

EMILY DICKINSON: THE CONCEPT OF CATHARSIS

by

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Table of Contents

Chapter	Page
I. Introduction: The Theory of Catharsis as Background for Considering Dickinson's poetry.	1-12
II. Dickinson's Life: A Context for Catharsis.	13-33
III. A Consideration of Selected Dickinson Poems.	34-67
IV. Conclusion	69-70
Works Cited	71-72

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Dedication

I always had the seed, now I want the blossom. How it was I would tell the awful truth, only to watch the horrific expressions on their faces. The emotion and the defense was to deny what I professed, protested, witnessed and survived. Those expressions of horror only change and transform to doubt. Their expressions are almost as ugly as my truth.

This thesis, my perspective, the need to tell and write, I dedicate to those who continue to have a strong aversion to truth. I pity you.

I also dedicate my work to those who can tell the truth.

To those who think that their feelings mean nothing.

To those who were lectured and never praised.

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Introduction: The Theory of Catharsis as Background for
Considering Dickinson's Poetry.

Readers of this thesis will find it heavily oriented toward the psychological, sometimes too heavily oriented in that direction to suit individual tastes. However, we live in a century in which things psychological have assumed an ever greater importance and in which the ties between literature and psychology have grown ever more intricate. To understand Emily Dickinson without paying a great deal of attention to the psychological aspects of her work and life seems, to me, rather self-defeating, and so I beg the reader's indulgence.

Literature and psychology are two distinct disciplines, each having its own theories, terminology and history. Literature is comparatively straightforward. In fiction a reader is presented with characters, protagonists and antagonists. A plot or general theme is put forth to be observed and enjoyed. A tone is set by the author, perhaps through the use of dialogue.

Literature is packaged in many forms other than fiction, all equally enjoyed and understood. Autobiographical works can be genuine works of literature, explicit, gentle, informative, curiosity solvers for curiosity seekers. The autobiography establishes an immediate relationship with the reader. The dialogue is ongoing, much as a conversation might be between two participants. The biography, sharing many qualities of form and content with the autobiography, is one

step removed from the reader, who gathers thoughts and ideas from the perceptions of the author. Thus, the biography is biased; the author's perceptions become his reality. The drama involves not only the theme and the personalities of the characters but also incorporates set direction, positioning, and on-going physical activity. Thus, the play provides a heightened awareness for the reader to follow, a broader scope with which to enjoy the work. In many ways, Dickinson's poems constitute the ongoing dialogue of an autobiography.

Perhaps the biggest mystery of the arts is poetry. Poetry is easily misunderstood by the novice. It may be thought of as always having a rhyme scheme. It may be thought to be effeminate, soft, wordy. A scholar and true reader of poetry knows many more significant things about this art form: It restores, refreshes, and consoles. It is both a way of reaching out for the poet and in, turn, a way for the reader to reach in. Imagery and symbolic gestures serve the poet as tools to reach the emotional and cognitive senses of the reader. Poetry is a voice, a private moment between the poet and the reader. Poetry is an entirely expressive genre (Fowler 147).

Dickinson is recognized as being a world-class poet. The relationship between the reader and the poet is a fascinating one, but what is the relationship between the poet and the empty page? In its own way, a clean page is a purge center, a safe haven for thoughts, remembrances and memories.

The novice wonders why a person feels compelled to write. One answer is that a writer of ability transforms what begins as an elementary activity into a creative outlet. The result can be catharsis. The Random House Dictionary provides this definition: "A purifying or figurative cleansing of the emotions, esp. as an effect of tragic drama. The relief of tension and anxiety by bringing repressed feelings and fears to consciousness" (Berg 328). Another definition offers this variation: "The act of ridding or cleansing. The relief of the emotions gained through viewing the experiences of others, especially in a drama. The relieving of a neurotic state by reenacting an earlier emotional experience" (Ehrlich 131).

Here is the essential joining of psychology and literature. Psychology is a science, one with medical, sociological and psychological dimensions. The study and practice of psychology rely upon certain conditions, such as environments, attitudes, beliefs, and passions. These essential elements provide the foundation for psychology, helping to shape one's feelings and emotions. As they develop, these conditions influence not only the individual, but his dealings with others, personally and professionally.

Carl Jung has suggested that there are "close connections between psychology and poetry, and art in general." Jung has outlined, in many of his works, the importance of art and its effect on the spirit, on the psyche on the soul. For Jung, art, like any other human activity deriving from psychic

motives, is a "proper subject for psychological study" (Jung 65). I believe that no poet is a more "proper subject" than Dickinson.

In any poet's work, the cathartic experience may be present, or actual catharsis may have taken place. The poem is either the map of a well-traveled journey, or else it's an affirmation that catharsis had taken place. The blending of literature and psychology can form a basis of complete understanding. Literature and psychology being complementary, and poetry can be seen as using technique or literary style to convey conscious, unconscious, and subconscious messages.

For the introspective poet, the notion of purification can be an important goal. To purify, to cleanse, to bring to light what is hidden in the deepest hollows of the subconscious does not necessarily imply resolution. Reconciliation, forgiveness or resolution are not to be confused with one's need to examine, observe, create and share. It might be easy for one to assume that the agenda of the poet who uses writing as a cathartic measure is looking to forgive and forget. But it is healthier to accept the will of the poet, to accept the forum that the poet has chosen, and to experience the poet's emotionality and cognitive processes.

The mind remains a hidden creature. At times it resembles the monster that as children we feared was hiding beneath the bed. The same mind that is busy processing small daily routines, remembering incidental chores and burdening

itself with worries is the same mind that hopes, imagines, and fantasizes. For me, no poetry better illustrates the process of catharsis than Dickinson's.

The mind of a poet is always at work. It sees, feels, and stresses. It fights the same daily battles as other minds, with one exception: What maybe hidden to so many is obvious to it. Momentary experiences with daily delights may be processed as being timeless wonderment. Pain, common fear, and disappointment may be constant sources of grief, permeating every aspect of the poet's life, understandings and thoughts.

A question exemplifies the importance of the cathartic experience: Is the end result more important, or less, or is it perhaps equal to the footing established and the journey traveled to arrive at an end point? This question raises many concerns for the poet and for the poet's reader.

The foremost item on the agenda of a poet seeking a cathartic experience may be panacea. But to find an answer and to set out on a cerebral journey only to reach a conclusion is to abandon much of the work, both positive and negative, which was involved in reaching and drawing a resolution. What happens if the resolution no longer fits the circumstances of the poet? The growth can no longer be measured by the journey, because the emphasis was not on charting a carefully traveled route, but rather on just "getting there." In psychology this is referred to as the

"All or None Principle" (Lowry 168).

A stance beneficial not only to the poet but to the reader as well is that which appreciates the struggle or journey that the poet masterfully traveled and by way of which he incidentally stumbled upon resolution. There is one caveat for success; the reader should try not to read or judge the poet behind the poem. "A piece of literature can thus be seen as effective a resolution of unconscious problems--as a dream may do, in a less structured manner--and so be read as a form of self-therapy and as evidence, not of neurotic sickness as in Freud in his more naive moments tended to assert, but of mental health writers can be seen as betraying unconscious conflicts" (Fowler 153).

In her writing, the poet begins to break down the posturing (the need to "put up a front") that she may feel necessary when engaged in verbal dialogue. The ego is protective; by posturing, a person can keep up appearances.

By examining and understanding the journey, the poet becomes vulnerable. Her own emotions are open for judgement by self and others, and ultimately are vulnerable to the unconscious. Again, the ego may be protective, but emotion is powerful, and forceful; It's the dominant factor behind behavior.

The reader should not mistake the poet's vulnerability for weakness, but rather as vulnerability deriving from a position of strength, with a hidden dose of truth. With

vulnerability, strength and courage, ownership of the poet's value system, moral beliefs, cultural influence and cognitive/psychological processes come to light. "Culture leads one into a creative transformation. Customs, rituals that one follows can strongly influence one's perception and work" (Neumann 154).

Introspection and self-awareness become the truth hidden in the soul of the poet, a truth that is reconciled by the poet. On paper. The paper is the forum in which the poet and the reader meet.

The conscious, subconscious and unconscious states of the poet are strikingly separate issues, yet strikingly similar. These dichotomies may be easily managed by the poet, or they may pose a battle of wits and produce inner conflict.

The comfort level that is associated with the conscious includes familiarity and clarity. Clarity may be recognized in varying degrees, and so, for the poet, the conscious aspect of writing is reassuring and less obscure. With familiarity there appears to be less threat of vulnerability. While the conscious position is more likely favorable than the unconscious, the unconscious forces the power of an issue to seep into the conscious with little or no explanation. The conscious is natural, "a mixture of all levels of awareness, an unending flow of words, images and ideas similar to the unorganized flow of the mind" (Holman 484).

The unconscious is hidden, either for safety reasons or

through a failure to let down one's psychological guard. Perhaps the unconscious is the more challenging cathartic experience due to the unfamiliar territory that the mind must retrieve. The unconscious, as suggested by Sigmund Freud, is also linked to memory (Bettelheim 146). Freud's orientation was not based on critical terms as in literature or in historical terms as in religion. Dickinson and Freud could have profited from having a patient-doctor relationship-- and historically speaking, they could have had one.

Freud's beliefs concerning the significance of the unconscious was perhaps best expressed in his book The Psychopathology of Everyday Life. Concerning unconscious motives, he writes: "often people preserve a specific memory, that capitulates a particular response. Memory becomes a catalyst to what is emotionally damaging or painful" (Freud 23). Freud accepts the idea that memory exists in the storehouse of the unconscious; subconscious and conscious operate as very powerful and profound forces.

