A New Redemption: Emily Dickinson's Poetic in Fascicle 22 and "I dwell in Possibility"

A. JAMES WOHLPART

> It was a life deliberately organized on her terms. The terms she had been handed by society—Calvinist Protestantism, Romanticism, the nineteenth-century corseting of women's bodies, choices, and sexuality—could spell insanity to a woman genius. What this one had to do was retranslate her own unorthodox, subversive, sometimes volcanic propensities into a dialect called metaphor: her native language.
>
> —Adrienne Rich, "Vesuvius at Home: The Power of Emily Dickinson"

IN 1983, IN HER INTRODUCTION TO *FEMINIST CRITICS READ EMILY DICKINSON*, Suzanne Juhasz outlined a revisionary stance that she felt was necessary to appreciate fully Dickinson's poetry.[1] In reaction to traditional criticism, which suggested that Emily Dickinson turned to poetry—a masculine activity—because of her failure as a woman or which read the poetry in light of a specific cultural context altogether ignoring concerns of gender, Juhasz posited the need for critical inquiry that was founded on the fact that Emily Dickinson was simultaneously a woman and a poet. Included in this collection of essays, Sandra M. Gilbert offered a reading that detailed the way in which Emily Dickinson structured her "life/text"—an emblematic conjoining of herself as woman with her poetry—"around a series of 'mysteries' that were distinctly female, deliberately exploring and exploiting the characteristics, even

the constraints, of nineteenth-century womanhood so as to transform and transcend them" (23).

In the 1980s, critics offered revealing analyses of Emily Dickinson's poetry in connection to the concerns of domesticity that were central to her life and her work. The primary focus of these readings was the way in which Emily Dickinson transformed the limitations of nineteenth-century gender roles into a powerful force that allowed her to refigure the world around her. Suzanne Juhasz, in *The Undiscovered Continent*, describes Emily Dickinson's concern with the domestic economy, witnessed in her retreat from the external world into an internal, created space, as a "strategy," explaining that

> Dickinson chose to keep to her house, to her room, to live in her mind rather than the external world, in order to achieve certain goals and to circumvent or overcome certain forces in her environment and experience that were in opposition to these goals—particularly, the expectations and norms that a patriarchal society creates for women, especially problematic when a woman wants to be a poet. (4–5)

Juhasz and others demonstrated that Dickinson used the home and domestic concerns, which represent an integral component of the cultural constraints of the nineteenth century, as a force for subverting the patriarchal society that surrounded her.[2]

The readings of the 1980s, which opened a new avenue for Dickinson criticism, culminated in the 1990s with such works as Paula Bennett's *Emily Dickinson: Woman Poet* and Betsy Erkkila's *The Wicked Sisters: Woman Poets, Literary History, and Discord*. Bennett grappled with the paradoxical implications of the role of domesticity in Emily Dickinson's poetry, admitting that, even while "Dickinson herself appears to have had little sympathy with the values of spirituality, purity and service underlying the role she chose to play,"

> there is no way we can separate Dickinson from the domestic life she led or from the role of 'poetess' she chose to play. . . . [F]or whatever reservations Dickinson had concerning domesticity, all the evidence suggests that she nevertheless identified strongly with women and with many aspects of domestic life. . . . Her submergence into the women's sphere and her presentation of herself as 'poetess' (a *woman* poet) was, therefore, a good deal more than simply a role she played in order to keep from playing others. (13)

Erkkila explains that "What made Dickinson's female world unique was that it became, for her at least, not an initiation into but a form of *resistance to* the structures of male power as they were embodied in home and school, church and state, workplace and marketplace" (19). As Erkkila, Juhasz, and others have noted, the home, for Emily Dickinson, was a creative space that allowed for a reaction against the domestic economy of the nineteenth century. Rather than a place for woman as server of others, the home became a place for woman as creator.

Dickinson's manipulation of domestic imagery, at once accepting and subverting the values of her culture, suggests the possibility of a heightened awareness of the critical significance of her poetry, a kind of self-consciousness not only about the poems created but also about the creative process itself. Indeed, Dickinson very often used her poetry to explore her own poetic—that is, the meaning of her poetry and her role as poet.[3] Because she had committed herself to a project that countered cultural expectations, and because she launched that project from the very seat of those expectations, Emily Dickinson often became self-reflective as she explored the ramifications of being a woman poet against the expectations of nineteenth-century womanhood. Such a concern for defining her poetic, then, was necessarily tied to explorations of domesticity; indeed, in her poems about creativity we can perhaps most clearly see the way in which Dickinson transformed

the home and the activities of the home into a poetic force that undermined nineteenth-century culture.

One such obvious example of domestic concerns explicitly intersecting with poetic concerns is in the private publication of her poetry in the form of the fascicle. R. W. Franklin, who has produced the most extensive scholarship on Emily Dickinson's manuscripts, suggests that the gathering of poems into fascicles, "a personal enactment of the public act" of publication, may have been motivated by the desire "to reduce disorder in her manuscripts" (Introduction ix). Yet he goes on to note that as the binding of poems progressed, the fascicles became less a record of completed poems and more of "a continuing workshop where, in producing a new copy for friends or in reading among the poems, she would enter the specific poetic process again" (Introduction x). Such a view of the fascicles—as an organic workshop—is very much linked to domestic concerns in that it embodies the view of Dickinson's poetry as living things used to nurture her relationships. Wendy Martin notes that "The word fascicle, which her sister Lavinia used to describe the packets of sewn poems, is . . . a botanical term referring to a flower pattern in which the petals spring irregularly from the top of a main stem like a peony. In binding her poems into fascicular packets, Emily Dickinson chose an appropriate form for the blossoming of her poems; each poem was a petal, each packet a flower" (144). The organic metaphors used to describe the publication process—whether through considering the writing process or the botanical reference—suggests that the fascicles were living things, part of Emily Dickinson's garden.[4] Moreover, both the physical nature and the content of the fascicles link them to a domestic economy. The physical method of binding the poems—sewing them together into a unit—"converted traditional female thread-and-needle work into a different kind of housework and her own form of productive industry" (Erkkila 38).

With the 1981 publication of Emily Dickinson's poems in manuscript form, critics have begun to explore the significance of the arrangement of poems in the fascicle form. The most extensive

consideration of this issue, Sharon Cameron's *Choosing Not Choosing*, engages the manuscripts in all their complexity—considering the importance of variants in the poems, of clusters or groupings of poems within fascicles, of the relationships of poems within these clusters, and of the relationships of clusters to each other. Cameron is ultimately concerned with the way in which these variants and multiple relationships complicate each other in order to produce an "excess of meaning" (43).[5] M. L. Rosenthal and Sally M. Gall, on the other hand, engage Fascicles 15 and 16 in order to demonstrate that Emily Dickinson used the form of the fascicle to provide order, albeit conditional, to her chaotic emotions: "The poems penetrate a life of secret turmoil, each striking a certain held pitch of awareness; and the fascicles mobilize these little systems of subjective energy into larger ones, permitting a more complex equilibrium among effects" (48). Others, such as Ruth Miller and William Shurr, have argued that a repeated drama occurs throughout the fascicles; for instance, Miller identified two primary dramas: of a woman, striving for acceptance or knowledge, failing, and then placing hope in an afterlife; or of a poet, seeking truth about the world, and then celebrating the relation between the mortal and the immortal, the natural and the spiritual (*Poetry of Emily Dickinson* 249).

While there is a great deal of disagreement about the way in which Emily Dickinson's fascicles are to be considered, Cameron, Rosenthal and Gall, and Miller all suggest that the fascicles present poems in ways that allow for interesting interactions among poems or groupings of poems that amplifies the meanings and possibilities of the poems.[6] Indeed, at the 1997 MLA convention, Eleanor Heginbotham argued that certain poems might play specific roles within a fascicle, acting as a central poem for the movement of the fascicle, or that two poems might intentionally face one another within a fascicle, creating a tension that is resolved elsewhere. With these contexts in mind, I would like to turn to an analysis of fascicle 22 (arranged in 1862), with a special focus on what I consider a central poem in this cluster, "I dwell in Possibility," one of Emily Dickinson's preeminent poems about poetry

and the poet. Central to my analysis will be an awareness of the way in which Emily Dickinson wrote from the perspective of a woman poet who concerned herself with undermining the foundations of the cultural beliefs that surrounded her through the private publication of her works.

