Ourself behind ourself: An interpretation of the crisis in the life of Emily Dickinson

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THE seeming contradiction between Emily Dickinson's life of seclusion and the extraordinary vitality and depth of understanding shown in her poems has been a constant source of bafflement to her readers and critics ever since the first volume of her verse was published in 1890. It is noticeable that the curiosity about her life has increased with the years, and the effort to account for her retirement from the world has led to a variety of interpretations, some of which are inconsistent with the facts.

This interest is due, I think, to two factors — on the one hand the growing acceptance of modern psychological theories, and on the other the increasing distance from the time in which she lived. While the basic pattern of the psyche remains constant in succeeding ages, conscious attitudes shift from one generation to another, and the action taken as a result of experience varies according to the setting in which the person finds his being. Looking back from the mid-twentieth century, it is not easy to understand a life of withdrawal, such as is found in our own time only in a few monastic orders, or is associated in the mind of the public with newspaper stories of eccentrics who immure themselves until death among the litter in neglected houses. There was nothing of the professionally religious in Emily Dickinson's motives, and neither was her seclusion the result of a pitiful surrender to weakness. Her choice of half a lifetime spent in her own home never robbed her of an ardent interest in human experience.

There is little probability that any further facts will come to light to change the outward picture as we already have it. Moreover, it is not the concern of this paper to give biographical data, but to try to follow the psychic events that shaped her life as a woman and a poet. The attempt to trace the inner story through the self-revelation to be found in her poems and letters is, however, open to the serious danger of drawing false inferences. When she said

> I dwell in Possibility –
> A fairer House than Prose –

she was pointing out that all human experience is open for a poet's choice. We must also take note of her warning to Thomas Wentworth Higginson in one of her first letters to him: 'When I state myself, as the representative of the verse, it does not mean me, but a supposed person.'[1] However, it may be permissible to assume that she was referring specifically to the small selection from her many verses that she had chosen to send. It is also evident that whether or not the subject matter of a poem deals with circumstances of time and place, it is the poet himself who speaks through it. He not only shows us his conscious attitudes, but inevitably reveals something of his unconscious mind, both on a personal level and on the deeper one that touches his relation to those underlying psychological patterns common to all men.

Among Emily Dickinson's poems there are few that appear to be direct and uncensored expressions of symbols from the unconscious. With an extraordinary awareness she transformed experience into art, in which the images, though spontaneous, are usually related to the conscious sensation or evaluation of the experience instead of being an outpouring from the autonomous depths of the psyche. In trying to trace the events in her inner world, then, one must to a large extent follow the experience as she became aware of it, rather than attempt an analysis of the images and symbols according to any preconceived idea of their significance. It may be noted that some of the poems that are of importance in this study are poetically inferior, as is often true when the subject matter is related to an aspect of the writer's mind that is not yet fully realized, or when the verses are written to relieve a tension not clearly understood.

Since the manuscripts have now been dated by various means, including a study of the handwriting and the papers on which they are written, it is possible for the first time to see the whole range of Emily Dickinson's writing, both in verse and prose.[2] As the poems now appear, arranged in chronological order by years, the startling fact is

[1] July 1862; original in Boston Public Library; printed in *Letters of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Mabel Loomis Todd (New York, 1931), p. 276.

[2] *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson, 3 vols. (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1955). This variorum edition, based upon a collation of original manuscripts at Harvard and elsewhere, has provided the text for the poems quoted in the present paper. A chapter contributed by the present writer summarizes the handwriting changes that have formed the chief means of establishing a chronology for the poems.

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revealed that the great bulk of her creative work as a poet was produced between her twenty-ninth and thirty-sixth years, culminating in 1862 with an overwhelming output of three hundred and sixty-six poems. In this arrangement the pattern of content and emotional intensity is revealed, and it becomes inescapably clear that the writer at that time was passing through a severe emotional and psychological crisis. The only known statement in her own words concerning this period in her life is in her second letter to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, when in answer to his questions she said, 'I had a terror since September, I could tell to none — and so I sing, as the boy does by the burying ground, because I am afraid.' [2] In the period of greatest stress she wrote

> The Martyr Poets – did not tell –
> But wrought their Pang in syllable –
> That when their mortal name be numb –
> Their mortal fate – encourage Some –
> The Martyr Painters – never spoke –
> Bequeathing – rather – to their Work –
> That when their conscious fingers cease –
> Some seek in Art – the Art of Peace –

She consciously took the artist's path to peace, and worked her way through deep and agonizing conflict, recording the steps in her poems.

It is my belief that the disturbance was of a spontaneous nature, not the result of any one set of circumstances, but the effect on a rarely sensitive personality of slowly accumulated pressures, both within and without, working against inherent forces for growth and fulfillment. It may not be too strong a statement to make that in the ensuing struggle, so painful that it might have wrecked a weaker mind, she preserved her sanity by the transformation into art of all phases of her inner experience during the time of crisis.

In choosing the poems that seem most indicative of Emily's individual struggle, I have been aware that any selection can give only a limited view of the field of her mental activity at any particular time. For the present purpose, however, I have omitted the poems of nature, those that concern other people, and, for the most part, those that give expression to her conscious wrestling with the problem of death and

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inson, ed. Martha Dickinson Bianchi and Alfred Leete Hampson (Boston, Little, Brown & Company, 1937).

[2] 25 April 1862; original in Boston Public Library; printed in *Letters of Emily Dickinson* (1931), p. 273, with erroneous reading 'of the burying ground.'

the fantasies she built around the grave and the life beyond it. The poems of death alone form the largest group among the categories of subjects, and are worthy of a separate study.[4] Regardless of their literary value, I have picked out those poems written in the first person that show intense emotion and uncontrollable moods, a few that are so unrelated to reality as to betray their origin in the subconscious world of dream or phantasm, and those that are connected with the themes of love and the lover, around which was centered the main area of her suffering. By following these poems, even in a sequence that can be only broadly true in time, the scenes of the inner drama become apparent to a surprising degree. The poems I have used in these pages represent only a part of the whole group that was the source of the study.

In 1840, when Emily Dickinson was nine years old, an itinerant portrait painter named Otis Bullard visited Amherst and took likenesses of a number of important persons in the town. At the home of Edward Dickinson he painted the entire family — the father and mother each separately, and the three children in a group. In the children's portrait Emily holds a book and a rose, while her younger sister Lavinia has in her lap a picture of a cat.[5] These properties remained characteristic of the two throughout their lives. The face of the future poet shows already the quality of awareness that was to be a major component of her mind, the eyes serious, yet ready to respond instantly to any suggestion of hilarity.

