

Representations of the Male in the Female Imagination: The Brontës and Dickinson

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The very simple, perhaps obvious, thesis I wish to argue may be stated as follows: the process of writing and attempt at creation of written symbols is the man or woman poet's main and vital means of personal development, of making meaning from the chaos of existence. The setting in motion of this process involves both technical linguistic development and development of thought and feeling, and these two aspects are reciprocal to each other, where they are authentic. But in any case, it is this *process* wrought in language – and not the merely instrumental choice of theme, object or argument, such as the question of gender –¹ which is most vital to the poet. Essentially, every other relationship feeds from this process of growth of understanding – or its stasis – in relation to the world. The steps in the progress of a life, the naked difficulties, joys, despairs, mistakes, successes, hopes built and realised or relinquished, and the boundless infinity of complex abstract and sensuous relationships, may be seen demonstrated in the experiencing, control, and shaping wrought in words by the poet from the massive bombardment of chaotic material into his or her personal lifespan. It goes without saying that there are always questions left open at the end of the life of a poet of any worth.

I will refer particularly to Emily Brontë, Emily Dickinson and Charlotte Brontë. I will concur, on the one hand, that it is true that the social contexts of late Romantic/early Victorian England and mid-19th century New England were on the whole castrating for any woman² – except the poor – aspiring to an independent life outside the home. And this gave these women writers material for a significant area of their work to be shaped in terms of rebellion against male predominance, also in the public field of literature. But I will contest that it is also true that their idea of the male and the men in their lives were of vital importance to their creativity, and not just as hostile oppressive adversaries to be eliminated because they were feared or revered.³ Where this fact is not given

space either by the writer herself, or subsequently by critics, I maintain that the risk of damage to the writer's own creativity, or to our successive attempts at creative understanding of the linguistic symbol—the poem—is indeed great.

I will argue that both Emily Brontë and Emily Dickinson resolved their relationship to men “mentally”: they recognised, accepted and put to good use the androgynous quality of their mentality. They, overall, neither saw male sexuality as necessarily a form of invading violence and murderous domination, though they sometimes used such images to show the feelings of consuming passion or numbing impotence; nor did they always feel that an idea of “femininity” was necessarily a slight to their womanly identity or consider aggressiveness or other forms of investigative epistemological desire a uniquely masculine trait or prerogative. On the contrary, their poetic work took a leap forward, began to “breathe”,⁴ in connection with the maturing of a capacity for imaginative intimacy with the opposite sex. And in that they saw this intimacy, even where potentially overwhelming, as a reciprocal intertwining, a possibility for creative life—symbiotic. This can be seen in the development of linguistic forms and the growth of networks of symbols in imagery, as I have argued elsewhere in relation to Dickinson,⁵ and goes totally against the view that Dickinson's work, for one, had no early, middle or late phases to it.⁶ Furthermore, whether or not these two poets ever had lovers in fact is irrelevant to the argument,⁷ in the sense that what they *pass on* in their symbolic representations—not the biographical external facts of their lives (which are not so much secret as private) but the *articulation of a state of mind*, the reaching of a mental maturity or readiness which may then inform any factual experience with its significance—enable the so-called “facts” of a human life to become what they “are”. That is, it is eminently demonstrated to us that on the emotional plane they came well to face, understand and show the complicated, often uncomfortable and sometimes very frightening constellation of feelings involved in coming to intimate, passionate knowledge—what it was to know and love someone deeply and to become known and loved in return.

In an analogous way, I shall point out, they were “at home” with their poetic work: a powerful poem was almost literally an act of love—even the poems expressing despair and hatred—and neither of these poets had the same degree or quality of hostility and anxiety that Charlotte had, regarding the *truth* of their representations, nor consequently, I believe, the tearing hunger for worldly fame that consumed Charlotte. Overall, these two poets seem to have felt their creative impetus and work, even where painful or exhausting, as life-giving to themselves and to others. Their life authentically went into their art, their art foretold their lives. It was not a form of masking or embroidering. It was not “figurative” but “actual”, to use the significant distinction Heathcliff makes.⁸ It is interesting, in this connection, how elusive are the historical facts of the lives of these two poets, although it is true that much documentation has deliberately been destroyed in both cases. Even in the most recent, historically

and technically excellent biography of the Brontës, Juliet Barker frankly admits that she can only depict Emily in shadow fashion, while the picture of the other figures, including less central ones, is radically altered.⁹

By contrast, I will argue that Charlotte, who left behind so much more explanatory documentation, was much less convinced of the “truth” or “trustworthiness” of her art. For her, there seems always to have been an unbridgeable gap between poetically creative writing which, like the “sin of dancing”,¹⁰ was “exciting but bad”, and analytic, prescriptive or literally descriptive writing, which was “dull but good”. She shows this, for example, in her striking metaphor for Thackeray’s creative verbal impetus (“sheet-lightning ... with an electric death spark hid in its womb”) which, while applauding his social reform prescriptions (his “serious genius”), seems to associate his rhetoric only with death.¹¹ And she shows it in her much reiterated preoccupation with what she calls representing things “as they are”, making them “real” not “decorative”,¹² “plain”, which, one cannot help feeling, meant taking the vitality out of them.¹³ She was not at home with her poetic faculty. In fact, after the publication of the Brontë sisters’ 1846 volume on the impetus of the so-called discovery of Emily’s more vital poems,¹⁴ she never wrote any poetry.¹⁵ Furthermore, most of her contributions to that volume were revamped old work from the years of collaboration with her brother Branwell.¹⁶ There is in Charlotte a significant change in tone and attitude after the deaths of Emily and Anne.¹⁷ But when she was not lost in a dream of being the self-elected slave to the most dazzling man around—one she could “die for”, “regard in the light of adoration”¹⁸—her repudiation and ridiculing of men, sharpened in her dexterity with analytic prose, was longstanding, skillful and bitter.¹⁹ To name but one debt to the man among the primary male figures in her life, she used without acknowledgement Branwell’s tale, “The Wool is Rising”, as part of her first offering to commercial publication, *The Professor*. The story of her final total repudiation of him became publicly visible through Mrs. Gaskell’s biography, but was mythologised as historically justifiable, and perpetrated misunderstanding as to how poisoning her attitude was, also for herself.

Charlotte seems to have fed the dishonest version of her brother’s life into Gaskell’s biography. The deliberate antedating of the nervous collapse that ensued after his disappointment in his affair with his employer’s wife, which served to cover up Charlotte’s analogous affair with Heger, has long been clarified. What is probably less known and has certainly been less documented until Juliet Barker’s recent biography,²⁰ is the long line of serious misconceptions regarding cardinal points in Branwell’s life, which constitute a misrepresentation little short of blatant lying, for which it is difficult to imagine excuses.²¹

Despite all of Charlotte’s humourless theorising about “Truth and Nature [being her] sole guides”²² in her art, her version of Branwell is evidently grievously distorted. Regarding Emily’s feelings about their brother, however, we probably get a good idea in the symbolic representation of them in *Wuthering Heights*, as I have described elsewhere.²³ This poetic novel seems to

understand and transform into something creative the drive towards early and tragic death that figures in some of Branwell's poems, letters and drawings,²⁴ in the beginning with a rather ironic and histrionic quality to it; but gradually in such a way that he only too well became the part, which one imagines must have had roots very early on in his childhood. And it is difficult not to recall, in this context, his haunting tribute, movingly pointed up by Barker,²⁵ to the much-maligned Aunt Branwell after watching her die, that "I have now lost the guide and director of all the happy days connected with my childhood".

