frequent use of first-person narration, makes these works likely targets for biographical criticism. Scholars connect Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* to the author's experiences in Brussels and the novel's M. Paul to Charlotte Brontë's own M. Heger. As the title of Janice Carlisle's article "The Face in the Mirror: *Villette* and the Conventions of Autobiography" implies, Carlisle sees this novel as an autobiography: she says, "*Villette* is genuinely puzzling, and it presents mysteries that we might be tempted to unlock with the key of biography" (265). Much of this temptation is brought on by the intense self at the center of a Charlotte Brontë novel. A reader believes in and sympathizes with her heroines because they describe their

agonies and joys truthfully. They hold back from the reader no facts that they themselves know.

According to Patricia Thomson,

The personal quality was what Charlotte Brontë relished--the quality in her own novels that Virginia Woolf described well as 'I love--I hate--I suffer'--and which she responded to more, I think, than anything else in the novels of George Sand. The lack of it was what she could not forgive in Jane Austen. (79)*

A similar temptation occurs with Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*. Because it tells the story of a woman poet who does not marry until the age of (about) thirty, many critics tend to read it autobiographically, a reading which in some cases is more appropriate than others. For instance, on the basis of a passage in book five of *Aurora Leigh*, Peter Dally states in *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: A Psychological Portrait*, "Robert, one feels, was a sympathetic lover, and exactly caught Elizabeth's feelings (134). One would hope so, but a single passage from *Aurora Leigh* is not much to go on. Perhaps Dally's assumption is related to the fact that *Aurora Leigh* is a first-person narrative, just as *Mauprat* and many of Dickinson's other favorites are. While not all of George Sand's novels have first-person narrators as *Mauprat* does, they do have believable subjective voices.

A similar element occurs in George Eliot's novels, a quality readers generally either love or hate. That quality is the authorial voice, the presence of Eliot's own values and understanding of human nature. For example, she says by way of defining the motives of Dorothea's husband, Casaubon, toward his relation, Will Ladislaw:

That is the way with us when we have any uneasy jealousy in our disposition: if our talents are chiefly of the burrowing kind, our honey-sipping cousin (whom we have grave reasons for objecting to) is likely to have a secret contempt for us, and anyone who admires him passes an oblique criticism on ourselves. (Book IV, Chapter 37. 265).

*This quotation brings to the surface the question of how Dickinson would have responded to Austen's novels. She would probably have enjoyed their wit and precision, so much like her own. But, she probably would not have relished them as she did *Jane Eyre* and *Aurora Leigh*. Dickinson seems to have enjoyed emotional reading experiences, and there is little passion in Austen's novels.

Though Eliot's narrators are not characters in the novels, and though she presents her characters from the outside, she forces her readers to empathize with the reasons for the characters' actions. She imposes her own interpretations on her story. Along with these shared stylistic qualities, the heroines in Emily Dickinson's favorite novels are also similar--similarly passionate.

Passionate Heroines

In terms of the heroines Emily Dickinson's favorites create, they have one quality in common that they inherited from Sand and her novels. Along with beauty, which these heroines may or may not possess (Eliot's always do; Charlotte Brontë's never do), along with intelligence (which only Emily Brontë's Catherine might not possess in excess), Edmée Mauprat, Catherine Earnshaw, Jane Eyre, Lucy Snow, Aurora Leigh, Maggie Tulliver, and Dorothea Brooke are deeply passionate women, far more so than most of their counterparts in domestic literature. Patricia Thomson attributes these characteristics in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's work and, to some extent, life to her interest in George Sand:

Passion, in some form, was what Elizabeth Barrett demanded of literature, and no one could deny its presence in the novels of George Sand. . . . Her stress on the supremacy of the heart, on the attainability of perfect and ideal love between man and woman, on the emptiness of a life in which love is not all-important, on the need to owe love, and not duty, one's primary allegiance--all these doctrines preached by George Sand's articulate heroines must have made Elizabeth Barrett much less startled by, and even possibly more receptive to, Robert Browning's swift and passionate wooing than she might have been, had she been less well versed in the gospel of George Sand. (49)

Many critics make the same argument about Marian Evans' setting up housekeeping with George Henry Lewes. Her women characters also share many of the same qualities found in Sand's and Barrett Browning's heroines. Jennifer Uglow, in the feminist biography *George Eliot*, sees Eliot's creation of unsurpassed heroines as a symptom of one of the least likeable of Eliot's characteristics:

persistent intellectual elitism. She constantly separates the extraordinary woman from the mass, a pattern she continues in the aspiring heroines of her fiction. A George Eliot heroine, whether historical or fictional, must, it seems, be above all *a woman of passion*, with a hunger for ideals and a great capacity for love. (italics mine 75)

The same might be said of all these heroines. In *Mauprat* Bernard describes a similar paragon in Edmée: "This woman was beautiful as the day . . . Her glance and her smile showed a union of goodness and acuteness which it was almost impossible to conceive; it was as if heaven had given her two souls, one wholly of intellect, the other wholly of feeling" (61). Charlotte Brontë's heroines are the same kind of woman, as is Aurora Leigh, but Brontë's do not possess Edmée's beauty. Perhaps because Jane Eyre was not beautiful, Dickinson particularly identified with her. Dickinson's poetry and letters reveal a woman who was intellectual, affectionate, passionate, but who did not think herself beautiful.

The Woman Question

While the heroines of George Sand, Charlotte and Emily Brontë, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning find passionate love an absolute necessity, they also believe that a woman should be more than chattel, that she should have an identity, beyond that of wife and mother. Perhaps Eliot's novels in general, and *Middlemarch* in particular, are exceptions to this statement. *Middlemarch*'s ending states the importance of unheroic wives and mothers. After explaining why Dorothea could not perform "great" acts as did St. Theresa and Antigone, Eliot says

But the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs. (VIII: Finale. 621)

Most of the other writers' heroines are not like Dorothea.

In marriage most of these heroines lose neither sexuality nor power nor their dreams, though their husbands may. For example, Rochester and Romney Leigh go blind, and Rochester

in particular becomes completely dependent on his wife. *Aurora Leigh*, for example, is in many ways a celebration of a woman's power. In Emily Dickinson's 1880 copy of the poem are three marked passages, which most critics believe were marked by her. All deal with woman's nature, which is not surprising because that is one of the primary issues in *Aurora Leigh*. The first slightly describes Aurora's aunt:

She had lived we'll say,
 A harmless life, she called a virtuous life,
 A quiet life, which was not life at all,
 (But that, she had not lived enough to know) . . .

She had lived

A sort of cage-bird life, born in a cage,
 Accounting that to leap from perch to perch
 Was act and joy enough for any bird.
 Dear heaven, how silly are the things that live
 In thickets, and eat berries!. (I: 10)

Following this passage, Aurora describes herself as a different kind of bird:

I, alas,

A wild bird scarcely fledged, was brought to her cage,
 And she was there to meet me. Very kind.
 Bring the clean water; give out the fresh seed. (I: 10)

This passage suggests that Dickinson was aware of the differences between kinds of birds--or kinds of women. But, the basis of a marking is not enough to draw many conclusions about which woman she identified with. In 1880, when she marked these passages, she would have been closer to the age and external circumstances of the aunt rather than the niece; further, a "cage-bird life" is similar to Dickinson's solitude. However, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's tone in the passage indicates the pity and condescension she holds for a superficial life, a life Dickinson did not lead, a tone she could not have been blind to. Emily Dickinson probably also did not identify with the first bird because her awareness of *Aurora Leigh* indicates she could not have been ignorant that "she had not lived enough to know."

The second passage, also taken from Book I, is Aurora's sarcastic discussion of the meaning and use of traditional woman's work, needlework, especially when created to please a man:

By the way,

The works of women are symbolical.
 We sew, sew, prick our fingers, dull our sight,
 Producing what? A pair of slippers, sir,
 To put on when you're weary--or a stool
 To tumble over and vex you . . . 'curse that stool!
 Or else at best, a cushion where you lean
 And sleep, and dream of something we are not,
 But would be for your sake. Alas, alas!
 This hurts most, this . . . that, after all, we are paid
 The worth of our work, perhaps. (I: 15)

Dickinson was quite familiar with women's work. In her own household, she was responsible for all of the baking, but she probably performed a great deal of needlework as well. In *Emily Dickinson's Home*, Millicent Todd Bingham discusses the domestic work Dickinson performed.*

She states that

The women [presumably including Dickinson] all had their share of the sewing. The frequent mention of it is evidence of how much time it required. . . . Sewing a fine seam by hand was an endless business. . . . [D]resses were lined, and built on whalebones, thin strips of stiffening, each one of which must be covered before being sewed onto the lining. . . . Underclothes were not only made by hand, the seams triply sewn. (116)

The Dickinson women not only sewed for themselves; they also sewed for the men of the family.

While Austin was teaching in Boston, many of the letters Dickinson wrote him contain information about the state of his wardrobe or accompany clothes the women of the family had repaired. Dickinson exhibits some of Aurora's attitude in an 1851 letter to Austin:

Your clothes are in beautiful order, everything in waiting to have some way to send. I have heeled the lamb's wool stockings, and now and then repaired some imperfections in the destined shirts--when you *wear* them, you must'nt forget these things. (#53. 1: 139)

She is willing to labor for Austin so long as he appreciates her work and does not take these evidences of her affection as his due.

*She often mentions knitting in her letters and sewing, which she usually spells *sowing*, fairly frequently in her poetry. See "The Making of a Home" in Millicent Todd Bingham's *Emily Dickinson's Home*, pages 112-119, for details about Dickinson's woman's work.

