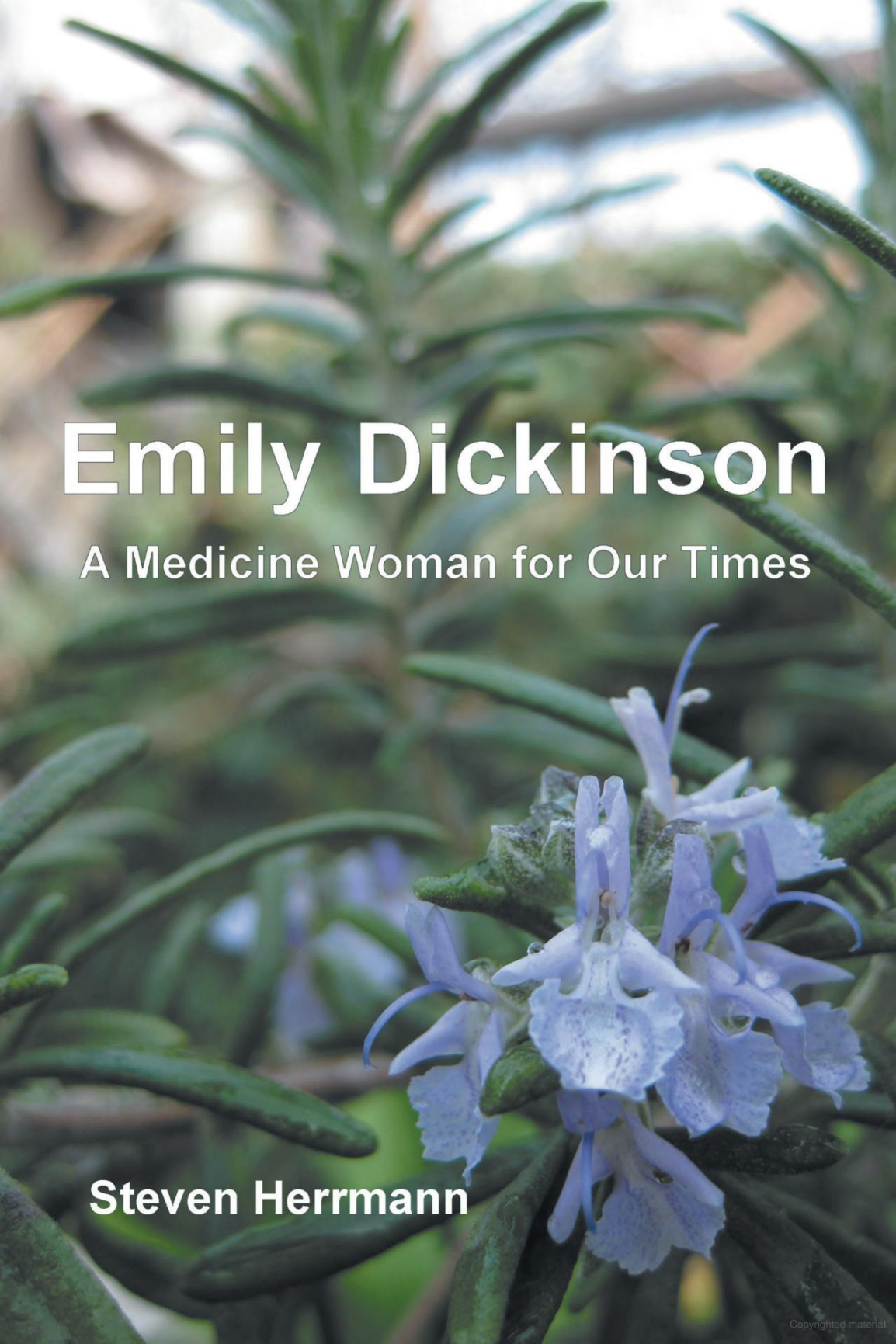

Emily Dickinson

A MEDICINE WOMAN FOR OUR TIMES

Steven Herrmann

Emily Dickinson: A Medicine Woman for Our Times

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CONTENTS

Footnotes in this publication consist mostly from the following five principal sources:

1. *The Complete Poetry* of Emily Dickinson, with J and the numerical order representing the poem's number in the Johnson edition, and F in the R.W. Franklin edition;

2. *The Letters of Emily Dickinson* in 3 Volumes;

3. *The Life of Emily Dickinson*;

4. *Cosmos A Sketch of the Physical Description of the Universe* Volume I;

5. *The Collected Works* of C.G. Jung, with ¶ representing the paragraph number as in standard English use in all Jungian journals published internationally;

All five of these principal sources may be quickly identified with the following abbreviations:

J/F *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, (Thomas Johnson, Ed.). New York: Little Brown and Company, 1951; *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Variorum Edition*, (R.W. Franklin, Ed.). Cambridge Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998.