It was Charlotte, of the three surviving sisters (and also differently from Dickinson) who engaged in a theoretical discussion about women's rights and needs in society. To this end she also gave a dour picture of the governess's lot in her novels, which Barker counters interestingly by documenting how inappropriately ungrateful and difficult Charlotte was in her actual governess posts.²⁶ After her failure to risk herself to her own apparently passionate, and reciprocated, feelings for her London publisher, George Smith,²⁷ she turned her gaze more to the public sphere of social causes and institutions. And probably, indeed, "if she had lived, her deep heart would sooner or later have spoken out on these things",²⁸ in line with the literary fashion of the day. It seems sad and ironical to me, that Charlotte, the deeply intimate female figure who apparently had the most crushing effect on her male counterpart in Branwell, the sister who in her lifetime did attain the fame she so longed for (though it did not make her happy) but whose literature is probably of less lasting significance to us than Emily's,²⁹ should have styled herself as a paradigm for women's revindication of "equality" with men.

Emily Brontë, not Charlotte, had a working affinity with Emily Dickinson, especially regarding the principle of creativity. In relation to this, I would like to look in particular at Brontë's poem "Julian M. and A.G. Rochelle" ("The Prisoner" for short³⁰), three poems of Dickinson's connected to this poem,³¹ and finally, two of her "Master" letters.³²

The story of "The Prisoner" is the Chillon-styled one of a young woman imprisoned in the dungeons of a rival family's "House". The up-and-coming heir of the family, Lord Julian, recounts how he had ventured down to wander "idly" about the dungeons of his family home and had found the golden-haired Rochelle, one of his former "playmates", now an ironical "guest darkly lodged" in his own home. As Julian tries to assimilate the impact of this meeting/discovery: "The dungeon seemed to swim in strange confusion round" (45), it is no longer clear whether the "confusion" is his or Rochelle's—nor *what* it is, though he asks automatically whether she is dying. Rochelle's subsequent description of what happens to her in the dungeon, which she characterises as a mode of overcoming her enemies' attempt to crush the life out of her, forms the core of the poem in the following powerful lines:

He comes with western winds, with evening's wandering airs,
With that clear dusk of heaven that brings the thickest stars;

Winds take a pensive tone, and stars a tender fire,
And visions rise and change which kill me with desire—

...

But first a hush of peace, a soundless calm descends;
The struggle of distress and fierce impatience ends;
Mute music soothes my breast— unuttered harmony
That I could never dream till earth was lost to me.

Then dawns he Invisible, the Unseen its truth reveals;
My outward sense is gone, my inward essence feels—
Its wings are almost free, its home, its harbour found;
Measuring the gulf it stoops and dares the final bound!

Oh dreadful is the check— intense the agony
When the ear begins to hear and the eye begins to see;
When the pulse begins to throb, and brain to think again,
The soul to feel the flesh and the flesh to feel the chain!

Yet I would lose no sting, would wish no torture less;
The more that anguish racks the earlier it will bless;
And robed in fires of Hell, or bright with heavenly shine,
If it but herald Death, the vision is divine. (ll. 69-72, 77-92)

The external-world story in the poem gives the context of strenuous binding *tension* between opposites—such as imprisonment/liberty, male/female—that is the generative precondition for what happens in these lines. And these seem to me a representation of the complex experience of creative inspiration strongly evoking the act of love, conception and child bearing. This tension between opposites is not a “division”, or “split” as, for example, Loeffelholz³³ designates concerning analogous phenomena in women’s writing, when she talks of “identity [being] this inward, [elusive] division”, or of “this split [being] female identity”. The he/she distinction is not shown by the poet as an expression of the alienation of the parties involved, but an indication of *relationship*, and refers to male and female figures fluidly and evasively, not in a fixed way. This “core” passage has much in common, I think, with the Miltonic description that runs through Keats in the evocation of the inspired poet’s feeling of up/down, blinding/blinded flight through the air³⁴ when the speaker, feeling the contours/movement of the object, attempts “inward sight”, to “look with the mind” as Meg Harris Williams has called it.³⁵ That is, the poet attempts to understand the object’s (i.e., male subject’s) shape/meaning as she simultaneously explores, comes to know, and even changes the inner contours of her own self, through this relationship or intertwining.

Here, in particular, inspiration is first termed “He”, rapidly becoming associated with the illumination and fluid ubiquity of “western winds ...

wandering airs” and “thickest stars”. This figure then, with anything but so-called “masculine” aggressiveness (“wandering ... pensive ... tender”), arouses the female observer’s receptivity to a pitch of decidedly non-passive/non-“feminine” expectation (“which kill me with desire”), whose sexual nuance hardly needs comment. A compressed holding pause of poised equilibrium is then evoked in the poem (“hush of peace ... soundless calm”), rather like the pregnant, unspoken gap between the VIth and VIIth stanzas of the “Ode to a Nightingale”.³⁶ In this pause, the fragmenting distraction of the meaningless sensual seeing of objects, the “distress and fierce impatience” (a “loaded Gun” or “pencil in a hand lightly created” in Dickinson’s terms³⁷) which is symptomatic of the lack of response to or containment of “killing desire”, becomes displaced by the *inception of meaning in sensual things* (“Mute music soothes my breast ...”). Order in the articulation of feeling of the poet’s experience of the world begins to evolve (“dawns the Invisible, the Unseen its truth reveals”). As the poet becomes more able to look with her mind (her “inward essence feel[ing]”), the image of the bird that comes alive (“almost free”) as it finds containment for its shape (“Harbour found”), and thus the skill, audacity and strength to “measure the gulf, stoop, and dare the final bound”, represents the releasing of the symbol, which is created through the process of exploratory involvement – disengaging of the mind from the object.

Emily Brontë’s terms of “earth [being] lost” and “outward sense [being] gone” do not represent “alienating the body and nature in the interests of consciousness” as Loeffelholz³⁸ would define what seems to her a typically Romantic problem. They are, rather, terms delineating areas of meaninglessness or non-meaning in sensual experience. To Emily Brontë, as to Dickinson, sensual experience needs to be imbued with meaningfulness by means of involvement with “inward essence”, else it is “void”,³⁹ non-existent. It is not a matter of social group “morality”, as it was for Charlotte; it is a question of being or not being, life or death. Inspired sensuousness partakes of the eternal. The creative search for and the making/discovery of such meaningful forms in the eternal flux and change of life, in which we are just transitory infinitesimal spots, “soundless dots on a Disc of Snow” as Dickinson put it,⁴⁰ was worth dedicating one’s life to, even at great risk.