The recollection of memory, especially of specific memories, can stimulate and even over-stimulate the thought processes at a particular time. Or, it can present a continuous handicap, wherein memories overshadow all thought. Memory can be dominant, permeating all aspects of the cognitive state. The cognitive state can manipulate all incoming information as well as taint all information conveyed through speech, writing and thought. In essence, Freud

thought that people had little control over memory, but rather were at its mercy (Freud 67).

Psychologically, the mind is always operative. In different states the mind functions in reaction to different messages. Its functions are: (1) proactive, and reactive; (2) Internal, and external.

The mind operates under several departments: the unconscious, the conscious, the subconscious and the ego. Other states are possible: dream state, fantasy state, quiet state excitable state and pensive state among others. Different states necessarily function independently of each other and cause specific results in combinations referred to as conflicts (Freud 76).

The mind never takes a rest. From birth it functions like a tape recorder, one that is always turned on. Messages are continually recorded, whether in the unconscious, subconscious or conscious. How and when the poet retrieves those messages and how the poet processes those messages are what cause the emotions to collide (Bettelheim 149). This collision one may call Art.

The recognition of just what constitutes catharsis becomes increasingly difficult to explain in literature. For example, especially in the genre called poetry, it is considerably easier to identify technique and style.

The concept of catharsis is not limited to psychology or to literature, but is also an important element in two

additional disciplines: religion and medicine. The definition and use of the term catharsis can be directly linked to Aristotle. "In Poetics, Aristotle, in defining tragedy, sees its objective as being 'through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation [catharsis] of these emotions', but he fails to explain what he [Aristotle] means by 'proper purgation' " (Holman 75).

The religious and the medical significance of catharsis, while both independent of each other, are yet connected to each other. The influence of the body on the mind and vice versa was recognized not only by Aristotle, but also by clergy and medical practitioners of the time. Medically, catharsis referred to "the discharge from the body of the excess of elements produced by a state of sickness and thus the return to bodily health" (Holman 75). Achieving this delicate balance restores the body to a proper functioning. In writing poetry, catharsis, the expulsion of emotional and cognitive matter that is unhealthy, can restore the mind to its healthy state. Of equal importance is the process by which the mind identifies, consolidates and purges in order to restore.

"In religious terms, as expressed in several places by Plato, catharsis is the process by which the soul collects its elements, brings itself together from all parts of the body, and can exist 'alone' by itself, freed from the body as from fetters" (Holman 76). An example of this purgation is found in the use of the word "purgatory," wherein purgation is

thought to free the soul of illnesses destructive to the soul. The idea is to purge, not to reconcile, and then to go forth in cleanliness, the soul restored.

The word catharsis sparks endless controversy in the terminology of psychological, literary, medical and religious areas. Adrian Abdulla suggests in Catharsis in Literature "that there are three commonly acceptable historical interpretations of catharsis: Purgation, purification and clarification. The first two specifically refer to emotions, the third refers to intellectual understanding" (Abdulla 3). For Abdulla, catharsis is aesthetically intellectual. The process, the journey itself, becomes an aesthetic achievement. The aesthetic value is easily recognized in catharsis because it is always different. The poet's point of view always emerges, and the voice of the poet is subjective.

A hallmark of aesthetic genius requires that the poet (and the reader) possess the ability to recognize both hindsight and foresight. The beauty of the poet's self-actualization and self-realization weaves magic into a poem, and this magic slowly unravels before the reader's eyes. The aesthetic value can therefore be imagined as the poet's dance with words.

The importance of the poet's experiences dominates her work. The poet's vulnerability and power depend on displaced anger that she may harbor, her own experiences, both positive and negative, and her recognition of joy. As Freud has

suggested, the comfort level that an artist has with her memory storehouse, the security that she finds in others, the safety of her own intellectual territory and the ability to abandon her concerns for what others may think, these all become highly relevant (Abdulla 81).

The cathartic experience could be explained in its entirety by incorporating ideas from different disciplines. If a poet has the need or desire for growth and exploration. The action of writing then becomes the conduit for purgation, realization and exploration. The second section of this thesis link the principles of catharsis with the life of that extraordinary poet Emily Dickinson.

II. Dickinson's Life: A Context for Catharsis

Emily Dickinson's determination to establish a sense of self and her success at conducting a unique lifestyle have caused much speculation and even more curiosity. I have said that the purpose of this thesis is to consider and examine Dickinson's psychological manifestations and the way that her personal crisis, the chaos of her life, is carefully woven through her poetry. For Emily, writing poetry was catharsis. It should be no surprise to find that writers and critics from the Feminist Movement and from the psychoanalytic community might share in the curiosity about Emily Dickinson equally with scholars of literature and poetry. "Dickinson's poetry is a creative movement for poets, scholars and those who dabble in the extraordinary study of self from the professional to the novice" (Lowry 48).

Emily's poetry is eclectic; it invites all to share in her journey. Her work favors no particular gender; rather the work identifies concerns that could be classed as "unisex." In this thesis Emily's poetry will be carefully examined in relation to the behavior that she often exhibited.

The poetry selected for emphasis in this thesis is chosen to support the theory of a psychological crisis in Emily's life, a crisis of the spirit, which poetry became the outlet. My focus on the poetry will consider the following four issues: poems focusing on death, poems centering on images of

the child, poems devoted to Emily's sense of deprivation, and explosive poems that scream and kick with anger.

Scholars and critics operate under an obvious handicap when they choose for deep analysis a poet who is no longer living. There is no living person for them to interview or to engage in dialogue, and this impossibility of one-on-one contact leads the scholar to act as an investigator. His investigation is reliant solely on the writings of others, only some of whom may have crossed Emily's path personally and professionally. Further, a scholar must accept all such writing as being by nature highly subjective.

C.G. Jung in 'The Spirit of Man, Art and Literature' describes conditions present in the artist's life that have a direct influence on her work: "There are close connections between psychology and poetry, and art in general, art like any other human activity which is derived from psychic motives" (Jung 65).

Jung also believed that an artist's attitudes toward sex often formed a basis for conflict and concern. This concern could be relieved through art. Such issues bear on the degree of self awareness that Emily may have experienced. How aware was she of her conscious and unconscious conflicts? What were the opposing forces in her conflicts? How did Emily's childhood relation to adults compare to her later relation to adults as an adult herself. In Emily's case, how did chronological growth compare with emotional and cognitive

growth? Freud would probably agree that the foundation for Emily's behavior was formed in childhood, and surely, an inability to process conflicts directly led to Emily's socially-handicapped and deficient lifestyle (Holland 2).

I see Emily's poetry as being written from a stream of consciousness; from a defense mechanism; I see her writing as angry Emily's voice speaking to the soul of her conflict. Emily's work throughout her life was indicative of a transformation and that transformation is the hallmark of her work (Neumann 81). This transformation may contain trace amounts of Emily's unconscious conflicts, but the majority of her work is painfully built on her unresolved sexual, social, religious, parental and philosophical conflicts. For the most part she appears to be deliberate; she was an expert on emotional pain and disappointment.

As suggested by many critics, Emily was quite knowledgeable, loaded with small tidbits of information, often of a exotic nature. Emily chose to let us see whatever she believed was most important. Her need to work out her conflicts through poetry might also be understood as existing at a highly sophisticated level of intellectualism. Here we must think of "intellectualism" as dissociated with emotions and feelings, as rational, and as based on ideas that are not to be confused with feelings (Lowry 7). Emily's poetry stems from feelings and emotions, which is indicative of catharsis; but from an intellectual view the poetry exhibits

energy and concern. Emily experienced an intellectual awakening as a result of her search for cathartic experience. If one were to read Emily's work as poetry plain and simple, the poetry would be viable, existing by itself without any psychological, sociological or religious considerations. Maslow states that "some people pass their entire lives without ever having anything that might be an intellectual awakening" (Lowry 1). As stated before, Emily consciously chose her intellectual growth as well as her social, sexual and religious restrictions.

We have only theories about Emily Dickinson's life and historical facts to examine in order to consider the importance of her poetry as a means for catharsis. For Emily, poetry may have been a forum to negotiate conflicts with which she had not come to terms at all. The poetry was also a desperate and realistic attempt to link herself with the rest of the world (Rogers 29). Carl Rogers has written that Emily comprehended her conflicts and that the poetry served as her companion, catharsis and connection.

It is no secret that Emily had few personal relationships with other human beings, again by choice. Emily's family history, interesting and diverse, is also quite indicative of life during the Victorian Era. To an outsider looking in, Emily's family and household appear to have been divided. John Cody's book After Great Pain explores the relationships between Emily and her family members. I believe that some of

the family members were considered to be "outsiders" as much as those who truly were "outsiders". I believe that the poetry was personified and given an identity by Emily. Only poetry, and then a very small circle of acquaintances, constituted Emily's "insiders." Perhaps many of her own relatives were as foreign to her, emotionally and intellectually, as a fellow student at Mount Holyoke might have been.

It must have been difficult for Emily to blend into the Victorian Era, with its specific gender roles and expectations. The basis for her dealings with men was severe. Emily's father, Edward Dickinson, was not only an excellent scholar but a lawyer as well, a Yale man whose station in life appeared to come easily to him. But that life also alienated him from his wife and two daughters. The relationship was easier between Edward and his son, Austin. Perhaps there was a commonality between father and son due not only to gender, but also to the son's choice to follow in his father's footsteps as a lawyer and civic leader in Amherst.