As a child, Emily lived in an atmosphere of parental solicitude and family affection, presided over by a devoted father who was the figure of authority and security. His was a possessive, dictatorial love, but it was a genuine emotion, with a hidden warmth that rarely expressed itself. As far as can be seen by her writing, Emily was never aware of the mother image as something separate from the parental one completely filled by her father, whose personality had a profound influence on the unconscious patterns developing in his daughter's mind. She never expressed a genuine affection for her mother until as an invalid in her later years the mother became the child.

Emily's tie to her home was secure and strong, and was never broken,

[4] They form the subject of one of the chapters of Thomas H. Johnson's *Emily Dickinson, an Interpretive Biography* (Cambridge, Mass., 1955).

[5] Reproduced by Barbara N. Parker, 'The Dickinson Portraits by Otis A. Bullard,' HARVARD LIBRARY BULLETIN, VI (1952), opp. p. 134.

though her personal life within its frame was destined to undergo an inner revolution. There are no signs of repression in the earliest of her letters now in existence, written to her brother Austin and to a school friend when she was eleven.[6] The letters are full of news of home, school, and village, expressed in vivid and earthy English, with a twist of drollery peculiarly her own. These show the child Emily in relation to her external world, but there was already another aspect of her life that she did not share with those around her. Twenty years later, as she reviewed the path by which she had come, she wrote

It would have starved a Gnat –
To live so small as I –
And yet I was a living Child –
With Food's necessity
Upon me – like a Claw –
I could no more remove
Than I could coax a Leech away –
Or make a Dragon – move –

Nor like the Gnat – had I –
The privilege to fly
And seek a Dinner for myself –
How mightier He – than I –

Nor like Himself – the Art
Upon the Window Pane
To gad my little Being out –
And not begin – again –

The famine of the spirit pictured here is given a more specific delineation in another poem written a few years later.

A loss of something ever felt I –
The first that I could recollect
Bereft I was – of what I knew not
Too young that any should suspect
A Mourner walked among the children
I notwithstanding went about
As one bemoaning a Dominion
Itself the only Prince cast out –

Elder, Today, a session wiser
And fainter, too, as Wiseness is –

[6] Originals at Harvard, unpublished; to be included in the collected edition of *The Letters of Emily Dickinson* now in preparation by Thomas H. Johnson and Theodora Ward.

I find myself still softly searching
For my Delinquent Palaces –

And a Suspicion, like a Finger
Touches my Forehead now and then
That I am looking oppositely
For the site of the Kingdom of Heaven –

'Intimations of immortality' were to Emily, as to other children destined to be artists, not present glory, as Wordsworth supposes, but the suffering of separateness. She came early to feel that her own nature was intended for some other and richer destiny than she could find in the way of life and the patterns of thought of the people who surrounded her.

During the dreaming period of adolescence, she was faced with the necessity of meeting the demands of her social group for a personal acceptance of the Christian life as it was interpreted in the churches of the time, and at fifteen she was plunged into a religious conflict. She seems really to have believed that she was bad, but to be herself was more compelling to her than the need to conform. Collective pressure such as she experienced in the community, and later at Mount Holyoke Seminary, failed to dim, and perhaps may have served to enhance, her inward joy, that loved life for its own sake, and refused to be harnessed. Her suffering was, after all, the contrasting shadow of the spontaneous delight that gave to her personality the quality of light passing through a prism. In her early twenties she felt herself to be an outsider, a little wistful, perhaps, about the happiness her friends found in their belief, but knowing that their way was not hers.

The 'loss of something' that she continually felt turned her toward a search for the source of the unknown treasure occasionally glimpsed but never clearly seen in nature, in friendship, or within her own being. With the enlargement of spirit these glimpses brought her she came to associate the word 'immortality,' which she did not project into a future life, but conceived as something present, though separated from the reality of every day, and carrying with it the implication of a larger self. The struggle of the individual to find her own boundaries had begun, and the artist was seeking the right to live.

Freedom to develop in her own way could come to this deeply introverted girl, living in the close-knit society of a small and still Puritanical college town, only by inward isolation. Girls of twenty-two did not leave home except for marriage, or unless they were obliged

to earn their living by teaching. Edward Dickinson provided well for his family, protected them from the rough world, and expected compliance in his plans. Emily complied, and her daily life, during the years of her early maturity, was regulated by family loyalty, parental authority, and the demands of household routine. But already she was somewhat separated from the community by her inability to conform to its accepted standards, while her inner life was taking shape below ground. It is not surprising that in her earlier creative years she wrote several poems about volcanoes, and used the same image in a number of poems on other subjects.

It is not known when Emily began seriously to write verse, for few of her early poems have been preserved, but it is possible that some of those that are entered in the little packets she began to assemble in 1858 may have had an earlier origin. Many are immature and sentimental, some show her close and loving observation of nature, but there are few that approach in quality the power of feeling and expression that was released in the years immediately following.

There is a handful, however, in the handwriting of 1858 that seem to have sprung from the moods that are felt when the stirring of something unknown below the threshold of consciousness brings a strong sense of impending calamity. There are suggestions in a few of the poems that she feared she was going to die. The sudden realization that life may cease at any moment is probably a common experience of late adolescence, and in her protected life Emily at twenty-seven had scarcely passed some of the phases of that period. During her long girlhood, spent in a house where the windows looked down on the graveyard, she had lived in daily awareness of death, and, in mourning the loss of two young men who had been important to her, had come to feel the insecurity of the tenure of life. But there is something more specific than this in the verses 'I often passed the village' and 'I hav'nt told my garden yet.' In the first she dwells on the atmosphere of the graveyard, and says

> I did not know the year then –
> In which my call would come –
> Earlier, by the Dial,
> Than the rest have gone.

Since there is no record of a serious illness at this time, her premonition seems to be of the same nature as the dreams of dying that often

presage a change in the life of the mind, when inner growth demands that a familiar part of the self give place to the new.

In another group of the poems of 1858, Emily used the sea as a symbol. Universally understood to represent the unknown, whether in the human adventure it stands for life, death, or eternity, the sea may also mean the unknown depths and distances within the human soul. As the primeval source of life, it is one of the great archetypal symbols for man's vast unconscious heritage of primordial instincts and emotions, and as such it is inclusive of all the meanings attached to it. So far as we know, Emily never saw the sea, and she never wrote of it descriptively, as she did of the hills around Amherst. To her it was always a symbol, and at this time it was chiefly associated with the danger of shipwreck. She was still afloat on its surface, not engulfed in it, but her little vessel was in imminent danger.

Adrift! A little boat adrift!
And night is coming down!
Will *no* one guide a little boat
Unto the nearest town?

So Sailors say – on yesterday –
Just as the dusk was brown
One little boat gave up it's strife
And gurgled down and down.

So angels say – on yesterday –
Just as the dawn was red
One little boat – o'erspent with gales –
Retrimmed it's masts – redecked it's sails –
And shot – exultant on!

The sailors and the angels, who see the calamity from opposite points of view, may represent the division she was beginning to feel within herself. In another poem, putting herself in the place of Noah, she sends out her spirit as the puzzled dove seeking for land.