This is the significance of “No Coward Soul Is Mine”, too. Like our core passage, this later poem is an invocation to the (male) Muse; in this case to the muse of the fleshing out of the agonistic testing of the lovers in *Wuthering Heights*. Contrary to what Gerin affirms,⁴¹ it is not a poem about personal certainty. Its negative linguistic structure grounds it in agonising doubt. It is in the face of this doubt, and not cushioned in the ease of self-assurance, that it enacts the poet’s *dedication* of herself to the search for a principle of life which she temporarily finds, consolidates in the making of the poem, and which will certainly outlast her personal existence. Furthermore, to criticise its terms on account of an implied lack of “democracy”, in the wonderfully sensuous and abstract invocation of “Life, that in me hast rest / As I Undying Life, have

power in Thee” (as Homans does when she complains that the image does not represent “an equal relation but a hierarchical devotion that operates only in one direction”⁴²) is to completely miss the implications of the poem, I believe. The image is one evoking creative inspiration, yet again in terms of the container and the contained, which are not *equal* but, in relationship, essential to each other’s vitality; it represents a principle not of stasis but of infinite departures as it is not concerned with the establishment of fixed hierarchies, but of movement, engagement, involvement. Roles change, intermix, the quality of each element shifts and reforms perpetually in tension to another, not in order to make one greater or lesser, but in the service of partaking in/creating “something else” (to use Dickinson’s term⁴³), which is experienced as part of “eternity”, the “boundless main” – a child, a poem, a symbol of some sort, meaning in the “void and formless infinite”.⁴⁴

Such failures in our capacity to hold and observe the global meaning of a poem, and the consequent overliteral extrapolation and relation of poetic figures to external fact in a distorting way, tend to derive from the imposition of preconceived reductive frameworks of theory on the poem, (so well described by Meg Harris Williams⁴⁵), with impairing consequences. Another such instance is Loeffelholz’s analysis of Dickinson’s poem (436), “The Wind – tapped like a tired Man – ”⁴⁶ which is somewhat analogous in theme and treatment to “The Prisoner”. The critic argues that like Brontë, Dickinson does image inspiration in the figure of a man, but that she does so in a way that is more emancipated from men and from the male-dominated literary tradition. How? By disembodiment of the male figure. Emily Dickinson realises what Helen Michie tells us is a “persistent dream of 20th century feminist discourse: a language in which the production of metaphor can take place without the phallus”; Loeffelholz concludes approvingly that “Dickinson’s caller is masculine but notably not phallic”. (It has yet to be explained, of course, how one can have the “masculine”, and later the “erotic”, without the “phallic”.) But still, Loeffelholz continues, in connection with this “improvement” of the embodiment of the male counterpart, the poem’s female “I” emerges stronger, less “collapsed” than the Brontë equivalent, when the male figure/inspiration departs. She considers “The Prisoner” (and Charlotte’s rigidly stereotyped bowdlerization of it, “The Visionary”) as analogous precisely in that, in both texts the inspirational male figure is “complicit with the powers of imprisonment”, which is not the case at all, in my view. What is more, she argues her Brontë-Dickinson comparison on the assumption that Dickinson did not have access to the much more complete 1846 version of “The Prisoner” which, unlike “The Visionary”, contains the important core passage.⁴⁷ The fact is that Dickinson did, as any superficial reading of the letters will testify.⁴⁸

“The Visionary”, Charlotte’s version of Emily’s “Julian M. and A.G. Rochelle”, was published in the 1850 volume edited by Charlotte containing, among other things, a second edition of *Wuthering Heights*, and “No Coward Soul Is Mine”. It consisted in lines 1-12 of the original MS, with alterations in

lines 4 and 12, ending with these 8 lines completely of Charlotte's making:

What I love shall come like visitant of air,
 Safe in secret power from lurking human snare;
 Who loves me, no word of mine shall e'er betray,
 Though for faith unstained my life must forfeit pay.

Burn, then, little lamp; glimmer straight and clear—
 Hush! a rustling wing stirs, methinks, the air:
 He for whom I wait, thus ever comes to me;
 Strange Power! I trust thy might; trust thou my constancy. (ll. 13-20)

I limit myself here to the following observations, especially regarding Loeffelholz's analysis. Neither in Emily's original poem nor in Charlotte's version is the apparently male inspirational figure "complicit with the powers of imprisonment" I think. In both poems, the male figure/visitor comes to the female/imprisoned figure as a liberator, and in some kind of antagonism with these powers, which are named as having both male and female components: "Frown, haughty sire; chide, my angry dame; / Set your slaves to spy, threaten me with shame"; these lines are spoken by Julian in Emily's version while by the female imprisoned figure in Charlotte's (ll. 9-10). In Emily's poem, the imprisoning powers evoked are identified with social and generational rank, if anything; in Charlotte's more idealised and limited version, they have more the feel of the adolescent's phantasy of parental hostility towards her nascent sexuality (as if she were about to be caught having her first affair in secret or having to elope in order to realise her sexual identity). A further distinction to be made regards the issue of the difference between the two versions. In "The Visionary" all trace of the consummated involvement between the imprisoned figure (presumed female) and the liberating figure (presumed male) is removed. "I trust thy might; trust thou my constancy" (l20) is about as consummated a love as Keats's miserable "forever wilt thou love and she be fair". No experience of interpenetration and re-birth is represented or, as it were, "disturbs" the poem. An almost depersonalised, abstracted-yet-overliteral vow of eternal fidelity is made (as by the dreaming adolescent), but these are mere "words". They do not have the feeling of the reality of the act, the "steps of the author", as she takes and is taken by the other, with something new being created, which is what one experiences in Emily Brontë's poem.

It is the 1846 "Prisoner" which is the real spiritual ancestor of Emily Dickinson's idea and overall imaging of creative inspiration, as I hope to show, after first considering the final two verses of the Brontë passage. The verse beginning "Oh dreadful is the check—intense the agony" is not a description of a "fall out of a realm of imagination" (meaning here, "deluded romantic day-dreaming") into hard reality, that "collapse"⁴⁹ which critics frequently misread into the tender and mutually beneficial farewell between Keats and the nightingale in the Ode's last stanza. The "check" and "agony" (evoking childbirth)

are different from the fragmented and fragmenting "struggle of distress and fierce impatience" of the Brontë poem. On the contrary, they represent the culmination of inward sight. The constellation of all the faculties in involvement with the object, the recoiling to leap up to it ("bound") and the taut sense of coming back down ("check"), or reluctant letting it go ("agony") is not in contrast to the experience of the sensual world, but intensifies such experience. It does not make the speaker less but more aware of and involved in reality. "Imagination" is not "departing sense".⁵⁰ These apparently "abstract" terms (as Charlotte so rightly described them⁵¹) imbue the poetry with sensuous power. We begin to have ears that hear, eyes that see, with echoes of Mark's Gospel, Coleridge and Shelley, which also recur in Dickinson's work in a similar context of investigation.⁵² The newly throbbing pulse evokes the newborn; the dulled brain begins to think again: "familiar objects" become "as if they were not familiar". They begin to attain that "inexhaustible" quality of the artistic symbol that Susanne Langer describes,⁵³ such that every time we experience it, it seems new: our inward sight is purged of "the film of familiarity which obscures from us the wonder of our being".⁵⁴ The soul recognises its intrinsic link to the flesh, and the flesh in turn realises its own existence as service, a link (the chain that checks, making itself felt) to the soul, not just to dissolution. One is reminded overall of Donald Meltzer's description of the "new idea" that "impinges on the mind as a catastrophe for, in order to be assimilated, [it] sets in flux the entire cognitive structure".⁵⁵

The experience of coming-to-knowledge represented in this passage reflects back on the "strange confusion" in the framework story, when Julian came face to face with a "new idea". For example, the questionable honourability of his own family "House" given its murderous attempt to crush a longstanding female friend or, one might argue, an important feminine part of himself that he had long buried, to his own detriment. The "new idea" in Rochelle might be termed something like the realisation that, even though life is difficult, dangerous, riddled with disappointments and transitory (a prison), it is nevertheless worth living to the full for the intensely beautiful parts of it: what Emily Dickinson termed, with echoes of Jacob's ladder, and her increment to this image in the wider context of her discourse, as the heart/breath-containing rib cage, "climbing the Bars of Ecstasy".⁵⁶ The entrance of the "new idea", our core passage, into the poem's external world order, transforms the poem. Julian, initiate to Rochelle's mystery, and, through love of "it", as Dickinson would say,⁵⁷ now in love with her—unchains Rochelle. But she does not wish to leave the prison that is the generative theatre of this gift. Instead Julian remains with her, relinquishing his worldly hero-status, until he earns her "love" in return; that is, until she recognises in him that vision, now shared, that he has recognised in her, and which does not actually *belong* to either of them.

