

Religion—‘A Fine Invention’
An Exploration of Faith and Doubt in Emily Dickinson’s Letters and Poems

by

John Guarnieri

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in

English

Youngstown State University

August, 2008

Religion—‘A Fine Invention’
An Exploration of Faith and Doubt in Emily Dickinson’s Letters and Poems

John Guarnieri

I hereby release this thesis to the public. I understand that this thesis will be made available from the OhioLINK ETD Center and the Maag Library Circulation Desk for public access. I also authorize the University or other individuals to make copies of this thesis as needed for scholarly research.

Signature:

John Guarnieri

Date

Approvals:

Dr. Stephanie Tingley, Thesis Advisor

Date

Dr. Steven Reese, Committee Member

Date

Dr. Jim Schramer, Committee Member

Date

Dr. Peter J. Kasvinsky
Dean of School of Graduate Studies and Research

Date

ABSTRACT

Emily Dickinson, in her lifetime, wrote approximately 1,800 poems and over a thousand letters. According to R.W. Franklin, a Dickinson biographer, Dickinson's productivity climaxed in the first half of the 1860s. Between 1861 and 1862 Franklin estimated Dickinson wrote 365 poems that she eventually self-published in Fascicles. My argument is that Dickinson used her Fascicles (specifically 12 and part of 13) and letters to justify turning her back on organized religion. It was not a coincidence that with 365 poems to choose from Dickinson selected 29 poems for Fascicle 12 and 19 for Fascicle 13. Dickinson places these poems in a precise order as to make her argument for turning her back on organized religion. She also uses her poetry to construct a religious dialogue that explores her crises of faith, self doubt and how she will obtain salvation. Faith and religion were important to Dickinson, but not the religion of her family. (Congregational Calvinism) Dickinson also wrote over a thousand letters to family, friends and people she didn't know. These letters contained hints as to Dickinson's impending religious conflict. In letter 220 written in 1860 and repeated in poem F202, Dickinson refers to faith as a "fine invention." This is an important clue to how Dickinson was beginning to examine her crises of faith. This repeating of words is an important pattern that Dickinson uses in her letters and poems to explore than challenge her family's religion.

In order to reach my conclusion it was important to do an explication of her letters and poems to look for patterns and word usage. Webster's 1845 & 1865 Dictionaries, as well as the Emily Dickinson Lexicon, were important tools. The dictionaries yielded religious definitions of words, (definitions which have been lost over the years) that Dickinson uses to dramatize and explore her crises of faith.

Introduction

Emily Dickinson, in her lifetime, wrote approximately 1,800 poems and over a thousand letters. But Dickinson was a very private person and with few exceptions her poetry was not published until after her death in 1886. According to R.W. Franklin, Dickinson's productivity climaxed in the first half of the 1860s. Between 1861 and 1862, Franklin estimated Dickinson wrote 365 poems that she eventually self-published in Fascicles.¹ My argument is that Dickinson used her Fascicles (specifically 12& part of 13) and letters to justify turning her back on organized religion. Dickinson first uses her letters to express and explore her religious conflicts. She then uses her poetry as a religious dialogue, to justify this personal decision. I do not believe it was a coincidence that with 365 poems to pick from Dickinson chose twenty-seven for Fascicle 12 and nineteen for Fascicle 13. Dickinson positions these poems in a precise order as to make a case and justify turning away from organized religion. She states her position in the first poem in Fascicle 12, F207 "I taste a liquor never brewed," that implies a discovery perhaps her new religion, or the first bookend in her story. The final bookend is poem F320 from Fascicle 13. (This was the ninth poem in this Fascicle and seemed to me an appropriate place to stop). In this poem, often referred to by critics as a "sunrise poem," Dickinson writes about her spiritual resurrection, accepting her new religion/faith, but with a tone of sadness and self-doubt concerning this personal decision. The tone and mood that Dickinson expresses in this religious dialogue, using her letters and poems, indicate what a difficult decision this must have been. By all indications Dickinson, a private person, provided only hints and clues to family and friends concerning her crisis

¹ Fascicle- Books containing between 11 and 29 poems. Made of four to seven prefolded stationary sheets bound with thread.

of faith. Though she guarded her privacy, Dickinson found a way to express her dissatisfaction with organized religion through her letters, words, tone and poetry.

Dickinson came from a fairly close religious family which makes her decision to re-evaluate her religion all the more curious. Her father was a respected member of the community and eventually appointed treasurer of Amherst College in Massachusetts. By all accounts the family regularly attended church and probably adhered to the remnants of Puritanism (Congregational Calvinism). In 1861 Austin (Dickinson's brother) and Sue had their first child, and the Civil War was in its infancy. Some critics contend, because of the close relationship Dickinson had with Sue, this birth may have greatly upset Dickinson. If there was a breach of friendship it was caused by Dickinson's inability to comprehend the pressures Sue was under as a new mother. But with a crying baby, Austin in a state of depression, and Sue ignoring her it's no wonder Dickinson felt rejected and abandoned. Alfred Habegger comments in his book *My Wars are Laid Away in Books-The Life of Emily Dickinson*, "For the poet, it was a repeat of how she had been treated by Master." (435) This is an important quote because Dickinson uses "Master" in letters and poems as a religious connotation referring to God/Christ. Was Dickinson equating her isolation from her brother and sister-in-law with feelings of isolation from God? Was the Civil War another cause for Dickinson's "terror?" Dickinson's interest, at least in the beginning, in the Civil War was minimal. According to Habegger Dickinson's position concerning the War was "oblique and conflicted," (402) and she would rather water her geraniums than help make bandages for the war. Habegger writes:

As she put it in 1861, she could not "weave Blankets, or "Books," and thus would "have no winter this year-on account of the soldiers." Remote from the

physical and emotional dangers combatants faced, she sounded her odd brittle note when a Yankee on his way to war stopped to request a nosegay: “I suppose he thought an Aquarium.” (402)

The attempts to link Dickinson’s “troubles” with the Civil War are plausible; more likely though was a sense of impending isolation from her sister-in-law and God. But it was in 1861 that, according to *A Historical Guide to Emily Dickinson*, Dickinson starts to experience a mysterious “terror” that has been attributed to a range of psychosocial and physical problems. Habegger believes that Dickinson thought she had early symptoms of eye trouble and possibly going blind, but there is no evidence of this. About this same time Rev. Wadsworth, the well thought of Minister of Dickinson’s family church, was moving to California. According to Habegger this was not an insignificant event. Dickinson felt she was being deserted by everyone (including her faith) who was dearest and could understand her, and this feeling of isolation found its way into her poetry. Habegger seems to zero in on what caused this “terror” when he writes:

It may have begun with a moment when “the meaning goes out of things,” as she puts it in one of her jottings, but its essence was a recognition of something permanent: the disconnection between heart’s absolutism and the realities of life. Painful and transforming, it brought a final sense of isolation, abandonment, rejection. Her troubles with Master had helped her understand her “unique burden” as a woman, and now there was Sue’s apparent uninterest. To be forgotten by her selected ones—“They have not chosen me,’ she said,/ ‘But I have chosen them” (F87A)—had always been the great and primary fear. (436)

In late summer of 1861 Sue wrote a note to Dickinson apologizing for ignoring her and because of family obligations (new child) she had been too distracted to answer Dickinson's poems or letters. But in Dickinson's mind this sense of isolation and abandonment gave Dickinson pause to examine and reevaluate her faith. The "terror" that Dickinson was experiencing was the realization that she was losing her religion/faith. In poem F202 written in early 1861, self-published in Fascicle 12, Dickinson writes "Faith is a fine invention." In this poem Dickinson makes it very clear, although somewhat sarcastically, that she believes her former religion was nothing more than an invention by someone; probably a man. This poem is an excellent example on how Dickinson uses words, tone, mood to examine and discuss her religious/faith conflict.

The connection between Dickinson and religion/faith can be supported through a close reading of letters and poems, particularly the poems of Fascicles 12 & part of 13. But Dickinson also wrote over a thousand letters to family, friends and non-friends. In some of her early letters (1845-1850) there are hints and clues that Dickinson is already concerned with her religion. It will be important to examine Dickinson's use of words, images, patterns, and tone in both letters and poems. For example, in a letter written to her close friend Abiah Root in 1845, Dickinson complains about housekeeping. But in same letter she comments that her knowledge of housekeeping is about as much use as her knowledge of her faith. (A similar metaphoric link between domestic tasks and religious faith appear in F319 self-published in Fascicle 13 in 1862.) Dickinson wrote this letter at the age of fifteen, and it provides a clue to the religious conflicts Dickinson will eventually experience. In other letters she continues her religious dialogue by challenging what it meant to be a Christian and therefore placing herself on a collision course with

her family's religion—Congregational Calvinism. In letter 169 written to Abiah in 1852 Dickinson provides additional clues to her growing religious dissatisfaction. Dickinson writes to her friend asking for forgiveness for not taking the Sabbath more seriously. (Abiah had gone through the conversion to become a Christian, a process Dickinson had avoided.) This letter foreshadowed poem (F236) Dickinson wrote in early 1861 and self-published in Fascicle 9. This is an important pattern; themes and ideas that Dickinson explores and expresses in her letters are then repeated and amplified in her poetry.

Dickinson position on keeping the Sabbath is very clear. She writes:

Some keep the Sabbath going to Church-
I keep it, staying Home-
With a Bobolink for a Chorister-
And an Orchard, for a Dome-

Some keep the Sabbath in Surplice-
I, just wear my Wings-
And instead of tolling the Bell, for Church,
Our little Sexton- sings.

God preaches, a noted Clergyman-
And the sermon is never long,
So instead of getting to Heaven, at last-
I'm going, all along.

This poem is an excellent example how Dickinson uses words and tone that will become important in defining her conflict of faith and religion. For example; Dickinson writes she will keep the Sabbath in her own way, “staying Home.” Her church choir will be the birds, “a Bobolink.” Her Church “a Dome” will be “an Orchard.” Dickinson, in order to place emphasis on what is important, capitalized key words. The poem has a certain lyrical quality and the mood is very upbeat. She uses this poem to help define the conflicts with her current religion. Keeping the Sabbath is a major tenant of Calvinism, but Dickinson felt imprisoned by this strict rule of the church. Dickinson was beginning

to explore religious alternatives to gaining salvation. She provides a clue as to what she may be longing for to help her with this personal conflict she is about to encounter.

Although this poem was not chosen for Fascicle 12 or 13, she is beginning to organize her argument against formal religion.