L *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, 3 Volumes, (Thomas H. Johnson and Theodora Ward, Eds.). Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958.

S *The Life of Emily Dickinson* by Richard Sewall, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980.

CS1 *Cosmos: A Sketch of the Physical Description of the Universe*, Vol. 1. by Alexander Von Humboldt, Baltimore: John Hopkins, 1997.

CW *Collected Works of C.G. Jung,* in 20 Volumes, (William McGuire, Ed.). Princeton: Bollingen.

INTRODUCTION

The last fifteen years in the USA were a virtual battleground between people favoring marriage equality across the nation and those who opposed it primarily on religious grounds. This ethical movement favoring democracy was pitted against the religious right, Catholics, Mormons, and many other non-liberal Christian denominations, which tried to oppose what would become in late June 2015, a national celebration for many American citizens. Countless people who were in favor of the institutionalization of same-sex marriage felt vindicated in the victory and I myself personally rejoiced that Spiritual Democracy had triumphed over the forces of oppression and darkness.[3]

In my home State of California, this movement in good conscience began to heat up when proposition 22 was passed, banning same-sex marriage equality. Many sentient souls were incensed. This was followed in 2003, when the Massachusetts—Emily Dickinson's home State—Supreme Judicial Court became the nation's first State to legalize same-sex marriage. The following year, in February 12, 2004, San Francisco mayor, Gavin Newsome defied California law by issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples. The rest, as everyone knows, is in our history books. For on June 26, 2015, in a historic victory for gay rights and human rights, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled 5-4 to grant gays and lesbians the constitutional right to marry their chosen partners, whomever they might be, regardless of gender, religious beliefs, or sexual orientations. It is not enough remembered today, moreover, that one of our national leaders, who spoke up for human rights at Moscow, Russia, was our former Secretary of State, Hillary Rodham Clinton. Clinton was present at the placement of the statue of Walt Whitman at Moscow Uni-

3 Steven B. Herrmann, *Walt Whitman: Shamanism, Spiritual Democracy, and the World Soul.*

versity on October 14, 2009. The statue was a reciprocal gift given 10 years prior by the Russian government of Alexander Pushkin and placed on the campus of George Washington University in Washington D.C. At the base of the Whitman statue are inscribed the following words: "You Russians and we Americans, so far apart from each other, so seemingly different, and yet in ways *that* are most important, our countries are so alike." Clinton added: "Just as Pushkin and Whitman reset poetry we are resetting our relations for the 21st century."

Many people today have their own public or private views, religious or scientific or secular on the meaning of marriage equality. Yet, often in the news, the significance of marriage as a *spiritual phenomenon in a very real and deep psychological sense* is completely overlooked. Looking to the Old and New Testaments of the Bible and the Koran, Bhagavad Gita, or any other religious text amongst the world's great religions, it is hard to see how they provide sufficient answers to an issue that was always at its roots, a doctrinal dispute filled mostly with male bias. Even in our outdated psychology texts, the progressives were slow to speak out about this ethical principle of human rights.

When we place ourselves back in the context of Amherst, Massachusetts, New England in 1861 at the time of the outbreak of the Civil War, when another contradiction in our American democracy was plaguing our nation and pressing for racial equality, we can see that justice won the battle for human rights, and will again and again until all ethnicities, cultures, and nations are made whole. I have written two books on Walt Whitman. As the unveiling of the statue in Russia shows, he is without any doubt our great poet of democracy. Yet, what about Dickinson? Can Dickinson be treated with the same national dignity? Will she ever rise to the stature of the male bards who reset American poetry? Will she ever be regarded in our American Universities as an equal to Whitman, or Herman Melville?

Melville's and Whitman's and Dickinson's voices are still speaking to us today.[4] They speak up for the same core freedom of religious liberty. It is out of religious schisms, in fact, that Dickinson came into her

4 S.B. Herrmann, *Spiritual Democracy: The Wisdom of Early American Visionaries for the Journey Forward*.

full poetical power. Her aim in life was to "Tell all the Truth but tell it slant—" as she famously said for "Success in Circuit lies" (J 1129/F 1263). One of these lies in American politics was the lie about gender equality. Dickinson told the Truth about equal rights but she told it slant. In this book, I see her as an intellectual and compassionate genius who was far ahead of her times. She may be even more relevant to the climate of our current world affairs and the struggle for human rights than when she was alive. This book is about women's rights as human rights, as Hilary Clinton has said, and the rights of all people across the globe. In the following pages, I draw out some of best themes of Dickinson's poetry and demonstrate how she speaks to us now, at a time when we need to listen most carefully to what she has to say.