The attitude in the section marked in *Aurora Leigh* is reminiscent of convictions Dickinson held about other kinds of women's work as well. In an 1850 letter, which she wrote at age nineteen, to her girlfriend Abiah Root, she reports on her unhappy housewifery:

Mother is still an invalid, tho' a partially restored one--Father and Austin still clamor for food, and I, like a martyr am feeding them. Would'nt you love to see me in these bonds of great despair, looking around my kitchen, and praying for kind deliverance . . . My kitchen I think I called it, God forbid that it was . . .
(#36. 1: 99)

The final passage marked in Dickinson's copy occurs in the second book, during an explosive argument between Aurora and Romney. She has just rejected his proposal of marriage, (a proposal much like St. John Rivers' to Jane Eyre), and he is denigrating her choice of career. Dickinson marked one of Aurora's caustic volleys:

I may love my art,
You'll grant that even a woman may love art,
Seeing that to waste true love on anything
Is womanly, past question. (II: 53)

As a maker of art, Dickinson probably identified with and enjoyed the acerbic humor in Aurora's statement. Perhaps it was an argument she herself used or would have liked to use against someone who thought her a harmless little poetess.

The Primacy of Love

The heroines of the fiction Emily Dickinson loved believe that love is the primary good. Ultimately, none is willing to sacrifice love for any other good, though most of them temporarily make that choice. *Wuthering Heights'* Catherine Earnshaw leaves Heathcliff to marry Edgar Linton; Jane Eyre leaves Rochester because he is already married; Aurora Leigh forsakes Romney Leigh for her career and because he is unfeeling; *Mauprat's* Edmée will not marry Bernard until he becomes good enough for her; Maggie Tulliver of *The Mill on the Floss'* valiantly tries to put aside her passion for Stephen Guest; *Middlemarch's* Dorothea marries Casaubon because she believes in

his intellect and life's work. Eventually these heroines realize that their original courses of renunciation are wrong and make choices not simply for marriage but for love in marriage (with the exception of Maggie Tulliver, who dies). Jane Eyre, believing that she has lost Rochester and facing St. John Rivers' cold proposal, "Jane, come with me to India: come as my helpmeet and fellow-laborer" (II: 238), decides that she cannot marry without love:

[H]e asks me to be his wife, and has no more of a husband's heart for me than that frowning giant of a rock . . . He prizes me as a soldier would a good weapon; and that is all. . . . [C]an I let him complete his calculations, coolly put into practice his plans, go through the wedding ceremony? Can I receive from him the bridal ring, endure all the forms of love (which I doubt not he would scrupulously observe) and know that the spirit was quite absent? Can I bear the consciousness that every endearment he bestows is a sacrifice made on principle? No: such a martyrdom would be monstrous. I will never undergo it. (2: 242-3)

Likewise, *Middlemarch's* Dorothea sacrifices her fortune in order to marry the man she loves.

Dominant Women

In most of these novels, the female lover dominates the relationship by making choices. Much of this dominance involves what the witty Mr. Tilney in Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* called the right of refusal: "You will allow that in both [marriage and dancing], man has the advantage of choice, woman only the power of refusal" (95). These passionate heroines retain control by exercising their power of refusal--causing their relationships to advance, to pause, or to stop altogether. There is no sense in Dickinson's favorite novels that the man is in control, as there is in any of Austen's novels, but Austen's novels also possess little passion. Because of the great passion the man in any of Dickinson's favorite novels feels, he is unable simply to leave his lover for a woman who is more accommodating and cooperative.

In many of these novels, other women pale next to the heroine precisely because she is a passionate woman but also because the lovers have a transcendent bond. For example, Edmée, feeling frustration about Bernard's brutality, reveals to her confessor,

"Yes, I love him! . . . It is not my fault; why should I blush at it? I cannot help it; it is the work of fate. . . . I know that Bernard is a bear, a badger, . . . a savage, a boor, and anything else you like. There is nothing more shaggy, more prickly, more cunning, more malicious than Bernard. . . . However, whether he forces me to kill myself or to turn nun, whether he remains as he is or becomes worse, it will be none the less true that I love him. . . . Bernard alone seems as proud, as passionate, as bold as myself--and as weak as myself; for he cries like a child when I vex him, and here I am crying, too, as I think of him." (Ch. 39. 407-8)

While Edmée empathizes with Bernard, she is the partner in control, the partner who knows all of the facts and the partner who acts on them. After all, for seven years Bernard does not even know whether she loves him, and he is so entrapped by his feelings that his options are limited.

The resemblance to *Wuthering Heights* should be obvious: both Edmée and Catherine say that they experience a surpassing bond with their lovers. This is one of the many points of similarity Patricia Thomson discusses in a chapter which deals with *Mauprat's* influence on *Wuthering Heights*. She finds many correlations between the novels, but for the purpose of a study of Dickinson, the most important are the powerful bond between the lovers, the women's control of their relationships, and references to the eternal nature of their love. Another is that the women control the relationship because of their concern with morality or society:

In both books, it is the women who are concerned with the social aspect of the relationship, intent on not degrading themselves by marriage; Bernard, like Heathcliff, can see no further than his devouring passion. Edmée loves her cousin because she cannot help herself, but has no illusions about the misery marriage with him, in his present state of savagery, would bring. (84)

Like Edmée, Catherine is the partner in control, though she and Heathcliff depend on each other completely. Despite her refusal of him, he and Catherine can never be separated as can ordinary lovers.* She tells her nurse, Nelly, that

My great miseries in this world have been Heathcliff's miseries, and I watched and felt each from the beginning; my great thought in living is himself. . . . My love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods. Time will change it, I'm well aware, as winter changes the trees. My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks

*This claim is not as unusual as it sounds. John Donne's "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning" makes a similar statement: "Dull sublunary lovers love/ (Whose soule is sense) cannot admit/ Absence, because it doth remove/ Those things which elemented it. . . . Our two soules therefore, . . . are one" (13-16 and 21).

beneath--a source of little visible delight, but necessary. Nelly, I *am* Heathcliff--he's always, always in my mind--not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself--but as my own being. (Ch. 9. 74)

Catherine cannot ever lose Heathcliff as she can Linton. Her choice to marry Linton is wrong; it destroys her, Heathcliff, and Linton too. But, it is her choice: Heathcliff has no choice.

Even in death, she is still the partner in control. When the first narrator, Lockwood, tells Heathcliff of seeing Cathy's ghost at Wuthering Heights, Heathcliff dismisses Lockwood and searches for Cathy's ghost himself:

He got on to the bed and wrenched open the lattice, bursting, as he pulled at it, into an uncontrollable passion of tears. 'Come in! come in!' he sobbed. 'Cathy, do come. Oh, do--*once* more! Oh! my heart's darling, hear me *this* time--Catherine, at last!' [But] The spectre showed a spectre's ordinary caprice; it gave no sign of being. (Ch. 3. 28)

Even in death, then, Catherine still is in control. In the end of the story, when Heathcliff refuses to eat and listens to an absent speaker, he may be willing himself to die to rejoin Cathy, but he believes that Cathy is instructing him in the art of dying; Cathy is controlling him even in death.

Her daughter, Catherine Linton, exercises even more control than a woman's traditional power of refusal. She attempts to take control of her life by fooling the nurse, Nelly; by disobeying her father; and by pursuing her cousin, Linton Heathcliff. Unlike her mother, she comes to be controlled by Heathcliff. But, just before Heathcliff wills himself to die, she and her cousin, Hareton, now her friend, plant a flower garden. Finally her womanliness and gentleness triumph, and she converts both Hareton Earnshaw, the new master of Wuthering Heights and the Heights itself to civilization. For both Catherines, love triumphs: one in life, and one in death.

Another of the qualities *Mauprat* and *Wuthering Heights* share is their employment of death imagery, particularly as it relates to the eternal bond of the lovers. One instance in *Wuthering Heights* occurs when the first Catherine dies. Heathcliff demands

'May she wake in torment! . . . I pray one prayer--I repeat it till my tongue stiffens--Catherine Earnshaw, may you not rest, as long as I am living! You said I killed you--haunt me, then! The murdered *do* haunt their murderers, I believe. I know that ghosts *have* wandered on earth. Be with me always--take any form--drive me mad! only *do* not leave me in this abyss, where I cannot find you! Oh,

God! it is unutterable! I *cannot* live without my life! I *cannot* live without my soul!' (Ch. 16. 174)

Of course, Heathcliff gets his wish. Catherine haunts him, drives him mad, and after his death, they are seen walking on the moors together.

However, Heathcliff is determined to share his life with Catherine in a physical way as well. The most famous graveyard allusion in *Wuthering Heights* shows Heathcliff's belief in an eternal life he will share with Catherine, a life he is determined to shut her husband, Edgar Linton, out of:

'I got the sexton, who was digging Linton's grave, to remove the earth off her coffin lid, . . . I struck one side of the coffin loose, and covered it up--not Linton's side, damn him! I wish he'd been soldered in lead--and I bribed the sexton to pull it away, when I'm laid there, and slide mine out too. I'll have it made so, and then, by the time Linton gets to us, he'll not know which is which!' (Ch. 29. 298-99)

In death, Heathcliff is determined to have a physical union with Catherine that will be more enduring than the one he was cheated out of in life. It is also his means of abrogating her woman's right of refusal. A possible Dickinson echo of this scene occurs in #449, "I did for Beauty," in which Dickinson's speaker speaks of being interred in a tomb "When One who died for Truth, was lain/ In an adjoining room" (3-4. 1: 347). This pair find themselves to be brethren or kinsmen, because beauty and truth "Themselves are One" (7), just as they are in Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn." Dickinson's speaker and her kinsman who died for truth talk "Until the Moss had reached our lips--/ And covered up--our names--" (11-12), until their individual characteristics, like Heathcliff's and Catherine's, were gone, so that any who came to separate them at the resurrection would find them inseparable. He who died for truth may be the lover Dickinson often wrote about, though she is not specific about his identity here. One who died for truth might be a jurist, an abolitionist, or a minister.