It is also important to examine how Dickinson frames her argument. She uses her letters to explore her dissatisfaction with organized religion. Perhaps Dickinson was attempting to elicit a response from her audience (writing letters to family and friends), but there isn't any evidence to support this theory. I don't believe Dickinson has started to search for an alternative, but rather examine and question the conflicts she has with her current faith/religion. Perhaps it was the confluence of events that took place in 1861 causing the sense of isolation that Dickinson was experiencing. It does appear though that these events would eventually lead Dickinson to repudiate organized religion. It is clear that Dickinson was moving from challenging her family's religion by using her poetry to explore and offer an explanation for an alternative religion/faith.

Another important aspect of this ongoing dialogue was how Dickinson used words to show her dissatisfaction with religion. For example, she used words such as "Master, Imperial, Purple, and Beryl" ("Beryl" means precious, sacred) all words that according to Webster's 1825 & 1845 Dictionaries had religious definitions. Dickinson would have been very familiar with these dictionaries and probably made extensive use of these books. Another important source of how Dickinson used words is the "Emily Dickinson Lexicon" a new web site devoted to Dickinson's word usage; (www.edl.byu.edu/webplay.php), *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 1845 version, was another source of words that Dickinson would have used. All of these dictionaries

provide clues and patterns that when placed in context lead to the inescapable fact that Dickinson was exploring alternatives to her religion/faith. Dickinson begins this spiritual journey of discovery with a letter written to Abiah Root in 1845

Chapter I

In September of 1845 Emily Dickinson wrote a letter to her friend Abiah Root. In the letter Dickinson provides the first hint of her dissatisfaction with her religion. She is writing her friend complaining about, of all things, housekeeping. But in this letter Dickinson writes, “But as long as I don’t, my knowledge of housekeeping is about of as much use of faith without works, which you know how we are told is dead.”² (L8) She continues on by apologizing for quoting from Scripture, but the passage was convenient and easy to use. Perhaps this is the first bit of evidence of how Dickinson will express her feelings toward organized religion. In order to understand what prompted Dickinson’s suggestion of religious intolerance (with a hint of sarcasm) I believe it is important to examine the roots of her dissatisfaction with Congregation Calvinism, the Dickinson’s family religion.

In *My Wars Are Laid Away In Books* Alfred Habegger, provides this description:

Calvinist saw true religion as necessarily containing elements of terror and psychic violence, Unitarians [A competing religion] stood for serenity, a life of rational virtue, a view of Jesus as a model for imitation rather than a divine Savior. (10)

Part of the problem with Calvinism was the philosophy that this religion was the only religion that a person could practice and obtain salvation. The elements of this religion terrorized their parishioners into believing this was the only true religion; the only way to enter God’s kingdom. Dickinson would soon reject this philosophy. Habegger writes that Calvinism had a vigorous life that extended well into Dickinson’s formative years. The movement provided revivals, Sabbath Schools, methods to distribute Bibles, promoting

² *The Letters of Emily Dickinson* Thomas Johnson Vol. 1

temperance, Sunday closing laws, and other reforms. In short, the religion was designed to keep certain social tendencies in check. These reforms were certainly a carry over from Puritanism. Habegger writes this comment about the intention of Calvinists; “these institutions served to foster the mysterious inner act based on surrender or submission and known as conversion. This was the system the poet was born into and grew up taking for granted” (11). Not only was Congregational Calvinism important in the Dickinson house, but the religion was also the cornerstone for Amherst College founded in 1820. The Dickinson family, including her father, was very active in running Amherst. Habegger comments that the mission for the College was to train a corps of pious and disciplined ministers and missionaries to roll back Unitarianism. Habegger writes, “They must counteract the disintegrative tendencies of American democracy, and carry on educated and resurgent evangelicalism from New England to the rest of the world.” (13) This was a religion and philosophy that Dickinson would soon reject.

In another letter written to Abiah Root in January 1846³ (L10) Dickinson confesses to her struggle with religion. She writes she almost went through the conversion to become a “christian.” (It is interesting to note the lack of capitalization for christian, but she does capitalize Christ. This method of capitalization was intentional, because it begins to show, in her style of writing, how she places empathizes and importance.) She writes in this letter of her love for Christ, but continues putting off becoming a “christian.” Dickinson is starting to understand the contradictions in practicing “christians” that have kidnapped “Christ” for their own use. She continues on by writing she hears Christ saying to his “Daughter give me thine heart.” (This line foreshadows a poem she wrote, appearing in fascicle 12 F205). Dickinson writes, “I hope at sometime

³ *The Letters of Emily Dickinson* Thomas Johnson Vol.I

the heavenly gates will be opened to receive me and The angels will consent to call me sister. I am continually putting off becoming a christian.” Later in the same letter Dickinson writes about attending a revival. The meetings attracted both old and young people who were looking for redemption only to be disappointed. She writes, “Many who felt there was nothing in religion determined to go once & see if there was anything in it, and they were melted at once.” She muses that she feels ungrateful living under Christ’s bounty and yet “still be in a state of enmity to him & his cause.” The tone of the letter is of questioning her religion, but not sadness or despair. Dickinson reflects on what may happen when death or “Eternity” descends upon her. It is interesting to note at this very young age, sixteen, she is thinking about life after death. She emphasizes the importance by capitalizing “Eternity” and “Death.” Dickinson concludes this letter with an interesting line; “Although I am not a christian still I feel deeply the importance of attending to the subject before it is too late.” The importance of this line is that it foreshadows her coming conflict with organized religion. This was one of Dickinson’s longer letters to her friend Abiah Root and she wants her friend to comment on this religious struggle.

In another long letter to her good friend written in March 1846, Dickinson continues with her dialogue of faith. She tells Abiah that she wishes she had found the same inner peace that apparently Abiah has found. (Participation in the rite of Conversion.) Dickinson still believes that God will listen to her prayers and accept her into paradise. Dickinson writes, “Although I feel sad that one should be taken and the others left, yet with joy that Abby & I peruse your letter & read your decision in favor of Christ & though we are not in the fold yet I hope when the great shepard at the last day separates

the sheep from the goats we may hear his voice & be with the lambs upon the right hand of God.⁴ (L11) The tone of the letter is one of concern but not apprehension or fear.

Dickinson's dialogue about her religion continues in L13 written (to Root) in August of 1846.⁵ There seems to be a subtle change in her tone, because she is beginning to separate how she feels about God and her preference for her world. Dickinson is not sure she can make the necessary sacrifices that Christ requires to enter his kingdom. (At least not according to the Calvinist rules.) Dickinson writes, "But I feel that I have not yet made my peace with God. I am still a s[tran]ger—to the delightful emotions which fill your heart. (Dickinson is referring to Abiah Root) I have perfect confidence in God & his promises & yet I know not why, I feel that the world holds a predominate place in my affections. I do not feel that I could give up all for Christ, were I called to die." (38) I believe Dickinson is starting to separate herself from Calvinism, which demands total surrender to God in order to be saved and enter his kingdom.

The next few years of Dickinson's life are spent at Mount Holyoke Seminary (1847-1848) She enters the Seminary with great expectations, because she is eager for wider educational opportunities. Dickinson appears not to have any difficulty adjusting to her studies or friends. But as weeks and months go by, the strict religious atmosphere of the Seminary starts to weigh on her. The Seminary practiced a strict form of Calvinism called Congregationalism, which required each student to be in Chapel every day from 9-10 and attend Sunday services. In a letter written to her brother Austin in May of 1848⁶ (L24) she complained that her request to come home on Sunday was denied. Dickinson writes, referring to a Miss Whitman, "She seemed stunned by my request & and could not find

⁴ *The Letters of Emily Dickinson* Thomas Johnson Vol. I

⁵ *The Letters of Emily Dickinson* Thomas Johnson Vol. I

⁶ *The Letters of Emily Dickinson* Thomas Johnson Vol. I

utterance to an answer for some time. At length, she said “did you know it was contrary to the rules of the Seminary to ask to be absent on the Sabbath”? I told her I did not. She took a Catalogue, from her table & showed me the law in full at the last part of it.” (68) Dickinson’s tone, in the remaining part of the letter, is somewhat sarcastic. She tells Austin that since there is only nine weeks left she will be content to obey the commands. But it is becoming clear that Dickinson’s tolerance for her old religion is rapidly shrinking.

In January 1850, in a letter to Jane Humphrey, (L30) Dickinson mentions for the first time “the Master.”⁷ This word shows up again in letters and poems. I believe she is using “Master” as a reference to God, not reverently but sarcastically. “Master” was also a reference to slave owners. Perhaps she felt God/religion owned her. This is a very long letter with tones of loneliness, despair, hopefulness and humor. Dickinson writes, “Oh ugly time- and space-and boarding-school contemptible that tries to keep us apart-laugh now if you will-but you shall howl hereafter! Eight weeks with their bony fingers still poking me away-how I *hate* them-and would love to do them harm! Is it wicked to talk so Jane-what *can* I say that isn’t? Out of a wicked heart cometh wicked words-let us sweep it out-and brush away the cob-webs and garnish it-and make ready for the Master! (L30) The remaining parts of the letter are rather chatty and informal, but it does appear the strict religious policies of the Seminary are negatively affecting Dickinson.

In a long letter written within a few days of L30, addressed to Abiah Root, Dickinson’s family has left her alone and is concerned that she may be lonely. In an

⁷ According to Webster’s 1824 & 1845 dictionary, 1) Master is defined as a man who rules, governs or directs either men or business or a lord; a ruler, one who has supreme dominion. 2) Often capitalized: a revered religious leader. 3) A great figure of the past whose work serves as a model or ideal. 4) A man who owns slaves is their master. Dickinson would have access to both dictionaries.

interesting playful tone she tells Abiah she is not alone, but is with three people.

Dickinson writes, “*Three* here instead of one –wouldn’t it scare them? A curious trio, part earthly and part spiritual two of us—the other all heaven, and no earth. God is sitting here, looking into my very soul to see if I think right tho’ts. Yet I am not afraid, for I try to be right and good, and he knows every one of my struggles. He looks very gloriously, and everything bright seems dull beside him, and I don’t dare to look directly at him for fear I shall die.” (86) The three people Dickinson is referring to (earthly and spiritual) are clues of what eventually will be her new religion or philosophy. The third person is God or her current religion: A religion that is unforgiving and will only accept one way to salvation. Even though this bit of dialogue is written in a playful manner, Dickinson is very concerned with her relationship with God. In preceding letters Dickinson expressed concerns that she is not willing to make the kind of sacrifices that Christ (or her religion) wants or demands to enter the kingdom. She wants God to see her as she is; a kind, pray-full, humble person.