As a woman, Dickinson experienced the dichotomization of her culture—a polarization of male and female, culture and nature, spiritual and physical, this life and afterlife, sin and salvation—as constraint; rather than working to reconcile the binary oppositions of her culture, however, Emily Dickinson offered a poetic that undermines the ground of these oppositions in order to subvert the cultural norms that imprisoned her and thus to expand into limitlessness and freedom.[7] Ultimately, the liberation that lies at the heart of Emily Dickinson's poetic in fascicle 22 and "I dwell" subverts orthodox, religious views on redemption and can most clearly be defined as the establishment of interrelationships with the natural world and with other humans that enable her to transform the quotidian into the sacred.[8] Dickinson subverts her culture's views on redemption in two primary ways: first, through offering a re-valuation of culturally opposed dichotomies, such as this life versus the afterlife and the physical versus the spiritual, in order to question the foundation of these oppositions, and, second, through reclaiming and revisioning the Garden of Eden, the originary space of these dichotomies. In fascicle 22 with "I dwell" as a central poem, using images of the house and the garden, Emily Dickinson demonstrates that the dichotomies that originate from such institutions as religion, which create a prison especially for women and which pervade and dominate our lives, might be overcome through grasping the physical and temporal interconnectedness of all things—of the natural landscape as well as of humans.[9]

The first grouping of poems, including "A Prison gets to be a friend—" (J652, F456), "Nature—sometimes sears a Sapling—" (J314, F457), and "She dealt her pretty words like Blades—" (J479, F458), describes the way in which humans not only accept and become accustomed to cultural constraints but also how we refuse

to engage the truth about these experiences because it is too painful.[10] As a result of our cultural constraints and disregard for truth, we become separated from nature, which is also here linked to the female poet. Significantly, Dickinson's description of the binary opposition between culture and nature—set up most clearly in a juxtaposition of the first two poems—posits the way in which we become comfortable and even happy in our cultural beliefs even though they imprison us. Set against this state of comfort, the poet, linked to nature and the feminine, offers a critique that creates pain and discomfort but ultimately is tied to freedom. The opposition between the poet and our cultural beliefs, which is set up in this first grouping, is central to the movement of the fascicle as a whole. While the central poem of the fascicle, "I dwell," offers a renewed vision of redemption, a kind of escape from our cultural system, the last grouping of poems in the fascicle returns to the concept of constraint explored here.

"A Prison gets to be a friend—" describes the process and the effects of acculturation, especially the way in which, as we grow older, we willingly replace our "freedom" with a "prison."[11] The opening of the poem explains that, between our prison and ourselves,

> . . . a Kinsmanship express—
> And in it's narrow Eyes—
>
> We come to look with gratitude
> For the appointed Beam
> It deal us—stated as our food—
> And hungered for—the same— (ll. 3–8)

According to Dickinson, humans not only come to accept their prisons as kin, but also come to be grateful for the attention we receive from our imprisoning systems; more importantly, we come to hunger for this attention as if it were our sustenance. Because of our acculturating experience, we lose sight of the freedom we experienced as children—"As plashing in the Pools— / When

Memory was a Boy—" (ll. 13–14)—and perceive the prison as more real than liberation:

> . . . Not so real
> The Cheek of Liberty—
>
> As this Phantasm Steel—
> Whose features—Day and Night—
> Are present to us—as Our Own— (ll. 19–23)

Dickinson suggests that the culturally created beliefs that guide our daily activities and define our selves—the beliefs that imprison us—are not real, are "Phantasm." Yet, significantly, we do not perceive the illusory nature of these systems; rather, because our beliefs provide a framework for navigating daily life, even though they simultaneously constrain us, they become more real than the liberty that we have abandoned.

The poem concludes, linking the imprisonment described in the poem to religion and reiterating the way in which we accept cultural beliefs—and, here, specifically, a belief in redemption in the afterlife—as the norm:

> The Liberty we knew
> Avoided—like a Dream—
> Too wide for any Night but Heaven—
> If That—indeed—redeem— (ll. 29–32)

As humans grow older, accepting cultural beliefs, we consider the freedom of our childhood, a freedom that we experienced naturally, as fantasy and can not even imagine liberation except insofar as it is connected to the afterlife. The acculturation process replaces our freedom with imprisonment, and relegates freedom ("redemption") to the spiritual world. Moreover, we have not only lost our ability to perceive true liberty, but also our ability to imagine—in the "Night"—this liberty. Consequently, we place our

hopes for redemption elsewhere, in the afterlife, a hope that Dickinson questions in the final line.

This first poem begins to set up some of the binary oppositions that Dickinson will seek to undermine later in the fascicle—especially the dichotomies of this life and the afterlife, and sin and salvation—and to connect this project to poetry. While she does not dispel the polarities here, she does question them in the final line of the poem—"If That [Heaven]—indeed—redeem—" (l. 32), suggesting that the hope for redemption and freedom placed on the spiritual afterlife may be misplaced. But she is also concerned with the relation between the prison of culture and poetry:

> We learn to know the Planks—
> That answer to Our feet—
> So miserable a sound—at first—
> Nor even now—so sweet— (ll. 9–12)

On one level, these lines describe the sound of pacing on the floor of a prison cell that we have become accustomed to. On another level, however, they describe the way in which her poetry (the metrical feet of her poetic lines) adjust to, though they never completely harmonize with, the prison. Such a negative depiction will be significant to my reading of the fascicle as a whole, which ends rather despairingly in the limitations of religion described in the first poem of the fascicle.

The second poem in the first grouping, "Nature—sometimes sears a Sapling—", counterbalances the first poem through a description of the way in which Nature impacts both the natural world and humans. The first part of the poem depicts the harmful effects of Nature on the landscape:

> Nature—sometimes sears a Sapling—
> Sometimes—scalps a Tree—
> Her Green People recollect it
> When they do not die—
>
> Fainter Leaves—to Further Seasons—
> Dumbly testify— (ll. 1–6)

Not only do these first lines demonstrate that pain is a natural part of life—the searing of the sapling and the scalping of the tree—they also demonstrate that this pain is part of the cycle of life—the fainter leaves that grow in later seasons. In this way, Dickinson insinuates a cyclical view of time, one that will be built on later in the fascicle, and asserts that pain is a part of growth.[12] But she also demonstrates that humans respond differently to the pain: "We—who have the Souls— / Die oftener—Not so vitally—" (ll. 7–8). Humans, who are more delicate and fragile than the natural landscape—we die more often—die in a different way than the natural world, for we die "Not so vitally—" suggesting that our death is not that of our mortal bodies but of our "Souls." The pain of Nature, then, does not kill humans; rather, humans become separated from Nature, the cause of discomfort, because our fragile natures, unlike that of the sapling and the tree, cannot withstand the pain. Such a depiction of the human reaction to pain explains the reason for our acceptance of cultural constraints elaborated in the opening poem.

While the first two poems work together to delineate a nice contrast between culture—a familiar prison—and nature—a discomforting force, the third poem, "She dealt her pretty words like Blades—", ties the two together and links them directly to the role of the poet. Like "Nature—sometimes sears a Sapling—", "She dealt her pretty words," which describes how "She" creates a "vulgar grimace in the Flesh," also focuses on how poorly humans react to pain and the way in which we create customs to gloss over the "pretty words" that are "like Blades":

> To Ache is human—not polite—
> The Film upon the eye
> Mortality's old Custom—
> Just locking up—to Die. (ll. 9–12)

Culture, which determined that it is not appropriate to reveal our discomfort, is described here as a film that skews our sight, imprisoning us in a kind of death in life. Because this poem follows

"Nature—sometimes sears a Sapling—" and because it deals with similar issues, the "She" of the poem might refer to Nature; yet, because "She" deals with words, the pronoun simultaneously refers to the poet who offers a truth that cannot be borne by her audience, thus connecting the female poet with Nature.[13] The first three poems of the fascicle, then, set up a clear distinction between culture—which is defined as a limitation or constraint, a custom or habit, such as placing our hope for redemption in the afterlife, that separates us from our freedom—and nature or the poet—which is connected to freedom, but also to a pain that humans cannot tolerate and thus that they disassociate themselves from.