For Edward Dickinson the reputation and security of the Dickinson name was an aid to a political career (Cody 15). Emily watched her father become a dominant local political force and perhaps grew to fear him rather than admire him. Edward Dickinson represented power. For Emily that power may have been too harsh and threatening. We must remember that a woman's role was not one that was at all up front, but instead

was played out behind the scenes. Differences in gender angered Emily; she could not change her gender, but she could not aspire fully while remaining in her own gender.

Edward Dickinson was a complex personality, dedicated to public causes. His personal life never received the same zealousness, dedication and attention that he lavished on his public life. Dickinson also imposed his own religious rhetoric on Emily; his Gods were her Gods (Cody 22). Emily came to view him as an intrusion; her nemesis. I believe that she was forced to keep up appearances, according to standards set by Edward Dickinson. Emily's father also failed to provide her with emotional nourishment. He chose to abandon her need for truth and intellect. This abandonment establishes and confirms his power, just as it confirms Emily's feelings of helplessness and despair.

It is no surprise that Edward Dickinson's daughters, Emily and Lavinia, never married. Edward's domineering and overpowering aura may have been so unappealing and so destructive, that it is no wonder that they chose their stations as spinsters, even though in the Victorian Era the choice to remain unmarried was unusual and socially awkward (Cody 53).

Loneliness and depression were friends to Emily, constant and dependable companions. Emily knew loneliness not only firsthand but through the sensitive observation of others close to her. Her mother was a constant emotional burden.

She watched her mother sink into a lonely life, and was so impressed by this suffering that she would write letters about it. (Cody 67).

Were one to consider the implications of a child having a parent that is suffering emotionally, what scenarios would be present? A child could feel abandoned both emotionally and cognitively if a parent, especially a mother, should be preoccupied with her own emotional status. The position of the mother as nurturer was key in the Victorian Era, and similarly, in today's culture, the mother is usually thought to be the comforting parent.

Aside from her observations of her mother, Emily may have interpreted her parents' marriage as a negative statement about the institution and may have caused her to question the purpose of the marriage union. Her father remained powerful while her mother fell behind in a frail and weakened condition which did not improve but rather waned as time passed. It is easy to see how a child might determine that marriage can lead to vulnerability. Such a vulnerability was evident throughout Emily's life, seen especially in her witnessing her mother's need for constant care, until her physical death. The emphasis on the physical is deliberate; one's soul can perish long before the body perishes. Emily's mother was vacant and ineffective long before her death.

Loneliness and being alone are usually two separate issues. But for Emily these issues were synthesized into one.

Is it the loneliness that led her to be alone? Or was it being alone that led her to be so lonely?

The behavior that Emily exhibited repeatedly was reclusive, and with age it became a debilitating handicap. Obsessive/compulsive behavior began to dominate her by the time she was thirty-one years of age. Dressing only in white until her death was perhaps one way of possessing control over herself (Cody 19). Emily's need to control was not limited to her own presentation and behavior; she exercised control over whom she saw, when she saw them, where she saw them, and how frequently she saw them. Emily's need to control, obvious to others, often kept people from approaching her.

If we were to consider historical facts while trying to understand Emily's behavior and to determine what exactly it was that she suffered from, we must take into account the following scenarios revealed in After Great Pain:

1. When Emily's mother passed away, Emily chose to attend her wake by staying upstairs; and she intentionally chose not to interact with anyone during her mother's service. This disturbing behavior is similar to a child's decision not to participate in an uncomfortable situation or discourse, but rather to run away and hide. Today this behavior is called denial.

2. As a young girl, Emily lost a close friend at Mount Holyoke. Instead of dealing with her loss and communicating about it, Emily became physically ill and was unable to return

to her studies. Her weakness and frailty ensured her privacy. This privacy enabled her to avoid accepting her pain because by virtue of having a physically weak demeanor she could hide; again, this behavior is indicative of denial.

3. As a middle-aged woman, Emily refused to be examined by a physician. Wanting distance, as a means of ultimate control, she commanded the doctor to examine her topically without her ever disrobing or having any physical contact with him.

Cody suggests that Emily's behavior was insane but that her poetry was sane. Emily may have wanted dialogue and human contact but she didn't possess many tools for dialogue. The aloneness/loneliness may have been necessary for her because she was like no other creature that she had known. Perhaps she felt that if she didn't hide in her room she would be tucked away in an asylum. In a sense, Emily's home was her asylum and her poetry her prescription, the cathartic experience that I believe prevented Emily from going under completely. She wrote to survive. She worked to sustain her appetite for control, and she wrote to leave a legacy for others like her who did not come forth. As Cody suggests, "So many writers argue sane, insane, normal/abnormal. They break down parts of her work, in search of a definitive answer that no scholar of yesterday or today could ever theorize" (Cody 32).

Though it may be easy to determine what Emily may have been feeling (by examining her poetry) it is more difficult to

assume that her condition was based on charted behavior. I believe, with John Cody, that Emily suffered from a psychosis and that included a gender variety depression. The neurotic behavior she exhibited could prove less debilitating with today's medical facilities. Chemical intervention would have helped. Her general depression led to exacerbated symptoms that continued to tap her creative intellectual energy. The positive outcome was her ability to achieve a heightened self-awareness and to manage her cathartic experience through her poetry.

Historically, in Emily's time psychological diagnosis and treatment was rather general and extremely limited. The DSM II Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders provides the modern with the historical mind set for an understanding of mental illness and disorders in the 1800's. This manual was prepared by The Committee of Nomenclature and Statistics of the American Psychiatric Association. The purpose of the DSM II is to clearly identify symptomatology and causation and, by so doing, to understand a person's behavior, reaction and presentation.

Classifying mental disorders was a difficult task back in the 1800's and continues to be in the 1900's. A distinct difference can be noted regarding disclosure. In contemporary society the stigma of disclosure is less prominent than it was even twenty years ago. Contemporary diagnostic procedures have become technologically and scientifically advanced, as

have the hope and determination of patients, clients and researchers (APA 9). In Emily's day, secrecy was required.

Cultural, religious and ethic communities have long had their own definitions of what is normal vs. abnormal. Historically, women were given a broader range of psychological manifestations as well as more sympathy than their male counterparts (APA 11). Contemporary psychology has turned away from the use of the words "normal" vs. "abnormal." Rather than use these conventional terms, the terms "acceptable" vs. "unacceptable" are now widely used and received. (Laing 63) According to the mental-health caste system operative in the 1800's, troubled people who were socio-economically disadvantaged found themselves isolated from their communities and ostracized, but troubled people who were economically and socially prominent found protection and comfort. Depression was a frequent diagnosis for significant behavioral problems. Most often women were diagnosed with depressive illness, or as being hysterical females (APA 17).

During the period between 1800-1900 in the United States mental illness was interpreted by a list of symptoms that may or may not have been indicative of a particular illness (APA 2).

What mental health professionals know today becomes essential information for one attempting to analyze Emily Dickinson's actions are exhibited through her creativity and her lifestyle. It is hard to determine what Emily's

particular illness may have been, but I have formed the following determination based on research which supports my belief that Emily was not only chronically depressed but also suffered from obsessive/compulsive disorder (neurosis) as well as extreme personality disorders (Non-psychotic) which ultimately led to psychotic episodes. Briefly stated, chronic depression is a debilitating illness. Depression may result from a biological predisposition as well as from situational factors. A key symptom of depression, especially in Emily's case, is a gross preoccupation with death (APA 28). Recurrent thoughts of death or suicide, in fact any suicidal thoughts, including thoughts of wishing to be dead, are equally problematic for a depressed person (Greist 8).

John Cody suggests that Emily had a spiritual separation and was disappointed with faith; and that this condition, along with situational desperation, can lead one to a desperate condition. While trying to understand what may have been Emily's thought on her own condition, and realizing her disenchantment with religion, I have found it interesting to define the status of depression as a condition from religious/biblical examples.

Among traditional Christians, the Corinthians spoke of frailty, vulnerability and sadness. "Martin Luther wrote a great deal about depression and had a constant battle with low self-esteem and depression" (Seamands 215). The biographies of the Saints also dealt with melancholia. Perhaps one of the

most interesting perspectives on depression and Christianity was offered in Healing for Damaged Emotion by David A. Seamands: "Depression is not necessarily a sign of spiritual failure. In the Scripture stories, some of the greatest depressions came as emotional let-downs following the greatest spiritual successes. This was true in the life of Elijah" (Seamands 189). Emily may have been able to find comfort in religion, but she consciously chose not to believe in the traditional values that appealed to her father.

Upon examination of Emily's poems, the poem quoted below stands out from the others with regard to her desperate, depressed condition. Writer Theodora Ward points out that this poem "shows that [Emily's] last bit of reality had given away" (Ward 54).

I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,
And Mourners to and fro
Kept treading--treading--till it seemed
that sense was breaking through--

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

And then I heard them lift a Box
And creak across my soul
with those same Books of Lead, again,
Then Space--began to toll,

As all the Heavens were a Bell,
And Being, but an Ear,
And I, and Silence, some strange Race
Wrecked, solitary, here--

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

(280 Johnson)

This piece of work explores Emily's terror and fright at her own condition. There is great emphasis on "What if?" Here she plays with fantasy; she considers "What if I were gone?"