For the first time in Dickinson’s religious dialogue L35, written to Jane Humphrey in April 1850, contains a strong tone of concern, apprehension and a sense of impending religious isolation. Dickinson writes, “How lonely this world is growing, something so desolate creeps over the spirit and we don’t know its name, and it wont go away, either Heaven is seeming greater, or Earth a great deal more small, or God is more “Our Father,”⁸ and we feel our need increased. Christ is calling everyone here, all my companions have answered even my darling Vinnie believes she loves, and trusts him, and I am standing alone in rebellion, and growing very careless.” (94) Dickinson continues on, writing that her friends believe they have found something precious; she

⁸ This reference to “Our Father” foreshadows poem F295 written in early 1862.

doesn't know what it is, but they do. I don't believe Dickinson is envious of her friends, but this may have been a way to question her religious conflicts. In a mocking and somewhat angry tone she writes, "How strange is this sanctification, that works such a marvelous change that sows in such corruption, and rises in golden glory, that brings Christ down, and shews him, and lets him select his friends!" (94) Dickinson is continuing to lay the foundation for her separation from organized religion. One can almost "hear" the anger in her choice of words such as; "rebellion" and "corruption." The only word she failed to mention was hypocrisy. Dickinson's friends had gone through the conversion, a ritual she refused to be part of. She is beginning to seriously question what it means to be a Christian at least as Calvinists define it, and why Christ would only choose Christians to be "his friends." This kind of thinking was putting her on a collision course with her family's religion—Congregational Calvinism.

In L39 written in late 1850 to Abiah, Dickinson for the first time contemplates making a change—her religion? Dickinson writes, "The shore is safer, Abiah, but I love to buffet the sea—I can count the bitter wrecks here in these pleasant waters, and hear the murmuring winds, but oh, I love the danger! You are learning control and firmness. Christ Jesus will love you more. I'm afraid he don't love me *any!*" (104) Is the "danger" she refers to the impending split from organized religion?

During the next few years Dickinson's letters to her brother, Austin Dickinson, dominate the correspondence. Austin was teaching in Boston and later Harvard Law School. In L48 written in mid July 1851 Dickinson teases her brother about how he treats his students, but makes an important reference to "Master" used as a religious reference. Dickinson writes, "Oh how I wish I could see your world and its little kingdoms and I

wish I could see the King—Stranger—he was my *Brother!* I fancy little boys of several little sizes, some of them clothed in *blue* cloth, some of them clad in *gray*—I seat them round on benches in the school room of my mind—then I set them all to shaking—on peril of their lives that they move their lips or whisper—then I clothe you with authority and empower you to punish, and to enforce the law, I call you “Rabbi—Master,” and the picture is complete!” (125) An important clue in this letter is Dickinson’s use of “King,” “Stranger,” and “Brother.” I believe King and Stranger refers to God/Christ and the concern she is being ignored. Dickinson then writes, perhaps sarcastically, “he was my Brother,” referring to her conflict of faith and God. This was the second time she used the word “Master,” Dickinson is forming a pattern how this term is used in other letters and poems—a religious connotation.

In October of 1851, L58 also written to Austin is very interesting because Dickinson appears to be close to making an important decision—perhaps resolving her religious conflicts. Dickinson writes:

I know how soon you are coming that I put away my sewing and go out in the yard to think. I have tried to delay the frosts, I have coaxed the fading flowers [Organized religion?], I thought I *could* detain a few of the crimson leaves until you had smiled upon them, but their companions call them and they cannot stay away— you will find the blue hills, Austin, with the autumnal shadows silently sleeping on them, and there will be a glory lingering round the day, so you’ll know autumn has been here, and the *setting sun* will tell you, if you dont get home till evening. (148)

Dickinson in her own poetic way is telling Austin that she had tried to delay her decision on religion and hoped she could retain some of her faith. (The crimson leaves) She finishes the letter telling Austin not to mind silent fields because her world is a green forest with a “*brighter*” garden. There has been no frost or unfading flowers; she hears the hum of the bee and invites Austin into her garden. The tone of this letter is very upbeat and very lyrical especially in the last lines, “I hear the bright bee hum, prithee, my Brother, into *my* garden come!” (149) Read separately this letter could be Dickinson writing about nature. But examining the letters before and based on how she uses words, this is Dickinson’s poetic way to explain a change. Could this be the first hint of her new religion?

L69 written in January 1852 to Abiah, Dickinson continues her rebellion against attending Sunday services. (Dickinson is back in Amherst) She writes that rather than attend these “stormy Sundays” she will remain at home and not (sarcastically) take the opportunity to hoard up the great truths “which I would have otherwise.” (169) Dickinson continues on by asking Abiah for forgiveness because of Dickinson’s unsatisfying attitude toward the Sabbath. It almost appears that Dickinson is telling Abiah that the Sabbath may be important to you, but I will not let this intrude in my life. This is another piece of evidence of Dickinson’s move toward breaking from organized religion. But in L88 written in April 1852 to Susan Gilbert, Dickinson uses words and tones that foreshadow poem F295 written in 1862.⁹ Dickinson wrote Gilbert to help console her over the loss of her sister in 1850. Dickinson writes, “I made up words and kept singing how I loved you, and you had gone, while all the rest of the choir were singing

⁹ F295 was the 12th poem in Fascicle 12. The poem is a dramatic monologue concerning the lack of faith Dickinson has in God.

Hallelujahs. I presume nobody heard me, because I sang so *small*, but it was a kind of comfort to think I might put them out, singing of you.” (210) This line sounds as if Dickinson is lacking confidence in someone’s ability to hear her, but not the sound of her voice. Dickinson is referring to her prayers, because she and her prays are so insignificant that God will not hear her. But Dickinson is comforted with the idea, that in spite of this, she still will pray for Susan. Perhaps In Dickinson’s mind her God (her new religion) and not the God of her father (Congregational Calvinism) will hear her prays.

The substantial exchange of letters from Dickinson to her brother came to an abrupt end when Austin returned to Amherst. The impending marriage of Austin and Susan (July 1856) altered Dickinson’s correspondence to Susan, and letters written to friends and non-friends became shorter and less frequent. According to Johnson¹⁰ it was during this time frame that Dickinson started to explore writing poetry. But there were at least two letters written in 1856 that Dickinson continued to explore her confused attitudes toward organized religion. L183 written to Mary Warner Corwell in April 1856 is the second break in style from letters to poetry. Dickinson’s letters always had a rhyme and rhythm to the writing and sometimes it becomes difficult to determine if the correspondence was a letter or poem. But in this “letter” Dickinson seems to make an effort to use a poetic style using ten stanzas with six lines and a distinct rhyme scheme. In the first stanza Dickinson writes:

I cannot stand him dead!
His fair sunshine head-
Is ever bounding round my sturdy chair-
Yet, when my eyes now dim-
The vision vanishes-he is not there!

¹⁰ *The Letters of Emily Dickinson* Thomas Johnson Vol. II. Page 314.

This poem starts with a tone of hopelessness and despair and ends with a very upbeat note. The letter was written to Warner on the third anniversary of her sister's death and was meant to be a note of comfort. But Dickinson is confused about the presence of God in her life. Dickinson seems to be searching for something redemption or salvation, but each time she thinks she has found God he is not there for her. She ends the first eight stanzas with "he is not there" indicating a lack of confidence for her salvation. She ends the poem though, on a very defiant tone. This is another clue that Dickinson is starting to separate herself from her family's religion. Dickinson is losing confidence in this God, but still believes her prayers will be heard. Dickinson writes that no matter what God thinks of her she will sit at his right hand. From L233 she writes:

Yes, we all live to God!-

Father, thy chastening rod

So help us, thine afflicted ones to bear,

That, in the spirit land-

Meeting at thy right hand-

'Twill be our heaven to find-he is *there!*' (325-326)

L185 written to Mrs. Holland in August 1856, Dickinson repeats language used in a letter to her brother in 1851(L58). In the letter written to Austin, Dickinson writes "I tried to delay the frosts" and "I have coaxed the fading flowers" the fact that Dickinson ,six years later, repeats these words and tone are additional clues to her personal conflict. The repeating of words and phrases are important because it reinforces her decision to break from her religion. Dickinson writes:

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 here this summer, and seen the things I have seen-I guess that He would think His paradise superfluous. (329)

The letter has a very sarcastic tone, and Dickinson seems to be challenging God about how he is building his world-heaven. She would like to see what he is building without the benefit of hammers, stones or journeymen. It almost appears that Dickinson's vision is one of Heaven on earth and how she practices her faith or new religion. In an interesting final note to the letter Dickinson says she would rather be loved on earth than be called a king on earth or lord in heaven. Dickinson in her own poetic way is challenging an important doctrine of Congregation Calvinism that all must submit and convert in order to enter paradise. At this point in her life Dickinson appears to be leaning toward the Unitarian philosophy that living a life of serenity and virtue will obtain paradise. This philosophy seems to fit into Dickinson's belief system, or new religion.

In 1858 Dickinson wrote what has become know as the "Master letters." This year was also important because according to Habegger, Dickinson becomes seriously interested in writing poetry and organizing her poems into fascicles.¹¹ L187, written in 1850, was addressed to "Master" but the recipient of the letter was unknown. Habegger¹² in his book believes that "Master" could refer to Leonard Humphrey, Dickinson's former teacher at Mount Holyoke Seminary. Johnson believes "Master" is the Reverend Charles Wadsworth with whom Dickinson has developed a close relationship. Both Habegger and Johnson believe that "Master" is a masculine figure who is important in Dickinson's life. But in 1850 in a letter in Jane Humphrey (L30), Dickinson mentions for the first time

¹¹ Fascicles. Books containing between 11 and 29 poems made of four to seven prefolded stationary sheets bound with thread.

¹² *The Life of Emily Dickinson* by Alfred Habegger

“Master.” In this letter Dickinson is using “Master” in reference to God not to another masculine figure. Dickinson would have used Webster’s 1845 dictionary definition of “Master”— “someone of supreme dominion, a revered religious leader often capitalized or owner of slaves.” There is anger in Dickinson’s voice. Abolition and slavery were important topics and I suspect were important issues in the Dickinson household.

Dickinson’s use of “Master” is her dramatic way of saying God/religion (Calvinism) will not own her. The tone of L187 is somewhat upbeat, but Dickinson’s health is suspect.

She does not despair and regardless of how she feels she believes God is listening to her.

Dickinson writes, “Indeed it is God’s house –and these are gates of Heaven, and to and fro, the angles go, with there sweet postillions—I wish that I were great like Mr. Michael Angelo, and could paint for you.” (333) She finishes the letter describing her vision of Heaven, “whether the hills will look as blue as the sailors say.” (333)

L220 written to Samuel Bowles in 1860 is a letter/poem that Dickinson, in a playful tone, continues to challenge organized religion. In this correspondence she is very direct in her criticism, Dickinson writes:

“Faith” is a fine invention
When Gentlemen can *see*—
But *Microscopes* are prudent
In an Emergency (220)

It is also important to note Dickinson repeated this letter/poem in a poem written in early 1861 and bound in Fascicle 12 F202. She made a slight change in the bound version by changing line 2 to read “For Gentlemen who *see*—.” Johnson believes the message in the

letter is obscure. But based on her prior correspondence, she is using this genre (letters) to challenge and eventually turn her back on her family's religion.