Because of Emily Dickinson's refusal to be explicit, critics and biographers cannot dissect Emily Dickinson's relationships in the same way as they discuss Catherine and Heathcliff's and Edm e and Bernard's. There are too few details, and many do not even believe that any romantic

relationship was real.* However, just as George Sand and Emily Brontë depicted passions stronger than death, much of Dickinson's love poetry asserts that she is bound to her lover by a transcendent bond that will endure beyond the grave. The quintessential poem that expresses this belief is "I cannot live with You--" (#640). In this poem, Dickinson's speaker rejects all possibilities--living with the lover, dying with him, rising with him (at the resurrection), and living eternally if together or if apart. Near the end of the poem, she laments

And were You lost, I would be--
 Though My Name
 Rang loudest
 On the Heavenly fame--

And were You--saved--
 And I--condemned to be
 Where You were not--
 That self--were Hell to Me-- (37-44. 2: 492)

In this poem the passion, however, is all on the speaker's side. She describes her feelings of despair and anguish but does not say that the lover feels the same way.

John Evangelist Walsh correctly asserts that part of this poem is related to the end of Chapter 24 of *Jane Eyre* (263). Before Jane's planned but unexecuted marriage to Rochester, she says

My future husband was becoming to me my whole world; and more than the world: almost my hope of heaven. He stood between me and every thought of religion, as an eclipse intervenes between man and the broad sun. I could not, in those days, see God for his creature: of whom I had made an idol. (2: 50)

The spirit and the words of this quotation are similar to those of the poem, though Dickinson's use of present tense and detail makes her borrowing far more interesting than the original. The most derivative part of the poem is the use of the eclipse image. Dickinson's poem says that "Your Face/ Would put out Jesus'," that "You than He [Jesus]/ Shone closer by," and that "You

*Elizabeth Phillips' *Emily Dickinson: Personae and Performance* is based on the thesis that Dickinson imagined herself to be the heroines of *Jane Eyre* and *Aurora Leigh*, among others. In her eyes the poetry was not written to, for, or about a real lover, but for Rochester, Romney Leigh, and other imaginary lovers.

saturated Sight--/ And I had no more Eyes/ For sordid excellence/ As Paradise" (22-3, 27-8, and 33-6).

How bountiful the Dream--

The golden visions of requited passionate love in these novels cast a shadow over Emily Dickinson's own biography. Dickinson reacts to a fictitious dream--probably to these heroines and, in some cases, their creators--in #646, "I think To Live--may be a Bliss." If she and the speaker are one, then even as Dickinson lived a life of domestic values--modesty, gentleness, and self-denial--she was dreaming of another, more adventurous kind of life, probably the kind lived by Sand, Evans, and Barrett Browning:

I think To Live--may be a Bliss
To those who dare to try--
Beyond my limit to conceive--
My lip--to testify--

I think the Heart I former wore
Could widen--till to me
The Other, like the little Bank
Appear--unto the Sea--

I think the Days--could every one
In Ordination stand--
And Majesty--be easier--
Than an inferiour kind--

No numb alarm--lest Difference come--
No Goblin--on the Bloom--
No start in Apprehension's Ear,
No Bankruptcy--no Doom--

But Certainities of Sun--
Midsummer--in the Mind--
A steadfast South--upon the Soul
Her Polar time--behind--

The Vision--pondered long--
So plausible becomes
That I esteem the fiction--real--
The Real--fictitious seems--

How bountiful the Dream--
 What Plenty--it would be--
 Had all my Life but been Mistake
 Just Rectified--in Thee (2: 497).

In the first stanza, Dickinson's speaker states that she cannot imagine daring to live, exercising her courage, and therefore earning a life of bliss. The lives of George Sand, Marian Evans, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning instantly come to mind--women who had courage enough to defy convention and to live their lives on their own terms. These women, and particularly Barrett Browning, are also suggested by the queenly language in the poem: *ordination*, *majesty*, *midsummer*, images Dickinson used in her four eulogies in honor of Barrett Browning.

As the poem progresses, Dickinson's speaker's imagination does not fail her. She envisions her heart widening like the sea to "The Other" and herself unafraid, receiving queenship: "No numb alarm . . . No Goblin . . . No start . . . No Bankruptcy--no Doom--." Her joys would be of the warm variety--sun and midsummer. She almost believes that her fiction is real and uses words of harvest to signify the joys of such a life, *bountiful* and *plenty*. But, then the subjunctive intrudes: the speaker realizes that her whole life has been a mistake that could have been rectified "in Thee." If the speaker represents Emily Dickinson and "Thee" the man she loved, then, by her own account, she was inspired by examples of passion but missed the opportunity to live the kind of life she wanted to live with her unnamed lover, a passionate and courageous life of majesty, certainties, and plenty.

Chapter 5

Reading the Social Gospel

In an 1848 letter to Abiah Root, Emily Dickinson reports a conflict with her brother. She was then the equivalent of a freshman at Mt. Holyoke Female Seminary, and her family had learned she was sick:

Austin arrived in full sail, with orders from head-quarters to bring me home at all events. At first I had recourse to words, and a desperate battle with those weapons was waged for a few moments, between my *Sophomore* brother and myself. Finding words of no avail, I next resorted to tears. But woman's tears are of little avail, and I am sure mine flowed in vain. As you can imagine, Austin was victorious, and poor, defeated I was led off in triumph. (#23. 1: 65)

Throughout Dickinson's description, Austin is the strong and powerful representative of a vast patriarchal empire that is attempting to control a rebel daughter. Dickinson emphasizes his mission, his age, and his gender as advantages in this contest for power. Her weapons are reason and emotion (words and tears), and she characterizes tears as a typical woman's weapon. However, her reason and emotion are ineffective against Austin's superior power.

At the end of this vignette, Dickinson is defenseless, "poor," and "defeated" as Austin takes her home. The phrase "led off in triumph" conjures up a picture in my mind: a woman is handcuffed, her head down, walking dejectedly behind the man in front of her. The demeanor of the woman in my picture and in Dickinson's description is reminiscent of a recaptured slave or a prisoner of war. Dickinson's imagining herself as a victim of a superior male force was not original. In nineteenth-century women's texts, she had read many oblique comparisons of women and slaves, Indians, and factory workers.

This chapter explores Emily Dickinson's reading of women's texts that preach a social gospel, beginning with a discussion of the works that educated her about the woman's rights movement. She also came in contact with ideas about woman's rights through works that deal with other oppressed groups. She learned sympathy for many oppressed groups through

identification and through compassionate responses modelled by other characters. Catherine Maria Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie* connected a concern for Indian's and women's issues, as did Helen Hunt Jackson's *Ramona*. *Ramona* and Lydia Maria Child's *Letters from New York* attack masculine institutions such as the legal system. *Letters even* equates women's status with slaves' status. Harriet Beecher Stowe indicts the South because its "peculiar institution" goes against all domestic values. Her hero, Uncle Tom, is a victim of that society because he is a feminine hero who believes in domestic values. Child's story "Poor Chloe" describes slavery's sexual and maternal threats to women. Finally, Rebecca Harding Davis' *Life in the Iron-Mills* presents human characters in an industry that makes them seem like beasts. Her hero, Hugh, is a feminine artist.

"The Woman Question"

There is good reason to believe that Emily Dickinson thought about the woman's rights movement. A comment in a letter to Sue demonstrates her awareness of the debate about woman's suffrage. Edward Dickinson delivered this letter to Sue while he attended a political convention in Baltimore. Dickinson was jealous of that opportunity:

Why cant I be a Delegate to the great Whig Convention?--dont I know all about Daniel Webster, and the Tariff, and the Law? Then, Susie I could see you, during a pause in the session--but I dont like this country at all, and I shant stay here any longer! "Delenda est" America, Massachusetts and all! (#94. 1: 212)

How much of the sentiment in this letter is put-on, and how much of it is sincere? Did Dickinson share the feelings of many women toward woman's rights?

Her friend T. W. Higginson was a firm believer in woman's rights and women's writing. In 1868, six years after becoming Dickinson's correspondent, he and several other litterateurs (among them James Parton and Horace Greeley) published a biographical anthology called *Eminent Women of the Age*. In the preface to that volume, the editors acknowledge the many

discussions of the present day in regard to the elevation of woman, her duties, and the position which she is fitted to occupy . . . The knowledge of what has been

attempted and accomplished by eminent women of our time is fitted to make an impression for good upon the young women of our land, and upon the whole American public. It will tend to develop and strengthen correct ideas respecting the influence of woman, and her share in the privileges and responsibilities of human life (v).

Because of her interest in Higginson's writing, Emily Dickinson could have been aware of or even read this volume.

Whether or not she heard of *Eminent Women*, she surely read countless debates on this issue in her books and magazines. In reading *The Atlantic Monthly*, she came in contact with many articles that discussed the woman question. Two examples are Higginson's "Ought Women to Learn the Alphabet?" which opened the February 1859 issue, and F. Sheldon's "Various Aspects of the Woman Question," which appeared in the October 1866 issue. Higginson's answer to his own question is a resounding yes. On the other hand, Sheldon offers a rare viewpoint for the usually liberal *Atlantic Monthly*, that teaching a woman will never "make a canary-bird into a useful barn-door fowl. It will wear yellow feathers, and it will sing and nibble at sugar" (434). That is, woman was born to a cage.

Harriet Beecher Stowe offers moderate feminism in her popular column "The Chimney-Corner," a regular feature in *The Atlantic Monthly*. In a stance similar to Higginson's and Sheldon's, Stowe also sees the woman's rights movement as a question. The title of her column for November and December of 1865* is "The Woman Question: Or, What Will You Do with Her?" In these two columns, the persona Stowe used, Christopher Crowfield, has a discussion on the future of woman with his wife, an intelligent and true woman, and a young man, Bob Stephens. The three present different ideas on the future of woman.