Depression can cause one to feel disembodied (Laing 71). Laing offers a definition of a person suffering from a condition that he refers to as "The unembodied self":

In this position the individual experiences his self as being more or less divorced or detached from his body. The body is felt more as one object among other objects in the world than as the core of the individual being. Instead of being the core of his true self, which a detached, disembodied, inner, true self looks on at with tenderness, amusement or hatred as the case may be. Such a divorce of self from the body deprives the unembodied self from direct participation in any aspect of the life of the world, which is indicated exclusively through the body's perceptions, feelings, and movements (expressions, gestures, words, actions, etc.). The embodied self, as on-looker at all the body does, engages in observation, control, and criticism vis-a-vis what the body is experiencing and doing, and those operations which are usually spoken of as purely mental. The unembodied self becomes hyper-conscious. It attempts to posit its own imago. It develops a relationship

with itself and with the body which can become very complex (Laing 71).

Emily's depressed status must not be trivialized. Her message is clear in the first line of poem 280: "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain." The words cry out, in a sense, that she has cognitively, spiritually and emotionally declared herself "DOA." The "Mourners" look on, at her, through her. The word "Silence" is synonymous with her affect and how it is that she chose to communicate as a silent partner.

Obsessive/compulsive disorder may stem from depression, though many people suffer from obsessive/compulsive disorders independent of depressive disorders. Often it is difficult to determine whether a disorder is a primary or secondary illness (Hartcollis 424). One may wonder whether it was the depression that led Emily to have developmental/behavioral disharmony or whether an obsessive/compulsive condition depressed her.

The obsessive/compulsive disorder is complex whether or not it is the primary illness or secondary illness. Obsessive/compulsive disorder is best defined for the layperson by the American Psychiatric Association (APA): "This disorder is characterized by the persistent intrusion of unwanted thoughts, urges, or actions that the patient is unable to stop. The thoughts may consist of single words or ideas, ruminations, or trains of thoughts often perceived by the patient as nonsensical. The actions may vary from simple

movements to complex rituals such as repeated hand washing. Anxiety and distress are often present either if the patient is prevented from completing his compulsive ritual or if he is concerned about being unable to control it himself" (APA 40).

Clearly Emily exhibited several obvious ritualistic acts, such as dressing only in white, as well as choosing topics that repeatedly related to death. Emily was also fixated on repetition of specific words or profound phrases, and these appear on several occasions throughout her work.

Finally, the combination of chronic depression and obsessive/compulsive neurosis led Emily into psychotic episodes. Psychosis and psychotic behavior are often misunderstood. Few people suffer from on-going acute psychosis; rather, most people who are psychologically impaired from this condition simply suffer from episodic psychotic illness and exhibit symptoms that are periodically psychotic.

Again, the DSM II offers a complete definition of psychosis: "Patients are described as psychotic when their mental functioning is sufficiently impaired to interfere grossly with their capacity to meet the demands of life. The impairment may result from a serious distortion in their capacity to recognize reality.... Alterations of mood may be so profound that the patient's capacity to respond appropriately is grossly impaired" (APA 23).

Emily's social and emotional impairment is not only

recognized as a handicap but is her "trademark" as well. Perhaps if Emily were "normal" or "appropriate," her work would be quite different. Emily's mental illness was in a sense the center of her creativity. Emily Dickinson, poetess, has proven to the contemporary community that talent is not solely dependent on wellness. Author James G. Hollandsworth, Jr., has done much research on psychological disorders and how those disorders influence talent. In his book The Physiology of Psychological Disorders--Schizophrenia, Depression, Anxiety and Substance Abuse a definition of awareness and focus on talent is examined through a positive perspective: "Though a person may be challenged with identifiable disorders, their creativity and seriousness is important, to themselves and to others" (Hollandsworth 238).

Aside from Emily's chaotic and bizarre behavior, many contemporary writers and critics have mentioned her having Bright's disease. In a personal interview with John Morgan, M.D., the complete explanation, causation, and symptomatology of Bright's disease was revealed. Bright's disease is an autoimmune disease of the kidneys resulting from strep infection. The kidneys ultimately shut down and the afflicted person dies from fluid overload. Bright's disease is extremely dangerous, and in the process of kidney deterioration and failure certain symptoms are present. There is extreme systemic hypertension, excessive bloating and a severe decrease in energy. Dr. Morgan suggests that onset of

this disease could be substantially early when onset is compared to time of death. As Bright's disease progresses, there is marked decrease in mental activity. Thus, Emily conceivably could have suffered for a very long period of time with this illness.

I can only speculate how Emily may have contracted Streptococcal (strep). I have been able to uncover a particular instance where Emily was known to be ill for at least one year. During Emily's tenure at Mount Holyoke she reportedly became homesick; for health reasons she didn't want to continue attendance. Upon further examination of this period in her life, we may see that Emily became notably depressed at the death of a school friend and consequently missed two months of school (Cody 18). More importantly, John Cody reveals that she had a cough for about one year, and this was out of the ordinary, especially for a young person. A cough may result from infection (strep), and this may have led to the beginning of Emily's kidney deterioration. Perhaps equally intriguing was Emily's depressed condition (Cody 19). For most young people, by virtue of their youth, there is growth. In Emily's case her youth seems to have been no more than a prelude to her early emotional and physical death.

Emily's writing style differs from those of most classic and contemporary poets and writers. Several techniques are distinctly Dickinsonian. The use of dashes is a mystery, as is her abandonment of standard punctuation. The dashes appear

to be an obscure statement of power. Emily uses the non-traditional dash as a method of control. The dash is also unmistakably Dickinson, and becomes her trademark as well.

The use of symbols is another Dickinson hallmark. In the body of Emily's work the word "sun" occurs 170 times, the word "sea" occurs 122 times, and "noon" occurs 76 times. "These words are used frequently enough in a symbolic sense to gather around themselves a complex atmosphere of associated ideas and images" (Cody 7). Aside from Emily's repetitious use of such key words, a subliminal context is present in much of her work. The use of the subliminal occurs in Emily's poetry as often as her use of straightforward candor. In her poems two distinct forms of writing complement each other.

The most interesting style Emily uses in her poetry is her self-awareness and identification. Emily assumes a position of ownership in her poetry, as seen in the poem "I reckon--when I count at all--". Emily communicates her feelings on poets in general as well as on herself as poet.

"I can Wade Grief--" is another personal poem that is spoken from Emily's soul regarding her feelings and emotional state.

The use of the "I" for Emily is exclamatory, as seen in the poem "I would not Paint a picture--" in which Emily states that poetry is the force, the dominion over other arts. The poem "Tell All the Truth but Tell it Slant" never uses the words "I" or "me" and yet Emily's voice continues to be

present and strong:

Tell all the Truth but tell it slant--
Success in Circuit lies
Too bright For our infirm Delight
The Truth's superb surprise
As Lightning to the Children eased
With explanation kind
The Truth must dazzle gradually
Or every man be blind--

(1129 Johnson)

The strength of this poem lies in Emily's conviction that truth is too powerful a force for humans to endure. Truth is also uncontrollable, as lightning is, and too hard all at once as lightning fires through the sky at nightfall. Emily sternly reminds us to be vague, not direct; her tone is cautious and firm.

Emily also gives us a glimmer of comedy. Her clear cut use of such opposing images as "despair/delicious," "Evokes so sweet a Torment" and "Through Villages of Ether--". The similarity in her use of various imagery is apparent in this selection:

I Would not paint--a picture--
I'd rather be the One
Its bright impossibility
To dwell--delicious--on--
And wonder how the fingers feel
Whose rare--celestial--stir
Evokes so sweet a Torment--
Such sumptuous--Despair--

I would not talk, like Comets--
I'd rather be the One
Raised rather be the One
Raised Softly to the Ceilings--
And out, and easy on--
Through Villages of Ether--
Myself endued Balloon
By but a lip of Metal--

The pier to my Pontoon--
Nor would I be a Poet--
It's finer--own the Ear--
Enamored--impotent--content--
The License to revere,
A privilege so awful
What would the Dower be,
Had I the Art to stun myself
With Bolts of Melody!

(505 Johnson)

At the end of this poem the use of the exclamation point solidifies Emily's powerful statement regarding her plight as woman poet.

With this discussion of the catharsis principle and its relevance to Emily Dickinson's life and writing, we are ready to grasp the principle underlying her poetry and to see the way it operates in four distinct areas. These form the center of the next section of this thesis.

III. Images of Catharsis: A Consideration of Selected Dickinson Poems

Throughout much of Emily Dickinson's poetry we hear the voice of a child who utters unresolved feelings of powerlessness. In her life, powerlessness had reduced Emily to feeling vulnerable and isolated. Her isolation hindered her from accepting womanhood, from engaging in mature relationships, and from moving onward as the years greeted her.

I believe Emily realized her immaturity, sexually as well as socially. The poems that explore her size suggest this, emotionally and physically identifying her frustration in adulthood.

The unresolved feelings remained unresolved, while the actual writing brought her consolation. The power in her pen, her control over words, and the ability to negotiate her inability to accept adulthood--these become her agenda.

Emily's catharsis was found in her poetic freedom. In the poem "I Never Hear the Word 'Escape'" Emily discusses her lack of power:

I never hear the word "escape"
Without a quicker blood,
A sudden expectation,
A flying attitude.

I never hear of prisons broad
By soldiers battered down,
But I tug childish at my bars--,
Only to fail again!

(77 Johnson)

An outstanding feature of this poem is the initial identification and exclamation "I never." The words are strong to begin with, but they become ever more powerful through the use of blatant exclamation, Emily's way of expressing her thoughts by making a grand entrance into the poem. The exclamation is similar to a child's screaming out and lashing at someone to evoke a response. The words "escape" and "prisons" suggest an intrusion of force that would solicit reactions of vulnerability and powerlessness. "Escape" is the forbidden and "prisons" are punitive. "I tug childish at my bars,--" reveals the pent up frustration and disappointments that suggest Emily's feelings for her father, a stifling social era, and her personal sexual/social frustrations. The last line, "Only to fail again!" states the child-like attitude "I can never win"

"I Cautious Scanned My Little Life" is another poem that explains Emily's unresolved powerlessness and her struggle to be a fully functioning adult. This poem is reflective yet very sad. Emily realizes that there is not much to look back on as an adult, and owns that her development never matured.