A second "Master" letter, L233 written in 1861, was addressed to "Master," but with recipient unknown. Johnson makes no comment concerning this letter, and Habegger now believes "Master" could be the Rev. Wadsworth. Wadsworth did not reside in New England, but occasionally traveled there to preach the gospel. I don't agree with Habegger because Wadsworth preaching and philosophy were in conflict with Dickinson belief systems. Habegger writes that Wadsworth offered redemption as a minister of the gospel, an idea that Dickinson would have been at odds with. In L233, filled with religious and spiritual criticism, Dickinson challenges her own beliefs in faith and God. The opening lines are an interesting analogy that Dickinson uses to question the corner stone of religion—faith. Dickinson writes, "If you saw a bullet hit a Bird—and he told you he was'nt shot—you might weep at his courtesy, but you would certainly doubt his word." Dickinson seems to be very direct in her criticism of God and certainly suggesting not believing everything God tells her. In another pointed comment Dickinson attacks the very essence of her religious conflict—faith. She writes, "Thomas' faith in Anatomy, was stronger than his faith in faith." Dickinson is beginning to understand that true faith does not require physical evidence. But this could also be part of the religious conflict she is trying to resolve-faith without evidence. In another line (from L233) that foreshadows poem F295 written in 1862, Dickinson uses a sarcastic, almost angry, tone when she writes, "He built the heart in me—Bye and bye it outgrew me—and like the little mother—with the big child—I got tired holding him." (373-374)

Dickinson continues on by talking about redemption; an important concept of Calvinism. She tells “Master” “I asked for it—you gave me something else.” This comment is important because it shows that Dickinson was looking for something; was it redemption or acceptance by the “Master?” If she was seeking redemption it would not be accomplished through her current religion, but with an alternative. Dickinson writes, “I forgot the Redemption and was tired—no more—[so dear did this stranger become that were it, or my breath—the Alternative—I had tossed the fellow away with a smile.]¹³ (374) Dickinson uses another important word in this letter, “Father,” which is another important clue to the identity of “Master.” The use of “Father” foreshadows poem F295 or J217 when Dickinson uses this word combined with “thee” to provide significant religious overtones. Dickinson writes in this letter, “These things are [reverent] holy, Sir, I touch them [reverently] hallowed, but persons who pray—dare remark [our] “Father”! You say I do not tell you all—Daisy confessed—and denied not.” (374)

In early 1861, approximately the same time L233 was written, Dickinson begins to assemble the poems for Fascicle 12 & 13. This process carried over to 1862. Late 1861 and early 1862, according to Johnson, were most critical; although Dickinson may not have known it these were historically eventful years in her life. This was the time frame when she faced her religious conflict and turned her back on organized religion to pursue another religious philosophy or faith. She was undergoing an emotional disturbance of such magnitude (moving away from Congregationalism Calvinism) that it caused her to turn her back on her family’s religion and to seek an alternative. She uses the poems in F12 & F13 to justify the magnitude of her decision. Dickinson arranges the poems in such

¹³ *The Letters of Emily Dickinson* Thomas Johnson Vol. II. Words which ED crossed out are enclosed in brackets.

order as to dramatically present and defend this personal decision. With approximately 365 poems to pick from Dickinson picked twenty-nine for Fascicle 12 and nineteen for Fascicle 13. This was not a random selection, but a calculated placement of poems to create a more dramatic effect concerning her religious conflict.

Chapter II

In 1861 Austin and Sue Dickinson had their first child and because of Dickinson's close relationship with Sue the event may have greatly upset her. Could the birth of this baby combined with the ever increasing religious conflicts Dickinson experienced, result in the "emotional disturbance" that has been documented? It is doubtful that this birth caused a split in their relationship; on the contrary, Susan was Dickinson's most trusted reader and critic. The records indicate that the two engaged in a literary dialogue that lasted for decades. Then how and why did Dickinson express this "disturbance?"

In the *Cambridge Companion to Emily Dickinson*, Fred D. White, in an essay titled "Emily Dickinson's existential dramas" writes:

It is always tempting to regard Dickinson as a confessional poet—one whose poems, for all their innovative brilliance, are nonetheless outpourings of her own private feelings toward love, death, nature, and immortality. A closer look at her vast poetic project, however, reveals a far more complex artistic purpose, one that revels in both the possibilities and the impossibilities of language to evoke the experience of life and mind. Dickinson, I wish to argue, constructs scenarios in verse, dramatizes the predicaments or states of mind or perceptions of imagined speakers, *personae*. (91)

The only item missing from this important statement is Dickinson's feelings toward religion. White provides an excellent clue on how she uses her poetry to reveal these inner conflicts. But it is important to note that the voices are Dickinson's and not a "personae." The style that White refers to is exactly what Dickinson does in F12&13 as it pertains to her turning her back on her family's religion. Dickinson is constructing a

scenario, or multiple scenarios in her poetry, using dramatic monologue to dramatize this important personal decision. White reinforces this idea and writes:

Dickinson's poems also are dramatic in the conventional sense of the word—not just in the way they depict personae engaged in dramatic monologue or dialogue, but in the way they construct a virtually Aristotelian problem/situation-crisis/climax-denouncement progression. Instead of directly conveying the poet's own thoughts and feelings about the subject, Dickinson prefers the aesthetically richer indirection of a dramatic rendering, whereby characters-personae-speak in their own disparate voices, thereby creating a richer and more complex work of art. (93)

This seems to me precisely what Dickinson is doing in F12&13; she is presenting a problem (dissatisfaction of organized religion) then uses her poems to justify/explain this dissatisfaction. The voice Dickinson uses in these poems is her own and even though the voice is "indirect" it just amplifies the urgency to her solving this conflict.

The first Fascicle to examine is #12. The very first poem (F207) starts out with a tone of excitement, hopefulness and a kind of lyricisms. The last poem in the Fascicle (F335) ends with a somber almost melancholy tone. The poems in between have tones that range from hope, to caution, to doubt, to certainty concerning this personal, important decision. F207 was written in early 1861 and coincided with reports of ill health, both mental and physical. Habegger¹⁴ believes that there was a split between Dickinson and Sue caused by the birth of Sue and Austin's first child. (Jacky) Habegger writes, "With all her troubles, the inexperienced mother was a little inclined to humor Emily as Emily was to help with Jacky. The poet loved and identified with children, but babies were another story." (434) Perhaps Dickinson did not understand the pressures of

¹⁴ *The Life of Emily Dickinson* by Alfred Habegger

motherhood that Susan was experiencing. Austin was in a funk and Susan was dealing with a crying baby so it is understandable that Dickinson felt ignored by Susan and Austin. But perhaps this birth gave Dickinson time to reflect even more on her decision to challenge her religion. An important point White makes is that Dickinson, at this time, was developing her world-view of existentialism. White writes, "I shall also argue that Dickinson's world-view is *existential*, which is to say that her personae regard's the individual self, and not any divine agency, as solely responsible for the events that shape their lives, which intrinsically limited, flawed, and separate from nature." (91) This philosophy puts Dickinson in direct conflict with her family's religion, Congregational Calvinism, which emphasis the church, conversion and sacrifice as the only way to attain salvation.

Dickinson begins her religious dialogue in F207:

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

The opening lines indicate that Dickinson has discovered something that no one else has. (Her new religion?) The tone of the poem is very upbeat, excited, and almost lyrical. The remaining stanzas contain the same excited mood:

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!

+Vats upon the Rhine+ Leaning against –the-Sun-

Dickinson uses key words to indicate she is discussing her “new religion”. For example, in the second stanza, line four “Blue” has many different meanings, but according to Webster’s 1865 dictionary the word has several Biblical uses including the definition of Heaven. In stanza three, line four Dickinson writes another important phrase, “I shall but drink the more”! Whatever Dickinson has discovered she wants to have more and to emphasize this she ends the line with an exclamation point. F208 continues in same upbeat mood as Dickinson writes about the song of the Whippowill. She uses phrases such as “everlasting sings,” “Galleries are Sunrise,” and “Whose Stanza, are the Springs,” to indicate her excitement with her new discovery. She ends the poem with an interesting stanza:

Whose Beryl Egg, what School Boys hunt-
In “Recess”, Overhead!

In Webster’s 1865 dictionary “Beryl” is a Biblical term meaning precious or rare stone. Dickinson is referring to the search for her new religion.

In the next three poems, F209 thru F211, the tone changes to a more serious mood perhaps sarcasm. In F209 Dickinson begins to realize the seriousness of her decision. Her discovery is tempered by the fact that no one is helping or cares about her choice. At the very least she engages in a dramatic monologue to discuss this crisis. Instead of conveying her own thoughts and feelings about this subject the characters speak in their

own disparate voices, thereby creating a richer and more complex poem. I have no doubt though that this is Dickinson's voice; she writes:

I lost a World- the other day!
Has Anybody found?
You'll know it by the Row of Stars
Around it's [sic] forehead bound!

A Rich man- might not notice it-
Yet- to my frugal Eye,
Of more Esteem than Ducats-
Oh find it- Sir- for me!

Dickinson goes from the excitement of discovery to the realization she is turning her back on organized religion. The opening line in the first stanza is very dramatic, "I lost the World –the other day"! She capitalizes "World" to place emphasis on her former religion. The sarcasm continues in the second stanza when she writes, "A Rich man-might not notice it"-. Dickinson is saying her former church is not aware or cares she has turned away from her old religion—Calvinism. It almost sounds as if Dickinson is challenging her church to help her retain her faith, and to help find her way through this personal crises; she writes, "Oh find it- Sir- for me! In F210 Dickinson continues her serious tone. She sarcastically writes if she dies, "If I should'nt be alive," how will she be saved or remembered? Will the minister, "Give the one in Red Cravet,"¹⁵ speak favorably while she is in the grave? "A Memorial crumb"— In the second stanza Dickinson continues the sarcasm:

If I could'nt thank you,
Being fast asleep,
You will know I'm trying
With my Granite lip!

¹⁵ According to Webster's Dictionary a Cravet was a wide necktie worn by men. Ministers often wore a wide red tie to accompany their robes.

She paints a wonderful portrait with the last line. Dickinson is proclaiming that no matter what her former church is preaching she will no longer accept their teachings.

Poem F211 takes on a serious tone. Dickinson seems to be reflecting on her personal religious crises and the consequences of this impending change, she writes:

I've heard an Organ talk, sometimes-
In a Cathedral Aisle,
And understood no word it said-
Yet held my breath, the while-

And risen up-and gone away,
A more Bernardine Girl-
Yet- knew not what was done to me
In, that old Chapel Aisle.