Once more, my now bewildered Dove
Bestirs her puzzled wings
Once more her mistress, on the deep
Her troubled question flings –

Thrice to the floating casement
The Patriarch's bird returned,
Courage! My brave Columba!
There may yet be *Land*!

With her whole world in the grip of a great flood that she does not understand, she is consciously seeking an answer with courage and determination.

In the poems of 1859 the stress of soul becomes more intense, taking form in different moods and attempts to interpret them. The danger and uncertainty of the little boat on the sea are still present in ' 'Twas such a little – little boat,' but in another poem using the sea image a new note is struck.

> Exultation is the going
> Of an inland soul to sea,
> Past the houses – past the headlands –
> Into deep Eternity –
>
> Bred as we, among the mountains,
> Can the sailor understand
> The divine intoxication
> Of the first league out from land?

Instead of fearing shipwreck, she is now positively impelled toward the sea, which she makes identical with eternity. That 'Eternity' here means the life after death seems doubtful, because at the same time she was writing poems about heaven that follow the earlier conception of a paradise built on traditional lines. More probable, it seems to me, is a meaning similar to that given earlier to 'immortality,' signifying wholeness of life contained in the great mystery of the inner world.

Among the other moods that appear in poems of the time is rebelliousness. Behavior on the level of the unconsciously assumed mask with which one faces the collective demands of society is ridiculed in the following:

> To hang our head – ostensibly –
> And subsequent, to find
> That such was not the posture
> Of our immortal mind –
> Affords the sly presumption
> That in so dense a fuzz –
> You – too – take Cobweb attitudes
> Upon a plane of Gauze!

In 'A little East of Jordan' she tells the story of Jacob wrestling with the angel, which concludes with these lines:

> And the bewildered Gymnast
> Found he had worsted God!

She also is fighting an unknown antagonist who might be revealed as the representative of the God of her Fathers, and she is frightened lest, like Jacob, she might find she had prevailed over him.

A third poem shows her to be almost ready to venture all, even her own soul, to gain the unknown goal that she longs for but fears.

> Soul, Wilt thou toss again?
> By just such a hazard
> Hundreds have lost indeed –
> But tens have won an all –
>
> Angels' breathless ballot
> Lingers to record thee –
> Imps in eager Caucus
> Raffle for my Soul!

The theme of imprisonment and escape appears in two poems of the same year. That beginning

> I never hear the word "escape"
> Without a quicker blood,

ends in defeat

> But I tug childish at my bars
> Only to fail again!

In another mood is a poem about the happy escape of a butterfly from its chrysalis ('Cocoon above! Cocoon below!'), an image that was to appear several times in succeeding years.

It was also in 1859 that she became aware of a figure met in dreams, who had the power to control her happiness. The poem beginning 'I have a King, who does not speak' might be an expression of a girl's feeling for a man with whom she has fallen in love, but who as yet remains remote from her. The emotional tone of the poem, however, seems more in keeping with a different interpretation. The mood induced by the mysterious silence of the dream king, and the emphasis on the effect of the vision rather than on its realization, suggests the rising into the field of awareness of a purely symbolic figure, under whose domination she finds herself happily integrated, but with whom she can maintain contact only in the unconsciousness of sleep.

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

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

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

And if I dont – the little Bird
Within the Orchard, is not heard,
And I omit to pray
'Father, thy will be done' today
For my will goes the other way,
And it were perjury!

The dreamer's allegiance now goes to an inner authority, whose claims are recognized as of greater force than those of the human father or the father God of whom he is the representative. In the new symbol, not yet identified as a lover but as a monarch, Emily instinctively acknowledges the power within herself of the masculine principle, which in complementing her own femineity is to play a leading role in her development as woman and poet. The sleeping princess has not yet been wakened, but the stage is set for the next act, in which she is to take part both as actor and observer.

By 1860 the real work of the poet had begun. A liberation of the creative force found expression in a wide range of subjects and variations of mood, but for the present purpose the year is notable as the first in which appear poems on the theme of love. It is impossible, of course, to tell in what order the poems were written, and it should be reiterated that the dating within any given period can be only approximate. The order in which the selected poems are used here is necessarily arbitrary, but by grouping them according to subject matter certain trends become apparent.

In a mood of retrospection the poet takes stock of the values stored up in her past, only to find they have vanished.

I cautious, scanned my little life –
I winnowed what would fade
From what w'd last till Heads like mine
Should be a-dreaming laid.

I put the latter in a Barn –
The former, blew away.

I went one winter morning
And lo – my priceless Hay

Was not upon the "Scaffold" –
Was not upon the "Beam" –
And from a thriving Farmer –
A Cynic, I became.

Whether a Thief did it –
Whether it was the wind –
Whether Deity's guiltless –
My business is, to find!

So I begin to ransack!
How is it Hearts, with Thee?
Art thou within the little Barn
Love provided Thee?

She suspects that this loss may be the work of God, and is even doubtful whether her own heart is contained within the frame she had built for it. The emptiness leaves room, however, for new and greater values to come in.

Maturity cannot come all at once, and childish moods alternate with struggle in the search for herself. A curious little poem beginning 'We dont cry – Tim and I,' written in childlike language and still in the mood of the past, is about two aspects of herself, the conscious ego and the child's unseen playmate, a masculine counterpart named 'Tim,' who shares all her weaknesses and is her companion in hiding from the world. This seeming retrogression to childhood is in striking contrast to another poem containing two figures. The setting is again the sea, but this time no little boat floats on its surface, for the shipwreck has already occurred, and nothing is left but a single spar for the victims to cling to.

Two swimmers wrestled on the spar –
Until the morning sun –
When One – turned smiling to the land –
Oh God! the Other One!

The stray ships – passing –
Spied a face –
Upon the waters borne –
With eyes in death – still begging raised –
And hands – beseeching – thrown!

It is as if two parts of a divided self were fighting for survival, and it is yet to be seen which one will succeed.

One cannot help associating with this last poem a second, which we have only in the handwriting of 1862, about two years later than that of the two swimmers, but which bears every indication of belonging to the same period, or of having been written in recollection of it.

Three times – we parted – Breath – and I –
Three times – He would not go –
But strove to stir the lifeless Fan
The Waters – strove to stay.

Three Times – the Billows threw me up –
Then caught me – like a Ball –
Then made Blue faces in my face –
And pushed away a sail
That crawled Leagues off – I liked to see –
For thinking – while I die –
How pleasant to behold a Thing
Where Human faces – be –

The Waves grew sleepy – Breath – did not –
The Winds – like Children – lulled –
Then Sunrise kissed my Chrysalis –
And I stood up – and lived –

Instead of an unidentified swimmer it is now her conscious self who is buffeted and in acute danger of drowning. But 'Breath' — which is life itself — will not let her go. The danger passes without any effort on her part, and a curious change in imagery comes as the sea loses its terrifying aspect. She is now a butterfly emerging from a chrysalis at the touch of the sun. A new phase of life has begun. In the two poems 'At last, to be identified!' and 'Tho' I get home how late – how late,' we see that she felt her identity was established, and she could look forward with hope, though life's journey might be long and fulfillment reached only in heaven. The movement is forward, and an arrival is predicted, in spite of the difficulties to be met.