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

I put the latter in a Barn--
The former, blew away.
I went one winter morning
And lo--my priceless Hay

Was not upon the "Scaffold"--
Was not upon the "Beam"--

And from a thriving Farmer--
A Cynic, I became.

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

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

(178 Johnson)

What makes the poem as strong as it reads is Emily's deliberate choice of words that enhance the tone of the poem with vivid imagery. For instance, Emily incorporates nature as a metaphor when she uses the words "winter" and "Hay."

The word "Winter" is symbolic of her lost youth.

"Winter" also casts a dark and sullen tone. "Hay" represents Emily's perception of an emotional storehouse. The unconscious, subconscious and conscious is the haven where emotions and experience are warehoused. As in storing hay, the preliminary work is done, and, once stored, is available for use. Often, one may choose their stored experiences and impressions as a conscious reference point for the present.

Emily uses the example of a thriving farmer as her cause to become cynical. Thus, this poem has several unique qualities that stand out: Emily's use of objects and nature as metaphor is indicative of her style. The vivid description of seeking an answer, described as examining the inside of a barn.

The use of the word "Thief" clarifies the main theme,

powerlessness and the lack of control. The "Thief," powerful and fleeting, is similar to the "wind."

The word "ransack!" maybe interpreted as desperation. After careful examination of this poem, we have an example of Emily's frantic poetic style. Desperation, vulnerability due to feelings of powerlessness is evident in this work. An excellent example of Emily's images of catharsis is portrayed in her poem "Superiority to Fate." Though this poem is much shorter than many of Emily's other action-packed entries, "Superiority to Fate" is able to address themes that are negotiated through cathartic crisis and cathartic resolution.

Superiority to Fate
Is difficult to gain
'Tis not conferred of Any
But possible to earn

A pittance at a time
Until to her surprise
The Soul with strict economy
Subsist till Paradise.

(1081 Johnson)

"Superiority to Fate" addresses several issues for Emily as Woman Poet. Though the poem is written by an adult woman, it possesses concerns that resemble a naive and immature presentation. Emily compares superiority over fate. The notion of superiority, and of being superior, seems foreign to her. In order for someone to be superior there must be a point of reference: Someone else must be inferior.

Emily knew inferiority. She lived and behaved and

existed as a child. Within her Father's domain, Emily found her father to be superior and his approval of her unattainable. Emily states that superiority is ultimately a desirable position. A person's fate is completely out of their control, what happens to someone may be interpreted as God's will, or nature's way. Emily knew that a far more superior being, perhaps God, would decide her fate as well as everyone else's.

Emily believed that superiority was for everyone else. The word "Pittance" symbolizes small increments, perhaps small increments that a superior person may give to an inferior person.

Emily asks what is "Paradise"? A Child would have this naivete, an optimistic view that there is something beyond reality that is immune to superiority, inferiority, powerlessness, and vulnerability.

Why would Emily be so consumed with the notion of paradise? One possibility is that her reality was too difficult to conceive. Perhaps the only hope she had was to place false hope in something or someplace. Power appears to be blatantly addressed in one other poem. This poem advises that power is so close to all, but so very distant from their grasp:

Power is a familiar growth--
Not Foreign--not to be--
Beside us like a bland Abyss
In every company--
Escape it--there is but a chance--
When consciousness and clay

Lean Forward for a final glance--
Disprove that and you may--

(1238 Johnson)

"Power is a familiar growth" conveys the idea that to seek power is universal. Whether it is having power over someone or someone having power over others, power is desirable.

The "Abyss" typifies the endless pursuit of power that "every company" struggles with.

In this poem Emily shows how it is that there is equality in struggle. It is not often that Emily suggests equity in her poetry. Perhaps this perception of equity is cathartic for Emily because, for once, she does not feel isolated. In "I Took My Power in My Hand" Emily identifies and questions "Or only I too small?" This poem reflects the same vulnerability that her other poems do, yet offers a well defined metaphorical theme with her choice of the word "pebble." This poem also demonstrates a rare feeling of courage, which vis-a-vis poetry:

I took my Power in my Hand
And went against the World,
'Twas not so much as David--had--
But I was twice as bold--

I aimed my Pebble--but Myself
Was all the one that fell--
Was it Goliath--was too large--
Or was Myself--too small?

(540 Johnson)

In this poem Emily achieves an awareness and catharsis through several realizations: The first realization, one that is most important, is Emily's willingness to be positive about

herself, rather than blaming herself. This conclusion can be found in these lines: "Was it Goliath--was too large--Or was myself--too small?"

The second realization that took place for Emily was her ability to recognize that she must do things for herself, succeed for and by herself. This strong statement can be seen in these lines: "I aimed my Pebble--but myself Was all the one that fell". "I took my Power in my Hand" clearly proves to be an extremely cathartic work and at the same time one that displays self-awareness.

These next selections depict Emily's emotional and cognitive starvation. Deprivation of happiness and of woman's companionship are evident as well. Carefully woven throughout many of the poems is a marked sense of loss and emptiness. The catharsis becomes apparent in her ability to experience self-awareness and ownership of her feelings of deprivation. Emily explores her needs and desires, and she confides these in her poetry, which is the source of her greatest strength and her support system.

The first poem that I will discuss fully addresses Emily's feelings of emptiness. "I Had Been Hungry All the Years" vividly describes her isolated status:

I had been hungry all the Years--
My Noon had Come--to dine--
I trembling drew the Table near--
And touched the Curious Wine-

'Twas this on Tables I had seen--
When turning, hungry, Home
I looked in Windows, for the Wealth

I could not hope--for Mine-

I did not know the ample Bread--
'Twas so unlike the Crumb
The Birds and I had often shared
In Nature's Dining--Room--

The plenty hurt me--'twas so new--
Myself felt ill--and odd--
As Berry - of a Mountain Bush--
Transplanted - to the Road-

Nor was I hungry--so I found
That Hunger - was a way
Of Persons outside Windows--
The Entering--takes away--

(579 Johnson)

In the first line Emily comments that she had been "hungry." The word "hungry" expresses a lack of nourishment and also serves to describe a passionate yearning and readiness to accept nourishment. In this case, nourishment is equivalent to food for the soul. When she refers to "all the Years--" there is a suggestion that this feeling is not temporary or fleeting, but rather nagging and on-going.

"My Noon had Come--to dine--" is another magnificent display of metaphor. I believe that "noon" represents mid-life, and at that milestone in age Emily was eager to make significant changes. Emily describes that she was ready in this poem by touching "the Curious Wine." Emily must have been curious by mid-life and must have had periods of feeling inadequate. By the time she reached an appropriate age for courtship and marriage, she chose not to partake in the

socialization process embraced by most of her peers.

Emily may have felt, as described in the first section of this poem, that she knew that she was longing for other delights, but that she was not emotionally ready to partake of them. When a person exists in a particular way for so many years, she may become set in her ways. The longer that it takes for a person to choose change, the more difficult it becomes to live with change.

In the latter parts of this poem, Emily uses vivid metaphors, which seem to dull her pain. Humor and metaphor appear to have properties that help to decrease the amount of discomfort that Emily may have felt. Emily observes " 'Twas this on Tables I had seen," an important observation for her. Emily admits, through poetry, that she is aware and that she knows her status. Emily's status is obvious; she is alone, and very much an outsider looking in. In the lines "When turning, hungry, Home /I looked in Windows, for the wealth/ I could not hope for Mine," it is here Emily recognizes differences. The "wealth" means several profound things such as knowledge, confidence, happiness and joy. The "Windows" serve as a metaphor for other people, those who possess while she does not.

The theme of Emily as beggar is clearly found in "I looked in Windows, for the Wealth." The theme of deprivation continues. "I did not know the ample Bread/ 'Twas so unlike the Crumb" portrays specific deprivation and destitution. She

compares her share of happiness to a crumb, while the "others" are engaged in sumptuous delight. For the others, there is quantity, while for Emily there is but a morsel.

Interestingly, she relates to "Birds" as contemporaries. Her birds are small creatures that take what is left for them, they are only allowed what nature allows them to take as food.

Emily writes "The Birds and I, had often shared/ In Nature's--Dining--Room--", which describes Emily's conscious feelings of being small and insignificant. There is also a bit of self-pity in this section, in which she expresses "I did not know the ample Bread/ 'Twas so unlike the Crumb."

The final sections of this poem are equally climactic. Through self-awareness and honesty, she comes to the realization that she is uncomfortable when she is full, and that "As Berry of a Mountain Bush / Transplanted--to the Road--" she is as a fish is out of water.

Emily concludes, that she is inclined to stay outside of the window, that perhaps she wasn't as hungry as she had thought she was. This poem espouses Emily's complacency and lack of will for actual change. I feel a direct link between Emily's depressed condition and the ambivalence that is woven throughout this poem. The catharsis that takes place is evident in Emily's proven ability to see both sides of a journey and the difference between the beggar and the victor.

"I Prayed, at First, a Little Girl--" is another poem in which Emily suggests that she feels desperate deprivation.