In the first stanza Dickinson is saying she has listened to what her old religion was telling her, but she neither listened nor believed what was being preached. According to Webster's 1865 dictionary "Bernardine" is a religious term meaning "to be brave or hardy." Dickinson's use of this term is important because it refers to her decision on religion—she is being brave, perhaps courageous at this critical time in her life. The last two lines do show some ambivalence. Dickinson is still concerned about this religious transformation she is about to undertake, and how she will be affected.

F212 is used as a diagram to help explain her decision. The tone of this poem is very straightforward—neither angry nor happy. Dickinson seems to say her old religion is almost a side show where important ideas are never discussed. The first two lines in stanza two seem to indicate this:

A Diagram-of Rapture!
A sixpence at a show-
With Holy Ghosts in Cages!
The Universe would go!

Dickinson's use of "Rapture" is also interesting. Conservative Christians (Calvinists) use this term to explain the rising of the saved to meet the savior (God) before the world ends. This is a philosophy that Dickinson would reject.

In the next group of poems, F202-F295, Dickinson's mood becomes sarcastic, snippy as she comments on issues with her old religion. The tone of F295 changes from sarcasm to bitterness, anger and depression as Dickinson realizes she has lost her faith. In F202¹⁶ Dickinson is at her sarcastic best when she comments about issues with her old religion:

"Faith" is a fine invention
For Gentlemen who *see*-
But Microscopes are prudent
In an Emergency!

It is very clear that Dickinson views her former religion as nothing more than someone's invention, perhaps the Puritans. The capitalization of "Microscopes" is important because the elements that made up her former religion are so insignificant to her that only a staunch Calvinist ("Gentlemen") could understand its structure. Anyone else would need a "Microscope." Dickinson use of "Microscope" is interesting because she intentionally mixes science with religion: A scientific invention used to examine her old faith. F 292 and F293 are, for Dickinson, long poems. The mood and tone of these poems is more serious and reflective. The first two lines of F292 establishes the mood, "I got so mad I could hear his name- Without-Tremendous gain" and in stanza five she writes, "Could dimly recollect a Grace- I think, they called it "God." Dickinson seems to reflect on her life that when she prayed to God he never responded. I believe this also reflects back to

¹⁶ Dickinson wrote three versions of this poem. The third rewrite appeared in Fascicle 12 early 1862.

F202 when she writes “Faith is a fine invention.” The last stanza seems to reinforce the idea that her former religion will not work for her, she concludes:

My Business-with the Cloud,
If any Power behind it, be
Not subject to Despair-
It cares-in some remoter way,
As Misery-
Itself, too great, for interrupting-more-

This same serious tone continues in F293. Dickinson writes about death-hers? Although she has written about death, in this poem death refers to her faith and former religion. She writes in stanza two:

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

Gauze refers to a burial shroud so I believe Dickinson is referring to her former religion being buried. She wants the burial as far away as is possible. In the fourth stanza she alludes to her new found courage concerning this important decision:

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

Dickinson is using these allusions (Gauze, Nerve, Peril) along with F292 and F202 to reinforce her decision to turn her back on organized religion. All three of these poems, according to Franklin, appear to be written about the same time- early 1862. The fourth poem in this group, F294, continues with her reflective tone and she still questions her decision. Dickinson writes:

A Weight with Needles on the pounds-
To push, and pierce, besides-
That if the Flesh resists the Heft-

The puncture-Coolly tries-

Dickinson's use of "Weight" is important because it refers to her decision (the "Weight" is her former religion) and the fact that she capitalizes the word lends added importance. The words Dickinson uses ("Needles", "push", "pierce") are interesting choices because these words reflect how her conscious must have felt-needles pushing and piercing her "Compound Frame" –reflecting the serious decision she made. F295 is a key poem in the Fascicle, because Dickinson brings together a range of emotions, (concerning her decision expressed in earlier poems and letters) into this poem. Her mood is one of bitterness, anger, depression and self doubt. Dickinson wrote two versions of the poem; the first version had nine lines and was changed in the second version to four lines. The rewritten version which was placed in Fascicle 12 seems more concise, Dickinson writes:

Father-I bring thee-not myself-
That were the little load-
I bring thee the departed (Imperial)¹⁷ Heart
I had not strength to hold-

The Heart I cherished in my own
Till mine-too heavy grew-
Yet-strangest-heavier-since it went-
Is it too large for you?

Dickinson uses a dramatic monologue to have a dialogue between her and God to help justify turning her back on him. The use of "Father" and "thee" are interesting because of their religious connotations. This was not the first time she referred to father; in letters L35 and L233 Dickinson uses Father and God as the same person. She accuses God (Father) of causing her despair and feelings of insignificance that has weighed her down.

¹⁷ Dickinson originally used the word "imperial" in this line, but decided to use "departed." Imperial is an important word that Dickinson has used in eleven of her poems and three letters. In the dictionary of symbols the Roman numeral for 1 (I), which is used to signify the acting individual (I am), also represents *Imperator or Imperial* that which can be considered as unique or absolute. (Her "Heart") I am guessing Dickinson was very familiar with Latin.

She wanted to offer God her “Imperial Heart,” but she is afraid God will reject it.

Dickinson is very conflicted because she believes, even though she has rejected organized religion, she is still a good person. Dickinson is surprised that she doesn't feel the worse because of this important decision. In line 7 she writes, “Yet-strangest-heavier-since it went”- indicating relief that her life will continue in spite of this decision. In the final line of the poem Dickinson leaves the depressed, self-pity and self-doubt mood that was evident in the beginning. The poem's mood ends with a mocking, snippy tone, “Is it too large for you?”

Poems F296 and F297 return to an upbeat mood; Dickinson seems comfortable with her decision, but in poems F298-F 300 the mood returns a dark, depressing, self-doubt tone as Dickinson continues to justify what she has done. But in an extraordinary poem, F301, she presents her audience with the reason she questioned her former religion. In 296 and 297 the tone is very playful. She writes about “Ships of Purple” and “Her Purple traffic,” but the use of “Purple” does not refer to color. In Webster's 1845 dictionary *Purple* is defined as “belonging to or befitting a supreme ruler, golden age of imperial splendor, regal attire treated with royal acclaim.” Dickinson seems very happy with her new found religious freedom and that of rational virtue and serenity as opposed to the Calvinist use of “terror” and psychic violence.

Poems F298 through F300 including a version of a letter (L242) written to Mr. Bowles in early December 1861 all have a dark, depressing tone that refer to death and the after life. In F298 Dickinson is concerned with death (her physical death or the death of her religion?) and the after life. Dickinson writes:

The Doomed-regard the Sunrise
With different Delight-

Because-when next it burns abroad
They doubt to witness it-
The Man-to die-tomorrow-
Harks for the Meadow Bird-
Because it's Music stirs the Axe
That clamors for his head-

Joyful-to whom the Sunrise
Precedes Enamored-Day-
Joyful-for whom the Meadow Bird
Has ought but Elegy!

In the first stanza Dickinson is referring to her former religion, "The Doomed-[Calvinism] regard the Sunrise, With Different Delight." I also believe she is concerned as to what will happen to her when she does die. Will her new religion be enough to attain virtue? She seems to provide an answer in the third stanza, "Joyful-to whom the Sunrise ("Sunrise" refers to the after-life) Precedes Enamored-Day"-(refers to her eventual death.) In poetic terms Dickinson's use of "Elegy" is important because it reinforces her feelings about death. In Poem/letter F197 and F299 Dickinson is very concerned and troubled if she has offended "Jesus"/ "Him", she uses the words interchangeably. In the first stanza of F299 she writes, "Did we disobey Him? Just one time!" The fact that she emphasizes the second line in the first stanza seems to indicate she is defiant. Dickinson is rationalizing to herself that she has made the correct decision even if she has disobeyed Jesus. Dickinson finishes the stanza by writing, "Charged us to forget Him- But we could'nt learn!" In F300 Dickinson is still voicing self-doubt concerning her decision, but she also alters her poetic form. She deviates from two stanzas with four to five lines to three stanzas with the first, three lines, the second, five lines and the third, sixteen lines. She repeats the pattern in F301. Perhaps this format permits her to provide more dialogue concerning her decision. In the opening stanza of

F300 it appears she is critical of friends or family that stayed with the old religion. But in a not so subtle statement, she admits rebelling against her former religion, she writes:

Unto like Story- Trouble has enticed me- [Her new religion]
How Kinsman fell-
Brothers and Sisters-who preferred the Glory-

Dickinson is very critical of people who force their children to participate in their family's religion. In doing so she is criticizing her own family. In Dickinson's own poetic way she shows her anger and defiance with a touch of bitterness. In stanza two she writes:

And their young will
Bent to the Scaffold, or in Dungeons-chanted-
Till God's full time-
When they let go the ignominy-smiling-
And Shame went still-

In an interesting line from the third stanza Dickinson is very clear she is rebelling against her religion and will not be oppressed; "Feet, small as mine-have marched in Revolution. Firm to the Drum." At this point in the Fascicle she is very clear she has made the correct decision.

In an extraordinary poem, F301, Dickinson presents her readers with the reason she questioned her former religion:

One Year ago-jots what?
God-spell the word! I-can't-

Was't Grace? Not that-
Was't Glory? That-will do-
Spell slower-Glory-

It was approximately one year ago in early 1861 that Austin and Sue had their baby. This was also the time when Dickinson starts to experience a mysterious "terror" that has been attributed to a range of psychosocial and physical problems. I think terror is too strong a word; concern and uncertainty would be a better choice. Dickinson is starting to

understand the Congregational Calvinism will not work for her. She is beginning to realize that divine intervention and conversion is not the path to salvation. Rather it is the importance of the individual self (Existentialism) that will get her to heaven. The use of “Grace” and “Glory” I believe refer to her former religion (Grace) and her new religion (Glory). In lines 7-9 of the third stanza Dickinson indicates, early in her life at least a year ago, that her religion did have some meaning to her. She uses a great analogy, comparing how wine tastes and her former religion, she writes:

I tasted-careless-then-
I did not know the Wine
Came once a World-Did you?

Dickinson continues her religious dialogue referring to her former and her new religion in the final lines of stanza two as “A Giant” looking at her “eye to eye.” The last line is very subtle; “No Acorn-then”- The use of “Acorn” refers to a small idea that will eventually grow to a large idea or tree-her new religion.