Bob has an extremely negative view of woman's rights activists, whom he calls

"those men-women, those anomalies, neither flesh nor fish, with their conventions, and their cracked woman-voices straining in what they call public speaking, but which I call public squeaking! . . . When she [any woman] crops her hair, puts on

*Citations include the installment number, X or XI, and the page number.

pantaloons, and strides about in conventions, she is an abortion, and not a woman." (X. 573)

Mrs. Crowfield, who shares with her husband the responsibility of being Stowe's mouthpiece, believes that

"The fault with many of our friends of the Woman's Rights order . . . is the depreciatory tone in which they have spoken of the domestic labors of a family as being altogether below the scope of the faculties of woman. 'Domestic drudgery' they call it: an expression that has done more harm than any two words that ever were put together." (X. 574)

Crowfield sees this movement as part of the progression of the human race towards complete freedom and equality. He prophesies about the future of humanity:

"We have put Slavery under foot, and with the downfall of Slavery the only obstacle to the success of our great democratic experiment is overthrown, and there seems no limit to the splendid possibilities which it may open before the human race. . . . [In addition,] the work is to be done, not so much by creating for her [woman] new spheres of action as by elevating her conceptions of that domestic vocation to which God and Nature have assigned her." (XI. 673 and 681)

Stowe undercuts her own arguments in the eyes of many modern feminists by several statements in these essays. For instance, she continually insists that woman's real concern should be the home. Her goal, in fact, is to educate women to be good housewives so that they will be able and happy in their domestic lives. Similarly, much of her anger at nineteenth-century feminists stems from their denial of the importance of "true womanhood." This separation from the woman's rights movement may have had a rhetorical function: Stowe was attempting to change the minds of people who were offended by the woman's rights movement. These readers might have immediately dropped her articles if she had used the oratory of the Seneca Falls Convention. The strategy of making ones' position amenable to the opposition had been a traditionally useful one for women activists.

Both Mary Wollstonecraft in *The Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and Margaret Fuller in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* employed this tactic and probably for the same reasons. Eventually, their ideas came to be accepted, though not necessarily in their short lifetimes.

George E. Woodberry's essay "Mary Wollstonecraft" demonstrates this acceptance well. In describing the *Vindication* for those who have not read it, he says that Wollstonecraft "originat[ed] and advocat[ed] opinions which are now so familiar that we forget they were ever original and can hardly believe there was ever any necessity for advocating them" (845).

Reader Response to the Social Gospel

Like Stowe, most of Emily Dickinson's women writers believe in emancipation. Their works act on the reader's imagination in the way that literature generally teaches compassion, by causing readers to identify with characters unlike themselves. In the social gospel literature, the reader identifies as a human being with a member of a culturally despised racial and social group. Then, the reader vicariously suffers injustice with members of that group. The fiction of oppression Dickinson read allowed her to identify with others who were dominated by both a patriarchal government and society.

As Emily Dickinson suffered with black, Indian, and immigrant heroes and heroines, she learned sympathy for their causes. As a reader, her reactions were often modelled by a positive character whose prejudices have disappeared upon contact with the oppressed group. For example, in Helen Hunt Jackson's *Ramona*, a California immigrant originally from East Tennessee, Aunt Ri Hyer, meets Indians for the first time in her life:

The experience was, to her, almost incredible. Her ideas of Indians had been drawn from newspapers, and from a book or two of narratives of massacres, and from an occasional sight of vagabond bands or families they had encountered in their journey across the plains. Here she found herself sitting side by side in friendly intercourse with an Indian man and Indian woman, whose appearance and behavior were attractive; towards whom she felt herself singularly drawn. (387)

In the previous half of the novel, the reader has already learned the good qualities of Jackson's Indian lovers, Ramona and Alessandro. Aunt Ri's opinion confirms the reader's. Was Dickinson

convinced of the Indians' virtues? Apparently. She wrote the author, "Pity me, however, I have finished *Ramona*. Would that like Shakespere, it were just published!" (#976. 3: 866).

Most women writers of the social gospel attempted to get their readers to identify with their characters. For example, Lydia Maria Child's *Letters from New York*, published in 1843, demonstrates Child's expertise at making her readers identify with traditionally unsympathetic characters. Patricia G. Holland calls this ability Child's "unique contribution [to American literature] . . . the depiction of general and widespread oppression in American society--of blacks, Indians, dependent women, the poor, the institutionalized" (50).

Embedded Women's Oppression

Most of these works see society and its institutions as oppressive to individual women and to subservient racial groups. Catherine Maria Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie* is one of the earliest works Dickinson read that expresses this opinion. (For synopsis, see Chapter 3, page 71.) Unlike many other early American works, *Hope Leslie* views American history from the Indian's point of view. Magawisca tells Everell that when the English attacked her village, they were initially unable to succeed in combat, so they resorted to a less noble tactic--arson:

Our warriors rushed forth to meet the foe; they surrounded the huts of their mothers, wives, sisters, children; they fought as if each man had a hundred lives, and would give each and all to redeem their homes. . . . The English fell back; they were driven to the palisade, some beyond it, when their leader gave the cry to fire our huts, and led the way to my mother's . . . In vain did our warriors fight for a path in which we might escape from the consuming fire; they were beaten back; the fire gained on us; the Narragansetts [Indian allies of the English] pressed on the English, howling like wolves for their prey. Some of our people threw themselves into the midst of the crackling flames, and their courageous souls parted with one shout of triumph; others mounted the palisade, but they were shot, and dropped like a flock of birds smitten by the hunter's arrows. Thus did the strangers destroy, in our own homes, hundreds of our tribe. (1: 68-9)

Hope Leslie contains many such descriptions of English brutality. For instance, Sedgwick later quotes "the history of the times" as saying that "it was a fearful sight to see them thus frying in the

fire, and the streams of blood quenching the same, and the horrible scent thereof; but the victory seemed a sweet sacrifice, and they gave the praise thereof to God" (1: 76). Sedgwick does not believe in such a bloodthirsty God, but she recognizes the anger and greed of white men who would use any means to destroy the Indians and to take their land.

In an introduction to *Hope Leslie*, Mary Kelley says that "Page upon page, chapter upon chapter, her [Sedgwick's] text uncovered an alternative past riddled with the tensions and contradictions entailed in Puritan conquest and Indian dispossession" (xxvii). Everell, Hope, and Sedgwick's other good white characters are noble men and women, and they must admit the wrong that their people have done to the Indians. If Emily Dickinson shared values with Everell and Hope, she must have done the same.

Sedgwick clearly meant to rewrite history, and not just in terms of the Indian wars, but in terms of women. Kelley sees Sedgwick as trying to place women in American history:

[W]omen appeared only rarely in the chronicles of New England. But that was exactly as it should have been, so far as the historians were concerned. The "helpmeet" labored for husband and children in the private realm of the household. Appropriately, then, woman was invisible. (xxi)

Women could hardly be more visible in *Hope Leslie*. Even though the novel's many female characters have the usual domestic and romantic concerns, they also involve themselves in matters of conscience. They make decisions that will affect the destinies of other people. That prerogative is often reserved for men in nineteenth-century fiction.

Both heroines, Hope and Magawisca, must transgress the laws of their paternal societies for the sake of conscience. Kelley says that "The parallel between Magawisca and Hope is most striking in their challenge to established authority" (xxvii). Just as Hope constantly challenges the strictures of Puritan society, "[e]ven with the difference in cultures, Magawisca also has to confront a patriarchal order. . . . [She] commits the ultimate act of resistance, interposing herself at the moment of Everell's execution and saving his life" (Kelley. xxvii). Whether an individual should

follow his or her conscience or submit to the law was a question many people in the pre-Civil War era asked.

In *The Life of Emily Dickinson*, Richard Sewall discusses these debates about the conflict between the individual conscience and the state. For example, Sewall reports that T. W. Higginson had participated in two conspiracies against the fugitive slave law, which

were fully covered and applauded by the *Springfield Republican*; and since both were prime examples of the clash between individual moral ideas and the sanctity of the law, the two lawyers of the Dickinson family were undoubtedly aware of them and may have discussed them in the presence of the others. (540)

Dickinson would have read the *Republican* on this issue for herself and was probably on the side of individual conscience.

One poem expresses the soul's refusal to obey a law she does not believe in; it is reminiscent of Magawisca's and Hope's belief in the individual's inviolate conscience:

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

You cannot prick with saw--
Nor pierce with Cimitar--
Two Bodies--therefore be--
Bind One--The Other fly--

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

Except Thyself may be
Thine Enemy--
Captivity is Consciousness--
So's Liberty. (#384. 1: 304)

In the third stanza, Dickinson says that the torturer will be able to change her mind no more easily than he could change an eagle's mind. The metaphor of a powerful, independent eagle is particularly relevant to *Hope Leslie*. For example, Magawisca calls her village the "nest, which the eagles of the tribe had built for their mates and their young" (1: 65), and the eagle is a common

metaphor for Indians in the novel. Like Magawisca and Hope, the speaker of "No rack" believes that freedom and captivity are psychological states. Sedgwick's truest women--Magawisca and Hope--can and must act as free people despite their powerless status as women in a patriarchal society. They are emancipated because they believe they are.

Ramona

If *Hope Leslie* was Sedgwick's attempt to rewrite history, in *A Century of Dishonor* and *Ramona*, Dickinson's friend Helen Hunt Jackson was attempting to rewrite the present. She wanted to show Americans the injustice of the United States' treatment of the Indians. If Emily Dickinson read *A Century of Dishonor: A Sketch of the United States Government's Dealings with Some of the Indian Tribes*, she never mentioned it in extant correspondence.* Unfortunately, Jackson's logical examination of the Indian problem changed the minds of few Americans. She was not the first to try this strategy and had as little success as her predecessors.

For example, Dickinson may have read a similar, though less explicit, article called "Our Barbarian Brethren." In May 1870, it headlined *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*. This article shares some conclusions with Jackson's treatise. For example, "the founders of the republic . . . adopted a policy toward the Indians which has proved most disastrous to them and injurious to the nation," and the Indians "have been forced or persuaded to cede their lands to the national government or to those of States for almost nothing" (809). Like the writer of this article, Jackson had little success when she made a logical argument. She was far more effective when she changed genres and wrote an emotional novel about the Indian problem.