The kiss of the sunrise, that brought the butterfly out of its chrysalis, is clearly something that has happened in the external world. Into the emptiness that had placed her in such danger has come the revivifying experience of falling in love. The God she had been taught to revere had proved insufficient, and looking within she had become aware of dark and mysterious forces that might overwhelm her in her defenseless state. Into the vacuum left by her struggle had come a man who for her carried the attributes of a God she could adore, and who as a man

had the power to bring to life the smoldering fires of the woman's instincts.

It is not necessary to try to identify the man who stirred Emily so profoundly. It would be almost safe to say it is not necessary to postulate the existence of any actual man as the object of her love, so closely was her emotion connected with her own inner involvement. Yet drafts of letters exist in handwriting of this period to someone whom she called 'Master,' [7] so expressed that if the situation they imply had been wholly imaginary, they would either have been the product of an insane mind or else of one uncntangled enough to fabricate consciously. Neither of these states is consistent with the impression given by other letters and the many and varied poems of the time.

Emily's need for a masculine teacher or guide had shown itself long before, and it is possible that the man to whom the earliest of the three drafts was written was not the same as the one to whom the others were addressed two or three years later. Not only are the later drafts more intense in tone, but the kind of emotion that is poured out in them, as from an eruption of a long-stifled volcano, is of a more erotic cast. Without doubt, the depth and intensity of her feeling were far greater than the actual facts in her relation to the man would have called forth if she had been a woman of simpler responses. The importance of the experience lay in its effect upon her, which was almost measureless.

At its central point was the encounter of Emily's conscious self with a personification of the symbol first seen in the 'King, who does not speak.' The kiss that awakens the sleeping princess, though conferred by the prince, is enacted in another realm than that of sensation. Emily was in desperate need of a savior, a mediator between her struggling consciousness and the unplumbed depths of her own nature, to bring her being into focus and enable her to experience wholeness of life. The powerful image that stepped out of dreams and manifested itself for her in a living man held godlike potentialities for setting in motion, with the aid of her own awareness, the forces of integration.

But full awareness can be reached only after full acceptance of experience as it comes through the senses and emotions. Emily Dickinson began to explore the experience of love. She still hesitated before the door, as she shows in

[7] *Emily Dickinson's Home: Letters of Edward Dickinson and His Family*, ed. Millicent Todd Bingham (New York, 1955), pp. 422–432. The handwriting of the third letter (p. 431) shows that it was written first, in late 1858 or 1859. The other two letters are in the writing of early 1861.

Come slowly – Eden!
Lips unused to Thee –
Bashful – sip thy Jessamines –
As the fainting Bee –

Reaching late his flower,
Round her chamber hums –
Counts his nectars –
Enters – and is lost in Balms.

She played more than once with the image of the flower and the bee, giving it sexual significance in the poems 'The Flower must not blame the Bee' and 'Did the Harebell loose her girdle' as she became aware of her own awakened instincts. Oblivious of convention, she gave her fantasy free rein when she wrote 'He was weak, and I was strong – then.' Fully alive now, and feeling herself freed from the choking restrictions that had bound her, she identified herself with a wild creature of the jungle as she ejaculated

With thee, in the Desert –
With thee in the thirst –
With thee in the Tamarind wood –
Leopard breathes – at last!

The theme of venturing all upon a throw, which she had left an open question a year earlier in the poem 'Soul, Wilt thou toss again,' reappeared at this time in a mood of exultant daring when she wrote three stanzas sprinkled with exclamation points, beginning

'Tis so much joy! 'Tis so much joy!
If I should fail, what poverty!

She weighs the consequences of taking the supreme risk, and accepts even failure itself as of value, because 'to know the worst, is sweet!' For the time being the stimulating effect of a vivid emotion was enough — life was expanding and brimming with hope, and the creative fire was burning strongly. It was at this time she wrote

I taste a liquor never brewed –
From Tankards scooped in Pearl –
Not all the Frankfort Berries
Yield such an Alcohol!

Inebriate of Air – am I –
And Debauchee of Dew –
Reeling – thro endless summer days –
From inns of Molten Blue –

When "Landlords" turn the drunken Bee
Out of the Foxglove's door –
When Butterflies -- renounce their "drams" –
I shall but drink the more!

Till Seraphs swing their snowy Hats –
And Saints – to windows run –
To see the little Tippler
From Manzanilla come!

'Reeling – thro endless summer days' describes a condition that life does not long permit, and the conflict between such an ecstatic state of inflation and the world of fact was not long in coming. Something happened that shattered the spell under which Emily was held. There came a point beyond which she could not go without carrying the emotion into a real relation with the person who had called it forth. Since many things point to an assumption that the loved one was a married man, the shock probably came when, by some word of his or a sudden revelation of her own intuition, she was forced to accept the reality of the situation. The miraculous condition of being in love fosters belief in infinite possibilities that bear no relation to fact, and in which the moral sense remains totally blind. If Emily suddenly became aware of what she had been wishing, her conscious attitude would have reinforced the inevitability of her fate. Ten years later she was to write with knowledge of her own tendency to escape from reality

I bet with every Wind that blew
Till Nature in chagrin
Employed a Fact to visit me
And scuttle my Balloon –

It is not surprising that in 1861 Emily Dickinson's handwriting shows great agitation. She wrote voluminously, on many subjects and in many moods, living, perhaps, on several levels or in different compartments of her psychic house, while the foundations began to shake underneath. In a mood of delight in life itself she could write of revelry in 'We – Bee and I – live by the quaffing,' then in deepest gloom cry out

If *He dissolve* – then – there is *nothing* – *more* –
Eclipse – at *Midnight* –
It was *dark* – *before* –

Sunset – at *Easter* –
Blindness – on the *Dawn* –

Faint Star of Bethlehem –
Gone down!

Would but some *God* – *inform* Him –
Or it be *too late*!
Say – that the pulse *just lisps* –
The *Chariots wait* –

Say – that a *little life* – for *His* –
Is *leaking* – *red* –
His little Spaniel – tell Him!
Will He heed?

Such extremes are danger signals pointing to a serious unbalance. The abject dependence of the spaniel on its master, whose very existence is so uncertain that he may dissolve entirely away, is far removed from the partnership in love described in the lines 'Forever at His side to walk,' written in the same year, and the active devotion expressed in another contemporary poem, 'Doubt Me! My Dim Companion!' The 'Dim Companion' has become completely unreal, and threatens to dissolve altogether, taking with him the whole of Emily's life force. She even thinks of suicide as a means of rejoining the lover who has ceased to exist for her in the real world.