In poems F302 and F303 Dickinson finally describes what her idea or image of her new religion is. F302 has three stanzas of four lines and in the first two lines of each stanza she is very clear in her image of this new religion, she writes:

It’s like the Light
A fashionless Delight-

It’s like the Woods-
Private-Like the Breeze-

It’s like the morning-
Best-when it’s done-

The words that Dickinson uses paint’s a vivid picture of this ideal religion; “Light” and “Delight”, “Woods” and “Breeze”, “morning” and “done.” This picture is certainly the opposite of her family’s religion- Calvinism. In F303 she places some limitations on this

new religion, admitting she does not want to be alone. Dickinson still needs the help of “The Hosts”¹⁸ but she doesn’t name them. She refers to them having no “Robes” nor “Names” or titles but their presence is always within her-“The Hosts.” These “Hosts” are gentle, caring and not the same Father/God who Dickinson criticizes in F297. The last stanza helps reinforce the differences in her new and former religion:

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

Dickinson uses Poem F330 and F331 as repudiation of organized religion, but not in a harsh way. In the first two lines of F330 she refers to religion as a “Belt” placed around her life and then the “Buckle” snaps. In the third and fourth line she “turned away, imperial, My Lifetime folding up”- Dickinson is referring to her decision to turn her back on her former religion. Poem F331 starts of with a flash back of sorts. Dickinson, in the first stanza, has an encounter (perhaps a dream) with her old religion:

The only Ghost I ever saw
Was dressed in Mechlin-so-
He had no sandal on his foot- [Jesus?]
And stepped like flakes of snow-
His Mien, was soundless, like the Bird-
But rapid-like the Roe-
His fashions, quaint, Mosaic-
Or haply, Mistletoe-

Dickinson uses great similes to describe this encounter, for example; “Mien” for kingdom; the kingdom, as it spread, “was soundless, like the Bird.” But this religion, although silent has spread very rapidly, “like the Roe.” (Roe is a mass of fish eggs that spreads rapidly in fresh water.) In the last stanza Dickinson’s tone is one of bitterness and anger

¹⁸ Webster’s 1865 Dictionary defines “Hosts” as translated from the Hebrew word *Sabaoth*-meaning “Almighty Gods of the Army of Earth or stars or unseen Angles.” I believe Dickinson would have used unseen Angles as “Host.”

with a scathing attack on her former religion. In the religious dialogue that Dickinson has written to this point, she makes it very clear to her readers (and herself) that she has completely broken away from Calvinism:

Our interview-was transient-
Of me, himself was shy-
And God forbid I look behind-
Since that appalling Day!

In the remaining poems in this Fascicle, Dickinson will occasionally have self-doubt with tones of depression, anger and bitterness having made this important decision.

In F332 Dickinson continues her religious dialogue and in a very defiant, dramatic monologue writes that God may take her body but not her spirit/soul. In the second stanza she writes:

It cannot be my spirit-
For that was thine, before-
I ceded all of Dust I knew-
What Opulence the more
Had I- freckled Maiden,
Whose farthest of Degree,
Was-that she might-
Some distant Heaven,
Dwell timidly-with thee!

The mood of this poem is very similar to F295 when Dickinson challenges God/Father to accept her as she is. The use of “freckled Maiden” is interesting because Dickinson is reflecting back to when she was a young, impressionable girl. She is also writing about what would have happened if she stayed a “freckled Maiden.” Dickinson may have accepted her family’s religion and “timidly” gone on with her life. In the final line of the third stanza she continues her criticism of God by using an interesting phrase, “Oh, Caviler, for you!” According to Webster’s 1865 Dictionary “Caviler” is defined as “A

disputant who quibbles, someone who raises annoying petty objections.” Is Dickinson telling God that he can have her physical body but she will never relinquish her spirit?

In poem F333 Dickinson tone is upbeat but reflective. She seems, at this point, content with her decision and completely at ease with herself. The first and last stanza shows reflection and love:

Many a phrase has the English language-
I have heard but one-
Low as the laughter of the Cricket,
Loud, as the Thunder’s Tongue-

Is the “phrase” she has heard love? Based on Dickinson style this is exactly what she is expressing; love can be very quiet, but can also be loud as “Thunder.” These are certainly powerful metaphors. In the last stanza Dickinson writes about the “Sorrow” that occurred in the early part of life. Dickinson she is referring to her former religion that she believes was forced on her:

Not for the Sorrow, done me-
But the push of Joy-
Say it again, Saxon!
Hush-Only to me!

Dickinson did not suddenly have an epiphany when she made her decision to turn her back on organized religion. Someone or something influenced her thinking and in a long poem F334 Dickinson provides a clue; not the something but someone. Dickinson wrote approximately 1800 poems, but only two poems, one that indirectly mentioned John Keats, and a second poem that served as a tribute to Keats, F448. Both of these poems were a tribute to Keats and based his poem “Ode on a Grecian Urn.” Both poets shared similar traits, for example; Keats was a prolific letter writer and wrote to friends,

family and people he did not know. Keats's first book of poems was published in 1817. Sales were poor and critical reaction was lukewarm. The critics said he was a "son of promise"¹⁹ and like Dickinson he was unfazed by the criticism. Not surprisingly Dickinson and Keats shared similar views on organized religion. To the end of his life (he died in 1821), Keats refused to seek solace for the complexities or absolutes of organized religion. There is no doubt in my mind that Keats's letters, poems were part of Dickinson's education and significantly influenced her. Both of their styles, use of dramatic monologue and how they used words were very similar. Poem F334 was written in three versions. Version A was placed in the fascicle; B version was sent to Susan Dickinson and C version went to Martha Bianchi. (Susan Dickinson's daughter) In the second stanza of version A Dickinson not only refers to the "Urn", but also provides more hints on her religion, for; example nature creates, but God takes away, she writes:

Inheritance it is-to us-
Beyond the Art to Earn-
Beyond the traits to take away-
By Robber-since the Gain
Is gotten, not with fingers-
And inner than the Bone-
Hid golden-for the whole of Days-
And even the Urn
I cannot vouch the merry Dust
Do not arise and I play-
In some odd fashion of it's own-
Some quainter Holiday-

The final poem in this Fascicle, F335, and is written with tones of self-doubt and depression concerning her decision. This tone is not a surprise because it reflects her

¹⁹ *The Norton Anthology, English Literature*. Seventh Edition.

existential views. According to an essay by White²⁰ the existentialist (Dickinson) values “longing over gratification, the journey over the destination, the creative process over its finished products.” (91) He also writes that anguish, doubt and striving are of greater value than comfort, certainty wealth or attainment. Dickinson has included all of these moods and tone in this last poem. She seems to say, even though I am smiling and happy with my decision, on the inside I am consumed with pain and doubt. She writes:

Her smile was shaped like the others
The Dimples ran along-
And still it hurt you, as some Bird
Did hoist herself, to sing,
Then recollect a Ball, she got-
And hold upon the Twig,-
Convulsive, while the Music crashed-
Like Beads-among the Bog-

A happy lip-breaks sudden-
It does'nt state you how
It contemplated-smiling-
Just consummated-now-
But this one, wears it's merriment
So patient-like a pain-
Fresh glided-to elude the eyes
Unqualified, to scan-

Beginning with the first poem in this Fascicle, “I taste a liquor never brewed”- Dickinson has constructed a scenario in verse. The conflict or scenario is organized religion and why there must be something better for her; an alternative religion. The tone/mood of her poems goes from excitement, to sarcasm, to anger and self-doubt. But she also writes about her new religion, a religion that values the individual and places nature and self-worth ahead of religious and psychic terrorism—Calvinism. She continues her religious dialogue in Fascicle 13.

²⁰ *The Cambridge Companion to Emily Dickinson*, “Emily Dickinson’s existential drama” by Fred D. White.

Chapter III

The poems in Fascicle 13 were assembled approximately the same time as Fascicle 12; 1861 to early 1862. According to Franklin, Dickinson bound these poems, nineteen altogether, in Fascicle 13 in early 1862.²¹ There does not seem to be any consensus among Dickinson scholars why she placed her poems in the order that she did. Did she do it intentionally? Did she place her poems in the order she wrote them? According to Jane Eberwein in *An Emily Dickinson Handbook*, the Fascicles represent “Dickinson’s strategy for a kind of self publication that evaded the gender implications of print.”(109) I agree with Eberwein’s because the placement of poems in Fascicle 12 and 13 does not appear to be random or coincidental. Dickinson, for herself, placed her writing in such an order that she could justify and explain turning her back on organized religion.

Poem F311 is one of Dickinson’s longer poems— six stanzas with the first stanza containing 12 lines. This is another good example how Dickinson likes to play with style, words and tone. The tone of this poem is very different from the final poem in Fascicle 12. The mood is upbeat with a lyrical rhythm, but the speaker (Dickinson) still manages to include religious dialogue. Unlike F335, which was loaded with self-doubt, Dickinson seems very content and happy with her personal decision. The last two stanzas reflect her attitude:

Day-rattles-too-
Stealth’s-slow-
The Sun has got as far
As the third Sycamore-
Screams Chanticleer
“Who’s there”?

And Echoes-Trains away,
Sneer- “Where”!

²¹ *An Emily Dickinson Handbook*, Jane D. Eberwein Greenwood Press, 1998.

While the old Couple, just astir,
Fancy the Sunrise-left the door ajar!

Dickinson chose of words in the last two stanzas in interesting. For example a Sycamore, according to Webster's 1845 dictionary, is from the Bible. (Luke 19.4) This is a tree that resembles a Fig tree and according to Luke, Zacchaeus climbed this tree to see Jesus his savior. The dictionary also refers to the fruit of this tree which is of inferior quality. (Dickinson's former religion?) Chanticleer is a rooster that is noted for its loud, clear voice. This choice of words is Dickinson's way of voicing, to herself, the correctness of her decision. She writes in an outburst of emotion that her former religion was inferior and she is happy with her new religion. I believe the choice of words that Dickinson uses is not accidental, because she is continuing a pattern using words that have a religious connotation.

Poem F312 is very interesting because Dickinson uses words and language from poem F207, the first poem in Fascicle 12. Unlike F207 which was upbeat with a tone of excitement and discovery F312 is filled with self-doubt and a hint of self-pity. Dickinson writes in the first stanza:

I can wade Grief-
Whole Pools of it-
I'm used to that-
But the least push of Joy
Breaks up my feet-
And I tip- drunken-
Let no Pebble- smile-
'Twas the New Liquor-
That was all!

Dickinson capitalizes key words to place emphasis on her feelings, for example; Grief, Pools, Joy and New Liquor. Where Dickinson was once excited about her new discovery or new religion "I taste a liquor never brewed" (F207 Fascicle 12) she now blames "the

New Liquor” on her sour mood, perhaps to emphasize her self-doubt. She finishes the poem writing about how “Weights-will hang”- that refer to her personal decision.