The next grouping of poems, including "'Why do I love' You, Sir?" (J480, F459), "The Himmaleh was known to stoop" (J481, F460), and "We Cover Thee—Sweet Face—" (J482, F461), deals with the importance and power of human relationships. These poems, which depict a fragile relation between a dominant male lover and a passive female devotee, have been read metaphorically as delineations of the various aspects of the poet's self; Gelpi notes that Dickinson's love poems describe a "subjective drama, and both figures in the drama are first and last psychological factors. . . . the 'other' [in the poems] is a projected personification of the poet's emotional and religious needs much more than any person she has known and loved. 'He' is real but not actual, and his reality is self-referential. 'He' is a protagonist/antagonist in the drama of identity" (*Tenth Muse* 247–48). Others have more recently read these poems in relation to Dickinson's creative powers, suggesting that the male lover might refer to the creative dimension of her personality, "her own inner agency, which she feared would desert or destroy her" (Martin 103).[14] While I certainly think that such readings add depth to our understanding of Emily Dickinson and her views of creativity, I want to consider these poems not as statements about Dickinson's multifaceted self, or about Emily Dickinson as a poet, but rather as statements that attempt to describe in some fashion the power of human relationships.

The first poem in this grouping, "'Why do I love' You, Sir?" replies to the question of the opening line through several parallels in the natural world—between the wind and the grass, the lightning and the eye—that demonstrate that love is beyond explanation and beyond language: "And reasons not contained— / —Of Talk— / There be—" (ll. 14–16). The dash at the start of line 15, a truncated line, mirrors the fact that there is a great deal about love that cannot be contained in words.[15] While the poem demonstrates that love is inexplicable, it concludes with evidence of love's power:

> The Sunrise—Sir—compelleth Me—
> Because He's Sunrise—and I see—
> Therefore—Then—
> I love Thee— (ll. 17–20)

The poem, which opens with the question "'Why do I love'" (note that the rest of the first line, "You, Sir?" is not in quotations and thus that the question is more about why humans love than it is about why she loves him), concludes without providing an answer beyond the fact that she is compelled to love. The power and force of love, a power that cannot be captured in language, becomes the only explanation for the love.

The next two poems, "The Himmaleh was known to stoop" and "We Cover Thee—Sweet Face—", describe the effect of relationships—the way in which relationships allow the meanest thing to become great, to expand beyond its normal proportions. The low daisy of the first poem, which puts forth her petals in a field full of daisies for the Himmaleh, is amplified: "Her Universe / Hung out it's Flags of Snow—" (ll. 5–6). The lowly flower suddenly recognizes herself as a "Universe" at the same time that her white flowers—the "Flags of Snow"—are spread out for others to see. Likewise, in the second poem, the narrator, who must continually con her lover in order to receive attention, concludes that she would be "Augmented . . . a Hundred fold— / If Thou would'st take it—now—" (ll. 11–12). Taken together, this series of poems

describes the way in which relationships enrich us beyond our normal state, offering a nice contrast to the first grouping of poems, which define the role of culture in delimiting us. In addition, this grouping begins the process of subverting cultural norms, a process emphasized in the second half of the fascicle, through offering a re-valuation of the devalued, passive, female position, a position which expands as the "Universe" and is "Augmented . . . a Hundred fold."[16] Moreover, these three poems lead to the next series of poems, which explicitly describes the liberation and expansion of the self into the universe, and to the central poem, "I dwell in Possibility" which is also concerned with relationships, and especially the relation of the poet to her "Visiters—the fairest—".

The third grouping of poems, including "Of Being is a Bird" (J653, F462), "A long—long Sleep—A famous—Sleep—" (J654, F463), "Without this—there is nought—" (J655, F464), and "The name—of it—is 'Autumn'—" (J656, F465), centers on describing the experience of liberation and expansion and suggests an interconnection of nature and humans. The first poem compares our "Being" to the free flight of a bird that floats upon the heavens and "measures with the Clouds / In easy—even—dazzling pace—" (ll. 6–7). The ease with which the bird associates with the clouds in the heavens belies the magnificence of her feat, linking the poem to the second grouping. The poem concludes noting that the only difference between our being and the bird is that "a Wake of Music / Accompany their feet—" (ll. 9–10), suggesting that birds can not only experience this sense of freedom but that they can also sing about it.[17] The second poem draws on the freedom experienced in the first poem of this series while beginning to undermine the binary oppositions (here, night versus day) that pervade our culture, thus building on the first two groupings of poems. The "long Sleep" not only "makes no show for Morn," but it also does not "look up—for Noon" (ll. 2, 8), suggesting that this famous sleep is independent of the boundaries of night and day that guide our temporal lives. The third poem in this series returns to the concept of expansion and ties into the second grouping of

poems that revealed the importance of relationships. The poem opens, referring to love, "Without this—there is nought—" (l. 1) and concludes:

> I wished a way might be
> My Heart to subdivide—
> Twould magnify—the Gratitude—
> And not reduce—the Gold— (ll. 9–12)

Here, the narrator expresses her desire to offer her love to as many humans as possible; with this magnification of relationships, however, her love is not thinly spread and thus weakened but is rather increased without reducing its intensity or power. Again, the concept of magnification is introduced, as in the second grouping, and is tied to an exploration of relationships.

The concluding poem in this series, "The name—of it—is 'Autumn'—", links the natural landscape and humans while also describing time as cyclical rather than being demarcated by boundaries (day and night). In the poem, autumn is described through human characteristics: "An Artery—upon the Hill— / A Vein—along the Road—" (ll. 3–4), thus linking humans and the natural landscape as well as humans and the seasons. When the wind upsets the autumnal clouds, the "Scarlet Rain" "sprinkles Bonnets—far below—" (ll. 8–9), offering a physical communion of nature and humans, before it "eddies like a rose—away— / Upon Vermillion Wheels—" (ll. 11–12). Although a poem about autumn might conjure images of death and decay, here the references to the beauty and the "Wheels" of the season suggest a concern not with time ending but with time as a cycle, as a part of a natural process—very much like "Nature—sometimes sears a Sapling—" and "She dealt her pretty words like Blades—" in the first grouping of poems. In addition, the cycles of time include both the natural landscape and humans which are linked in the poem.[18] Such a link, which exists in many Dickinson poems, can also be seen in her letters. In February 1855, in a letter to Susan Gilbert, Dickinson metaphorically connects her observation of nature (and the seasonal cycles of nature) with her feelings for her friend, her

relationships: "Sweet and soft as summer, Darlings, maple trees in bloom and grass green in sunny places—hardly seems it possible this is winter still; and it makes the grass spring in this heart of mine and each linnet sing, to think that you have come" (L 178).

The central poem in fascicle 22, "I dwell in Possibility—" (J657, F466), draws on the themes and motifs registered in the first three groupings of poems. Centrally concerned with defining poetry and the role of the poet, "I dwell" works to undermine the religious dichotomies of Dickinson's culture—sin versus salvation, physical versus spiritual, this life versus afterlife—not through reconciliation but rather through subverting the foundation of these dichotomies.[19] The opening lines of the poem begin to assert this stance: "I dwell in Possibility— / A fairer House than Prose—" (ll. 1–2). Dickinson, describing her vocation through the domestic image of the house, sets up a distinction between the house of poetry and the house of prose, the former founded on openness and multiplicity—like the cycles of nature—the latter by contrast founded on clear cut distinctions—such as night and day, sin and salvation. The house of poetry is "More numerous of Windows— / Superior—for Doors—" (ll. 4–5), linking poetry to relationships and thus interconnectedness. Significantly, the house of poetry is also tied to nature:

> Of Chambers as the Cedars—
> Impregnable of Eye—
> And for an Everlasting Roof
> The Gambrels of the Sky— (ll. 5–8)

and thus completes the depiction: prose arises from culture and creates constraint and limitation because it is founded on polarities; poetry arises from nature and creates freedom and liberation because it sees past polarities and is based on interconnectedness.