Melville and Whitman helped form the cornerstone for what I'm calling spiritual democracy. But little known to the world of white male privilege in their day was an unacknowledged poetess of Amherst who published only seven poems in her lifetime, with 1,775 of them now in print in Thomas Johnson's authoritative text. Despite her virtual anonymity during her relatively short lifetime (she died at 55 years of age) she has risen, nevertheless, to the very pinnacle of American poetry and in some respects, she may even surpass the intellectual brilliance of her male contemporaries, if only because she chose her words more precisely, and also proves to be more scientifically minded in her themes of nature and the Cosmos.

Whereas the men in Emily's family, along her father-line, all believed in the Puritan doctrine of original sin, Emily said in fierce rebellion against this patriarchal inheritance: "I do not respect 'doctrines.'"[5] Hers was a natural theology of love to the world of nature and the Goddess, not one of damnation and sin. Taking the national violence inwards, her fight was not with Native Americans, like her ancestors, but with traditional Christianity, and all of its creeds, which became her interior battleground. "My Life had stood—a Loaded Gun" (J 754/F 764) she wrote, and "My Wars are laid away in Books—" (J 1549/F 1579). For her revolution in theology, she confronted outworn doctrines that had

5 Emily Dickinson, *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, p. 346.

been written by faded men in that campaign inscrutable of her own powerful interiority.

As the great Prussian scientist of the 19th century, Alexander von Humboldt, once said about himself, the one feat he prided himself on most and that sustained his writings most during his lifetime of international fame was the feat of scaling what he thought to be the highest summit in the world: Chimborazo, in Ecuador. All of the great American men of letters from Emerson, to Thoreau, to Melville, to Whitman, knew about Humboldt's book *Cosmos*, which made him the most famous man in the world by the time of his death in 1859. Dickinson scaled her own interior summits of famous volcanic peaks. She had read about them in her geology books. Today, she is the rave on University and College campuses in programs specializing in feminist studies and American literature. Yet, the images we have of her in the general public today are of a shy and reclusive woman who wrote poetry in personal letters to friends and family, but who was a bit mad, and did not care much for publication. In her lifetime, she was ironically a "Nobody!" "I'm Nobody! Who are you?" (J 288/F 260) she asked sixty years before women were granted the right to vote. The fact of her anonymity was painful for her and she suffered much anguish when her desires for a successful publishing career were dashed because publishers could not properly understand, nor appreciate, the depths of her feminine wit and wisdom. This wisdom is a *medicine* that Dickinson has to offer us today.[6] We can thank her sister, Lavinia, or Vinnie, for ensuring that her poems were put into the right hands for posthumous publication.

In Amherst, where she lived almost her whole lifetime in her father's house, she once said to a female friend: "I find I need more vail."[7] Today, of course, the veil has become a symbol for religious oppression of women's freedoms in Iran and across the world, and women are throwing off their veils to become who they are. I see her as one of the greatest advocates for women's voices that has ever lived, and this includes the voices of the injured feminine in men, and women alike.

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6 See Endnote C.

7 *L*, I, p. 229.

Today, many literary critics agree that Dickinson is unequalled by anyone writing in American English. Her lack of recognition and sense of outer failure, in the traditional male sense, must have nearly drove her to feel the pain of an entire generation of women and this depth of feeling is what makes her voice so vital and important for us to hear again today. As we will see in this book, no one in the world of literature grasped the significance of human equality and equal rights for women's voices in the 19th century as completely and as powerfully as Emily did. What did it mean to her to love men and women in her generation with equal body, equal heart, and equal voice? How did she arrive at the foundation of American democracy that insists on the principle of human freedom?

By going through a subliminal door, deep inside her own psyche, Emily entered the mythopoetic realm that was a main domain of study of such explorers of the unconscious as Frederick Myers, Theodore Flournoy, William James, Sigmund Freud, and C.G. Jung. Long before such pioneers of the new dynamic psychiatry helped give birth to modern psychology, Dickinson had already mapped out the terrain of the mythopoetic imagination in stupendous metaphorical images and she had arrived at the domain where human rights are also natural rights.