Emily as the beggar again figures prominently in this poem, and she uses the words "little," and "Childish" as indicators that she strongly identifies herself as minute. Her questions and her wishes are insignificant:

I prayed, at first, a little Girl--
Because they told me to--
But stopped, when qualified to guess
How prayer would feel--to me

If I believed God looked around,
Each time my Childish eye
Fixed full and steady, on his own
In Childish honesty--

And told him what I'd like, today,
And parts of his far plan
That baffled me--
The mingled side Of his Divinity--

And often since, in Danger,
I count the force 'twould be
To have a God so strong as that,
To hold my life for me

Till I could take the Balance
That lips so easily frequent, now,
It takes me all the while to poise--
And then--it doesn't stay--

(576 Johnson)

In the second line, Emily defends herself by writing "Because they told me to--." This sentence is offered not only in defense, but also to give Emily's perspective and awareness of her positions vs. other people's position. The use of the word "they" may appear to be insignificant, but is actually extremely significant. The importance of "they" is its ambiguity. One wonders who are "they"? In her life, everyone seems to have been her superior. The word "they" divides Emily from others, as if the two were distinctly

separate entities. There is no bond, but rather a division, the same as seen in other poems where she sets the tone of division by using descriptive phrases that suggest that she is an outsider looking in.

Emily's catharsis is evident as well in the first section of this poem: "But stopped, when qualified to guess How prayer would Feel--to me--". She is aware and conscious of her feelings, and appears to be motivated in this poem. Her motivation lies beneath an agenda; her agenda is for her to experience, through poetry, the importance of her feelings.

In the second stanza of this poem Emily identifies her feelings, and that those feelings are important to her. Emily uses the word "Childish" twice in the second section, less in the literal sense than as a metaphor. The word "Childish" suggests her feelings of innocence and powerlessness. The suggestion of her innocence can be appreciated in these words:

"If I believed God looked around,
Each time my Childish eye
fixed full, and steady, on his own
In Childish honesty--

The phrase "Childish eye" captures Emily's naive perception, that, I believe, stemmed from her feelings of inadequacy in attaining maturation.

The poetry was Emily's way of reaching out to a select group of people. For Emily, recognition of her work appeared to be positive, yet she was careful and selective in choosing an audience. Both The "Childish eye" and "Childish honesty" are phrases that are similar to powerlessness; but within the

context of this poem, symbolize inquisitiveness. There is a struggle in these words for Emily; she holds "God" as the almighty of power, and positions herself as beggar for mercy and knowledge.

In stanza three Emily writes "And told him what I'd like, today." The childish tone suggests a child begging a significant adult for something. My observation of Emily as "beggar" is noticeable in the rest of section three:

And told him what I'd like, today,
And parts of his far plan
That baffled me--
The mingled side--of his Divinity--"

Clearly, Emily again appears to be at "his" mercy, is deprived of choice, control and knowledge. This power of "his" is divine. Emily as "beggar" is explored in this poem, for "his" divine will and chance that she can only beg for, as a child would beg for attention or gifts.

These feelings of deprivation could have also intensified Emily's depression. If she feared that she was not in control of her destiny, and was at the mercy of greater forces than herself, the feelings of inadequacy could have overwhelmed her. Overwhelming insecurity and feelings of helplessness can also lead a person into a depression. Usually, when one feels in control of one's life, there is emotional security. For Emily, the lack of control brought the degradation of surrendering her emotional life to greater forces.

In the poem "Some--Work for Immortality--" Emily explores

her desperation in attempting to achieve control over her future and her life:

Some--Work for Immortality--
The Chief part, for Time--
He--Compensates--immediately--
The former--Checks--on Fame--

Slow Gold--But Everlasting--
The Bullion of Today--
Contrasted with the Currency
Of Immortality--

A Beggar--Here and There--
Is gifted to Discern
Beyond the Broker's insight--
One's-- Money--One's--The Mine--

(406 Johnson)

In this poem, As in so many of Dickinson's works, the subject matter is not easily recognized, and may be interpreted in many different lights. My interest in "Some - Work for Immortality" is found in Emily's words that recommend the importance of staying in today. In this poem Emily identifies two distinct areas of awareness: qualitative and quantitative. "The Bullion of Today--" is a perfect description of the time that all of us have, and how every day is priceless.

Along with the recognition of today, Emily pursues the notion that "A Beggar" is in constant struggle with immortality (qualitative), while the beggar's counterparts, the takers, assume their wealth in what they can measure at that moment (quantitative).

What was it that Emily wanted time for? What dimensions, as beggar, could Emily have aspired to? I believe that when

Emily died, she had hoped that she would have another chance. That chance she hoped to find in paradise; and in her mind her poetry would be a document that proved that indeed she really did exist.

Emily wanted to attain awareness and resolve. By nature of their properties, neither of these qualities could be measured by "the Broker's insight--." By definition of these, awareness, catharsis, and resolution are not tangible goods. For Emily, the aspiration of attainment would be her greatest wealth, yet she was at the mercy of societal norms that didn't value recognition of self and awareness of self.

With the struggle ever present in Emily's life, she was always deprived of notoriety and of belonging, but was viewed instead as either ornery or maladjusted. Perhaps she was dramatically insecure and awkward. For Emily, the self-degradation of her emotional status and awareness became her nemesis. Emily knew she was different, but she kept herself well hidden, and used poetry as her private world to explore, exclaim and explode. This is why Emily needed time to investigate all of these dimensions. Emily may not have known that she achieved what she wanted; her poetry is immortal and timeless.

The "Explosive Poems" present us with a vivid idea of Emily's anger. There is no mistaking the anger that she felt, the anger that caused her periodically to break from reality.

From examination of previous poems in this thesis, we see that Emily's feelings of size, power, and depravation were the cause and root of many of her social, religious and sexual handicaps. This section will attempt to explore her profound feelings of anger. It is important to realize one important factor: Emily's anger was real, and yet it was episodic. Emily's anger caused her to seek catharsis by writing explicit poems. One might conclude that her choice of catharsis was weak. This stems from the fact that in contemporary society we are encouraged to disclose our feelings, and feelings of anger from women are quite acceptable. In the Victorian era, however, anger appeared to be a masculine trait. Today, admitting and feeling anger is "unisex."

For Emily, poetry served as an opportunity to vent her anger, in a safe place. The act of writing became her way of purging hostile feelings. Aside from having the forum to vent, Emily would be able to read her work, if she chose to, and continue to become aware of her true feelings.

There are two categories of explosive poems that must be addressed. The first group of poems come from an angry place within Emily. In the poem "Witchcraft was Hung, in History," Emily points her finger at a society that has compelled her to be angry towards society:

Witchcraft was hung, in History,
But History and I
Find all the Witchcraft that we need
Around us, every Day--

(1583 Johnson)

In this poem, Emily relates to the trials of history. By choosing the subject of Witchcraft, she suggests that the accusations and finger pointing of that time have endured. Though Emily was not there, she can relate to the pain of cruelty from one human being to another. The word "Witchcraft" has several implications; it can mean communication through evil or that is evil. When people, especially women, were perceived as being witches, there were punitive results. In essence, this poem examines the power behind the practice of communication. Emily relates as victim, and appears to be angry as well at a society that has not sought social change.

"I Shall Know Why--When Time is Over--" is a poem that explores Emily's anguish and concern. In this poem she exclaims that anguish is emotionally painful. Here Emily admits that she is seeking for answers; that Christ will answer, that "Peter" will be equitable and that it is in "Paradise", a familiar theme of Emily's, that she hopes to abolish her anger:

I shall know why--when Time is over--
And I have ceased to wonder why--
Christ will explain each separate anguish
In the fair schoolroom of the sky--

He will tell me what "Peter" promised--
And I--for wonder at his woe--

I shall forget the drop of Anguish
That scalds me now--that scalds me now!

(193 Johnson)

In the body of this poem, Emily incorporates familiar subjects. Size and power are addressed, by her use of "Christ" and "Peter." The notion of "Paradise" is examined through her use of the phrase "when Time is over--."

A unique quality in this poem regards the life--after death. Emily believes that when life is over, she will "have ceased to wonder why--." This sentiment does not appear to make much sense literally. But symbolically, I believe, these words mean that when she is dead, the hurt and pain behind the questions and feelings won't be as emotionally and cognitively destructive.

In the lines "Christ will explain each separate anguish/
In the fair schoolroom of the sky--," Emily hopes that there is equity in the eternal. Christ holds all resolution and maintains fairness. Through Emily's anger comes a glimmer of optimism.

In the second stanza of this poem, Emily begins to discount her anger by making imaginary deals with Christ. Christ tells her 'what "Peter" promised--'. If it is what she wants to hear, Emily will forget her anger.

The last sentence is an affirmation of the pain caused by her anger: "That scalds me now--that scalds me now!" For Emily, the anger that she experienced "now" clouded both her perception of reality and any feelings of Joy she may have had. Another dimension of Emily's "Explosive Poems" are those verses that blatantly use words which are violent, enraged and

graphic. In the following selections Emily uses the words volcano, lava, earthquake and smoldering to vividly describe her anger. These poems not only arise from the tone of anger, but strongly suggest violent and hostile images.

I believe that Emily was not angry all the time, but that her anger was periodic. When Emily did become angry, she seemed to be distanced from reality. This separation caused her to think irrationally, to write graphic, explosive poems, and then to withdraw. It was in this state, I believe, that she suffered her episodic psychoses. The poetry is an outlet; in writing these feelings out, her catharsis was achieved. An analogy may be a whistling teakettle. As the water boils, the steam begins to seep out, and a faint whistle can be heard. More heat and more steam produces a louder, more insistent whistle.