Ramona is the story of the adopted daughter of a Mexican lady, Señora Moreno. The Señora does her duty toward the religious Ramona but despises the girl, while Felipe, the Señora's

*By 1881, the time of *Century's* publication, the two women had been corresponding for at least six years, which makes Dickinson likely to have read Jackson's work.

son, adores his adopted sister. The Señora catches Ramona kissing Alessandro, a noble and musically talented Indian, with whom she has fallen in love. Then, Señora Moreno tells Ramona the secret of her birth, that she is a half-breed: her parents were an Indian woman and a Scottish man. Ramona is delighted to discover her Indian heritage because it is something she shares with Alessandro. Felipe, Ramona's and Alessandro's impotent advocate with Señora Moreno, tells Alessandro to leave the area for a few days to allow the Señora to forget her anger. When Alessandro returns, he is different. His village has been destroyed, his psyche badly damaged. The lovers elope. They hide and change Ramona's name to Majella (which in Alessandro's language means dove) so that pursuers will not be able to trace them. After the death of Señora Moreno, Felipe tries to find them and welcome them home, but they have disappeared.

The rest of the novel tells of their attempts to settle in various Indian villages, all of which are eventually claimed by the whites, who, unlike the Indians, have deeds. Ramona's first child dies because a doctor will not travel to treat an Indian baby. Alessandro, slowly going mad, begins to have spells in which he cannot recall his actions, many of which are out of character. He and Ramona move to the top of a mountain because they think it will not be coveted by whites. There, their daughter is born. One day, Alessandro comes home with a white man's horse. As he realizes what he has done, he prepares to return the animal to the owner, who meets Alessandro in the front yard and shoots him several times. Felipe finds the widowed Ramona and takes her home with him. Eventually, they marry and leave the United States forever, for Mexico.

Throughout the novel, Jackson calls American law unfair. She does not show only the Indians suffering from the law but claims that even the powerful Señora Moreno has had reason to lament the coming of the Americans:

[A]fter the surrender of California, [the United States] undertook to sift and adjust Mexican land-titles; and that was the way it had come about that the Señora Moreno now called herself a poor woman. Tract after tract, her lands had been taken away from her; it looked for a time as if nothing would be left. . . . No wonder she believed the Americans thieves, and spoke of them as hounds. (17)

Jackson's narrator states that the Señora's coldness of heart came out of all of the horrors that she had endured at the hands of the Americans: "Out of such throes as these had been born the second nature which made Señora Moreno the silent, reserved, stern, implacable woman they knew. . . . Of the gay, tender, sentimental girl, . . . there was small trace" (31). Even the Señora's cruelty to the heroine, if traced to its root cause, is attributable to unjust American laws.

However, the American treatment of the Mexican land-owners is nothing compared to American treatment of the Indians. Alessandro tells Ramona about the way his village was destroyed:

"No," answered Alessandro. "There was no battle. There would have been, if I had my way; but my father implored me not to resist. He said it would only make it worse for us in the end. . . . [Some Americans] got together and brought a suit, they call it, up in San Francisco; and it was decided in the court that they owned all our land. That was all Mr. Rothsaker could tell about it. It was the law, he said, and nobody could go against the law." (237-38)

Alessandro's father chooses the traditional response to male violence that women are often taught: no resistance. He counsels his son that even if he must endure humiliation and pain, he will still be alive.

The major distinction between rapists and American land thieves is that these attackers are not tangible to Alessandro. He does not know their names, and at the time he tells Ramona this story, he has never seen them. Similarly, he uses a passive verb for the central action of the narrative: "it was decided." Despite his intelligence and literacy, Alessandro cannot comprehend a suit, and for him its judgment is a disembodied action. Perhaps Emily Dickinson, the daughter of one lawyer and the sister of another, smiled at Alessandro's naiveté. Coming from a legal family, however, may have made her understand the difference between what is *legal* and what is *right*.

Blaming the government instead of individuals is a good rhetorical strategy on Jackson's part. Michael T. Marsden applauds Jackson's choice in making "the enemy abstract governmental policy and not the settlers and [her] focusing the story on particular families [which] allowed

readers to feel real, and often intense, empathy" (18). Again, this reader response is modelled by Aunt Ri. After she hears of the Indians' story, she is "aghast" and "indignant":

"Why, they take folks, 'n' penerentiarize 'em fur life, back 'n Tennessee, fur things thet ain't so bad's thet! . . . [Ramona said] "The Americans think it is no shame to cheat for money." "I'm an Ummeriken!" cried Aunt Ri; "an' Jeff Hyer, and Jos! We're Ummerikens! 'n' we would n't cheat nobody . . . an' I tell you, naow, the Ummeriken people don't want any o' this cheatin' done, naow!" (394)

In this speech, Jackson insists that her quarrel is with the American government, not with the American people. She believes that if people knew the truth, their sense of fair play would make them want to change the government's Indian policies.

Letters from New York

Like *Ramona*, most of Dickinson's specimens of the social gospel presented the view that society and the legal system were masculine institutions that desperately needed feminine values. Child's belief that women are being corrupted by the male system is present in two of Child's *Letters from New York** that Dickinson obviously borrowed from. *Letters* is a collection of newspaper columns, mostly from the weekly *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, which Child edited. The reason Emily Dickinson reacted strongly to these particular letters is not clear, unless one knows of her interest in women's issues. These two letters deal with an unusually unsympathetic class: murderers condemned to death. On the surface, Dickinson would seem to have no interest in this group or in these letters.

Child tells the story of a man who was sentenced to hanging but who committed suicide an hour before the sentence was to be carried out. Before people in the crowd knew of his suicide, they complained that because of a fire in the prison, the hanging would not be enough of

*There were two volumes, one published in 1843 and another in 1845. The Dickinsons seem to have read only the first volume, which I refer to.

a spectacle. In a dramatic moment, Child tells of her conversation with a disappointed woman in the crowd:

"What a pity!" exclaimed a woman, who stood near me, gazing at the burning tower; "they will have to give him two hours more to live." "Would you feel so, if he were your *son*?" said I. Her countenance changed instantly. She had not before realized that every criminal was *somebody's* son. (#31: 211).

Child's point is that capital punishment brutalizes all members of society. Her example of a *woman* crying out for a murderer's death is an extreme demonstration of this point. Even a woman, whom Child believed by nature to be noble, gentle, and loving, can become cold-blooded. For Child the woman in the crowd is a real victim of the execution.

John Evangelist Walsh rightly suggests that this part of Child's letter captured Dickinson's imagination and caused her to write a poem "rather far removed from Emily's usual concerns, and without Mrs. Child's book no one would ever have known that Emily is here remolding an actual incident in which Mrs. Child was involved" (120). The poem Walsh is referring to is

Upon the gallows hung a wretch,
Too sullied for the hell
To which the law entitled him.
As nature's curtain fell
The one who bore him tottered in,--
For this was woman's son.
"Twas all I had," she stricken gasped--
Oh, what a livid boon! (#1757. 3: 1179)*

A great deal of remolding of Child's story and philosophy takes place in this poem. Unlike Child, who buries negative information about her prisoner and states that only God should judge him, Dickinson's prisoner earns no sympathy with her or with her God. She only sympathizes with his mother and not for the loss of her son but for having only this son, this "livid" or "appalling" (according to Johnson an alternative word) "boon" to lose.

*The high number of this poem does not necessarily mean that it was written late in Dickinson's career. No autograph copy exists, and since Johnson's dating is based on handwriting, no date was assigned. Johnson put all poems that could not be dated at the end of his edition.

However, Dickinson's poem shares an important similarity with Child's narrative. In comparable ironic twists, both writers conclude that capital punishment actually victimizes a woman, not the dead man. Both Dickinson and the woman in the crowd learned something from Child's admonishment: that they could empathize with the feelings of a murderer's mother. However, Dickinson learned Child's real point, that society's masculine laws and values victimize women.

Child's *Letters from New York* was probably influential in changing the country's mind about issues such as woman's rights, while disavowing belief in that cause. The purpose of this volume is to rouse compassion for oppressed classes of Americans, particularly blacks and women. (In light of Austin's high-handed conduct in the excerpt that opened this chapter, it is ironic that *Letters* was one of his favorite books.) Like Stowe and Jackson, Child was careful about her advocacy of woman's rights. That movement conflicted with her deeply-held ideas of domesticism and Pauline doctrines of marriage. Jean Fagan Yellin in *Women and Sisters: The Antislavery Feminists in American Culture* suggests that domestic values were a powerful reason women were unwilling to voice their convictions about their lack of status. She says that

The dilemma that the nineteenth-century antislavery feminist faced was that if she affirmed herself on a spiritual level as a woman--as God's female reasoning creature--[by becoming an activist] on a social level she relinquished her sisterhood, her community. Yet if she affirmed that community, it was at the price of advocating her spiritual womanhood. (10)

As Jackson gave up her privacy and published under her own name for the sake of the Indians, Child was willing to step out of the domestic sphere and advocate freedom for blacks and other racial groups in a public forum.

For her, the selfless act of freeing someone else was closer to the domestic creed than the act of freeing herself or other women. Her intellectual honesty prevented her from being completely silent on such an important issue of the day. Child could not hide her true beliefs on woman's rights, although her letter on "Woman's Rights" begins with this disclaimer:

I confess a strong distaste to the subject, as it has been generally treated. On no other theme, probably, has there been uttered so much of false, mawkish sentiment, shallow philosophy, and sputtering, farthing-candle wit. . . . the style of its advocates has been offensive to taste, and unacceptable to reason. (#34: 232)*

Despite these words, the entire volume has built to this point, wherein Child finally reveals the true beliefs she has been hiding for thirty-three previous letters.

One of the earliest hints about Child's feelings toward the woman question occurs in letter #23. There she tells of meeting "The Florida Slave-Trader and Patriarch." He says of his own slaves:

"I always thought and said, that the coloured race were [sic] superior to us, physically and morally. They are more healthy, have more graceful forms, softer skins, and sweeter voices. They are more docile and affectionate, more faithful in their attachments, and less prone to mischief, than the white race. If it were not so, they could not have been kept in slavery."