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

At the climax of this desperate condition, it seemed as if something in her had actually died.

I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,
And Mourners to and fro
Kept treading – treading – till it seemed
That Sense was breaking through –

And when they all were seated,
A Service, like a Drum –
Kept beating – beating – till I thought
My Mind was going numb –

And then I heard them lift a Box
And creak across my Soul
With those same Boots of Lead, again,
Then Space – began to toll,

As all the Heavens were a Bell,
And Being, but an Ear,

And I, and Silence, some strange Race
Wrecked, solitary, here –

And then a Plank in Reason, broke,
And I dropped down, and down –
And hit a World, at every plunge,
And Finished knowing – then –

With the horror of finding that her last hold on reality had given way, she was plunged into the merciful void of unconsciousness, where contact with the roots of being might once more be found. The extraordinary clarity with which she was able to record the experience shows that she did not pass beyond the border of sanity, for the insane cannot explain themselves, but there must have been a period when it was only with the greatest difficulty that she could withstand the disintegrating forces that assailed her. There is a vast difference, however, between the helplessness described in the last poem and the attitude of conscious acceptance in one beginning 'Alone, I cannot be,' for in the end the autonomous figures of fantasy and dream were the means of her salvation. With intense condensation and clarity she described the coming above the threshold of consciousness of a visiting host, unidentifiable, uncontrollable, but not malign. There is wonder, but no terror in this poem.

Alone, I cannot be –
The Hosts – do visit me –
Recordless Company –
Who baffle Key –

They have no Robes, nor Names –
No Almanacs – nor Climes –
But general Homes
Like Gnomes –

Their Coming, may be known
By Couriers within –
Their going – is not –
For they're never gone –

The unnamed hosts were not an invading army, but her visitors, to be cordially received. If she felt herself to be haunted, the feeling only drove her to give expression to the thoughts that crowded upon her with their coming. It seems probable that at this point she seriously took up her role of poet, and began to work at her craft with full acceptance of her creative gift.

Writing to save her life, Emily was almost overwhelmed by the verses that poured from her pen. She knew now that, aside from its therapeutic value, the work for its own sake must go on, but she could not control it or evaluate it herself. There was no one at home to whom she could turn for help, so, responding to an article in the *Atlantic Monthly* addressed to 'young writers,' she appealed to the well-known critic and essayist, Thomas Wentworth Higginson. The story of her association with him by letter, during the course of her remaining years, need not be told here.[6] It is only necessary to say that his lack of understanding, added to her own difficulty in meeting the outer world, discouraged her from seeking publication and helped to shape the course of her life. So far as we know, she was never again to make an appeal for an audience, though in later years she enclosed many poems in letters to her friends.

In the great mass of poems in writing of about 1862 — one more than the number of days in the year — the prevailing atmosphere is that of pain. With only a few exceptions, the poems of love and the lover have to do with separation, renunciation, or a postponed reunion in heaven. In one of the best known,

> There came a Day at Summer's full,
> Entirely for me –

she recounts the climax of the story, making acknowledgment of a love that is not to be fulfilled. Of the lovers at the hour of parting she says

> So faces on two Decks, look back,
> Bound to opposing lands –

and concludes

> Sufficient troth, that we shall rise –
> Deposed – at length, the Grave –
> To that new Marriage,
> Justified – through Calvaries of Love –

In spite of the overwhelming sense of loss running through most of the poems at that time, there are others that speak of the lover as the life giver, and suggest the direction in which she will find healing. In 'To my small Hearth His fire came,' she tells how the coming of love brought illumination within. It is significant that the past tense is used

[6] See Theodora Ward, 'Emily Dickinson and T. W. Higginson,' *Boston Public Library Quarterly*, V (1953), 3–18, and the chapter on the friendship in Johnson, *Emily Dickinson, an Interpretive Biography*.

throughout, showing that in looking back she is able to begin evaluating her experience.

In 'I live with Him – I see His face,' the spiritual union with the lover within the individual who loves brings the conviction that 'Life like This – is stopless' and therefore the experience of love teaches immortality. Another poem, 'He touched me, so I live to know,' tells of the difference she finds in herself since being permitted, just once, to touch the loved one.

But the poem that expresses most fully the effect of love on the individual describes the call to full adulthood in terms of a second baptism.

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 –

The use of the word 'Crown,' appearing in several poems, always implies an honor conferred, and dedication to the one who conferred it. Yet despite this vision of the call to fullness of life as an individual, Emily wrote during the same period an expression of her feeling of complete identity with the loved one.

Empty my Heart, of Thee –
It's single Artery –
Begin, and leave Thee out –
Simply Extinction's Date –

Much Billow hath the Sea –
One Baltic – They –

Subtract Thyself, in play,
And not enough of me
Is left – to put away –
"Myself" meant Thee –

Erase the Root – no Tree –
Thee – then – no me –
The Heavens stripped –
Eternity's vast pocket, picked –

The theme is similar to that in the desperate poem of the previous year, 'If *He dissolve* – then – there is *nothing* – *more*,' but this time there is a marked advance, both in poetic quality and in emotional control. It is a statement made in philosophic calm, not the cry of a lost child in the dark.

Emily was now able to look at herself, to recall her experience and record her sensations in passing through the crisis of suffering. She had moods of resentment at having been stirred out of her unconscious state, as expressed in

Of Course – I prayed –
And did God Care?
He cared as much as on the Air
A Bird – had stamped her foot –
And cried "Give Me" –
My Reason – Life –
I had not had – but for Yourself –
'Twere better Charity
To leave me in the Atom's Tomb –
Merry, and Nought, and gay, and numb –
Than this smart Misery.

There were sensations of numbness and periods of dreaming, indulged in because it is easier to believe the experience is a dream than to wake and find it is reality. Most of all there was the illusion of death, and the sensation of non-existence in chaos. It is hard to imagine a more devastating picture of negativity than is found in the following poem, even though it is expressed in terms of the senses.

It was not Death, for I stood up,
And all the Dead, lie down –
It was not Night, for all the Bells
Put out their Tongues, for Noon.

It was not Frost, for on my Flesh
I felt Siroccos – crawl –

Nor Fire – for just my Marble feet
Could keep a Chancel, cool –
And yet it tasted, like them all,
The Figures I have seen
Set orderly, for Burial,
Reminded me, of mine –
As if my life were shaven,
And fitted to a frame,
And could not breathe without a key,
And 'twas like Midnight, some –
When everything that ticked – has stopped –
And Space stares all around –
Or Grisly frosts – first Autumn morns,
Repeal the Beating Ground –
But, most, like Chaos – Stopless – cool –
Without a Chance, or Spar –
Or even a Report of Land –
To justify – Despair.