"The Prisoner" seems in line with the step forward Gerin distinguishes in the quality of Emily Brontë's poetry from versifying to creative form, in terms of the entering of a "sterner power" into the language, like the later "God of Vi-

sions", the "slave, comrade and King"⁵⁸ that she "takes" when he doesn't "take" her. It was in fact the Gondal poem left out for Charlotte to "discover" in October 1845, at a point when Charlotte was "stalled"⁵⁹ both in her artistic progress and in her personal life. The explosion and deep estrangement that consequently took place between the sisters is well known, though variously interpreted. It seems difficult to believe that after years of Emily's notoriously staking her own ground when she wanted to, she did not deliberately put this poem in her sister's path. Emily was the one who later remained most adamant about the privacy of authorial identity (whereas for Charlotte it was a sort of finite cat-and-mouse game with her public, pending fame). Evidently, while the poem's publication may not have been negative in every sense to Emily—as Gerin believes, to the extent of its totally inhibiting her creativity and leading to her death—the "public undressing" of her deeply intimate internal life was a source of great anxiety, and not sought in any immediate way by her. It seems logical to deduce that Emily showed the poem to Charlotte in response to a cry for help, as to how to begin to "think again", to be reminded what it was like to really "feel", and how to distinguish this from fake substitutes. And although Charlotte, on the one hand, misused the publication of the 1846 volume as another weapon for diminishing Branwell (by excluding him from it), it did extricate her mind from its stale fixation on Heger and set in motion the writing of *The Professor*, and then *Jane Eyre*.

I would like finally to turn to Emily Dickinson. She presents a "uniquely enigmatic face to literary scholarship", since she deliberately left all her manuscript poems undated. This has led "many scholars, baffled by her sphynx-like rebuffal, to conclude that her thought underwent no real or consistent development, and that correspondingly her language is 'fanciful' rather than 'imaginative' (in the Coleridgean sense): a sophisticated game using self-referential qualities ('fixities and definites' as Coleridge would say) rather than 'dissolving to recreate'", as M.H. Williams has put it.⁶⁰ The idea has become more assimilated today, that her small poems are not fragmentary but part of a long link poem,⁶¹ perhaps some modern equivalent of the epic: that "first flower of a new symbolic mode ... ready to take meanings and express Ideas that have had no vehicle before", that "hodge-podge of literary creations, vaguely yet grandly spanned by a story—the all-inclusive story of the world", as Langer has described it.⁶² They do not at all represent the modern fragmenting of identity and alienating of language from reality that David Porter has posited.⁶³ The confounding absence of an externally given chronological perspective in the evolution of her poetic work will only be overcome, I think, by a systematic mapping of the revolution in the linguistic forms of the undated poems in relation to the intensification of the poetic quality of the dated letters. Until then, it is particularly necessary to bear in mind that each small densely compressed poem is a link in a very vast articulate network whose progressive unfolding is not easy to envisage.

For example, I cited earlier Loeffelholz's very romanticized analysis of poem 438, "The Wind tapped—like a tired Man—", which the critic uses to show Dickinson's successful emancipation from the male tradition. I consider this a misunderstanding, caused by preconception, of the self-consciously cruel and ironic tone of the poem. To me, it represents only *part* of a process in the development of Dickinson's ideas about men, women, and the creative process, which here Dickinson shows us backfiring. It is a poem about what it is like when, despite the woman poet's/lover's waiting and hoping, nothing happens. The sad "I ... alone" at the end is nothing to the complex "forlorn" but equipped "I" ready to pioneer forth at the end of the "Ode to a Nightingale". And the poem certainly does not represent a successful attempt to develop that so-called advanced thing, a work with "less violent and less dualistic alternatives".⁶⁴ On the contrary, I believe, it is very violent and castrating on the part of the female poetic "I": the Man is tired, timid, has no feet or bones, hums incomprehensibly from up some tree rather than speaking straight to his lover—logically then he has no face and the vague "music" that his disembodied fingers perhaps evince gets stuck in a belljar. But the poem's mood is also finally self-damaging; Dickinson knew it, else she could never have shown it to us in the way she does. One can but remember her "box of Phantoms" or her analogous early comment, that "Few have been given me, and if I love them so, that for *idolatry*, they are removed from me—I simply murmur *gone*, and the billow dies ..." (my emphasis),⁶⁵ to which I shall return. That feigned self-criticism in "idolatry" is an example of the closest this courageous woman ever got to any form of hypocrisy, and it did not last long.

The poem (652), "A Prisoner gets to be a friend—",⁶⁶ is analogous in theme to the above poem, but sees it from another vertex. It shows, too, the moments of failure of the creative process, but not by making a cruel parody of the man or of the couple's incapacity to engage. Rather, it gives the feeling of what it is like to stagger through meaningless periods of existence, when "life stands straight and punctual and yet no signal comes", as she said elsewhere.⁶⁷ Instead of imaginative vision, we have childlike-childish memories of life outside. But even these fade before the unequivocating pact made with negative imprisonment, this neutered non-being that is more real than real beings. This alliance, in which Crushed-poet and Anti-inspiration are not opposing points creating vital tension, but similars interminably mirroring one another, does not even allow of that much-loathed, stereotyped, hierarchical relationship between the sexes, which now seems mild stuff by comparison. And Liberty, a "Cheek" from Dickinson's present point of view—recalling, in a complex way, the lover and punning on Brontë's "dreadful check"—is actively *avoided*. It seems "like a Dream" (a perfidious illusion), and is so "wide" (immense/inappropriate), that it cannot be contained by "any Night", except by that conventional Corporation/Company "Heaven" which for Dickinson was associated with death/meaninglessness, and whose capacity and divinity (capacity to make immortal, to inspire) she doubts anyway. There is no container/contained, engagement/

disengagement pattern, but the absence of it. The poem represents a stasis in growth. It speaks eloquently about another way of fleeing from creative experience.