Dickinson concludes the poem further defining her conception of the expansion at the heart of her poetic. She notes:

> For Occupation—This—
> The spreading wide my narrow Hands
> To gather Paradise— (ll. 9–12)

Here, Dickinson suggests that poetry, as a vocation, creates a change in her being. She moves from narrowness, a symbolic reference to human depravity and sin borrowed from orthodox, Puritan religion, to expansion. The capitalization of the word "Hands" suggests a parallel between the poet as creator and God as creator. Thus, poetry as a vocation allows her to overcome and move beyond limitations as set by a traditional view of humans and become infinite, ultimately "gather[ing] Paradise." Because Dickinson has moved beyond conventional religious beliefs, the paradise referred to here is not the paradise of traditional religion but a revised and renewed paradise—one founded on a unique interrelation of the natural world (the house is compared to cedars and connected to the sky) and humans (the house includes multiple entrances).[20]

A similar revisioning of Heaven, one based on human relationships and often connected to nature, can be seen in Dickinson's letters.[21] In a letter to Susan Gilbert, Dickinson notes "Dear Children—Mattie—Sue—for one look at you, for your gentle voices, I'd exchange it all. The pomp—the court—the etiquette—they are of the earth—will not enter Heaven" (L 178). Here Dickinson redefines the state of salvation; rather than existing in something as royal as the afterlife, heaven and thus redemption exist through relationships. Similarly, in a letter to Mrs. J. G. Holland in January 1856, Dickinson notes "While I sit in the snows, the summer day on which you came and the bees and the south wind, seem fabulous as *Heaven* seems to a sinful world—and I keep remembering it till it assumes a *spectral* air, and nods and winks at me, and then all of you turn to phantoms and vanish slowly away" (L 182). Dickinson's relation to her friend, as "Heaven," is troped as a summer day, connecting her redefinition of paradise to a relationship with and interconnection between humans and nature.[22]

As the central poem in the fascicle, then, "I dwell" works to undermine rather than merely reconcile the polarities of her culture in two specific ways. First, in this poem the home becomes the site of her occupation, thus subverting the separation of the public sphere and the private sphere that occurred in the nine-

teenth century and that devalued the domestic and the female. In Jeanne Holland's analysis of Dickinson's various forms of publication, from the fascicle to the household scrap, she asserts that "As a nineteenth-century woman writer . . . Dickinson retires to the domestic to confront, and thwart as best she can, its ideological stranglehold" (154). Yet Dickinson's objective was not merely to oppose the constraints of nineteenth-century womanhood or domesticity; rather she offers a re-valuation of the domestic sphere that provides a basis for the re-valuation of other cultural paradigms that exist as constraints. Second, returning to paradise as the Garden of Eden, Dickinson returns to the originary space of polarities (before sin, the fall, separation from God and nature, before the creation of culture) and reclaims that space as one where she entertains "Visiters—the fairest—" (l. 9). Such a revisioning of paradise as a renewed Garden of Eden to be gathered through extended, welcoming arms offers a new form of redemption, one based not on the afterlife but rather on this life—and specifically on the interconnectedness of and relationships in this life.

The first grouping of poems in the second half of the fascicle, including "A Solemn thing within the Soul" (J483, F467), "Whole Gulfs—of Red, and Fleets—of Red—" (J658, F468), "My Garden—like the Beach—" (J484, F469), and "The First Day, when you praised Me, Sweet" (J659, F470), alternates between poems focusing on garden imagery and poems focusing on time. Both "A Solemn thing" and "My Garden," with references to gardens, describe the movement from seeming insignificance to significance; yet this apparently clear cut distinction is erupted with the assertion that the smallest and meanest thing is really no different from the greatest, thus subverting the foundations of these distinctions and building on the second grouping of poems in the first half of the fascicle. "A Solemn thing within the Soul" occurs within the Garden of Eden—and thus before the fall—and depicts the slow process of becoming "ripe": "Your chance in Harvest moves / A little nearer—Every Sun" (ll. 14–15). While Judith Farr notes that the focus of the poem is on "the reunion of God with his creation" (63), in this garden the end of the process is not the most

significant, for it is "Wonderful—to feel the Sun / Still toiling at the Cheek" (ll. 7–8) while you "golden hang" (l. 3). The experience of ripening within the garden is one that offers its own form of communion, not only with God but also with nature (the "Sun" as God and as nature).[23] Similarly, "My Garden—like the Beach—" suggests that the garden, which ultimately creates her poetry, like the grains of sand on the beach which create the pearl, are equally significant, for it is the garden and the beach which offer the foundation for the existence of the sea and poetry (l. 2). These two garden poems within this series build on "I dwell" in that they undermine distinctions and polarities (in the first, sinner vs. redeemed; in the second, garden vs. poetry or sand vs. pearl) and depict the interconnectedness of all things. The glorification of the insignificant—the sand, the garden, the ripening Soul—creates a re-valuation that interrupts traditional distinctions and thus allows for a perception of the interconnectedness of all things.

The other two poems in this series, interpolated with the garden poems, also deal with seeming polarities through references to time and also undermine these polarities through careful delineation of the value associated to units of time. "The first Day, when you praised Me, Sweet" seems to offer a distinction between two time periods, before the day she was praised—"The Minor One—that gleamed behind—" (l. 7)—and after that day—"And Vaster—of the World's" (l. 8). Yet these two sets of days are both described as "Gold"; the only distinction (beyond the fact that one is past and one looks to the future) is that they are separated by "That Day" that she received praise, the day that "Glows Central—like a Jewel" (ll. 4–5). While this kind of demarcation between two periods generally leads humans to a different valuation of those periods, Dickinson suggests that such a dichotomization not happen—that we see the separating moment as unique, but that time flow around it. Building on the awareness of time as cyclical, such a perception allows for a sense of constant renewal. Similarly, while "Whole Gulfs—of Red, and Fleets—of Red—" dramatizes a sunset, it does not, recalling "A long—long Sleep," offer the sunset as a marker for creating distinctions or differ-

ences between night and day, one time period and another. The moment, which appears to divide, really only makes us recognize the value of what lies on either side and, ultimately, the equal value of these units of time. Gelpi notes that Dickinson's struggle to live in the moment created a unique dilemma, for to live in the moment meant that she must dwell on that moment, allowing other moments of time to slip away; the result was a kind of melding of time around the moment: "one found one's self living not just in the present but in the past and even the future; a life dedicated to apprehending the immediate intensity became alarmingly caught up in retrospection and anticipation" (*The Mind of the Poet* 103). Such a perception alters our relationship to time through uniting disparate moments within the flow of time.

The second grouping of poems in the last half of fascicle 22, including "To make One's Toilette—after Death" (J485, F471), "'Tis good—the looking back on Grief—" (J660, F472), "I was the slightest in the House—" (J486, F473), and "You love the Lord—you cannot see—" (J487, F474), reiterates the project of the fascicle and "I dwell"—that the polarities and distinctions offered through orthodox religion create limitations and constraints and that her house—the house of poetry—offers freedom from these constraints. Three of the poems in this series focus specifically on the oppression of religious dogma. "To make One's Toilette—after Death" suggests that it is easier to prepare for the day when a friend has died than it is when the friend has been "wrenched / By Decalogues—away—" (ll. 7–8), possibly referring to the many friends of Dickinson who were swayed by the religious awakenings of the nineteenth century and joined the church. The loss of friends in this life to orthodox religion becomes worse than the loss of friends to death because of the continued presence of the friends, a presence which acts as a constant reminder of the loss.[24] "I was the slightest in the House—" concludes that

> I never spoke—unless addressed—
> And then, 'twas brief and low—

I could not bear to live—aloud—
The Racket shamed me so— (ll. 10–13)

The organized religion that pervades Dickinson's culture causes a racket that creates shame (the guilt of sin) but also that silences and devalues women—"I was the slightest in the House— / I took the smallest Room—" (ll. 1–2). Significantly, the overwhelming presence of religion abnegates her own thoughts and exploration of a wider world: "Let me think—I'm sure— / That this was all—" (ll. 8–9). The next poem, "You love the Lord—you cannot see—", builds on this idea, suggesting that most humans spend their time consumed with traditional rituals that are empty:

You love the Lord—you cannot see—
You write Him—every day—
A little note—when you awake—
And further in the Day. (ll. 1–4)

Yet the poem also offers a solution to the racket of religion through the house of poetry: "But then His House—is but a Step— / And Mine's—in Heaven—You see" (ll. 7–8). Access to God's house, to heaven, occurs through one step, death; yet her house, the house of poetry as identified in "I dwell," is already heaven because it recaptures the paradise of the Garden of Eden.

The value that has been placed within the distinction between sin and salvation, this life and the afterlife is reversed in these poems—it is easier to lose a friend to the afterlife than to lose her in this life—and thus the differentiation is interrupted. The other poem in this series, significantly placed as the second poem in this series of four poems, reiterates the process so crucial to fascicle 22 of breaking down or undermining the dichotomies and polarities, and the consequent values, that are part of our culture. " 'Tis good—the looking back on Grief—" again suggests that though we often value certain experiences differently, no differentiation should be made between these experiences:

And though the Wo you have Today
Be larger—As the Sea

Exceeds it's Unremembered Drop—
They're Water—equally— (ll. 9–12)

Grief, like all experiences, when fully and truly experienced, does not have any distinctions; a small grief and a large grief are both overpowering and overwhelming—are "Water—equally." If we differentiate between the two, we devalue the "small" grief which is equally profound. By extension, Dickinson suggests in this series of poems that this life is as valuable as the afterlife, that redemption should not be relegated to a spiritual existence after we die but rather that it can and should be experienced in our temporal lives.