Striking as these images evoked by the sensations are, they do not stir the reader as deeply as those in another poem written with the poet's intuition, which takes her beyond the purely personal aspect of experience. In an extraordinary abstraction of the ultimate extremity of loneliness, she finds, not meaningless chaos, but a vision of the great wholeness of the universe, expressed in the word 'Circumference.'

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

By living her own experience through to the utmost she has passed the limits of the purely personal, and touched something vastly larger. The change from the personal to the suprapersonal goal is illustrated in two letters written three years apart. In 1859 she wrote to Dr and Mrs Holland, '*My* business is to love.' In her letter to Higginson of July 1862 she said, 'My business is circumference.' [9]

[9] *Emily Dickinson's Letters to Dr. and Mrs. Josiah Gilbert Holland*, ed. Theodora Ward (Cambridge, Mass., 1951), p. 55; *Letters of Emily Dickinson* (1931), pp. 169, 276. The original of the letter to the Hollands is not known.

It must not be forgotten that while this inner struggle was going on, the creative power of the poet was expending itself with the force of a cataract, and she was writing voluminously on life and death, nature and people. At the same time she carried on the ordinary tasks and social relations that came to her.

I tie my Hat – I crease my Shawl –
Life's little duties do – precisely –

she wrote, ending the poem with the explanation that such behavior in time of stress is 'To hold our Senses – on.' But unconscious forces were at work beneath the safe realm of 'sense,' and a few poems contain images from so deep a level that she may not have understood them herself.

In a poem with the quality of a dream appears the theme of treasure to be found under the sea. It was not the first time Emily had used this image, for in 1861, when the state of being in love was at its height, she wrote four stanzas, beginning '*One Life* of so much Consequence,' in which she stated the worth of the man she loved. The second stanza reads

One Pearl – to me – so signal –
That I would instant dive –
Although – I *knew* –to *take* it –
Would *cost* me – *just a life*!

The pearl is used as only one of several ways of estimating the value to her of the person whom she names in the final lines a 'Monarch,' and the sea where it is hidden exists only as a means of proving that the fulfillment of her love is worth the sacrifice of life itself. After the blow had fallen, and she was staggering to her feet on shaky ground, she wrote again of the pearl, but with quite different significance. It clarifies the terms in which the poem is expressed to recall the lines from Browning's *Paracelsus*, which Emily had undoubtedly read, using similar imagery.

Are there not, Festus, are there not, dear Michal,
Two points in the adventure of the diver,
One – when, a beggar, he prepares to plunge,
One – when, a prince, he rises with his pearl?
Festus, I plunge!

Twisting the sequence of Browning's thought, she wrote

The Malay – took the Pearl –
Not – I – the Earl –
I – feared the Sea – too much
Unsanctified – to touch –

Praying that I might be
Worthy – the Destiny –
The Swarthy fellow swam –
And bore my Jewel – Home –

This is not a figure of speech — it is live drama, acted between herself and a seemingly irrelevant figure brought up from the unknown depth of her own mind. The poem concludes

Home to the Hut! What lot
Had I – the Jewel – got –
Borne on a Dusky Breast –
I had not deemed a Vest
Of Amber – fit –

The Negro never knew
I – wooed it – too –
To gain, or be undone –
Alike to Him – One –

The familiar image of the dangerous sea is used here with new meaning, for she has come to recognize that in the depths she feared lies the treasure that is rightfully hers. The pearl is not only a jewel for which a great price may be paid, but its spherical form represents the wholeness that Emily was reaching for. But at the time when this dream or fantasy came to her, her conscious, superior self was defrauded of the pearl because of her fear of the unknown and a sense of unworthiness that was part of the religious conflict from which she had suffered since her adolescent years. The figure of the Malay who seizes it, a primitive unconscious being whom she feels to be greatly inferior, is the dark reverse side of her own psychic image of man, the opposite of the bright guiding figure seen in the lover, in whose light she had been lifted to new levels. The primitive human being, at one with himself and the world of nature, simply lives, unaware of the value of the pearl he possesses. To gain the treasure the superior being must recognize the Malay in himself, and humbly accept his services as a diver.

There is no record of any further dreams or fantasies that carried on the theme of the treasure, and if Emily won the pearl of wholeness in

the end it was not by retrieving it from the Malay. Two other poems of this time have to do with the life of the instincts, but only to acknowledge that something has been lost. In one she revives the leopard image she had used when, in the first flush of love, her whole being had been flooded with new life. This time, associating the leopard with something vital in herself for which she can find no place in the social pattern, she pleads for pity and understanding of the wild creature in an alien environment.

Civilization – spurns – the Leopard!
Was the Leopard – bold?
Deserts – never rebuked her Satin –
Ethiop – her Gold –
Tawny – her Customs –
She was Conscious –
Spotted – her Dun Gown –
This was the Leopard's nature – Signor –
Need – a keeper – frown?

Pity – the Pard – that left her Asia –
Memories – of Palm –
Cannot be stifled – with Narcotic –
Nor suppressed – with Balm –

Another dreamlike poem of a particularly eerie quality, made stronger by the manner of simple statement in which it is written, uses a tiger instead of a leopard as its subject.

A Dying Tiger – moaned for Drink –
I hunted all the Sand –
I caught the Dripping of a Rock
And bore it in my Hand –

His Mighty Balls – in death were thick –
But searching – I could see
A Vision on the Retina
Of Water – and of me –
'Twas not my blame – who sped too slow –
'Twas not his blame – who died
While I was reaching him –
But 'twas – the fact that He was dead –

The writer feels no fear of the dangerous beast — only pity for him in his extremity. She remains curiously remote from the tiger, who was the creature of her own unconscious mind, as if her life had passed the point at which he was important to her. She simply recognizes

the fact that it was his fate to die, and she could do nothing to prevent it. Her sole connection with him is in the image she sees on his eyeballs, that of herself with the life-giving water that came too late. One is reminded of the custom of the Brahmans, who, it is said, send their sons alone and unarmed into the jungle at night, that they may meet a tiger eye to eye, and in conquering their fear learn to know and control the tiger in themselves. Emily recognized herself in the dying eyes of the tiger, but was tragically aware that for her life had passed beyond the point where the power of the great instinctual forces could be realized.

After a great storm, the wind, though shifting to another quarter, does not subside at once, and the slow process of reconstruction must be started in shelterless desolation. For Emily it must have seemed as if all had been swept away in a flood and she was left alone to rebuild her house little by little. She had let go the outgrown attitudes she had held before her awakening, and the revelation that had come through love had been projected into the person of the one she loved. She had failed to claim from the unconscious the 'pearl of great price,' because of her fear of what the deep waters might contain. The great life force that was in the beast of the jungle had died before she could reach it with her small offering of succoring water. From whence, then, was to come the power to rebuild her house by her own unaided efforts?