"It is a shameful and a shocking thought," said I, "that we should keep them in slavery by reason of their very virtues." (#23: 143)

Throughout *Letters*, Child reiterates this perception that blacks' virtues keep them in line.

Similarly, Child quotes reformer Hannah More as saying that "There is perhaps no *animal* . . . so much indebted to subordination, for its good behaviour, as woman" (#34: 236).

Nineteenth-century readers of *Letters* would not have needed Child to make this overt connection between women and blacks. They would have recognized the virtues the slave trader attributed to blacks: moral superiority, grace, softness, sweetness, docility, affection, faithfulness, goodness. Those were the stereotypical qualities of the true woman. Child deeply believes in the importance of these domestic and (in many cases) Christian qualities, but she also believes that they make anyone who possesses them prone to oppression in a market economy.

In "Woman's Rights," Child is also explicit about the ways in which white men hold their power: she says "That the present position of women in society is the result of physical force, is obvious enough" (#34: 234). Equally obvious was the fact that blacks were subordinated by

*Parenthetical references to *Letters* indicate the letter number (#) followed by the page numbers.

violence. In another letter, Child makes a blatant connection between the subjugation of black slaves, the oppression of Irish immigrants, and the subordination of women. She believes that the shared characteristic of these groups is that they are primarily emotional rather than rational creatures. Then, she refers to white male intimidation that keeps these groups from obtaining power. She hopes that eventually man's "physical force [will] yield to moral sentiment . . . God speed the hour" (#33: 232).

Feminine Heroes and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

Just as Child believed that masculine market values were destroying feminine values, many other nineteenth-century women authors blamed society's evils on market values. The best-known example is Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1851). Stowe's novel states that the institution of slavery is destroying Americans' Christian and domestic values. Every group in Southern society has been corrupted by the presence of slavery. For example, white women who are good to their slaves cannot protect them from the demands of the plantation economy. Mrs. Shelby, the wife of Tom's original master, tries to get her husband to understand that his selling Uncle Tom and Eliza's son, Harry, makes their claims about the patriarchal institution of slavery hypocritical. Mrs. Shelby tells her husband that they have been the slaves' parents:

"I have taught them [the slaves] the duties of the family, of parent and child, and husband and wife; and how can I bear to have this open acknowledgement that *we care for no tie, no duty, no religion, however sacred, compared with money?* . . . I have told her [Eliza] that one soul is worth more than all the money in the world; and *how will she believe me when she sees us turn round and sell her child?*" (Italics mine. 1: 57)

Her husband's answer is that necessity guides him and that "We men of the world must wink pretty hard at various things, and get used to a deal that is n't the exact thing" (1: 58)

The South's market values also destroy black families. Eliza's husband, George, tells her before his escape that they are not a real family:

"Don't you know a slave can't be married? There is no law in this country for that; I can't hold you for my wife, if he [the white master] chooses to part us. That's why I wish I'd never seen you,--why I wish I'd never been born; it would have been better for us both,--it would have been better for this poor child if he had never been born." (1: 36)

Many black families are destroyed by the necessity of market values. Stowe believes that the lack of legal marriage encourages promiscuity among blacks and that the separation of parents and children destroys individuals.

The story is full of mothers whose children are sold away from them. Lucy, for one, commits suicide when her young son is sold away from her. The separation of parent and child is also devastating to children. The best example of this destruction is Topsy, who knows nothing but that she must take care of herself. She claims that she "Never was born, . . . never had no father nor mother, nor nothin'. I was raised by a speculator, with lots of others. . . . I spect I grow'd. Don't think nobody [such as God] ever made me" (2: 37-8). Uncle Tom and Aunt Chloe have provided their children with a happy family life, but when Tom is sold, that happy life comes to an end.

The novel's presentation of Uncle Tom's life and death is the story of the destruction of the moral exemplar of a domestic novel. Elizabeth Ammons says in "Heroines in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*" that "Stowe's protagonist is gentle, pious, chaste, domestic, long-suffering, and self-sacrificing. In a nineteenth-century heroine, those attributes would not seem strange. . . . Stowe makes him a heroine instead of a hero" (162). Tom believes in Christianity in a way that no other hero in the novel does. As Child argues in *Letters from New York*, Uncle Tom's domestic virtues keep him in line. Unlike Eliza's husband, George, Tom is liable to be destroyed because of his virtue. This is exactly what happens to him when he becomes Simon Legree's slave.

Legree is Stowe's worst example of masculinity. Only a woman would have described a masculine threat as Stowe describes Legree at his first meeting with Tom. Legree was

though short, of gigantic strength. . . . his large, coarse mouth was distended with tobacco, the juice of which, from time to time, he ejected from him with great decision and explosive force; his hands were immensely large, hairy, sunburned,

freckled, and very dirty, and garnished with long nails, in a very foul condition. (2: 165)

The fastidious Emily Dickinson probably cringed at this description and the implications of the threat of his power as he "proceeded to a very free personal examination" of the slaves (2: 165). This description is all the more horrible because Stowe describes Legree's actions through Tom's eyes. After buying Tom, Legree takes Tom's hymnal and says that "I'll soon have *that* out of you. I have none o' yer bawling, praying, singing niggers on my place; . . . *I'm* your church now!" (2: 170). So much for kind paternalism. As Tom's tenure in Legree's employ continues, Legree treats Tom to all kinds of brutality in order to get him to renounce his Christianity. But, like a true woman, Tom patterns himself after Christ and eventually sacrifices his life for his beliefs. Tom transcends his temporal circumstances and goes "Past now the bleeding of earthly regrets; past its fluctuations of hope, and fear, and desire; the human will, bent and bleeding, and struggling long, was now entirely merged in the Divine" (2: 245).

His death resembles one of the kinds of freedom that speakers in Emily Dickinson's poems achieve when they die. In a poem written about 1861, she speaks of the glorious renunciations of martyrs, who "bore the faithful witness--/ Till we--are helped" and of the

Clear strains of Hymn
The River could not drown--
Brave names of Men--
And Celestial Women--
Passed out--of Record
Into--Renown! (#260 5-6, 10-15. 1: 187)

If this poem is not about Uncle Tom, it certainly indicates that Dickinson appreciated his Christian heroism and the sacrifice he made. His name has certainly become "renowned," and public feeling about his death has been called one of the causes of the Civil War.

"Poor Chloe": The Rape of the Will

Just as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* destroyed its feminine hero and threatened the ability of other characters to be true women, many of these pieces of social gospel literature present the threat of rape or threat of losing children. Sometimes they present both. Except for these pieces, almost none of the women's literature Dickinson read presents women who are victims of seduction and betrayal, as they often are in other literature, such as in Samuel Richardson's novels, *Clarissa* and *Pamela*.

However, in this literature, women are often threatened. One of the stories Dickinson may have read in *The Atlantic Monthly* is Lydia Maria Child's "Poor Chloe: A True Story of Massachusetts in the Olden Time." Chloe was the slave of a hypocritical Christian woman, Mrs. Lawton, whose minister, Mr. Gordonmammon, prevailed on her to make Chloe marry the minister's male slave so that he would not "stray" so far. Chloe was in love with another man and found the minister's slave, Tom, repulsive. Like Richardson's *Clarissa*, Chloe fought the rape of her will that was the equivalent of forced marriage:

[T]hinking made Chloe feel still more rebellious. Tom was fat and stupid, with thick lips and small, dull-looking eyes. He compared very unfavorably with her bright and handsome Jim. She swayed back and forth, and groaned. . . .
[U]nderlying all her confusion of thoughts there was a miserable feeling that, if the minister and her mistress both said she must marry Tom, there was no help for it. (356)

Chloe finally submits, and she and Tom have a son, Tommy. Mrs. Lawton finds Chloe's attention to Tommy inconvenient, and while Chloe is out one day, Mrs. Lawton sells the little boy. Chloe dies of grief.

Child's Chloe resembles other Child heroines, whom Jean Fagan Yellin calls "tragic mulattos," women of interracial ancestry who are seduced and abandoned. There is no evidence that Chloe is a mulatto; however, like Child's other heroines, she is the victim of unwanted sexual attention. Yellin states that "The pathos of the Tragic Mulatto rests in the contradiction between

her sincere efforts to adhere to the patriarchal definition of true womanhood and the patriarchy's insistence that she violate this norm" (72). Child probably utilized this genre because women readers especially sympathized with these problems.

Why did Child write an anti-abolition story set in a historical period? And what was the use of publishing such a story after the abolition of slavery in the United States? (After all, Child cannot expect her readers to change Massachusetts' history, nor does she need to ask them to abolish slavery after the civil war.) For Dickinson and other *Atlantic Monthly* readers, Child's message in "Poor Chloe" related more to gender than to race. Chloe's life as a slave is more restrictive than the lives of most women; however, there are many similarities. For example, the only expression she could make of her misery when her mistress tried to force her to marry was doing her chores badly, "the only way she had to exercise her free-will in its desperate struggle with necessity" (356). Chloe attempts to convince others that hers is a woman's problem:

"I don't think Missis [Lawton] would like it, if you made Missy Katy [Lawton's daughter] marry somebody when she said she did n't want to be married."

"Chloe, it is very presumptuous in *you* to talk in that way," rejoined the minister. "There is no similarity between *your* condition and that of your young mistress. You are descended from Ham, Chloe; and Ham was accursed of God on account of his sin . . . you ought to feel ashamed of yourself for giving your minister so much trouble about such a trifling matter." [He left.] "Trifling matter!" said she. "S'pose it's trifling matter to *you*, Massa Minister." (357)

Of course, Chloe was also cursed as a descendant of Eve. Her belief that women's ideas are trifling matters to men resembles the letter that opened this chapter. Like the minister, Austin and the family believed that Dickinson's reasons for staying at school were trifling.