“Weights” referring to the pressure she feels concerning her relationship with God and religion in particular. I do not believe this is a new feeling, because she began to feel this religious pressure as early as 1861. But Dickinson is admitting that this decision is causing her a great deal of personal anguish. The use of “Him” in the last line is important because Dickinson has used this word in several poems in Fascicle 12, usually with a religious connotation.

F313 and F314 are poems that seem philosophical in thought. In F312 Dickinson uses two voices. In the first stanza she writes about not projecting too far into the future. “You see I cannot see- your lifetime- I must guess”-, perhaps see is referring to her spiritual present and future. This is important to note because Dickinson uses both “I” and “your” when discussing her religious conversion. I believe “I” is Dickinson and “your” refers to Dickinson’s close friend Abiah.²² In the second stanza she continues her spiritual dialogue, but still is concerned with her decision. She uses phrases such as, “My timidity enfolds”- and “Haunting the Heart”- that sound melancholy. The fact that Dickinson capitalizes “Heart” is important because she uses the same form in poem F295— for example, “I bring thee the departed Heart.” In poem F314 Dickinson’s mood returns to an upbeat, hopeful tone, “Hope” is the thing with feathers.”- In the second stanza she refers to a small bird whose voice can still be heard above the sound of a gale:

And sweetest-is the Gale-is heard-
And sore must be the storm-
That could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm-

²² In March of 1846 Dickinson, in a letter to Abiah Root, writes to her friend that she (Dickinson) finds the same inner peace that apparently Abiah has found.

Dickinson is referring to herself as a little “Bird” and her voice (her new religion) struggling to be heard above the noise of the storm or her decision.

Poems F315 & F 316 seem to reflect Dickinson’s continued melancholy tone or mood. In F315, “To die-takes just a while”- Dickinson reflects’ upon her decision in terms of death or state of grief by looking backward. In the second stanza Dickinson uses strong metaphors to describe her feelings:

A darker Ribbon-for a Day-
A Crape upon the Hat-
And then the pretty sunshine comes-
And helps us forget-

It is interesting the way Dickinson begins each stanza using “A” and “And” to refer to the past and present; perhaps the death of her old religion. But when the “sunshine comes,” (the dawn or resurrection?) Dickinson believes she made the correct personal decision. F316 is an important poem because Dickinson refers back to F209, from Fascicle 12, written in early 1861. F316 also reinforces her decision to turn her back on organized religion:

If I’m lost-now-
That I was found-
Shall once-on me-those Jasper Gates
Blazed open-suddenly-

That in my awkward-gazing-face-
The Angels-softly peered-
And touched me with their fleeces,
Almost if they cared-
I’m banished-now-you know it-
How foreign that can be-
You’ll know-Sir-when the Savior’s face
Turns so-away from you

The first two lines are reminiscent of an old spiritual (“Amazing Grace”) about the lost soul who rejected religion, but eventually returned to his/her faith. Dickinson’s reference to “Jasper Gates” is an interesting phrase. According to Webster’s 1865 dictionary “Jasper” is a gem of various colors “inserted in the High Priest breastplate.” (Ex. 28:21) Jasper is also named in the building of New Jerusalem “emblematic of the glory of God.” (Rev. 21:11) “Gates” refer to the pearly gates of Heaven that Dickinson believes will welcome her when her time comes even though she turned her back on organized religion. She writes about this welcome in her second stanza when the “Angels” touch her face with their “fleeces,” “Almost as if they cared”-. Dickinson ends the stanza in mocking, sarcastic tone very similar to F209. She writes in 209, “I lost a World-the other day!” and finishes with “Oh find it-Sir-for me!” In the last stanza of F316 she writes, “You’ll know –Sir-when the Savior face/ Turns so-away from you.”- I believe the use of “Sir” in both poems refers to God. This is not the first poem Dickinson repeats words and phrases. Perhaps this was Dickinson’s method to place emphasis on her own thoughts; the repeated, continued use of dramatic religious monologue.

The mood of F317 returns to a more playful, whimsical tone. Dickinson writes about “Delight is as the flight”- and for the present time seems content with her decision. In the final stanza she uses interesting dialogue to describe her mood:

And so with Lives-
And so with Butterflies-
Seen magic-through the fright
That they will cheat the sight-
And Dower latitudes far on-
Some sudden morn-
Our portion-in the fashion-
Done-

Dickinson is saying in spite of the seriousness of her decision (“through the fright”) she will continue to exist. Like the “Butterflies” she will see the “magic” and her life (Lives) will continue. Perhaps Dickinson has finally recognized that she has escaped the confinement of her former religion hence the first line of the poem, “Delight is as the flight.” But I also think she hints of death (Dickinson’s death?) in the last three lines “Some sudden morn”- “Our portion-in the fashion” and using “Done” as the last word for the final sentence.

Poem 318, “She sweeps with many-colored brooms,” has been characterized by several critics as a poem dealing with death or dying because of sunset images. In an essay titled “Certain Slants of Light: Exploring the Art of Dickinson’s Fascicle 13,” by Douglas Leonard, Leonard believes the poem deals with domestic images—the sunset as a housewife. Taken as an individual poem in this Fascicle, Leonard may be correct in his interpretation. But if I interpret this poem in relation to the poems in Fascicle 12 and the poems preceding, it is quite evident Dickinson is continuing her religious dialogue. Dickinson uses a number of words that have a religious connotation, for example; “Evening West,” in Webster’s 1845 dictionary “West” has a meaning of “departure, decline or fall,” “Purple,” royal robes, “East,” “where the Messiah will appear,” “Emerald,” “transparent, somewhat translucent,” and “Amber,” “golden hue, Heavenly light, divine truth, splendor of resurrected things.” Dickinson writes:

She sweeps with many-colored Brooms-
And leaves the shreds behind-
Oh Housewife in the Evening West-
Come back-and- dust the Pond!

You dropped a Purple Ravelling in-
You dropped an Amber Thread-
And now you’ve littered all the East

With Duds of Emerald!

And still, she plies her spotted Brooms
And still the Aprons fly,
Till Brooms fade softly into stars-
And then I come away-

Dickinson may have used domestic images intentionally as a metaphor for religion, because in a letter written in September 1845 to Abiah from *The Letters of Emily Dickinson* Thomas Johnson Vol.1, Dickinson complains about housekeeping. She writes to her friend that her (Dickinson's) knowledge of housekeeping is "about of as much use of faith without works, which you know how we are told is dead." There are two voices in the poem as part of her dialogue; "You" and "she." Instead of conveying her own thoughts or feelings she uses a separate voice to make her monologue more dramatic. But curiously in the last sentence Dickinson returns with her own voice, "And than I come away." Dickinson uses this poem to dramatically reinforce that her dissatisfaction with her former religion is over. She has used a "Broom" as a metaphor to sweep, "Evening West" her former religion out the door. Dickinson continues on by writing that all the old religious elements were only transparencies, non-truths as she waited for the Messiah. (East) I think the idea of her new religion or beliefs in her mind is still evolving. Dickinson, in the first variant, writes, "Till Brooms fade softly into stars- And I come away"- In a second variant Dickinson changes the last two lines to read, "Till Dusk obstructs the Diligence- Or contemplation fails." The second variant found its way into F318 that Dickinson self-published in this Fascicle. Perhaps the first variant was not dramatic enough, but these two lines are stronger and create a more serious tone. This was not the first time Dickinson altered or changed lines before placing her poems in the

Fascicles. There are several examples in Fascicle 12 where she changed or added words to adjust the mood/tone.

Poem F319, “Of Bronze-and Blaze”-, is different than any other poems in Fascicle 12 & 13. Dickinson wrote two stanzas; the first stanza contains 13 lines and the second, 6 lines. The poem is very lyrical and the tone very upbeat. Leonard has characterized this poem as a “sunset poem” dealing with “despair or spiritual blindness.” (129) Dickinson meant this poem and the one preceding F318; to reinforce in her mind her new found religion or faith. In the first few lines Dickinson plays with words to paint a picture of a sunset (her former religion) and the magnitude of her decision. Dickinson writes:

Of Bronze-and Blaze-
The North-tonight-
So adequate-it forms-
So preconcerted with itself-
So distant-to alarms-
An Unconcern so sovrein
To Universe, or me
Infects my simple spirit-
With Taints of Majesty-
Till I take vaster attitudes-
And strut upon my stem-
Disdaining Men, and Oxygen,
For Arrogance of them-

In the sixth line I believe Dickinson begins to understand the magnitude of her decision.

Dickinson compares what she has done to the “Universe” and how this decision has affected her, “Infects my simple spirit,” “With Taints of Majesty.” I find this line important because Dickinson is referring to her former religion. In Webster’s 1845 Dictionary “Majesty” refers to a religious deity. She finishes the poem comparing her decision to an “Island” surrounded by “dishonored Grass.” Webster’s 1845 Dictionary

defines “Grass” as herbage with or covering a grave. I believe Dickinson is referring to organized religion.

If F319 is a sunset poem with references to Dickinson’s former religion then F320, “There’s a certain Slant of light”-, should be considered a sunrise poem or spiritual resurrection. (This poem is also the mid-point of Fascicle 13) Even though the poem is set in the afternoon, the morning or dawn is associated with spiritual awakening.

Dickinson continues her pattern of using words and phrases that have Biblical references.

But in Dickinson’s mind the price of this resurrection is a life of grief and loneliness.

Grief because of the personal crises this decision caused and loneliness because she was the only person who knew. Up to this time, early 1862, I don’t believe Dickinson

confided in anyone concerning this religious decision. In the first stanza Dickinson

repeats themes and language from poem F211, a pattern she has used before. In this poem she writes:

I’ve heard an Organ talk, sometimes-
In a Cathedral Aisle,
And understand no word it said-
Yet held my breath, the while-

I think Dickinson either refused or did not believe what organized religion was telling her.

But in F320 the guilt she feels from this change continues to haunt and oppress Dickinson.

The poem has a feel of overwhelming depression and grief, almost as if Dickinson

suffered the loss of someone or something very close to her. In this case it is not someone,

but the religion that was part of her family—Congregational Calvinism. White in his

essay, “Emily Dickinson’s existential dramas,” regarded Dickinson as a “confessional

poet” (91) whose poems were outpourings of Dickinson’s attitude toward her private

feelings; love, death and nature. Although it is tempting to think she was a “confessional

poet” Dickinson shows something else. The speakers that White refers to are Dickinson’s own voices and not a separate “personae.” Dickinson’s attitude toward her religion can be included in this drama. In poem F320 Dickinson uses powerful imagery and haunting effects as well as dramatic monologue to describe these deeply personal, emotional feelings. I’m convinced, since Dickinson never wanted her poems published; this was Dickinson way of justifying her move from organized religion. Dickinson writes:

There’s a certain Slant of light-
Winter Afternoons-
That oppresses, like the Heft
Of Cathedral Tunes-

Heavenly Hurt, it gives us-
We can find no scar,
But internal difference-
Where the Meanings, are-

None may teach it-Any-
`Tis the Seal Despair-
An imperial affliction
Sent us of the Air-

When it comes, the Landscape listens-
Shadows-hold their breath-
When it goes, `tis like the Distance
On the look of death-

Dickinson paints a picture of a bleak winter’s day that oppresses and depresses her the way her former religion oppressed her. In the first stanza Dickinson compares the guilt she feels to the heft “Of Cathedral Tunes.” In the second stanza she writes about “internal differences” and “Where the Meanings, are.” Dickinson seems to say she has been conflicted by her decision, but these internal conflicts have helped her resolve this conflict. The result was Dickinson’s spiritual awakening. The use of “imperial” in the third stanza is important, even though it is not capitalized, has religious connotations.