While the movement of the entire fascicle up to, and immediately after, "I dwell in Possibility" is concerned with offering a poetic of liberation and freedom that undermines the cultural and religious dichotomies of sin and salvation, and thus redefining redemption, the final grouping of poems in the fascicle reasserts the religious dichotomies and thus suggests that maintaining the poetic of redemption is difficult if not impossible. "Myself was formed—a Carpenter—" (J488, F475), "We pray—to Heaven—" (J489, F476), "He fumbles at your Soul" (J315, F477), and "Just Once! Oh least Request!" (J1076, F478) increasingly assert the dominance of a traditional God who judges and condemns. "Myself was formed—a Carpenter—" is tied to the theme of the fascicle in that it suggests that her work as a poet, linked to Christ's work through the image of the carpenter, should not be measured according to traditional cultural values:

a Builder came—

To measure our attainments—
Had we the Art of Boards
Sufficiently developed—He'd hire us
At Halves— (ll. 4–8)

The narrator, with her tools, "Against the Man—persuaded— / We—Temples build—I said—" (ll. 11–12). While the poet offers

something grander than the builder desires or understands, her art is diminished through the valuation offered by her culture.[25] Indeed, the next two poems in the cluster, "We pray—to Heaven—" and "He fumbles at your Soul," indicate that the traditional values of her society, on the afterlife and the God of the afterlife, dominate; the heaven of the first poem, while it can not be located—"There's no Geography" (l. 9)—is the central concern of humans: "We pray—to Heaven— / We prate—of Heaven—" (ll. 1–2), just as the God of the second poem, who "fumbles at your Soul" (l. 1), "Deals—One—imperial—Thunderbolt— / That scalps your naked Soul—" (ll. 11–12), suggesting the imperious and dominating nature of God in mid-nineteenth-century American culture.[26]

The concluding poem of fascicle 22, "Just Once! Oh least Request!" with its unanswered questions to the God described as "Adamant," "a God of Flint," and "remote" (ll. 2, 6, 8), depicts the poet herself returning to traditional religious beliefs. Unable to maintain her poetic of redemption in the face of a society that cannot hear the painful truth or experience the liberation of her poetic, the poet has no choice but to put her request "Just Once" to God who offers the only salvation that humans perceive even though she knows that this request will not be acknowledged. Such a recognition is reflected, occasionally, in Dickinson's letters; in a letter to Louise and Frances Norcross in 1861, Dickinson describes a little boy who is

> restricted to Martin Luther's works at home. It is a criminal thing to be a boy in a godly village, but maybe he will be forgiven. . . . If angels have the heart beneath their silver jackets, I think such things could make them weep, but Heaven is so cold! It will never look kind to me that god, who causes all, denies such little wishes. It could not hurt His glory, unless it were a lonesome kind. I 'most conclude it is. (L 234)

Dickinson's desire for angels to show their hearts or for God to allow the boy something else to read than Luther's works is coun-

tered with her recognition that Heaven is remote, cold, uncaring—and in control of all.

Significantly, this last poem delimits the expansion and liberation at the heart of Dickinson's poetic as outlined in fascicle 22 and "I dwell." While the first half of the fascicle leading up to the central poem describes the power of interconnectedness and human relationships (especially in the second grouping) as the foundation for liberation (in the third grouping), "Just Once! Oh least Request!" with its emphasis on our relationship to a remote God, returns to the prison of culture delineated in the opening poem of the fascicle and thus brings the movement of the fascicle full circle. Indeed, the domestic imagery central to the fascicle (especially the house and garden), is appropriate for this movement of despair that opens and closes the fascicle, with the hope at the center of the fascicle, for the house that Emily Dickinson lived in, while it constituted the space that allowed her to write, create, and thus re-valuate her culture, was also the house of her father who formally joined the church in 1850 and increasingly pressured his daughter, the last hold out, to convert as well. As Cynthia Griffin Wolff notes, "The notion of 'House' brings together a number of Dickinson's concerns: her autonomy, her authority, her right to inherit the earth, her right to possess herself of god's heroic grandeur as well, and her right to create poetry through which these ambitions could be realized" (431).[27]

The house of poetry in fascicle 22, which offers a re-valuation of domesticity and a new redemption through interconnectedness, meanwhile must contest with the dominant house of prose, with its confinement and oppression. Jeanne Holland's analysis of the scraps that represent Dickinson's later form of private publication suggests that moving away from the fascicle, a form that closely mirrored public forms of publication, to the scrap, a more refined domestic technology of publication, was an attempt to "materially locat[e] her poems in the private home. It is significant that her writing on household refuse coincides with her agoraphobic withdrawal from public life" and more fully "reflects and

shapes her explorations in the domain of selfhood and writing" (141). This movement did not erase the conflict between patriarchy and poetry, as Holland demonstrates in her analysis of the manuscript of Poem 1167, "Alone and in Circumstance—" (dated 1870), which includes a stamp with a locomotive on it, a representation of her father. Rather, it allowed Dickinson the opportunity in her later poetry to more fully question "the oppositions between locomotive/poetry, father/daughter, male/female" (147). Yet in the early part of her career, the late 1850s and early 1860s, Dickinson felt very keenly the constraining power of the patriarchal culture that surrounded her. She notes, in the conclusion of a letter to John L. Graves dated April 1856, what "a conceited thing indeed, this promised Resurrection!" (L 184), suggesting her frustration at the overbearing power of patriarchal systems.

I want to conclude this paper with reference to another poem, "They shut me up in Prose—" (J613, F445), that was composed around 1862 and situated in fascicle 21. In this poem, Dickinson also develops her conception of the paradoxical relationship between constraint and liberation using house imagery, here the house of prose. In this poem, she suggests that those in power—ministers or parents—use "prose" as a method of confinement: "They shut me up in Prose— / As when a little Girl / They put me in the Closet—".[28] While the poem opens with a description of her constraint, the conclusion of "They shut me up" suggests that residing (or being confined) in the house of prose does not, ultimately, limit or constrain the narrator:

> . . . Could themself have peeped—
> And seen my Brain—go round—
> They might as wise have lodged a Bird
> For Treason—in the Pound—
>
> Himself was but to will
> And easy as a Star
> Abolish his Captivity—
> And laugh—No more have I—

Significantly, the epistemological freedom that the narrator experiences derives from her confinement in the house of prose; without the captivity, the narrator would never have been able to enact the abolishment of her captivity—would never have been able to access her freedom. Dickinson here suggests that a dialectical relation exists between constraint and liberation, between prose and poetry, and that, ultimately, it is the confinement of prose that provides Dickinson the opportunity to create the transcendence of poetry. Such a tension, significantly, is traced in the movement of fascicle 22 as a whole, which, while it opens and closes with conceptions of constraint, has as its central conception that of liberation, a liberation that is offered through subverting the foundations of Dickinson's culture.

Florida Gulf Coast University

Notes

[1] I would like to thank the College of Arts and Sciences at Florida Gulf Coast University for support with professional development in writing this paper. I would especially like to acknowledge the assistance of Lisa Crocker, who provided me with research on many of the poems in this paper and who aided in editing the text.

[2] Other critics who explored Emily Dickinson's poetry within the context of domesticity in the 1980s include Cheryl Walker, *The Nightingale's Burden*; Wendy Martin, *An American Triptych*; and Suzanne Juhasz, "Writing Doubly: Emily Dickinson and Female Experience."

Gertrude Hughes, in "Subverting the Cult of Domesticity: Emily Dickinson's Critique of Woman's Work," argues that Dickinson re-valued the gendered experiences of the nineteenth century, an argument akin to my own:

> Like her daily life, her poems are filled with the flower-tending, letter-writing, music-playing, and sickroom nursing that were canonically assigned to her, but the poems do not use these in prescribed ways. Whereas the convention prescribed that such homely occupations existed to provide background and support for male activities, Dickinson decided for herself what constituted trivia and what 'firmament,' and she also decide whether male activities deserved support or scorn. (18)

I will extend this argument to fascicle 22 and especially "I dwell" where Dickinson uses the locus of the home to redefine and re-valuate such culturally determined beliefs as what constitutes redemption.

[3] For a detailed analysis of Dickinson's metapoetics—that is, of her reflection on poetry and the role of the poet—see Raab.

[4] In her third letter to T. W. Higginson, dated July 1862, Dickinson describes her poems as "Blossom[s] from my Garden" (L 268). That Dickinson's poetry originates

from her garden will be significant to my reading of "I dwell in Possibility" which centers on the way in which she reclaims and revisions the Garden of Eden.