The minister thinks of the black characters in "Poor Chloe" as he does of animals. He speaks of Tom "straying" before his marriage to Chloe, as though he were a "tom-cat" (355). The minister also says that Chloe will get used to being without her Tommy because "My cow lowed dismally, and wouldn't eat, when I sold her calf; but she soon got used to doing without it" (361). However, Chloe's grief is the human kind, the kind Dickinson describes in "They say that 'Time Assuages'--" (#686). The conclusion reads:

Time is a Test of Trouble--
 But not a Remedy--
 If such it prove, it prove too
 There was no Malady-- (5-8. 2: 530).

There was no remedy for Chloe's grief. Despite what the minister might think, she was human. In this literature, oppressing groups often see the oppressed as animals. In Rebecca Harding Davis' *Life in the Iron-Mills*^{*}, the Welsh's presumed bestial character is pointed up by their very name, the Wolfes.

Life in the Iron-Mills and the Woman Artist

Emily Dickinson is linked to this story by her regular reading of *The Atlantic Monthly*, wherein it appeared in April 1861. An extant note to Sue requests "Will Susan please lend Emily "Life in the Iron Mills"--and accept Blossom" (#231. 2: 372). This undated note reveals no external circumstances that might help to date it. Perhaps Dickinson had read information in the newspapers about this feature and thought it sounded interesting, or perhaps she had already read it once and wanted to borrow it from her sister-in-law in order to reread it (in which case the rereading could have taken place much later than April). The story is certainly compelling enough to bear rereading.

The story begins as the narrator looks out her window onto her town, which has an iron-works. She tells the story of Hugh Wolfe, who works in the iron-mill, and his cousin Deborah, a picker in a cotton-mill. On the night this story begins, Deborah finishes her shift in the cotton-mill, takes a meal to Hugh at the iron-mill, and sleeps on an ash pile while he finishes work. In his few hours off, Hugh sculpts korl, a flesh-colored by-product of iron manufacture. On this

^{*}There is some scholarly disagreement as to whether *Life in the Iron Mills* is a short story (and thus a minor work) or a novella (and thus a major work). I am following the example of Tillie Olsen and other critics, who consider it a major work and therefore italicize the title instead of putting it into quotation marks.

night, several well-to-do visitors at the mill see Hugh's korl sculpture of a hungry working-class woman. Admiring Hugh's talent, one man tells him to "Make yourself what you will. It is your right." (440), but the man will not help Hugh to do so. After the visitors leave the mill, Deborah tells Hugh that she has stolen one man's wallet. She gives it to Hugh so that he can improve their lives, but he is arrested, tried, and convicted of theft. In jail, he becomes ill and kills himself. Deborah is imprisoned as an accomplice for three years and, upon her release, becomes a Quaker. The narrator reveals herself to be the owner of the korl woman.

One part of the story would definitely have had meaning to Dickinson in 1861, about the time of the second Master letter. Near the end of the story, the narrator tells the reader that

There may be in her [Deborah's] heart some latent hope to meet there [in heaven] the love denied her here,--that she shall find him whom she lost, and that then she will not be all-unworthy. Who blames her? Something is lost in the passage of every soul from one eternity to the other,--something pure and beautiful, which might have been and was not: a hope, a talent, a love, over which the soul mourns. (450)

This passage could appear in any Dickinson biography and be true; Davis' point is that it could appear in any human being's biography and be true. After all, she is attempting to prove to her readers--in their comfortable homes, in their clean clothes, with their full stomachs--that factory workers are no less human than they themselves.

Dickinson knew of these prejudices toward immigrants. The Wolfes are Welsh, a race related to the Irish, a group Dickinson was at least occasionally interested in. Austin taught mostly Irish boys when he was employed as a schoolmaster in Boston in 1851-52. Dickinson often calls his students "poor sons of Erin" and in one tongue-in-cheek letter to her brother tells him that

Vinnie and I say masses for poor Irish boys souls. So far as I am concerned I should like to have you kill some--there are so many now, there is no room for the Americans, and I cant think of a death that would be more after my mind than *scientific destruction, scholastic dissolution*, there's something lofty in it, it smacks of *going up!* (#43. 1: 113)

One purpose for the letters between Austin and his family was clearly to amuse (For example, Dickinson often tells him how much their father laughed at Austin's stories), so these sentiments should not be taken too seriously. They do demonstrate her awareness of the immigrant problem, an awareness which *Life in the Iron-Mills* would undoubtedly raise.

Throughout *Life in the Iron-Mills*, Davis compares the factory workers of her story with her upper class readers. For instance, she says that Deborah's look of

apathy and vacancy . . . steal[s] sometimes over the rarest, finest of women's faces,--in the very midst, it may be, of their warmest summer's day, and then one can guess at the secret of intolerable solitude that lies beneath the delicate faces and brilliant smile. (434)

Despite all of the differences between Deborah and a woman in a well-furnished drawing room, their sadnesses are the same. Despite what (comparatively) wealthy and educated people believe, factory workers are still human beings, just as are Jackson's Ramona and Alessandro and Stowe's Tom and Eliza.

The narrator asks her readers to identify with two of the story's characters. Even as Dickinson identified with Deborah because she had lost her love, she also had reason to identify with Hugh. One of the most pathetic scenes of the story comes as he is imprisoned, looking at the world outside his prison bars: "A longing seized him to be spoken to once more. 'Joe!' he called, out of the grating. 'Good-bye, Joe!' The old man stopped a moment, listening uncertainly; then hurried on . . . It was a little thing; but it hurt him" (448). Many of Emily Dickinson's poems relate to dungeons, prisons, or jails, which are sometimes literal, sometimes metaphoric. The captive may be the soul imprisoned by the body, and the freed person is often a soul liberated by death. Sometimes Dickinson's captive is like Byron's "The Prisoner of Chillon," who is so used to captivity that he prefers prison to freedom.

In at least one poem, Dickinson tells of a captivity much like Hugh's, and if the handwriting dating is accurate, it was written in the same year that *Life in the Iron-Mills* came out in *The Atlantic Monthly*, 1861. Dickinson speaks of her desire to

. . . burst the fleshly Gate--
 And pass escaped--to thee! . . .
 They cannot take me--any more!
 Dungeons can call--and Guns implore
 Unmeaning--now--to me-- (#277. 2-3, 7-10. 1: 198)

This poem may have come out of Emily Dickinson's identification with Hugh Wolfe. And, there were reasons that she should identify with him. Like Uncle Tom and Alessandro, Hugh is a feminine hero. Feminist critic Jean Pfaelzer calls him "an archetypical example of the feminized male hero" and, more importantly for this study, "a feminized projection of the rebel artist" (237).

Davis says that Hugh has "a meek, woman's face" (435), and Deborah's thoughts of his uncommonly kind nature make him seem feminine. Davis also makes clear that Hugh is not "one of the boys" at the iron-mill. The other men are suspicious of his education (which is scant but ample compared to theirs) and his craft. They call him "Molly Wolfe" because he does not drink, because he does not fight dogs or roosters, and because he always gets beaten in a fight (435).

Hugh's statue also relates to his femininity. Davis describes it as

a woman, white, of giant proportions, crouching on the ground, her arms flung out in some wild gesture of warning. . . . There was not one line of beauty or grace in it: a nude woman's form, muscular, grown coarse with labor, the powerful limbs instinct with some one poignant longing. One idea: there it was in the tense, rigid muscles, the clutching hands, the wild, eager face, like that of a starving wolf's. (437-38)

Of course its face looks like a starving wolf's: it bears the soul of its creator, Hugh Wolfe. When the mill visitors ask him to explain the statue, he first responds, "She be hungry." Then he says that she is "Not hungry for meat," and finally, he says that she is hungry for "Summat to make her live, I think,--like you" (438). One of the visitors understands Hugh's statue. He tells the others to "Look at that woman's face! It asks questions of God, and says "I have a right to know." Good God, how hungry it is!" (438).

Tillie Olsen in "A Biographical Interpretation" equates Hugh Wolfe's desires for culture, beauty, and fulfillment with Rebecca Harding Davis' desires for those things. To what degree did Emily Dickinson identify with Hugh? Like him, she created things that were admired but often as curiosities. Readers who should have understood her work did not. Like him, she was imprisoned

in a social system that kept her from rising. In her case the limiting factor was not money or even education but her domestic values. They kept her in her home, doing her mending, growing her flowers, baking her bread. All the while she knew there was another world outside the Dickinson homestead. And most of what she knew about that world, with the exception of her experience with friends and family, came through her reading. Through this reading, she learned compassion for the oppressed, and she came to understand why so many women had to fight for suffrage.

Conclusions

With very few exceptions, Emily Dickinson had the most important personal relationships of her life with other women--Sue, Louise and Frances Norcross, Mrs. Holland, Vinnie, high school friends. Dickinson had the most passionate literary attachments of her life to women as well--to Marian Evans, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, the sisters Brontë. Dickinson was also deeply affected by women's popular and political writing. She considered the solutions women writers proposed to women's problems as valid options she herself could accept or reject. This study indicates that Emily Dickinson believed that women's writings were more important, more true, and more relevant to her own life than were men's writings because only women could understand the dilemmas a talented, intelligent, and strong woman faces in a patriarchal society.

Emily Dickinson entered into a dialogue with other women she read--enlarging on their ideas, changing them, reforming them, denying them, accepting them--and as she sent these remade ideas out in poems and letters, she entered into a new dialogue, not only with the women who were her immediate audience but with those who read her now and in the future. Sometimes a reader of Dickinson's letters and poetry feels that he or she has been eavesdropping on a private conversation between Dickinson and her lover, her friend, or her God.

But the reader of Dickinson's poetry has actually become a participant in a conversation conducted in the mind and on paper. In this day women are still in charge of housework, religion, and relationships, just as women were in the nineteenth century. The issues are unchanged. Women still wonder whether they should submit to society's demands, dominate in personal relationships, or crusade for political reform. There are still no easy answers, and compromises continue to be unsatisfactory. The dialogue goes on as readers discuss their problems on paper. The community of women readers and writers Dickinson was a part of--the community of spoken and written discussion--is alive and well today. The voices of those who spoke in the nineteenth century still speak to interested listeners. The communication goes on as long as women continue

to be moved by the letters, stories, and poetry these women wrote and to be interested in the same issues--woman's role as a female and as a human being.