Dickinson used this word in eleven poems and three letters and refers to someone who is unique or absolute. Imperial can also signify the “acting individual” (I am) or the Roman numeral I. (From Dictionary of Symbols) Dickinson writes, “An imperial affliction- Sent us of the Air.” Dickinson is saying her religious conflict has greatly affected her, and taken a toll in her personal life. The last stanza contains powerful and emotional images and tone. Dickinson seems overwhelmed by what she has done. When Dickinson expresses these emotions, through her poetry, the “Landscape listens,” and “Shadows- hold their breath,” she evokes images of nature that are dark and haunting. Dickinson finishes the stanza with an image of death; the death of her old religion. I do not believe it is a coincidence that this poem is the half way point of this Fascicle, but this seemed to be the appropriate place to stop. Dickinson has said what she wanted to about her crises of faith; to question and challenge her old religion and then seek an alternative. I consider this to be the bookend poem of this story or Dickinson’s way of voicing her final decision; her former religion is in the past.

There are other poems in the Fascicles that Dickinson uses to discuss faith and religion. But in Fascicles 12 & part of 13 she has grouped these poems in such an order as to justify turning her back from organized religion. Beginning with F207, the first poem in Fascicle 12, “I taste a liquor never brewed” which dealt with Dickinson’s discovery of her new religion to F320 in Fascicle 13 “There’s a certain Slant of light” the poems follow in an ordered way. According to White from his essay “Emily Dickinson’s existential dramas,” Dickinson has constructed a “problem/situation-crises/climax.” (93) Dickinson, rather than confront this crises of faith directly uses her poetry to convey her thoughts and feelings toward her problem-organized religion. She realizes that

“christianity” has been kidnapped by the “christians” and there must be a better way to obtain salvation. Dickinson seems to prefer the privacy of her writing using dramatic monologues, varying voices, the adroit use of grammar and style (even using longer stanzas for extended dialogue) to create rich and complex works of poetry.

Conclusion

I am not really certain what lead me write this thesis on Dickinson; after all there has been at least a thousand theses written about this enigmatic poet. Subjects ranged from Dickinson mental state; to her sexuality and the role this may have influenced her writing. Papers have been written analyzing her style, grammar and tone. Other writings have dealt with her family (including potential personal relationships) and Dickinson eventually isolating herself in the family home. There has also been important work done on Dickinson's Fascicles; why she placed poems in these little booklets. Why did Dickinson pick only 814 of her poems for her 40 Fascicles? There was one paper that examined all of her Fascicles, and several that did examine a certain Fascicle for a particular theme; death, isolation or faith. Papers have examined Dickinson's Fascicles for clues on her techniques, word usage, death, nature and immortality. There have been some recent papers that attempted to link the Civil War with Dickinson's reported troubles that may have guided her writing. Dickinson's concern for the War does not go beyond the context either religiously or politically. In fact she was more concerned with her relationship with her sister-in-law, Sue and only had minimal interest in the War. Dickinson's conflicts were of faith, religion and self-doubt not the existential concern of the Civil War but only the context. But there has been no attempt to link and explain Dickinson's crises of faith and search for an alternative religion through her letters and poetry.

Dickinson learned from her parent's, religion's central importance. But starting at a very young age Dickinson was picking up mixed signals, from her father, about the act of conversion. Dickinson was beginning to question the tense atmosphere of her family's

religion, (Congregational Calvinism) and what was necessary for salvation. Dickinson is never comfortable with her decision to explore an alternative faith, and turn her back on organized religion. The examination of her letters, poetry and the placement in Fascicles 12 & part of 13 are the first scholarly work to offer an explanation why Dickinson turned her back on her family's religion. The importance of close reading of Dickinson's early letters and poems makes it possible to see the pattern that Dickinson establishes to challenge organized religion/faith. It is not a coincidence that, at least in these Fascicles, Dickinson chooses and places her poems in a precise order to justify and explain her crises of faith. Dickinson does not reject faith or salvation, but attempts to seek alternative methods to gain heaven. I can not explain all Dickinson's intentions as to why or how she placed or arranged her poems in the forty Fascicles. But at least in Fascicles 12&13 her intentions are very clear. Although Dickinson is never comfortable with her decision, she believes that she will enter the "Jasper Gates." (F316) In poem F236 written in early 1861, Dickinson makes it clear she is going to heaven. Her thought process may have been theological, but in the last four lines she is crystal clear on entering heaven, she writes:

God preaches, a noted Clergyman-
And the sermon is never long,
So instead of getting to Heaven, at last-
I'm going, all along.

Dickinson in her own whimsical way, using her own voice shouts, "So instead of getting to Heaven- I'm going, all along." Dickinson's writings will never be easy to interpret or comprehend because, for me, she is an enigma wrapped in a riddle!

Works Consulted

- Dickinson Emily. *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*. Ed. Ralph Franklin. 3vol. Various ed. Belknap Pr. of Harvard UP, 1998
- Dickinson Emily, 1830-1886. *The manuscript books of Emily Dickinson*, edited by R. W. Franklin. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap, 1981
- Dickinson Emily, *Selected Letters*. Edited by Thomas H. Johnson. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts.1958
- Doriani, Macaley Beth. *Emily Dickinson: Daughter of Prophecy*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996
- Eberwein D. Jane. "Ministerial Interviews and Fathers of Faith" *The Emily Dickinson Journal*, Vol.XII. 2000
www.muse.jhu.edu/journal/Emily_Dickinson_Journal.
- Habegger, Alfred. *My Wars are Laid Away in Books: the Life of Emily Dickinson*. New York, N.Y: Random House, 2001
- Historical Guide to Emily Dickinson*. Edited by Vivian Pollack, Oxford, England. Oxford Press. 2004
- Leonard, Novich Douglas. "Certain Slants of Light: Exploring the Art of Dickinson's Fascicle 13" *Approaches to Teaching Dickinson Poetry*. Eds, Robin Riley and Christine Gordon. "Approaches to Teaching World Lit." Number: 26: Mod. Lang. Assn. of Amer. New York, Pagination: 124-133. 1998.
- McIntosh James. *Nimble Believing: Dickinson and the Unknown*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. 2000
- Mitchell, Domhnall. "The Grammar of Ornament: Emily Dickinson's Manuscripts and their Meaning." *Nineteenth-Century Literature*. March 2001, Vol.55 issue 4, page 479.
- Mitchell, Domhnall. *Revising the Script: Emily Dickinson's Manuscripts*. "American Literature," December 1998, Vol. 70 issue 4, page 705.
- Oberhaus, Huff Dorthy, *Emily Dickinson's fascicles: method & meaning*. University Park,Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995
- Online Etymology Dictionary
www.etymonline.com/index
- Patterson, Rebecca. *Emily Dickinson Imagery*; Edited with an introduction by

- Margaret N. Freeman: University of Massachusetts Press, 1979
- Rosenbaum, S.P. *A Concordance to the Poems of Emily Dickinson*. Ithaca: Cornell UO, 1964.
- The Cambridge Companion to Emily Dickinson*. Edited by Wendy Martin. "Emily Dickinson's existential dramas." Fred D. White. Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, edited by Thomas H. Johnson with Theodora Ward, Associated Editor. Cambridge, Mass. Harvard University Press through The Belknap Press, 1958.
- The Oxford English Dictionary*. 1845.
- The Compact Oxford English Dictionary*
www.askford.com/consise_oed.
- The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*. Fourth Edition. 2000
- The Webster's 1825, 1845&1865 Dictionary*. Electronic Version by Christian Technology Inc.
www.christiantech.com/
- The Norton Anthology, English Literature*. Major Authors/Seventh Edition. John Keats.
- Wylder, Edith. "The Last Face." *Emily Dickinson's Manuscripts*. University of New Mexico Press, 1971.

Works Cited.

An Emily Dickinson Handbook, edited by Jane D. Eberwein. Westport Conn. Greenwood Press, 1998.

The Cambridge Companion to Emily Dickinson. Edited by Wendy Martin. "Emily Dickinson's existential dramas." Fred D. White. Cambridge University Press, 2002.

The Compact English Dictionary.
www.askford.com/consise.oed.

Dickinson Emily. *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*. Ed. Ralph Franklin. 3 vol. Various ed. Belknap Pr. of Harvard UP, 1998.

Dickinson Emily, 1830-1886. *The manuscript books of Emily Dickinson*, edited by R. W. Franklin. Cambridge, Mass. Belknap Press, 1981.

"Dickinson Emily Lexicon."
www.edl.byu.edu/webplay.php.

Eberwein D, Jane. "Ministerial Interviews and Fathers of Faith" *The Emily Dickinson Journal*. Vol. XII. 2000.
www.muse.jhu.edu/journal/Emily_Dickinson_Journal.

Habegger, Alfred. *My Wars are Laid Away in Books: the Life of Emily Dickinson*. New York, N.Y: Random House, 2001.

Historical Guide to Emily Dickinson. Edited by Vivian Pollack, Oxford, England. Oxford Press. 2004

Leonard, Novich Douglas. "Certain Slants of Light: Exploring the Art of Dickinson's Fascicle 13" Approaches to Teaching Dickinson Poetry. Eds, Robin Riley and Christine Gordon. "Approaches to Teaching World Lit." Number: 26: Mod. Lang. Assn. of America. New York, Pagination: 124-133. 1998.

The Letters of Emily Dickinson, edited by Thomas H. Jefferson with Theodora Ward, Associated Editor. Cambridge, Mass. Harvard University Press though the Belknap Press, 1958.

The Norton Anthology, English Literature. Majors Authors/Seventh Edition. John Keats M.H. Abrams, General Editor & Stephen Greenblatt. Associate Editor. W.W. Norton & Co.

The Oxford English Dictionary. 1845.

The Webster's 1824, 1845 & 1865 Dictionary. Electronic Version by Christian
Technology Inc.
www.christiantech.com/