"I Have Never Seen "Volcanoes--" is a magnificent poem, one in which Emily utilizes careful detail. Her use of metaphor and symbolism is carefully woven into a story-like verse. This poem has a definite beginning, middle and end, as if it were a fable:

I have never seen "Volcanoes"--
But, when Travelers tell
How those old--phlegmatic mountains
Usually so still--

Bear within--appalling Ordnance,
Fire, and smoke, and gun,
Taking Villages for breakfast,
And appalling Men--

If the stillness is Volcanic
In the human face

When upon a pain Titanic
Features keep their place--

If at length the smoldering anguish
Will not overcome--
And the palpitating Vineyard
In the dust, be thrown?

If some loving Antiquary,
On Resumption Morn,
Will not cry with joy "Pompeii!"
To the Hills return!

(175 Johnson)

Emily compares the human temperament to volcanic activity. The volcano--powerful, hot, and quick--produces great fear and permanent damage.

In the first stanza Emily chooses the word "phlegmatic," a word that describes one of the four humours. The phlegmatic person could be described as one who has a slow temperament. I interpret the "phlegmatic mountains" to be people, or perhaps her father, who appeared strong, unemotional and cold. "Mountains" are generally out of reach, difficult to climb and impossible to embrace.

The second stanza describes the tools necessary to causing harm. It is here that Emily refers to "appalling ordnance," which suggests an orderly inventory and collection of munitions. A person who is volcanic and explosive could have a storehouse of behaviors that manipulate, trap and abuse others around them.

"Taking Villages for breakfast" painfully describes how a person may be like a village, full and prosperous. Another person can assert their force and in one moment minimize their

victim's efforts by devouring and consuming, as one would at a meal, until nothing is left.

"Stillness" is dangerous; it is volcanic; when a person shows no emotion, but rather a blank affect, there is the capability of becoming dangerously flammable. The very calmness causes others to feel unsettled. The most powerful statement relating to this can be found in the middle of the poem. "When upon a pain Titanic- / Features keep their place--" describes the deceit of an unmoved, emotionless face. The face, eyes, lips are part of the "features" that are demonstrative reactions from emotions; I am reminded of the saying that "the eyes are the mirror of the soul."

When the features are as still a mask, a person is at risk. If there aren't words, tones, responses or facial affirmations, a person could feel powerless and frightened. Therefore, the power is at the helm of the phlegmatic personality; as compared to the "Titanic," they are powerful and forceful personalities.

Emily describes the phlegmatic personality as possessing a "smoldering anguish." "Smoldering" is low, constant, and capable of bursting into violent flames. "Smoldering" personalities may appear to be stoic, but are actually quite threatening.

The last stanza says that people would prefer not to be buried alive as in "'Pompeii--!'" Emily suggests that people who wish to maintain their emotional lives will run as far as

possible from the volcano (phlegmatic personalities).

"Volcanoes Be in Sicily" shares the same theme as "I Have Never Seen 'Volcanoes'--" The difference between these two poems is Emily's marked reference to "Home":

Volcanoes be in Sicily
And South America
I judge from Geography--
Volcanos nearer here
A Lava step at any time
Am I inclined to climb--
A Crater I may contemplate
Vesuvius at Home.

(1705 Johnson)

In "Volcanoes Be in Sicily" Emily contrasts the differences in danger of a physical volcano vs. an emotional volcano. Her comparison of these two forces begins with her observation that "Volcanoes" occur somewhere else. Emily has done what many people do; they attempt to deny chaos that is close to home. Some will say "That doesn't happen here." For Emily, the realization that "Volcanos [are] nearer here" was a painful reminder that she was trapped in the life she knew in Amherst. Again, I see her feeling trapped and angry as a result of her futile dealings with her father. Edward Dickinson was most definitely a phlegmatic personality, outwardly calm, but capable of exploding. Emily may often have felt as though she was his scapegoat, and approached him as though he were "A Lava Step at any time."

Emily writes "Am I inclined to climb--a crater I may contemplate," which is a sincere consideration. She would like to approach the "Volcano," but she realizes that there

may be a point where she must reconsider her approach.

At the close of this poem, which is similar to a brief commentary, Emily concludes that "Vesuvius [can exist] at Home." "Vesuvius" is a politically correct way of communicating various descriptions of the phlegmatic personality's behavior. Emily purposely chose the word "Vesuvius," familiar as a reference in geography. For her purpose, "Vesuvius" was an attempt at describing behavior that she was cautious of. I assert that Edward Dickinson was a roundabout "Vesuvian" and thus that Emily had to be cautious in choosing a form of communication through which to explore her fear, anger, and frustration in dealing with such a flammable personality.

"A Still--Volcano--Life-" explores Emily's feelings on mortality:

A still--Volcano--Life-
That flickered in the night--
When it was dark enough to do
Without erasing sight--

A quiet--Earthquake Style--
Too subtle to suspect
By nature's this side Naples--
The North cannot detect

The Solemn--Torrid--Symbol-
The lips that never lie--
Whose hissing Corals part--and shut--
And Cities--ooze away--

(601 Johnson)

The volcano is quick, and sudden. The destruction is damaging in a instant, without much notice. Life is much like this. "A quiet--Earthquake Style--" expresses well the

emotional rumblings underneath, out of sight, rumblings that break through to surface and level all to nothing. Emily's vision of the end as "The Solemn--Torrid--Symbol--," with its quietness, its intense heat and its destruction of life is unmistakable.

My final selection for discussion is Emily's sad and rebellious poem "The Reticent Volcano Keeps." In this poem Emily observes that there isn't any thought or word that can be held in confidence. In the first sentence there is contradiction. "Reticent" would be covert, the "Volcano" is always overt. There is anger and fury in silence, covertly. Overtly, there is calmness.

The reticent Volcano keeps
His never slumbering plan--
Confided are his projects pink
To no precarious man.

If nature will not tell the tale
Jehovah told to her
Can human nature not survive
Without a listener?

Admonished by her buckled lips
Let every babbler be
The only secret people keep
is Immortality.

(1748 Johnson)

Emily suggests that silence is too difficult to bear, she firmly implies this in the lines: "Can human nature not survive / Without a listener?" Emily knew what it felt like to survive and exist in silence. Emily's poetry was her "listener."

The "Explosive Poems" are remarkable works, ones that

came from a place within Emily that would become emotionally engulfed. Perhaps one could assert that these poems were reactive, or rebellious. Whether or not this is the case, Emily's "Explosive Poems" are born out of her world, where there was much superficial consistency, and also much depression, neurosis and anger.

Emily may have been reactive to circumstances that she could not disclose verbally. When in extreme stress, she may have attempted to silently "voice" her feelings, in explosive verses whose chief and unmistakable symbol was the volcano.

The most startling poetry written by Emily occurs in her "Death Poems". The theme is peculiar, is obsessive/compulsive, and reveals Emily's depressed and suicidal condition. The poetry is also serious and extremely disturbing. Like many contemporary students, I stand in awe of Emily's interest in death and dying. It is unusual for a person, man or woman, especially one so young, to be so consumed by expiration of life.

Emily's poetry addresses all components of death and dying, ultimately covering every conceivable circumstance with regard to death: the escape from death, dying, choosing a type of death, being saved from death, postponing death, how a child views death, and numerous other related topics (Johnson 768). No single theme is more prominent in Emily's work.

The first area of the "Death Poems" I will focus on concerns Emily's interest in the self-termination of suicide:

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

What if I file this Mortal--off--
See where it hurt me--that's enough-
And wade in Liberty!

They cannot take me--any more!
Dungeons can call--and guns implore
Unmeaning--now--to me--

As laughter--was--an hour ago--
Or Laces--or a Traveling Show--
Or who died--yesterday!

(277 Johnson)

Sadly, Emily purports to believe that after committing suicide, there is "Liberty!" Obviously, in order to have this opinion, life must have seem a burden to her, one with all too many restrictions and unnecessary rules. Freedom would come by completely detaching oneself from life.

In this poem, Emily also views suicide as an escape. To escape, would be a significant flight from another place that is too unhealthy, frightening or torturous to be endured.

The third stanza of the poem is disturbing, because Emily seems in a fantasy state: "They cannot take me--anymore!/
Dungeons can call--and Guns implore/Unmeaning--now--to me--". To have spent so much of her time imagining "What if?" is unhealthy and unnatural.

At the close of the poem Emily sums up the non-existence of a life "As laughter--was--an hour ago--". Aside from its negativity, this thought devalues the formation of a person's life. Perhaps Emily felt that her life was as transitory as laughter, as spontaneous as laughter, and as quick to end in

laughter. Today, we refer to this summation as "taking a personal inventory."

"He Scanned It--Staggered" is another "Suicide" poem, one with distinct notes of the eerie.

He scanned it--staggered--
Dropped the Loop
To Past or Period--
Caught helpless at a sense as if
His Mind were going blind--

Groped up, to see if God was there--
Groped backward at Himself
Caressed a Trigger absently
And wandered out of Life.

(1062 Johnson)

I do hear Emily's voice coming from this poem, very distinctly. "He" is in an emotional crisis. "His Mind were going blind--" is a critical statement of desperation. This is delusion vs. reality. The poem reads as if the act of suicide was occurring in slow motion. The subject of this poem appears to be in a fugue state, as he "Caressed a Trigger absently/ And wandered out of Life."

The word "absently" is intriguing; as if "he" were having an outer-body experience. I see Emily's feelings in this poem, I see her depressed state coming through, clouding her perceptions. Her thoughts may have been staggered, with little or no connection from one to another.

Suicide is a powerful theme, but her obsession with the physical death, with psychological death, and with grieving appears in itself to be poetic for Emily.