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Appendix

Emily Dickinson's Reading of Women Writers

Emily Dickinson's Reading of Women Writers

Note: This list includes the pieces of women's literature that members of the Dickinson family owned, alluded to, or had access to through magazine and newspaper subscriptions. (With regard to Dickinson's reading in magazines and newspapers, this list is selective.) Also on the list are some articles and books about women writers, especially those writers for whom Dickinson showed overt interest. If another member of the Dickinson family was the primary owner or reader of a piece, I have noted that. Dates in parentheses are dates of publication. If the exact edition Dickinson used is known, I have indicated that specific edition.

Alexander, Francesca.

The Story of Ida. (1883)

Annesley, Miss

The Light in the Valley Or the Life and Letters of Mrs. Hannah Bocking. (1860)

Badger, Mrs. C. M.

Wild Flowers Drawn and Colored from Nature. (1859)

Barbauld, Mrs. Anna L.

"How blest the righteous when he dies." (Dickinson quotes in 1853)

Blind, Mathilde.

Life of George Eliot. (1883)

Brontë, Anne.

The Tenant of Wildfell Hall. (1848)

Brontë, Charlotte.

Jane Eyre. (1847)

Villette. (1853)

Shirley. (1849 Read by Dickinson's brother, Austin)

Brontë, Emily.

Wuthering Heights. (1847)

Browning, Elizabeth Barrett.

Aurora Leigh. (1857)

Earlier Poems. (n.d.)

Last Poems. (1862)

Poems. (1844. This volume included two poems that Dickinson referred to by name: "Catarina to Camoens" and "A Vision of Poets.")

Prometheus Bound. (1833 A translation.)

(Dickinson probably read everything by Elizabeth Barrett Browning, one of Dickinson's favorite poets.)

Burnett, Frances Hodgson.

A Fair Barbarian. (1880)

Child, Lydia Maria.

The Frugal Housewife. (1829. Owned by Dickinson's father)

Letters from New York. (1843. Read by Austin)

Isaac T. Hopper: A True Life. (1853. Owned by Dickinson's mother)

"Poor Chloe" (*The Atlantic Monthly* March 1862)

The Rebels, or Boston Before the Revolution (1825. Owned by Dickinson's father)

Clarke, Mrs. Cowden- (Mary Victoria).

Complete Concordance to Shakspeare. (Dickinson's edition was dated 1877.)

Cooke, Rose Terry.

Poems. (1861. Owned by Samuel Bowles' wife)

Craik, Mrs. Dinah Maria Mulock.

Olive. (1850)

Head of a Family. (1851)

(Dickinson may have read many other works by Craik. She frequently contributed to *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, which Dickinson often read.)

Cross, John Walter.

Life of George Eliot. (1885)

Davis, Rebecca Harding. American. 1831-1910.

Life in the Iron Mills. (*The Atlantic Monthly* April 1861)

Story of To-Day (Serialized novel in *The Atlantic Monthly* 1862)

Dickens, Charles.

"Adelaide Anne Procter" (*The Atlantic Monthly* December 1865. Reprinted in anthologies of Procter poems, *Legends and Lyrics* and *Adelaide Anne Procter's Poems.*)

Eliot, George. (Mary Ann Evans Cross).

Adam Bede. (1860)

Armgarth (*The Atlantic Monthly* July 1871)

Daniel Deronda. (1874-6)

How Lisa Loved the King (Owned by Sue. Originally published in *Blackwoods Magazine* 5 May 1869)

Jubal and Other Poems. (1870. Printed in this volume were *Armgarth*, "O May I Join the Choir Invisible," and "How Lisa Loved the King." Dickinson occasionally referred to "the Choir Invisible" and "Lisa.")

Middlemarch. (1871-2)

The Mill on the Floss. (1860)

Poems. (perhaps 1879)

Romola. (1862-3)

Scenes of Clerical Life. (1858)

The Spanish Gypsy: A Poem. (1868)

(Almost all of George Eliot's works appear on this list, and because of Dickinson's interest in Eliot, Dickinson probably read all of Eliot's work that was available to her, even those she has no known connection with. Dickinson also read many notices and reviews of George Eliot and her work, which frequently appeared in newspapers and magazines.)

Field, Kate.

"Elizabeth Barrett Browning" (obituary. *The Atlantic Monthly* September 1861)

Ford, Emily Fowler.

"Gladioli" (*The Atlantic Monthly* June 1871)

Poems (1872. Dickinson knew of, probably read)

(Dickinson is likely to have read Ford's work, because of their personal connection. They were friends as girls and renewed their connection as adults.)

Fuller, Margaret.

Correspondence of Fräulein Gűnderode and Bettina von Arnim. (1842)

Fullerton, Lady Georgiana.

Ellen Middleton. (1844)

Grantley Manor. (1847)

Lady Bird. (1852. Read by Austin and Sue)

Gaskell, Mrs. (Elizabeth Cleghorn Stevenson).

The Life of Charlotte Brontę. (Dickinson's copy was published in 1858)

Gordon, Mary Wilson.

Memoir of John Wilson. (1863)

Higginson, Mary Potter Thacher (the 2nd Mrs. Thomas Wentworth Higginson)

Room for One More. (1879)

Seashore and Prairie. (1877. Possibly read by Dickinson)

Higginson, Thomas Wentworth.

"Helen Jackson. ('H.H.')" (In *Short Studies of American Authors* 1880. This critical work was a gift from Higginson to Dickinson.)

Howe, Julia Ward.

"Emerson's Relation to Society" (*Springfield Republican* 7/29/84)

"George Sand" (an abridgement of Sand's *Histoire de ma Vie*, in *The Atlantic Monthly* November 1861)

"I Stake My Life Upon the Red" (mentioned by Higginson to Dickinson in December 1874)

Passion Flowers (Published anonymously in 1854. Emerson recommended to Sue in 1857.)

Jackson, Helen (Maria Fiske) Hunt. (Pseudonyms "H.H." and "Saxe Holm")

Bits of Travel at Home. (1878)

A Century of Dishonor. (1893)

"Esther Wynn's Love Letters" (*Scribner's* December 1871)

"Hide and Seek Town" (*Scribner's* August 1876)

Nelly's Silver Mine (1878. possibly read by Dickinson)

Mercy Philbrick's Choice. (published anonymously in 1876)

Ramona. (1884)

Verses by H. H. (1870)

(This list is not exhaustive. Because Dickinson and Jackson knew one another from girlhood and developed a friendship as adults, Dickinson probably read everything Jackson wrote.)

James, Henry.

"The Novels of George Eliot" (*The Atlantic Monthly* October 1866)

"Jane Austen" (*Harper's New Monthly Magazine* July 1870)

Lowell, Maria White (Mrs. James Russell Lowell)

Poems. (1855)

Mackarness, Mathilda Anne.

House on the Rock. (1852)

Only. (1850)

Manning, Ann.

The Maiden and Married Life of Mary Powell, Afterwards Mistress Milton. (1849, '55, '59)

Martell, Martha

Second Love. (Read by Dickinson's sister, Lavinia, in 1851)

McIntosh, Maria J.

Woman in America: Her Work and Her Reward. (1850. Read by Lavinia)

Miller, Olive Thorne.

"These Our Brothers." (*The Atlantic Monthly* December 1884)

Parton, Sara (Fanny Fern)

Fern Leaves from Fanny's Port Folio. (1853. Read by Lavinia to the family)

Perry, Thomas Sergeant.

"George Sand" (obituary. *The Atlantic Monthly* October 1876)

Phelps, Mrs. Elizabeth Stuart.

The Last Leaf from Sunny Side. (1851, '54)

"A Woman's Pulpit." (*The Atlantic Monthly* July 1870)

Porter, Jane.

The Scottish Chiefs. (1810 Owned by Dickinson's father)

Thaddeus of Warsaw. (1820)

Procter, Adelaide Anne.

"A Woman's Question" (Reprinted in the anthologies *Legends and Lyrics* and *Adelaide Anne Procter's Poems*)

Review of Sand's *Mauprat.* (*Harper's New Monthly Magazine* May 1870)

Robinson, A. Mary F.
Emily Brontë. (1883)

Sand, George.
Mauprat. (Issued in translation about 1870)

Sedgwick, Catherine Maria.
Hope Leslie. (1827 Dickinson's father's book.)
Redwood. (1822 Dickinson's father's book.)
A New England Tale. (1824 Dickinson's father's book.)

Sheppard, Elizabeth.
Charles Auchester.
Almost a Heroine.
Rumors.
 (Dickinson cut out references to these novels from Spofford's "The Author of *Charles Auchester*." See reference below.)

Smedley, Menella Bute.
The Maiden Aunt. (1849)

Spofford, Harriet Prescott.
 "The Amber Gods." (*The Atlantic Monthly* February 1860)
 "Circumstance." (*The Atlantic Monthly* May 1860)
 "The Author of Charles Auchester" (*The Atlantic Monthly* June 1862)
 (Dickinson probably read many more stories and poems by Spofford, who frequently published in the magazines Dickinson read.)

Stowe, Harriet Beecher.
Uncle Tom's Cabin. (1852).
 "The Chimney-Corner" (Stowe's regular column in *The Atlantic Monthly*)
 (Stowe wrote many pieces for *The Atlantic Monthly* and other magazines, so Dickinson probably read other pieces by her.)

Taylor, Bayard
 "Casa Guidi Windows" (about Elizabeth Barrett Browning. *The Atlantic Monthly* June 1868)

Vane, Florence.
 "Are We Almost There?" (Read by Dickinson about 1845)

Woodberry, George E.
 "Mary Wollstonecraft" (*The Atlantic Monthly* December 1880)

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VITA

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