The poem (384), “No Rack Can Torture Me”,⁶⁸ is conceptually very close to “The Prisoner” and “No Coward Soul Is Mine”. Opening like Brontë’s poem with a negatively structured affirmation, it represents a positive state of mind—achieved “Consciousness”, a complex word in Dickinson’s work. Its logical basis is then exposed in the chainlike generating of one container/contained image from another. The “free” soul “knits” (positively holding/imprisoning) a “bolder Bone” than the mortal bone, its counterpart: “Two bodies—therefore be—/ Bind One—the Other fly”. This shows the reciprocity between the two opposing parts in the generating of tension, vitality. The argument is carried forward in the Eagle-divesting-the-nest-for-the-sky metaphor, and goes on to posit that the reader, too, may therefore find some similar process of creativity if s/he is not his/her own unequivocal “Enemy”. Until the conclusion is drawn, “Captivity is Consciousness— / So’s Liberty”, where again there is a triad formation: Captivity is Consciousness; Liberty is Consciousness; but Consciousness is both Captivity and Liberty—the two opposing forces engage to create the third. These poems are all conjectured at about the same period. I am arguing, with them, not that one is better than another, let alone that they are her most beautiful poems, but that Dickinson suggests in the elaboration of the imagery and form that inspiration has to do with the kind of engagement of opposites for the creation of a third element (the symbol, the poem, the immortality principle, the flight and so on), which I have described in Emily Brontë’s “Prisoner”.

There is a plethora of exquisite poems that use the explicit or implicit opposing tension between male and female figures in different ways, attributing and interchanging qualities and attitudes in a variety of contexts. “Wild Nights” (P249, c.1861), “If *He dissolve*—then—there is *nothing—more—*” (P236, c.1861), “Ah, Teneriffe” (P666, c.1861), all show the woman kneeling, as it were, expressing the agony of the poetic “I”’s yearning for creative meeting with the lover, with more or less hope of success implicit in the form and imagery realised. “Of all the Souls that stand create—” (P664, c.1862), is concerned more with a moment of assertion of the solid authenticity of the poet’s identity. Yet, analogously to the notably “Columnar self” of P789 (c.1863), it still images the articulation of this in a tripartite fashion; “I” and “One” make Immortality, the creation of which—as the naked lovers come face to face in that typically oxymoronic “Apart—intrinsic—stand” (to die-separate / to make love-conjoin)—is imaged so extraordinarily as “this brief Drama in the flesh” being “shifted—like a Sand”. Poems like “Again—his voice is at the door” (P663, c.1862), or “This Chasm, sweet, upon my life” (P858, c.1864), work in terms of a literal interview between lovers, one depicting rage at misunderstanding, the other testifying to the existence of sustained, deepening intimacy.

A poem like "The murmuring of Bees, has ceased" (P1115, c.1868) is, in a sense, more abstract. But it, too, contemplates the continuity of the cycle of birth-life-death of various forms in a tripartite way. The ceasing of the bees' "murmuring" initiates another successive "murmuring", which in turn foretells further "murmuring" at the close of that. Autumn is moved by summer to produce winter in continuing transformation. The separation of "friend" from "friend" who, when together, had produced "Accent", now creates that significant gap, named "interval", such that it may be held for observation and thought about. And this generates, with the poet's universalised "we" (very different in tone from the self-asserting, haughty and insecure "We – Our – Mine" of her earlier work), the continuing "thoughts" that "More intimate with us become / Than persons, that we know", which produce this particular poem, and so on.

At this point I would like to think back for a moment to Dickinson's earlier comment in the face of the loss of, or disappointment in, her loved object: "I simply murmur *gone*, and the billow dies". I suggest that the internal hardening against people/things that she loved, the inability to create symbolic representation for good objects in their absence (later elegiacally named her "Lost"⁶⁹), was the central focus of her art. And it was precisely this frustration that she transformed in the extraordinarily beautiful and excruciatingly painful "Master" letters. In them, with the same sense as Milton's, Keats's, and Brontë's of trying to hold and become orientated in a storm of disintegration (here the created fiction of being cast away from her lover's countenance), she made the strenuous effort of *looking*, for once, at a loss (parting) or separation, without either running away from her own cataclysmic feelings about it, or killing the object off. And she tried to learn, instead, how to give birth (parting/parturition) to a living symbol of the loved object, such that it might thus continue both to sustain her, and to propagate in other contexts. I believe this may best be seen in some passages from two of the "Master" letters, L233 and L248.

Letter 233 immediately presents her as having been hurt by her lover. Her remonstrance elicits the following chain of passages:

... God made me – [Sir] Master – I didn't be myself. I don't know how it was done. He built the heart in me – Bye and bye it outgrew me – and like the little mother – with the big child – I got tired holding him. I heard of a thing called "Redemption" – which rested men and women. You remember I asked you for it – you gave me something else. I forgot the Redemption [in] the Redeemed – I didn't tell you for a long time, but I knew you had altered me – [I] and was tired no more ...

... – To come nearer than presbyteries – and nearer than the new Coat – that the Tailor made – the prank of the Heart at play on the Heart – in holy Holiday – is forbidden me – You make me say

it over—I fear you laugh—when I do not see—[but] “Chillon” is not funny. Have you the Heart in your breast—Sir—is it set like mine—a little to the left—...
 ... Have you the little chest to put the Alive—in? ...

Generally, what seems to happen is this: she tries to explain herself. The (possibly irritating) ravenous intensity of her affection is the consequence of a “divine” act of creation/love (“it was done”) of which she was not part, “unconscious”,⁷⁰ and about which she can do nothing but continue to observe what she “is-being”. This moves her now into *feeling* as if she were consciously involved in what she imagines as a similar act of creation to that by which she was made: her aroused feelings are a pregnancy with a growing/expanding “heart-child”. She turns to the implicit father of this heart-child, asking to be “saved”, which she automatically thought meant finding rest from carrying all this, meant annihilating/evacuating her loaded feelings. Only to realise that the more deeply she becomes involved with the father, the more intense and pushing is her passionate turmoil (“something else”). But, since the experience of some intimacy with the Master had “altered” her (like Cathy Earnshaw’s “dream that went through her like wine through water and altered the colour of her mind”, or Dickinson’s own derivative “vivid species—of power to us—that leaves no mode like Tyrian dye”⁷¹), she finds that “rest” becomes obsolete and engagement in the experience her holding sustenance. In the progress of this metamorphic event, investigation of the lover/love relationship sets in.

The part beginning “To come unto ...”, seems to describe a step back: either a recall to the fact that their lives are not literally united in this way, or the inevitably recurring moment of disengaging from the other. Perhaps the lover finds her metaphor ridiculous, she thinks, her passion overbearing, perhaps he never liked nor understood her really at all. And she begins to ask questions about what *he* is like. Is he in fact so worthy of her really, vengefully forcing her to keep repeating how she yearns for intimacy with him (“you make me say it over”)? Perhaps just to make fun of her (“‘Chillon’ is not funny”); what is he really like (“Have you the Heart in your breast?”); do things stay alive in his mind, she doubts; *she* is alive inside—is *he* (“Have you the chest to put the Alive—in?”)? This investigation persists in the complete text, as if, at a renewed distance, instead of her showing herself to him—thus being the contained—she tries conversely to form and contain a picture of him in her mind—being the container (as Heathcliff does of Cathy at the end of *Wuthering Heights*). This seems to me an emotionally creative mood, shown in the originality of the language, which I believe derives directly from the psychically authentic imaging of having been made with child by her passionate attachment to the lover. And this becomes, as I have repeatedly emphasized, an image for creative inspiration that is quite intrinsic to the human mind.