[5] Cameron states, early on, that "In Dickinson's fascicles—where 'variants' are more than the editorial term for discrete delimited choices—variants indicate both the desire for limit and the difficulty in enforcing it. The difficulty in enforcing a limit to the poems turns into a kind of limitlessness, for . . . it is impossible to say where the text ends because the variants extend the text's identity in ways that make it seem potentially limitless" (6). While Cameron would certainly argue against such a thing, I would suggest that one reading of fascicle 22 is in fact an exploration of the thematic significance of the concept of limitlessness, a reading that I will pursue here. Significantly, as Cameron notes, the variants to poems within fascicles increased in 1861, about the same time that Dickinson arranged the poems in fascicle 22.

[6] Cameron makes the most comprehensive argument concerning the compounding of a multiplicity of meanings, suggesting that a thematic approach to the fascicles that does not engage the variants and interrelationships is not, indeed, reading Dickinson. I would suggest, rather, that a thematic approach such as the one that I pursue here might act as one reading of a fascicle which could easily, even comfortably though possibly contradictorily, be joined by other readings which privilege other poems and discern different groupings within the fascicles. My reading, then, would only be the beginning of a series of readings that would allow for a compounding of meanings, all of which might be expected to interact, to lead to questionings, to lead to problematization.

[7] Many critics have noted the conflict in Emily Dickinson's poetry between constraint and transcendence, especially in relation to her conception of her vocation as poet. Many of these readings posit the conflict as one between Puritanism and Transcendentalism without considering the importance of gender.

For those critics who consider the conflict to be an unresolved tension that offers complexity to Dickinson's work, see Albert Gelpi, *The Tenth Muse: The Psyche of the American Poet*, and Hyatt Waggoner, *American Poets*, who provide perhaps the strongest background for this discussion. See also Carter, who suggests that Dickinson experienced "a continuing and never-resolved conflict between the secularism represented by Emerson's Transcendentalism and the Christianity represented by her family and her New England heritage" (85), and New, who locates Dickinson not in Romanticism nor in nihilism but in a third position, "that of a theologically answered doubt," that New defines through Kierkegaard (4). As I will note later, New proceeds to read "I dwell" as a thoroughly Transcendental poem (6–7).

On the other hand, Weisbuch argues ultimately that the second world, that of Puritan limitation, overwhelms the first: "The veto power of Dickinson's second pain-filled world stands ready to negate or qualify the self-legislated grandeur of the first. . . . Dickinson would insist on testing her fictions, and they would often fail. The resultant despair is not simply a worldly pessimism; it is directed not against 'so fair a place' as nature but against her own visions which have neglected a limit. Her second world is 'second' because it is logically subsequent to her hopes. . . . In this second world, the Transcendental possibilities of the first tantalize only to torture" (*Emily Dickinson's Poetry* 2). For similar readings, see Wilner, Yin, and Eberwein, "'Graphicer for Grace.'"

My reading of Dickinson's poetic, following the lines of many of the feminist critics of the 1980s and 1990s, is founded on a concern for gender as a tool for subverting traditional cultural values. As Jeanne Holland notes in her analysis of

Dickinson's private publishing efforts, "The ideological split between 'male' literary creativity and 'female' domestic labor collapses in Dickinson's experience. Because she combines ideological positions that her culture struggles to separate—indeed her late works meld literary creativity and domesticity—Dickinson's multiply [sic for multiple?] gendered perspective enables her to resist . . . possessive individualism" (152).

[8] Dickinson's rebellion against orthodox religion can be seen in many letters and poems, especially in her descriptions of refusing to go to service with her family and remaining home, instead, to write letters to her friends. This rebellion can also be seen in "Some keep the Sabbath going to Church—" (J324; F236), which concludes: "So instead of getting to Heaven, at last— / I'm going, all along" (ll. 11–12). The distinction between the heaven of orthodox religion—based on faith in the afterlife—and the heaven of this life is at the heart of Dickinson's redefinition of redemption.

Several other critics have also noticed this rebellion. Margaret Homans, in "Emily Dickinson and Poetic Identity," suggests that Dickinson reacted against both orthodox religion and Emersonian Transcendentalism, and especially their gendered foundations, in developing her poetic. In relation to Transcendentalism, she notes that, while Emerson works from polarities to a state of reconcilement, Emily Dickinson "works toward undermining the whole concept of oppositeness" (140), an argument that I will build on.

In addition, in "Writing Doubly," Suzanne Juhasz notes that in many of Dickinson's poems, rather than staging a conflict between two polarities (either/or), she offers simultaneity (both/and); while patriarchal culture devalues female experience as domestic and trivial, Dickinson's poetry reacts against this devaluation and asserts the grandness of the female experience not in order to cancel out the former but only to offer a simultaneous and contradictory view. Again, my reading will build on this argument, relating it specifically to the poems in fascicle 22.

[9] I am following the organization of the fascicle suggested in the Variorum edition of Dickinson's works, edited by Franklin (Dickinson, *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: A Variorum Edition* 476–92). Fascicle 22 includes the following poems, grouped according to my own strategy:

First Part

Grouping One

J652/F456 A Prison gets to be a friend—
J314/F457 Nature—sometimes sears a Sapling—
J479/F458 She dealt her pretty words like Blades—

Grouping Two

J480/F459 'Why do I love' You, Sir?
J481/F460 The Himmaleh was known to stoop
J482/F461 We Cover Thee—Sweet Face—

Grouping Three

J653/F462 Of Being is a Bird
J654/F463 A long—long Sleep—A famous—Sleep—
J655/F464 Without this—there is nought—
J656/F465 The name—of it—is 'Autumn'—

Central Poem

J657/F466 I dwell in Possibility—

Second Part

Grouping One

J483/F467 A Solemn thing within the Soul
J658/F468 Whole Gulfs—of Red, and Fleets—of Red—
J484/F469 My Garden—like the Beach—
J659/F470 The First Day, when you praised Me, Sweet

Grouping Two

J485/F471 To make One's Toilette—after Death
J660/F472 'Tis good—the looking back on Grief—
J486/F473 I was the slightest in the House—
J487/F474 You love the Lord—you cannot see—

Grouping Three

J488/F475 Myself was formed—a Carpenter—
J489/F476 We pray—to Heaven—
J315/F477 He fumbles at your Soul
J1076/F478 Just Once! Oh least Request!

My analysis will follow what I perceive to be an organizational pattern in the fascicle. I will analyze three groupings of poems in the first half of the fascicle, with a special emphasis on the first grouping, that set up the primary themes and motifs, including especially the concept of constraint or limitation, the importance of relationships, and the experience of liberation or freedom. These first three groupings will lead up to a reading of the central poem of the fascicle, "I dwell in Possibility," a poem which delineates the role of poetry and the poet in relation to the themes and motifs introduced in the first half of the fascicle. In this poem, Dickinson most clearly undermines the binary oppositions of her culture—especially relating to religion—through returning to, and redefining, the Garden of Eden—symbolically the foundation for the dichotomies that pervade nineteenth-century culture. I will then analyze three groupings of poems in the last half of the fascicle that fall away from "I dwell" through repeating the theme of "I dwell" but also through suggesting that maintaining the undifferentiated state is difficult or perhaps even impossible.

[10] While I will consistently note both Johnson's and Franklin's numbers for the poems when I first introduce them, when citing Dickinson's poems, I will use Johnson; if Franklin offers a significant alternative, I will note the Franklin version in a footnote.

[11] Several critics have offered differing readings of this poem. Roger Lundin interprets the poem within intellectual contexts of the nineteenth century that suggest that Dickinson's concern with the disorientation that occurred as a result of the advance of human knowledge led to a growing awareness that the universe does not display an ordered design (135–37). James Guthrie reads the poem within the context of Dickinson's problems with her sight and her experiences as a patient (69–71). Finally, Eleanor Heginbotham glosses the poem in relation to references to Milton ("'Paradise fictitious,'" 59).

[12] Wolff provides a nice gloss of this poem, reading it within a biblical context—Jacob's struggle with God. While this struggle wounds Jacob, it also offers him a new identity—"a new 'self' empowered to exercise the authority he had won" (149–50). While I certainly agree that the pain in the poem is connected to the possibility for growth, I suggest that Dickinson is concerned with differentiating nature's response to this pain from human's response.