In Emily's groping progress toward a philosophy to carry her through, we find one of the first signs of a positive trend in a little poem, a triumph of condensation and control, which she found important enough to revise twice, at intervals of several years. I give it in the first version, that of 1862.

When I hoped – I feared –
Since – I hoped – I dared
Everywhere – alone –
As a Church – remain.

Ghost – may not alarm –
Serpent – may not charm –
He is King of Harm –
Who hath suffered Him –

Since I stopped hoping, she is saying, I have also ceased to fear. Ac-

ceptance of fate frees one from the conflicting pulls of hope and fear, which are inseparable. One who has lived through the worst is released from the power of harm. On the solid rock of accepted fact, it may be inferred, a footing can be found from which a more positive step can be taken.

The character of a large number of the poems written during the years immediately following the crucial one of 1862 is different from anything that has gone before. There is still struggle, but the intensity is less of pain and of passion than it is a concentration of the whole being on the effort of affirmation. 'Who am I?' she seems to be saying, 'What can I find in my own mind and soul on which to build a new life?' It took all her courage to probe the cellars under the collapsed structure. She had already said in 1862

One need not be a Chamber – to be Haunted –
One need not be a House –
The Brain – has Corridors surpassing
Material Place –

Far safer of a Midnight – meeting
External Ghost –
Than an Interior – Confronting –
That cooler – Host.

Far safer, through an Abbey – gallop –
The Stones a'chase –
Than Moonless – One's A'self encounter –
In lonesome place –

Ourself – behind Ourself – Concealed –
Should startle – most –
Assassin – hid in our Apartment –
Be Horror's least –

The Prudent – carries a Revolver –
He bolts the Door –
O'erlooking a Superior Spectre –
More near –

In the dim corridors of the mind one can prepare to meet and defend oneself from objective fears, but the greatest horror to be encountered is the sudden consciousness of the hidden self, as close as one's own shadow, yet charged with ghostly power. Added to the draft of the poem are two alternative readings for the closing lines that help to explain the effect of terrifying surprise in the spectral meeting. These are

A Spectre – infinite – accompanying –
He fails to fear –

and

Maintaining a Superior Spectre –
None saw –

The horror is strengthened by the fact that the ego has remained unconcious and unafraid until the revelation occurs.

In a poem written the following year comes a repetition of the theme in different terms, which carries the thought a step further.

The Loneliness One dare not sound –
And would as soon surmise
As in it's Grave go plumbing
To ascertain the size –

The Loneliness whose worst alarm
Is lest itself should see –
And perish from before itself
For just a scrutiny –

The Horror not to be surveyed –
But skirted in the Dark –
With Consciousness suspended –
And Being under Lock –

I fear me this – is Loneliness –
The Maker of the soul
It's Caverns and it's Corridors
Illuminate – or seal –

The horror is still present, and the fear of the dark can only be alleviated by bringing in the light of God. Without the illumination the only course is to seal up the caverns and corridors of the soul and never enter them.

The poems fail to tell us the shape of the spectres that so terrified the writer, but the implication is that she sought the illumination of God in which to look at them. The verses that grew out of her scrutiny were not descriptive, but were rather the crystallization of her thought after the spectres had been met and dealt with. A very important poem of this period is the following, which brings out a new attitude toward the object of her love.

You constituted Time –
I deemed Eternity

A Revelation of Yourself –
'Twas therefore Deity

The Absolute – removed
The Relative away –
That I unto Himself adjust
My slow idolatry –

She has begun to stand apart from her experience, to separate the person she loved from the projections she had made to him, and to find a reason for the loss she still felt as the supreme fact in her life. She carried the thought further, though without personal application, in an analysis of the act of renunciation.

Renunciation – is a piercing Virtue –
The letting go
A Presence – for an Expectation –
Not now –
The putting out of Eyes –
Just Sunrise –
Lest Day –
Day's Great Progenitor –
Outvie
Renunciation – is the Choosing
Against itself –
Itself to justify
Unto itself –
When larger function –
Make that appear –
Smaller – that Covered Vision – Here –

In the past Emily has used 'Day' as the image of the illumination love brought her. At that time it was the summation of life for her — it 'covered' her 'vision' completely. Now she has found a still 'larger function,' using that word perhaps in the mathematical sense, meaning related values. She sees the generating power of God behind the appearance of the light of day, and lets go the immediate joy for the expectation of a greater experience.

It was not that she had ceased to hold the attitude of devotion and consecration to the love that had engulfed her, but that power had actually gone from it into her life, to be used in other ways. Jung has said that the difference between the image of woman in man and the image of man in woman is that the former represents the man's soul, while the latter represents the woman's mind. This seems to be borne

out by the nature of the poems that form a large proportion of those Emily wrote in the years 1863–65. In the writing of 1863 alone we find that more than a third are philosophical, and many of these are in the form of definitions, such as the one above on renunciation. The first lines of some actually use the phraseology of the text books, beginning 'Remorse – is,' 'The Spirit is,' 'The Truth – is,' 'Grief is.' The broken stones and fallen timbers of her house were being relaid and framed into a structure with precision, one at a time, as the past was translated from the terms of emotion into those of mind. Whether or not she actually felt at this time such solidarity of conviction as she expressed in the following poem on the self, she could at least see a goal of psychic integrity that set her feet upon a firm road.

On a Columnar Self –
How ample to rely
In Tumult – or Extremity –
How good the Certainty

That Lever cannot pry –
And Wedge cannot divide
Conviction – That Granitic Base –
Though None be on our Side –

Suffice Us – for a Crowd –
Ourself – and Rectitude –
And that Assembly – not far off
From furthest Spirit – God –

It is striking to note that at the very time when Emily was finding her foothold and building her philosophical structure, she was also establishing her habits of withdrawal from the world around her. In 1863 her chosen way of life had become so apparent that her family and friends were troubled by it. In a letter to her brother Austin, Samuel Bowles, whom she admired and cherished as a friend of her own, sent greetings to the members of both households, concluding '. . . & to the Queen Recluse my especial sympathy — that she has "overcome the world." — Is it really true that they sing "old hundred" and "alleluia" [?] perpetually, in Heaven — ask her; and are dandelions, asphodels, & maiden's cross the standard flowers of the ethereal?'[10] Judging from the letters and poems she had sent to Bowles, it seems probable that Emily had taken him into her confidence, and no one else would have had the license to tease her as he did. He

[10] Original at Harvard, unpublished.

obviously felt that she was dramatizing her situation, and should not be encouraged to indulge a tendency that to him, as well as to others, undoubtedly appeared morbid.