In the second letter (248), there appears to be an intensification of the process that takes place in the one examined:

Oh did I offend it—[Did'nt it want me to tell it the truth?] ...—who
only asks—a task—something to do for love of it—...
A love so big it scares her, rushing among her small heart—
pushing aside the blood and leaving her faint (all) and white in the
gust's arm—
Daisy—who never flinched thro' that awful parting, but held her
life so tight he should not see the wound—who would have
sheltered him in her childish bosom (Heart)—only it was'nt big
eno' for a Guest so large—...
Low at the knee that bore her once unto [royal] wordless rest
[now] Daisy [stoops a] kneels a culprit ... but punish [do not] dont
banish her—shut her in prison, Sir—only pledge that you will
forgive—sometime—...
Wonder stings me more than the Bee—who never did sting me
...—Wonder wastes my pound, you said I had no size to spare—
You send the water over the Dam in my brown eyes—...
I've got a Tomahawk in my side but that dont hurt me much ... Her
master stabs her more—
Wont he come to her—or will he let her seek him, never minding
... so long wandering ... if to him at last.
Oh how the sailor strains, when his boat is filling—Oh how the
dying tug, till the angel comes. Master—open your life wide, and
take me in forever, I will never be tired ...

The image of the Master comes through more clearly, the language is yet more intense and particular in form. It seems the small hurt of the first letter has been consolidated to rupture, and she is now trying out her feelings in the face of being totally "discouraged" (rather than doing her usual discouraging of the other). This time, the imagined pregnancy is not just "tiring", but confessedly "scaring", and potentially deadly ("white in the gust's arms"). But her facing the loss of the loved object becomes firmer even as it becomes more painful. And it seems to me there is an extraordinary pun on the compressed words "awful parting" which have a counterpart in Prose Fragment 34: "God cannot discontinue himself. This *appalling trust* is at times all that remains" (my emphasis). They refer, yes, to the loss of the object but, rather like Brontë's "dreadful check" and "intense agony" of the moment when sensuous existence becomes imbued with meaning and intensified, the "awful parting", during which she did not "flinch" but "held tight", suggests entering the experience of birthing (parturition: the opening wide of the mother's legs—the separation of the newborn from the mother with the intense check of the unravelling umbilical cord, symbolic of their affectionate reluctance to accept the inevitable parting). She bears the "awful parting" because she knows it is fundamentally positive, life-giving. She fears the lover may not realise this, but only see/feel the hurtful "wound" aspect of it. So she imagines "sheltering him". But then, she realises, of course she cannot in fact, for he is "large" to her, alive in her mind.

He is the other essential protagonist creating *with her*, not the child she must protect.

The passage later moves into the expression of “wonder”. On one level, she is surprised that—and questions why—he had taken “offence”, which she seems to link to her moments of independence from him (the birth of the child/poem, for example) just as she tended to blame/kill off her objects if she couldn’t swallow them whole. On another level, the “wonder”, I think, refers to her own newfound capacity to sustain the “awful parting”, instead of, as it were, her habitual just “saying *gone* and the billow dying”. The lover remains an empowered man, remains loved. “Wonder” at her love for him, not his desire for vengeful acquittance for loving her (the earlier “you make me say it over”), “wastes her pound” now. Forgiveness can be asked, if it helps (lyrically “Low at the knee that bore her once ... Daisy kneels ...—only pledge that you will forgive”). It can be explained that her involvement with the “child” does not entail her no longer loving him, but brings her closer to him (such that “punishment” and “prison, sir”, would be preferable to the denial of his forgiveness). Then comes the image, again, of a kind of insemination of feeling between him and her in his “sending the water over the Dam in her brown eyes”: the “parting” hurts (water-as-tears), but also in some way interlinks them more (water-as-body fluids). She takes a step back again, changing vertex in her relationship to him, (he’s worse than a “Tomahawk” to that “her” that is not the resilient “she” who can see what he is). Then the passage moves into an evocation of the strenuousness of attempting to keep love alive/relationship meaningful (“Oh how the sailor strains when the boat is filling”), suggesting awareness of the risk that the attempt might fail, and the symbol of the complex articulation of feeling be dispersed and lost. The “Master open your life wide” seems partly to plead the re-emergence of her need for a containing port (as in lovemaking) in these straits of feeling, for reciprocal communication about their mutual burden (losing/finding each other). It also seems to contain her exhortation that the roles interchange, that he perform the frightening/ exhilarating function of birthing this time (helping her to survive the storm).

There is a continual movement back and forth between creative engagement, disengaging, and reforming relationship between the lovers in the images discussed. This, as I have said, I see connected both to the poet’s attempt to create the symbol in the art/words and, in biographical terms, to achieve the internalisation of the good object in its actual or imminent absence, in such a way that the poet-person’s own identity may be sustained, and also be set free, to become available to others.

The linguistic/emotional experimentation in the “Master” letters, dissolving to recreate, was the watershed point for the leap forward in Dickinson’s development into a great poet. It fed her poems thereafter, including the happier love letters to Otis Lord, which tell us much, I believe, about her experience and idea of the (frightening) passage from imitative versifying to creative form. As it

was in her art, so it was in her life:

The supper of the heart is when the guest has gone (L318); Till it has loved—no man or woman can become itself—Of our first creation we are unconscious (L575); The great confidences of Life are first disclosed by their departure (L807); Intimacy with Mystery, after great Space, will usurp it's place—Moving on in the Dark like Loaded Boats at Night, though there is no Course, there is Boundlessness (L871); I work to drive the awe away, yet awe impels the work ... Till the first friend dies, we think ecstasy impersonal, but then discover that he was the cup from which we drank it, itself as yet unknown (L891); Icebergs italicise the Sea—they do not intercept it, and “Deep calls to the Deep” in the old way (L899); An enlarged ability for missing is perhaps a part of our better growth, as the strange membranes of the Tree broaden out of sight (L951); Should you ask me my comprehension of a starlight Night ...—It stills, incites, infatuates—blesses and blames in one. Like Human Affection, we dare not touch it, yet flee, what else remains? ... How vast is the chastisement of Beauty, given us by our Maker! (L965)

Emily Dickinson's mature work abounds in a wealth of the most searching, poignant and unforgettable expressions of this complicated and passionate process of creating the holding power for the immortalisation, the continued life, of the loved-object-imminently-to-be-lost, which in some way or shape or form, more or less explicitly, is always ghosted by the creative conjoining of opposites characteristic of the act of love. Her work also abounds in expressions of her love for it, this “going / Of an inland soul to sea” (P76). And indeed it seems incredible that the myth of her as an isolated, inward-looking, renunciating spinster should have taken such pervasive hold. Dickinson was haunted by Emily Brontë's formulation for this great love affair, the bringing into being of the eternal:

Though earth and man were gone,
And suns and universes ceased to be,
And Thou were left alone,
Every existence would exist in thee⁷²

“Every night [she] reached found [her] lungs more breathless, seeking what it means”.⁷³ Like Blake for whom “Eternity is in love with the productions of time”, she came, as Cynthia Griffin Wolff has so beautifully described,⁷⁴ “to begin to understand that individual identity is a miracle of constant change and development. Each successive ‘self’ must incorporate some form of its earlier stages as the prerequisite for growth”; but that “once passed ... these former epochs are gone forever and can never be relived. Perhaps, then, death is not a unique loss, but merely one additional stage of growth—both for the deceased

and for those left behind who are forced to parse the implications of this passage”.

Awful parting, appalling trust.