[13] While Weisbuch suggests that this poem describes the "misuse of the word's power" ("Prisming Dickinson" 210), Gelpi offers a reading similar to mine, noting the connection between poetry, which depicts life, and pain (*The Mind of the Poet* 137).

[14] Betsy Erkkila notes that in the Master Letters and love poems, the narrator offering herself up to the male lover "might be read as an attempt to invest . . . [herself] with masculine subjectivity and power. But because masculine presence would threaten to overpower the woman, her romantic passion is often most intense when the male figure is either absent or unavailable" (66). See also Adrienne Rich (104–05, 109).

[15] Franklin does not truncate these lines:

> And reasons not contained—Of Talk—
> There be—preferred by Daintier Folk— (ll. 14–15)

Significantly, the four other stanzas of the poem, even in Franklin, include truncated lines, which, like the Johnson version of these lines, builds on the theme of the inexplicability of human love.

[16] In reference to Poem 481 and others like it, Robert Smith offers a nice reading of the way in which Dickinson created a "*masochistic aesthetic*" that used the "thematics of domination and submission" in order to subvert "power hierarchies." Such a thematics, according to Smith, creates a "representative space . . . from within which poet and readers alike are able to explore and demystify the brutal conjunction of power and pleasure in intersubjective relations" (2).

[17] In a letter to Dr. and Mrs. J. G. Holland, written in the summer of 1862, Dickinson makes a similar parallel: "My business is to love. I found a bird, this morning, down—down—on a little bush at the foot of the garden, and wherefore sing, I said, since nobody hears? One sob in the throat, one flutter of bosom—'My business is to sing'—and away she rose! How do I know but cherubim, once, themselves, as patient, listened, and applauded her unnoticed hymn?" (L 269).

[18] In "Terrains of Difference," Joanne Feit Diehl notes that "poem 656 ["The name—of it—is 'Autumn'—"] disrupts conventional literary distinctions between the internal and the external, between nature and culture, between the body and all that lies beyond it. In addition to its brilliantly descriptive view of autumn, Dickinson's text constitutes a re-examination of the relationship between nature and the human, presenting a vision of the world as body and of seasonal (therefore cyclical) occurrence as a willed or volitional event" (87).

[19] Many readings of "I dwell in Possibility" suggest that this poem reflects Emersonian Transcendentalism. See Judith Farr, who notes that "I dwell" "makes the association frequent in Emerson between sky and paradise while her allusion to fairest visitors is to those transcendental emissaries, the muses, or sources of artistic inspiration to whom she alludes in a number of poems about the poetic process. Poem 657 describes the creative responsiveness Emerson praised in *Nature*: 'Every spirit builds itself a house, and beyond its house a world, and beyond its world a heaven'" (51). See also Douglas Robinson, who notes: "Certainly her attachment to Emersonianism was strong. In her very Emersonian poem 'I Dwell in Possibility' (657) . . . 'Possibility' tropes nature while enacting *NATURE*: 'Build, therefore, your own world.' The poem *is* Dickinson's world, her dwelling place or house of poetry" (25). Likewise, Frederick L. Morey reads the poem in the light of Emersonian Transcendentalism and Kantian metaphysics (33). Finally, while the context of Doriani's study is "the Christian prophetic tradition," and especially that tradition as it existed in Puritan New England,

the emphasis on prophecy links the study to considerations of Emersonian Transcendentalism (1); Doriani's reading of "I dwell" focuses on the religious terms of Dickinson's vocation (142). See also Diehl, "Emerson, Dickinson, and the Abyss," and McElderry for discussions of Dickinson and Transcendentalism.

Significantly, most other readings focus on the concepts of liberation and limitlessness; see Juhasz, "'I dwell in Possibility': Emily Dickinson in the Subjunctive Mood"; Miller, "Poetry as Transitional Object" (449–50); and Julia Walker (21). Only Benfey reads this poem as emphasizing limitation and negation: "The doors and windows of the first stanza seem, in retrospect (on rereading, that is), to be there less in the service of openness than for the possibility of closing them when necessary: they serve as much to exclude as to include" (34).

[20] Elisa New interprets the final lines of the poem in terms of Emersonian Transcendentalism: "in these lines Dickinson lays out not only the promise of poetic innovation that her work will fulfill, a wrenching of the poem away from the prose dictions that afford available paraphrase, but also promise of an alternative, more commodious theology than that to which American poetry is used. 'Possibility' implies both a poetic and a theological movement. By 'spreading wide [her] narrow Hands' the poet will gather in a redemption neither guaranteed nor made particularly available by her forebears' faith, a redemption whose paradoxes will deepen and compound" (7).

New's analysis of the connection between Dickinson's poetic and theology parallels my own, yet I don't read Dickinson's beliefs as grounded in Emersonian transcendentalism, which very often works towards reconciling binary oppositions (see Homans 140). Dickinson, rather, works through oppositions in order to envelope and encompass; specifically here she works through constraints and limitations in order to reach freedom, a strategy common in her works that suggests the importance of constraints as a part of the process for attaining liberation. Amy Cherry notes that "the limitations of the prison are what keep her writing. She needs the boundaries so she can attempt to overcome them" (21). I will return to this idea in my conclusion.

[21] For two interesting discussions of Dickinson's views on and symbolic uses of Heaven in her poetry, see Guthrie (Chapter 4) and Wolff (321–42).

[22] Significantly, even when Emily Dickinson maintains a traditional view of Paradise, as existing only in the afterlife, she still defines it through relationships; in a letter to Mrs. J. G. Holland in 1856, Dickinson notes that she wishes that she were in the afterlife, "which makes such promises. . . . And I'm half tempted to take my seat in that Paradise of which the good man writers, and begin forever and ever *now*, so wondrous does it seem. My only sketch, profile, of Heaven is a large, blue sky, bluer and larger than the *biggest* I have seen in June, and in it are my friends—all of them—every one of them—those who are with me now, and those who were 'parted' as we walked, and 'snatched up to Heaven'" (L 185). Yet even after this, she suggests that she envisions two distinct paradises: "If roses had not faded, and frosts had never come, and one had not fallen here and there whom I could not waken, there were no need of other Heaven than the one below—and if god had been there this summer, and seen the things that I have seen—I guess that he would think His Paradise superfluous" (L 185). Significantly, Dickinson admits that maintaining the vision of this life as paradise is difficult, primarily because of the presence of death which interrupts the cycles of life, the flow of time, key concepts in her poetic and revisioned redemption.

Many other letters maintain the real presence of the paradise of this life; see, for instance, letters 193 and 305.

[23] Both Wolff and Lundin suggest that the narrator in the poem is suspended between two worlds—the "heaven above and the abyss below" (Lundin 159)—suggesting that her "glimpse into Heaven, then, is not glorious but terrifying" (Wolff 306). Such a reading ignores the significance of the garden imagery in the poem which suggests that becoming ripe allows the soul to fall into the garden, a garden of redemption before the fall; in this reading, only one world exists, that of possibility and hope.

[24] For a strong discussion of Emily Dickinson's reaction to the revivals that occurred in and around Amherst throughout her life, and their impact on her family and friends, see Chapter 3 in Gelpi, *The Mind of the Poet.*

[25] Judith Farr also discusses this poem, in connection with "I was the slightest in the house" and "A Solemn Thing it was I said," noting that in these poems, "Dickinson's speaker offers herself in solitude to nature's influence and predicates the sacramental connection between landscape and humanity, between landscape and the divine, which was the hypothesis of the romantics and a chief principle of Ruskin" (51). While I agree that such a connection is established in fascicle 22, I have suggested in my reading of "I dwell" especially that it differs somewhat from that of the romantics; more importantly, in looking at the movement within the fascicle, by the time Dickinson gets to "Myself was formed a Carpenter," which is in the final grouping, she is moving away from the ability to maintain this sacred connection. While Guthrie rightly notes that this poem offers a high valuation of poetry (132), this claim comes in response to the devaluation of her work by "the Man," a symbolic representative of the dominant, patriarchal culture.

[26] Wolff describes this domination in sexual terms: "God rapes us one by one; however, He has violated us collectively, too, for His violence has vitiated the very culture in which we have been reared" (280). For other discussions of this poem, see Fast, who suggests that the poem is concerned with poetic inspiration; Juhasz, who reads the poem in relation to "the nature and uses of power itself" ("Poem 315" 66); and Ringler-Henderson, who reads the poem as depicting "a devastating psychic and emotional storm" (70).

[27] For a nice discussion of the role of place, and especially the home, in Emily Dickinson's thinking, see Eberwein, "Dickinson's Local, Global, and Cosmic Perspectives."