Two poems address death as their theme, but the

types of death differ, from a psychological death (disassociation) to emotional death (lack of feeling).

Emily's poem "'Tis So Appalling--It Exhilarates" (Johnson 281) again speaks of death as liberty. In the fourth section of this poem, Emily clarifies an important feeling, which I believe demonstrates her inability to think clearly, while in her depressed state: "Looking at Death, is Dying--."

If Emily were to obsess and focus her attention on death, it is as though she vicariously resolved her own death wish.

"I Felt a Cleaving in My Mind--" generates a distinct feeling that Emily was losing her sense of reality, living in a dream--state, and emotionally dazed. This poem depicts a process in Emily that describes her "emotional death." Again, the feelings are not connected:

I felt a Clearing in my Mind--
As if my Brain had split--
I tried to match it--Seam by Seam-
But could not make them fit.

The thought behind, I strove to join
Unto the thought before--
But Sequence unravelled out of Sound
Like Balls--upon a Floor.

(937 Johnson)

The last line describes her feelings as her emotional control gives way to depression. The weight of "Balls--upon a Floor" is a visual, and auditory image. When hearing "Balls" to the "Floor" it is as though all foundation could give way, at a moment's notice.

Emily may have felt that she was suffering a slow death. Throughout the collection of her poems, she becomes aware of

her mortality, and is almost apologetic.

As seen in the poem "It Feels a Shame to be Alive--", Emily carefully measures the worth of one life, when compared to another:

It feels a shame to be Alive--
When Men so brave--are dead--
One envies the Distinguished Dust--
Permitted--such a Head-

The Stone--that tells defending Whom
This Spartan put away
What little of Him we--possessed
In Pawn for Liberty--

The price is great--Sublimely paid--
Do we deserve--a Thing--
That lives--like Dollars--must be piled
Before we may obtain?

Are we that wait--sufficient worth--
That such Enormous Pearl
As life--dissolved be--for Us--
In Battle's--horrid Bowl?

It may be--a Renown to live--
I think the Man who die--
Those unsustained--Saviors--
Present Divinity--

(444 Johnson)

There are many directions in this poem. Emily glorifies death, and, interestingly, she relates to soldiers, their braveness demonstrated through their defending others. She appears to revere those who defend liberty.

What I find to be problematic with Emily's distorted value system is her need to identify value in life, as if it were tangible. In essence, she compares her life to the lives sacrificed by soldiers. Emily concludes that she feels like a traitor, because she has life, and she has not earned it

nor fought for it. The value of her life, which was greatly distorted, is not worth the glory of living. It is as if she felt that she didn't deserve to live. Depression had consumed her, and robbed her as a thief would take a dearest possession; her sanity.

Emily's interest in death and her preoccupation with it was not only obsessive/compulsive, but also served as a source for her use of creative metaphor. As seen in the poem "Death is Like the Insect," Emily writes of one subject, death. Yet, Emily personifies "Death" as if it were as three-dimensional as an "insect" is:

Death is like the insect
Menacing the tree,
Competent to kill it,
But decoyed may be.

Bait it with the balsam,
Seek it with the saw,
Baffle, if it cost you
Everything you are.

Then, if it have burrowed
Out of reach of skill--
Wring the tree and leave it,
'Tis the vermin's will.

(1716 Johnson)

In this poem Emily asserts that "Death" is similar to a pesky insect. Even though an insect is small, its presence is obvious. For Emily, her imminent death was on her mind. Why was she so taken with the small cemetery outside her window? I wonder if she found any wisdom in death's silence.

Emily uses the word "Menacing" to describe the "insect" we could call "death" in front of us, but we know that the

potential is always there. I believe Emily was obsessed by the potential. Some people see life in nature, beauty in simplicity. Emily choose to see death in nature, and glory, and significance in death.

In the second stanza of this poem, Emily states that death will possess "Everything you are." There is a philosophical tone in these words. As she personified death, she assigned it power and control. Death is a final matter for most, and for Emily it was as though death was very much a part of her life, more so than merely an end of her life. This obsession of death was also part of her depression, which in turn was very much a part of her being.

In the final line of this poem Emily reclassifies death as "Vermin." "Vermin" is defined as "birds and mammals that prey on game" (Berg 1312). Death is a part of life, but for Emily, obsessing about death was a large part of her life. By consciously examining death, in all phases, Emily thought she had a focus.

"Death Leaves Us Homesick, Who Behind" is another death poem in which Emily suggests that death is menacing, like vermin:

Death leaves Us homesick, who behind
Except that it is gone
Are ignorant of its Concern
As if it were not born.

Through all their former Places, we
Like individuals go
Who something lost, the seeking for
Is all that's left them, now--

(935 Johnson)

Here Emily clearly protests the quality of death as a cruel thief. Emily appears to be confused in this poem. I believe that this poem is indicative of her depressed state, as well as of her vacillating between emotional conscious and her subconscious. It is the departure of loved ones that make us "homesick" for them. Throughout Emily's life experience, she suffered many losses. Perhaps she found comfort in going "Through all their former Places," and needed to recapture the feelings that she had experienced when there was life.

A striking problem for Emily concerns her inability to develop fully, to grow and to expand beyond her own self-imposed limitations. If she had not possessed proper grieving skills, she would have a hard time letting go. Part of growth depends on one's ability to let go, and move on.

Emily also suggests in this poem that actual death, the physical departure, takes all of the person. She seems to hold little regard for memories, or for actual time shared with other people when they were alive. I am convinced of this from reading the line, "As if it were not born," and from analyzing it within the context of the poem.

Considering how much glory, beauty and permanence Emily found in death, I am amazed at the ability she had in recognizing all of its various aspects. Again, there is confusion in her position on death itself; it appears that her feelings on this matter were dependent on particular variables.

I believe that when Emily was particularly close to someone who departed, she held on dearly to whatever remnants of that person she was able to maintain. This repeated refusal to let go and her conscious awareness of her loss are evident in her poem "Death Sets a Thing Significant":

Death sets a thing significant
The Eye had hurried by
Except a perished Creature
Entreat us tenderly

To ponder little Workmanships
In Crayon, or in Wool,
With "This was last Her fingers did"-
Industrious until--

The Thimble weighed too heavy--
The stitches stooped--themselves--
And then 'twas put among the Dust
Upon the Closet shelves--

A Book I have--a friend gave--
Whose Pencil--here and there--
Had notched the place that pleased Him--
At Rest--His fingers are--

Now--when I read--I read not--
For interrupting Tears--
Obliterate the Etchings
Too costly for Repairs.

(360 Johnson)

There is much pain in this poem. The pain stems directly from Emily's realization that death is significant, and that, in relation to other things, it establishes a stronger presence. Death dominates.

In the first stanza of this poem, Emily admits that it is death itself that causes us to reassess the value, importance, and significance of earthly achievements. "The Eye had hurried by" offers an explanation of what it is that people

take for granted. Later, events and conversations become cherished memories.

Emily refers to "little Workmanships" as the contributions that one has made. These contributions include impressions, opinions, encouragements and other forms of communication that form a lasting memory. She needed to have memorabilia. These serve as a kind of private headstone, before which she can ponder the dead person, and in essence, visit with that person. There is security in possession.

Emily's pain is evident in the middle of this poem. When memory becomes too overwhelming to bear, as the weight of a thimble might test the strength of the dying, Emily could reserve her "visit" for a later date. Carefully Emily sees the delicate markings in the book that her friend gave her. The content of the printed word has less importance as the markings that her friend has placed throughout the pages. These markings, his opinions, enchantment and delights, were what held importance for her, considerably more than the actual published content.

By preserving remnants of others, Emily was able to keep the dead close to her. It's difficult to say whether this is symptomatic of depression, or whether it merely represents obsessive/compulsive behavior. Perhaps it could be best defined as a delicate sensitivity concerning grief and loss.

Each of the poems I have examined offers a strikingly different dimension on death. Actually, Emily was rather

thorough and voluminous in this discourse. Death was familiar to her, and she clearly allowed herself to become obsessed with its actual significance and permanence.

Had Emily not suffered from depression, then she might have held an interest in death that would escape the overzealousness and the morbid focus that she placed on the matter. Death was not a natural occurrence for her, as it was for others; it was one of the chief monsters that consumed her thoughts.

Conclusion

Emily Dickinson wrote for many reasons. To leave a legacy behind her was not the least of these. But perhaps her most important reason for writing was its role as a form of self-imposed therapy. Through it she achieved catharsis as she attempted to restore bits and pieces of herself, her sanity.

Emily Dickinson has given an exceptional gift to contemporary readers. She has challenged all of us to rethink the role of poetry writing as a source of restoration. Emily has also contributed to the psychiatric community, and has given many of its clients a sense of hope and a liberating example of disclosure.

She has proven that catharsis is beneficial to self, and to others as well. In her work many can find a sense of belonging, can relate to her poetry as to their own words. To some, Emily has offered psychological and emotional freedom.

Other communities may benefit from Emily's poetry. Feminist writers may take the opportunity to analyze her frustrations, and seek to empower women by providing a comparison of female American writers. Emily's work is not exclusive to women, and offers both men and women a glimpse into the psyche of her soul. Emily's soul and substance, in some ways, is not that much different from anyone else's.

Aside from serving as an example of heroism (emotional,

cognitive and gender), Emily's poems constitute an act of raw courage.

The aesthetic value can be appreciated in her choice of metaphor and symbolism, but no other quality quite measures up to the beauty of her catharsis. The journey that Emily travels, and the issues that unravel before our eyes on the page, this is catharsis.

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