It is indeed hard to reconcile the contradiction between the courageous and positive trend of her thinking at this time and her inclination to shrink from all contact with the outside world, unless one remembers that the main result of the inner experience had been the attainment of full maturity as a poet. To a woman who was not an artist, such psychic events as she had undergone would have led to a quite different adjustment to life. But an artist of such power and sensitivity as Emily Dickinson, however 'columnar' her self may be, is not free to live as others do. Something must be sacrificed. In her case it was the outer shell, the protective covering usually built up from the individual's assumptions about life and the habits, traditional and personal, that govern his behavior in social situations. These Emily had put aside as inessential, and since she was not forced by outer circumstances to deal directly with the demands of society, her natural bent was encouraged. She lived so close to the center of her being, to the main springs of the life of spirit, that she brought to every contact an emotional charge and an enhanced awareness that made extraordinary demands on her store of vital energy. She carried with her into every least happening in daily life the whole sum of her consciousness, and since her consciousness covered a far broader field than that of the average person, every aspect of nature and every human situation was invested for her with the power to evoke a response on the deepest level. It is no wonder, then, that she felt the need of limiting her sources of stimulus. A way of living that began as a necessity in a period of great stress continued as the habit of a lifetime, to the bafflement even of her friends, who could not fully understand that within her chosen limits her life was crowded with rich and varied experience.

Emily's dedication to the absent lover was not at once relinquished when she began to find her footing on a new level, but it was undergoing a change. Love is not lost: it is transformed. When the man she loved is withdrawn, a woman must redeem from her love the power and meaning it held for her, or she will be possessed by a ghostly lover whose hold prevents her from moving forward into a new phase. Now, no longer contained in the loved one, Emily had drawn from her love the masculine element that set her mind free, and had translated into art the varied emotional states that had swept through her being. Yet

to her, as to other women, it was natural to direct her living toward the person whom she loved, even if he had receded into a disembodied existence. She recognized this need when she wrote in 1862

I tend my flowers for thee –
Bright Absentee!

For a time she still needed the focal point found in the lover to whom she had dedicated her life, and with whom she looked forward to reunion in heaven. Reunion on earth would, after all, have made demands on her that she could not meet, for the lover was now wholly spiritual, a companion of the soul to whom she could act her life.

Two trends emerge in the poems that complete the cycle. One follows the old pattern of personal devotion, of longing and waiting for the fulfillment of love in another sphere. The other shows a change in the character of the spiritual relation to the symbolic figure with whom the loved one had been identified. It was in 1862 that she wrote one of the best known of her poems on her dedication.

Title divine – is mine!
The Wife – without the Sign!
Acute Degree – conferred on me –
Empress of Calvary!
Royal – all but the Crown!
Betrothed – without the swoon
God sends us Women –
When you – hold – Garnet to Garnet –
Gold – to Gold –
Born – Bridalled – Shrouded –
In a Day –
"My Husband" – women say –
Stroking the Melody –
Is *this* – the way?

Here her story is completely dramatized. In the lines

Born – Bridalled – Shrouded –
In a Day –

the experience is seen to contain the whole of life and death, and her suffering is transmuted into spiritual ecstasy. From the marriage in heaven she now passes by a natural sequence to the role of a nun, who becomes the bride of Christ. In a poem written in 1864, the human lover has disappeared, her earthly fate is fully accepted, and the trans-

fer of allegiance from the relative to the absolute, foreshadowed in 'You constituted Time,' has been accomplished.

Given in Marriage unto Thee
Oh thou Celestial Host –
Bride of the Father and the Son
Bride of the Holy Ghost.

Other Betrothal shall dissolve –
Wedlock of Will, decay –
Only the Keeper of this Ring
Conquer Mortality –

Although a number of poems about her experience of love were still to come, they were written in reminiscent vein, and the lover was no longer to carry the full weight of her soul. In fact she had come to perceive that it was within herself he existed, and that she was free to exercise in her own mind the power to heighten or diminish his importance.

I make His Crescent fill or lack –
His Nature is at Full
Or Quarter – as I signify –
His Tides – do I control –

He holds superior in the Sky
Or gropes, at my Command
Behind inferior Clouds – or round
A Mist's slow Colonnade –

But since We hold a Mutual Disc –
And front a Mutual Day –
Which is the Despot, neither knows –
Nor Whose – the Tyranny –

The poem is sufficiently obscure to allow several interpretations. It has usually been understood as an acknowledgment of woman's power over an actual lover, or a fantasy of longing for such a condition. It could also be understood in a religious sense, as a statement of the importance of faith, which according to the degree of its intensity enlarges or lessens the individual's conception of God. The moon image, however, seems hardly appropriate even to an unconventional picture of the Christian God, but quite in keeping with the ancient myths whose rituals were sacred to women. In the sense of the soul's lover, Emily had already used the image of the moon in an earlier poem, 'The Moon is distant from the Sea.' At that time it was the lover who controlled the tides, and she who responded obediently to his commands.

Now the situation is reversed; the lover is no longer a human being, but a part of herself. The perfect circle of the disk of the moon's face is held between them in mutual accord, and although she can by her own will reveal it to herself or hide its light and power, she cannot escape from the control it also exerts on her.

Here the record begins to fade; its mission has been accomplished. Since life is never without motion and change, and human documents are at best approximations of the truth, many questions remain, but one thing stands out clearly. After six years of intense creativity, Emily Dickinson the poet had completed the greater part of her life's work, but Emily Dickinson the woman — a white-gowned mystery to strangers — a many-faceted, glowing personality to those who knew her — was just entering her years of maturity. Her dedication was no longer to be to the memory of a man she had loved, or to the hope of spiritual reunion with him in the future life, but to that inner integrity of soul that can only be described by the use of symbols. In her own words it is the 'pearl,' the 'kernel,' the 'flower of the soul'; when projected into life and beyond life it is the 'disc' and above all 'circumference.' At the end of the creative period, in 1865, she wrote of the change that had taken place in her

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

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

I dwelt, as if Myself were out,
My Body but within
Until a Might detected me
And set my kernel in.
And Spirit turned unto the Dust
"Old Friend, thou knowest me,"
And Time went out to tell the News
And met Eternity

THEODORA WARD

STORY VIEW OF HARVARD

THE Department of Printing and Graphic Arts of the College Library has issued, as the seventh publication in its series *Historic Harvard and Cambridge Views*, a reproduction of 'A N.W. View of Hollis, Harvard and Massachusetts Halls' painted in water color by Joseph Story in 1795. Story, later the youngest Justice appointed to the Supreme Court of the United States, the first Dane Professor of Law at Harvard, and a member of the Corporation and of the Board of Overseers, painted the picture at the age of fifteen shortly after he had entered the class of 1798. The original now hangs in the President's office in Massachusetts Hall.

The reproduction, executed in collotype by the Meriden Gravure Company and hand colored, measures 9½ by 15 inches. Copies, at $5.00 each, may be ordered from the Department of Printing and Graphic Arts, Houghton Library, Harvard University. Certain other views in this same series are still available.

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