[28] Robert Weisbuch has rightly linked the reference to prose in this second poem to the "rigidities of puritanism" that existed in the Dickinson family (*Emily Dickinson's Poetry* 4). Weisbuch concludes: "The House of Prose, of conventional and prosaic conformity, here [in "They shut me up"] becomes a punitive closet; but the House of Possibility, of imaginative epistemological freedom, exists wherever the mind is" (*Emily Dickinson's Poetry* 5).

Works Cited

Benfey, Christopher E. G. *Emily Dickinson and the Problem of Others.* Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1984.

Bennett, Paula. *Emily Dickinson: Woman Poet.* Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 1990.

Cameron, Sharon. *Choosing Not Choosing: Dickinson's Fascicles.* Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992.

Carter, Steve. "Emily Dickinson and Mysticism." *ESQ* 24 (1978): 83–95.

Cherry, Amy L. "'A Prison gets to be a friend': Sexuality and Tension in the Poems of ED." *Dickinson Studies* 49 (June 1984): 9–21.

Dickinson, Emily. *The Letters of Emily Dickinson.* Vol. 2. Ed. Thomas H. Johnson. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1958.

———. *The Poems of Emily Dickinson.* Vols. 1 and 2. Ed. Thomas H. Johnson. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1955.

———. *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: A Variorum Edition.* Vol. 1. Ed. R. W. Franklin. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1998.

Diehl, Joanne Feit. "Emerson, Dickinson, and the Abyss." *Modern Critical Views: Emily Dickinson.* Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House, 1985. 145–160.

———. "Terrains of Difference: Reading Shelley and Dickinson on Autumn." *Women's Studies* 16 (1989): 87–90.

Doriani, Beth Maclay. *Emily Dickinson: Daughter of Prophecy.* Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1996.

Eberwein, Jane Donahue. "Dickinson's Local, Global, and Cosmic Perspectives." *The Emily Dickinson Handbook.* Ed. Gudrun Grabher, Roland Hagenbuchle, and Cristanne Miller. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1998. 27–43.

———. "'Graphicer for Grace': Emily Dickinson's Calvinist Language." *Studies in Puritan American Spirituality* 1 (Dec. 1990): 170–201.

Erkkila, Betsy. *The Wicked Sisters: Women Poets, Literary History, and Discord.* New York: Oxford UP, 1992.

Farr, Judith. *The Passion of Emily Dickinson.* Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992.

Fast, Robin Riley. "Poem 315." *Women's Studies* 16 (1989): 55–59.

Franklin, R. W. *The Editing of Emily Dickinson: A Reconsideration.* Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1967.

———. Introduction. *The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson.* Ed. R. W. Franklin. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1981. ix–xxii.

Gelpi, Albert J. "Emily Dickinson and the Deerslayer: The Dilemma of the Woman Poet in America." *Shakespeare's Sisters: Feminist Essays on Women Poets.* Ed. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1979. 122–34.

———. *Emily Dickinson: The Mind of the Poet.* Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1966.

———. *The Tenth Muse: The Psyche of the American Poet.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1975.

Gilbert, Sandra M. "The Wayward Nun beneath the Hill: Emily Dickinson and the Mysteries of Womanhood." *Feminist Critics Read Emily Dickinson.* Ed. Suzanne Juhasz. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1983. 22–44.

Guthrie, James R. *Emily Dickinson's Vision: Illness and Identity in Her Poetry.* Gainesville: UP of Florida, 1998.

Heginbotham, Eleanor. "Dickinson's Aesthetics and Fascicle 21." *Unfastening the Fascicles: An EDIS Roundtable at the 1997 MLA.* http://jefferson.village.virginia.edu/dickinson/fascicle/hegin.html. 18 June 1998.

———. "'Paradise fictitious': Dickinson's Milton." *Emily Dickinson Journal* 7.1 (1998): 55–74.

Holland, Jeanne. "Scraps, Stamps, and Cutouts: Emily Dickinson's Domestic Technologies of Publication." *Cultural Artifacts and the Production of Meaning: The Page, the Image, and the Body.* Ed. Margaret J. M. Ezell and Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1994. 139–181.

Homans, Margaret. "Emily Dickinson and Poetic Identity." *Emily Dickinson.* Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House, 1985. 129–44.

Hughes, Gertrude Reif. "Subverting the Cult of Domesticity: Emily Dickinson's Critique of Women's Work." *Legacy* 3 (Spring 1986): 17–28.

Juhasz, Suzanne. "'I dwell in Possibility': Emily Dickinson in the Subjunctive Mood." *Emily Dickinson Bulletin* 32 (1977): 105–109.

———. "Introduction: Feminist Critics Read Emily Dickinson." *Feminist Critics Read Emily Dickinson.* Ed. Suzanne Juhasz. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1983. 1–21.

———. "Poem 315." *Women's Studies* 16 (1998): 61–66.

———. *The Undiscovered Continent: Emily Dickinson and the Space of the Mind.* Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1983.

———. "Writing Doubly: Emily Dickinson and Female Experience." *Legacy* 3 (Spring 1986): 5–15.

Keller, Karl. *The Only Kangaroo Among the Beauty: Emily Dickinson and America.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1979.

Lundin, Roger. *Emily Dickinson and the Art of Belief.* Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998.

Martin, Wendy. *An American Triptych: Anne Bradstreet, Emily Dickinson, Adrienne Rich.* Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1984.

McElderry, B. R., Jr. "Emily Dickinson: Viable Transcendentalist." *ESQ* 44 (1966): 17–21.

Miller, Ruth. "Poetry as a Transitional Object." *Between Reality and Fantasy: Transitional Objects and Phenomena.* Ed. Simon A. Grolnick and Leonard Barkin, in collaboration with Werner Muensterberger. New York: Jason Aronson, 1978. 449–68.

———. *The Poetry of Emily Dickinson.* Middletown: Wesleyan UP, 1968.

Morey, Frederick L. "Dickinson-Kant, Part III: The Beautiful and the Sublime." *Dickinson Studies* 67 (1988): 3–60.

New, Elisa. "Difficult Writing, Difficult God: Emily Dickinson's Poems Beyond Circumference." *Religion and Literature* 18.3 (Fall 1986): 1–27.

Oberhaus, Dorothy Huff. *Emily Dickinson's Fascicles: Method and Meaning.* University Park: Pennsylvania SUP, 1995.

———. "Emily Dickinson's Fascicles: Method and Meaning of a Christian Poet." *Literature and Belief* 15 (1995): 1–21.

Raab, Josef. "The Metapoetic Element in Dickinson." *The Emily Dickinson Handbook.* Ed. Gudrun Grabher, Roland Hagenbuchle, and Cristanne Miller. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1998. 273–95.

Rich, Adrienne. "Vesuvius at Home: The Power of Emily Dickinson." *Shakespeare's Sisters: Feminist Essays on Women Poets.* Ed. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1979. 99–121.

Ringler–Henderson, Ellin. "Poem 315." *Women's Studies* 16 (1989): 67–71.

Robinson, Douglas. "Two Dickinson Readings." *Dickinson Studies* 70 (1989): 25–35.

Rosenthal, M. L., and Sally M. Gall. *The Modern Poetic Sequence: The Genius of Modern Poetry.* New York: Oxford UP, 1983.

Shurr, William H. *The Marriage of Emily Dickinson: A Study of the Fascicles.* Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1983.

Smith, Robert McClure. "Dickinson and the Masochistic Aesthetic." *Emily Dickinson Journal* 7.2 (1998): 1–21.

Waggoner, Hyatt H. *American Poets: From the Puritans to the Present.* 1968. Baton Rouge: Louisiana SUP, 1984.

Walker, Cheryl. *The Nightingale's Burden: Women Poets and American Culture before 1900.* Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1982.

Walker, Julia M. "ED's Poetic of Private Liberation." *Dickinson Studies* 45 (June 1983): 17–22.

Weisbuch, Robert. *Emily Dickinson's Poetry.* Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1972.

———. "Prisming Dickinson; or, Gathering Paradise by Letting Go." *The Emily Dickinson Handbook.* Ed. Gudrun Grabher, Roland Hagenbuchle, and Cristanne Miller. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1998. 197–223.

Wilner, Eleanor. "The Poetics of Emily Dickinson." *ELH* 38 (1971): 126–54.

Wolff, Cynthia Griffin. *Emily Dickinson.* New York: Knopf, 1987.

Yin, Joanna. "'Arguments of Pearl': Dickinson's Response to Puritan Semiology." *Emily Dickinson Journal* 2.1 (1993): 65–83.