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Notes

1. I cannot agree, for example, with Vivian R. Pollak's assertion that "gender was Dickinson's generative obsession", in *Dickinson: The Anxiety of Gender*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984, 18.
2. See e.g., Mary Loeffelholz, *Dickinson and the Boundaries of Feminist Theory*, Urbana, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991, 50.
3. See eg., J. Feit Diehl, quoted in Loeffelholz, op. cit., 84: "she suggests it may be necessary for Dickinson to kill in order to live" for the purpose of countering "a tradition that historically has done violence to women's literary productivity".
4. Letter 260. Dickinson's letter introducing herself to T.W. Higginson on 15th April 1862 is well known, though its tone is much debated: "Are you too deeply occupied to say if my Verse is alive? ... Should you think it breathed—and had you the leisure to tell me, I should feel quick gratitude—...". All references to letters (L) in this paper are quoted from *The Letters of Emily Dickinson in 3 vols.*, eds. Johnson & Ward, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958.
5. "Emily Dickinson's Search for the 'Chiefest' Words: A Proposal for Research into the Chronological Development of the Poems", in *Spicilegio Moderno: Letteratura Lingue Idee*, Bologna: Galeati, n. 19/20, 154-73.
6. See Pollak, op. cit., 22: "her art exhibits no clear-cut psychological development; she has no early, middle and late manner". She also quotes Northrop Frye in corroboration of this view.
7. It seems a significant step forward in our attitude to these two poets and their work that, differently from the longstanding myth of certainty about their social "isolation", we have recognised that *we do not know* whether they in fact had lovers or not. Dickinson's love for Otis Lord is documented, and at last it has been put in writing, by Cynthia Griffin Wolff, that "she may have become emotionally involved with some other man [than Otis Lord] whose identity is not known By the late 1850s, a great many distinguished speakers came regularly to Amherst; ... it would be difficult even to name all the men Emily Dickinson might have come to know during these years", in *Emily Dickinson*, Radcliffe Biography Series, Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1988, 406. In *Brother in the Shadow: Stories & Sketches by Branwell Brontë*, eds. Butterfield & Duckett, Bradford: Bradford Libraries & Information Service, 1988, 142-23, accounts are given which bear witness to a relationship between Emily Brontë and Robert Heaton. In connection with this issue of the possibility of relationships, Juliet Barker's biography, *The Brontës*, London: Phoenix (Orion Books), [1994] 1995, performs an analogous service to Wolff's biography regarding Amherst, exploding the myth about the dearth of cultural life in Haworth.
8. See Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, Chapter XXII.

9. Op. cit., (see note 7 above), xviii.
10. In E.C. Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, ed. Shelston, London: Penguin Classics, [1857] 1985, 152.
11. Ibid., 327.
12. Ibid., 493, 308.
13. Examples of this attitude in word and action can be seen, for instance, in Barker, op. cit., 532, 708, 709; Gaskell, op. cit., 296.
14. See above, p. 9.
15. Barker, op. cit., 480.
16. Patrick Branwell Brontë, the only boy among the Brontë children, was extremely close to Charlotte when they were young, and her intimate partner in inventing the tales of "Angria" (see also Christine Alexander, *The Early Writings of Charlotte Brontë*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1983, for a thorough documentation of this). He was the first of the four children to die, after the extremely early deaths of the eldest sisters, Maria and Elizabeth, and apparently the only one to die not only from illness, but as a result of general dissipation. Long before his early and wasteful death, Charlotte had turned against him irretrievably and rather spitefully. Mrs. Gaskell, who befriended Charlotte to write her biography, shaped the tragic aspect of her work around an image of an unmentionable Branwell, after the figure of the unassimilated foundling Heathcliff, "as dark almost as if it came from the devil" (*Wuthering Heights*, Ch. IV). This seems to have entailed her not being truthful about certain events and their timing in the biography of Charlotte, for the sake of idealising the image of Charlotte herself. One example of this, pointed out by Shelston, is the positioning of Branwell's final nervous breakdown. Gaskell dates this during the period of Charlotte's stay in Brussels in order to conceal the melancholy expressed in her letters then, which derived from her affair with Heger, and not from any concern for Branwell who, as Barker points out, was actually in good shape at the time.
17. See, eg., letter to Laetitia Wheelwright, 12 April 1852, quoted in Barker, op. cit., 691: "It cannot be denied that the solitude of my position fearfully aggravated its other evils. Some long, stormy days and nights there were when I felt such a craving for support and companionship as I cannot express".
18. Gaskell, op. cit., 183.
19. Examples of this attitude to Branwell can be seen in Gaskell, op. cit., 278, 375; Barker, op. cit., 340.
20. Op. cit., note above. But see also Lock & Dixon, *A Man of Sorrow The Life, Letters and Times of the Reverend Patrick Brontë*, London: Nelson, 1965; and eds. Butterfield & Duckett, op. cit. note above.
21. Such misconceptions regard, for example, the probable falsity of the whole episode of his application to the Academy in London; his sound good sense in giving up a statistically doomed attempt at a career as a portrait painter in Bradford; his great, imaginative interest in the opening of the then extraordinary Leeds-Manchester railway, for itself, for the well-paid job with prospects it gave him (ridiculed by Charlotte), and for the opportunity it provided for free travel to meet literary and music friends in nearby towns with some cultural life; finally, his gradual success in beginning to earn respect in literary circles and to get a career as a writer—which is what he really wanted—off the ground. Although Barker is not helpful regarding the psychological dynamics of Branwell's actual disintegration, chronologically it seems to have taken place only when he was faced with failure to captivate, or rather to see through the simply opportunistic nature of, what he considered the woman of his

dreams. That is, a lady of higher social standing, whose adoration of him might enable him, untrammelled and in style, to (Byronically) wallow in “literary” glory. One can hardly quite believe it was a straightforward issue of disappointment in love—as far as affairs go he seems to have had at least one illegitimate child. It would seem more that what let him down was some kind of bad judgement and its accompanying failure in self knowledge on an emotional level, not helped by the hypocritical and alienating aspects of a puritanical, criticising attitude in his family, especially from Charlotte for whom the whole story probably ran too near the bone.

22. See Gaskell, op. cit., 329.
23. “‘Myself’ and the ‘supposed person’: Emily Brontë & Dickinson”, a paper given at the XVII AIA Conference “Il Cenauro Anglo-Americano: Culture di Lingua Inglese a Confronto” at Bologna University, February 1995, and currently being published in the proceedings.
24. See, egs., Barker, op. cit., 465, 470, 473, 490, 652 (photographic reproduction of letter to J.B. Leyland, Oct 1846); Gaskell, op. cit., 167-68.
25. Op. cit., 404.
26. Ibid., 311-12.
27. Ibid., 721.
28. Gaskell, op. cit., 493.
29. See Barker, op. cit., 721. Charlotte herself said with satisfaction that *Villette* ought to disturb the contemporary public less than *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley*. It is also interesting in this connection that even Ellen Nussey thought that while the representation of Emily in *Shirley* was recognisable in its literal aspect (her external looks and habits), it failed to convey her in spirit (ibid., 612).
30. “The Prisoner: A Fragment”, published in the sisters’ 1846 volume of poems, consisted in ll. 13-44, 65-92 of the complete original version (in *The Complete Poems of Emily Jane Brontë*, ed. C.W. Hatfield, New York: Columbia University Press, 1941) plus four additional lines at the end. MS date is given in Hatfield as October 9, 1845. It was one of the poems that formed part of the “Gondal” saga, which Emily apparently elaborated with Anne.
31. Poems 438, 652 and 384 (see below notes 46, 67, 69). All the poems (P) referred to in this paper are quoted from *The Poems of Emily Dickinson* in 3 vols, ed. Johnson, Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University, [1951], 1955. All dating of the poems is purely conjectural.
32. The factual identity/identities of the “Master” to whom these letters were addressed is/are not known. Nor is it known whether they were ever sent. Of the three extant, two are in ink, the last one in pencil. They are undated, but conjectured: L187, 1858; L233, 1861; L248, 1862. Words Emily Dickinson crossed out in manuscript are bracketed thus : []; alternatives bracketed thus: (), after Johnson.
33. Op. cit., 110-11.
34. “Paradise Lost”, III,1-55; “Ode to a Nightingale”, stanzas IV-VIII. See my discussion of this in “‘The Ode to A Nightingale’: ‘some vantage ground’. Keats and the Significance of the Acquisition of Identity”, shortly to appear in *Lingua e Stile*, Bologna: Il Mulino.
35. “Looking with the Mind”, in *Encounter*, LXXIV/4 (May 1990), 33-38.
36. See M. Harris, op. cit., note 34 above.
37. P754 and L656. This poem is fundamentally, I believe, a discussion of Emily Dickinson’s preoccupation with the capacity of her art to create, but also to destroy, and the distinction between different qualities of destructiveness with which the artist

must come to terms. The connection between this much discussed poem and the letter passage has long been evident (see for example my "Study of the Development of Thought and Technique in Emily Dickinson's Poetic Language", unpublished thesis, 7, and Appendix D, University of Urbino, 1982-83). The lesser known extraordinary letter passage is worth quoting in full: "What is it that instructs a hand lightly created, to impel shapes to eyes at a distance, which for them have the Whole area of Life or of death? Yet not a pencil in the street but has this awful power, though nobody arrests it. An earnest letter is or should be life-warrant or death-warrant, for what is each instant but a gun, harmless because 'unloaded', but that touched 'goes off'".

38. Op. cit., 124.
39. E. Brontë's "No Coward Soul Is Mine", l. 26. MS dated 23 or 25 January 1846, during the period when it is almost certain that she was still writing *Wuthering Heights*. This poem's MS date was always given as 2 January 1846, until Juliet Barker's recent correction of the mistake, op. cit., note 7 above.
40. P216 (later of two extant versions).
41. In *Emily Brontë*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, [1971] 1978, 256.
42. See Margaret Homans, *Woman Writers and Poetic Identity: Dorothy Wordsworth, Emily Brontë, and Emily Dickinson*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981, 132.
43. See L233. p. 13 above.
44. Milton, *Paradise Lost*, III, l. 12.
45. See "'Knowing' the Mystery: Against Reductionism", in *Encounter*, LXVII/1 (June 1986), 48-53.
46. 436

<p>The Wind—tapped like a tired Man— And like a Host—"Come in" I boldly answered—entered then My Residence within</p> <p>A Rapid—footless Guest— To offer whom a Chair Were as impossible as Hand A Sofa in the Air—</p> <p>No Bone had He to bind Him— His Speech was like the Push Of Numerous Humming Birds at once From a superior Bush—</p>	<p>His countenance—a Billow— His Fingers, as He passed Let go a music—as of tunes Blown tremulous in Glass—</p> <p>He visited—still flitting— Then like a timid Man Again, He tapped—'twas flurriedly— And I became alone—</p>
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47. Op. cit., 124-30.
48. See L 299; L813b.
49. Loeffelholz, op. cit., 128.
50. Ibid.
51. See letter to W.S. Williams, 2 November 1848.
52. See, egs., L235; L245 and the play with the use of the word "film" in relation to seeing/feeling and experiencing beauty/truth.
53. See *Philosophy in a New Key*, Cambridge, Mass.: University Press, [1942] 1979, 239.
54. Shelley P.B., "A Defence of Poetry", in *Shelley's Prose and the Trumpet of a Prophecy*, ed. David Lee Clark, London: Fourth Estate, 1988, 295.
55. With Meg Harris Williams, *The Apprehension of Beauty: The Role of Aesthetic Conflict in Development, Violence and Art*, Old Ballechin, Strath Tay, Scotland: Clunie Press, 1988, 20.

56. P1434, also in L558.
 57. See egs., L233; L235; L248.
 58. Gerin, op. cit., Ch. VIII; Emily Brontë's poems 37, 176 in ed. Hatfield (op. cit.).
 59. "Il n'y a rien que je crains comme le désœuvrement, l'inertie, la léthargie des facultés. ... je ne connaîtrais pas cette léthargie, si je pouvais écrire. ... La carrière des lettres m'est fermée ...". Letter to Heger, in Gaskell, op. cit., 276.
 60. Preface to book in preparation, Morag Harris, *Great Bewildering Metaphors and Real Intellectual Property: Experience and its Analysis in the Language of Dickinson*.
 61. This was posited as long ago as 1968 by Ruth Miller in her brilliant and spectacularly overlooked study, *The Poetry of Emily Dickinson* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press). But even so, studies are dogged to this day by the lack of a methodological map of the development of Emily Dickinson's linguistic forms. It is quite absurd to pretend that words like "bird", "star", "sea", "enlarge", "one", "it" — to name but a random handful — "stood for" the same things early on as they came to hold when they accrued symbolic meaning later, in the way that cries out to anyone who bothers to look.
 62. Op. cit., 203; and *Feeling & Form: A Theory of Art*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul [1953] 1970, 305.
 63. In *The Modern Idiom*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981.
 64. Loeffelholz, op. cit., 129.
 65. L177; L173.
 66. 652

A Prison gets to be a friend—	The Posture of the Key
Between its Ponderous face	That interrupt the Day
And Ours—a Kinsmanship express—	To Our Endeavor—not so real
And in its narrow Eyes—	The Cheek of Liberty—
We come to look with gratitude	As this Phantom Steel—
For the appointed Beam	Whose features—Day and Night—
It deal us—stated as our food—	Are present to us—as Our Own—
And hungered for—the same—	Ans as escapeless—quite—
We learn to know the Planks—	The narrow Round—the Stint—
That answer to Our feet—	The slow exchange of Hope—
So miserable a sound—at first—	For something passiver—Content
Nor ever now—so sweet—	Too steep for looking up—
As plashing in the Pools—	The Liberty we knew
When Memory was a Boy—	Avoided—like a Dream—
But a Demurer Circuit—	Too wide for any Night but Heaven—
A Geometric Joy—	If That—indeed—redeem—

67. Prose Fragment 49, in *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, op. cit., III.
 68. 384

No Rack can torture me—
 My Soul—at Liberty—
 Behind this mortal Bone
 There knits a bolder One—
 You cannot prick with saw—
 Nor pierce with Scimitar—
 Two Bodies—therefore be—
 Bind One—The Other fly—

The Eagle of his Nest
No easier divest—
And gain the Sky
Than mayest Thou—
Except Thyself may be
Thine Enemy—
Captivity is Consciousness—
So's Liberty.

69. L873.

70. L575 and p. 16 above.

71. *Wuthering Heights*, Chapter IX; L275.

72. Charlotte's bowdlerized 1850 version. The original MS was not published in Dickinson's lifetime.

73. 815.

74. *Op.cit.*, 512-13; see note 7 above.