Her fight for women's rights was an interior battleground with traditional male stereotypes with a long pre-history in theology, philosophy, and politics. Such religious biases had been inherited from her grandfather, Samuel Fowler Dickinson (1775-1838), who died when Emily was seven years old. Samuel was born a year before the Declaration of Independence was drafted. He entered Dartmouth in 1791. He was made famous by having founded Amherst College. As Edward Hitchcock, a pious scientist and President of Amherst College from 1845-1854 said of Samuel: he was "urged by the command of our divine Savior to preach the gospel to every creature."[8] It was from Hitchcock that Emily was introduced to what would become her favorite chapter in the King James Bible, Revelation 21. Chapter 21: 2 reads: "And I John saw the Holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." In Revelation 21: 9, the

8 *S*, 1: 35.

bride is referred to as the "the Lamb's wife." In his vision, John is carried away to a great and high mountain by the seventh angel who descends out of Heaven and where he is shown a mystical light, which was said to be "like jasper stone, clear as crystal" (Revelation 21: 11). It is a vision that describes the New Jerusalem in great detail; it is constructed from foundation to top by gold, pearls, and twelve precious stones. This chapter of Revelations gives us a stupendous image of the Holy city and its foundation in the Hebrew-Christian Bible, which is wonderfully set forth in grand archetypal imagery.

Even there, however, the meaning of women's voices as an archetypal reality in the human soul, which might make us all equal, was not made sufficiently conscious for us in scripture or "doctrine" by any woman or man. It is true that we have had many Christian Saints that were women and who wrote mystical poetry in the Christ tradition, and that many churches of Europe were erected to the Virgin Mary. In a deep *feeling* of love that transcends sex and gender and gets outside the Christ myth, however, there have been no sacred texts written by women that have elicited much veneration. With the exception of the great mother religions, which were wiped out by the patriarchies, men have written all of the major religions of the world. No major female voice has risen in the world to inspire the nations with a spiritual message such as Dickinson's.

As we will see in the pages ahead, in the field of modern psychology and in the psychology of religions, it was only Jung who fully grasped the significance of the feminine in theology and its spiritual significance for world culture as a whole. We need to fill in some of the missing pieces, however, that Jung himself could not mine as a European. By turning to an authentic trailblazer who anticipated the social and political movements of Spiritual Democracy that are currently afoot, my hope is that I can help to show how Dickinson succeeded in writing her own version of a new sacred text for the world. We will proceed to examine her full credentials herein, with all of the appropriate modesty such a task entails by telling her simple and wonderful story in a psychobiography. In doing so, I will view her as a Medicine Woman, a poet-shaman,[9]

9 S. Herrmann, "Whitman, Dickinson and Melville—American Poet-Shamans: Forerunners of Poetry Therapy," *Journal of Poetry Therapy*, Vol. 16, No. 1.

whose chief aim was to bring *healing* to a one-sidedly patriarchal and heterosexual culture of white privilege during a time when women were just beginning to find their voices after the secret meeting of a group of incensed women assembled together at Seneca Falls and spoke out through their feminist rebellion in 1848.

Emily's grandfather, Samuel, her father Edward, and brother, Austin, were all men of privilege and worldly affairs. Her father, Edward, was the treasurer of Amherst College. In their very home, however, was a child of remarkable genius, a girl of unsurpassed wit and scintillating brilliance, who dropped out of Mount Holyoke Female Seminary, yet, who soared to become "Wife" not only to a single nation, but to become a "Bride" of unlimited possibilities in the world and Cosmos.

She had the instinctive intelligence of "Nature's God" inborn in her. Her calling as a poet was given to her from birth. It is out of the well of natural wisdom that she spoke to the world with a "Voice" of authority about the news of the universe, which was at that very moment being said to be infinite by astronomers.

> If the foolish, call them "*flowers*"—
> Need the wiser, *tell*?
> If the Savants "Classify" them
> It is just as well!
>
> Those who read the "Revelations"
> Must not criticize
> Those who read the same Edition—
> With beclouded Eyes!
>
> Could we stand with that Old "Moses"—
> "Canaan" denied—
> Scan like him, the stately landscape
> On the other side—
>
> Doubtless, we should deem superfluous
> Many Sciences,
> Not pursued by learned Angels
> In scholastic skies!

Low amid that glad Belles lettres
Grant that we may stand,
Stars, amid profound *Galaxies*—
At that grand "Right hand"! J 168/F 179

What she is saying here is that the new Revelation in 1860, the year after Alexander von Humboldt died, was the spiritual science of an infinite Cosmos. I think she believed that poets are sometimes wiser than those who merely classify nature into scientific categories because they have a wider vision from the "other side" in "scholastic skies!" By this she means astronomy and the angelic realm, or archetypal psyche, where the whole infinite universe can be beheld in the beauty and symmetry of a single flower. Classification, such as in the science of botany, can narrow one's cosmic vision and close one off thereby to the Infinite.

The Life we have is very great.
The Life that we shall see
Surpasses it, we know, because
It is infinity.
But when all Space has been beheld
And all Dominion shown
The smallest Human Heart's extent
Reduces it to none. J 1162/F 1178

This mature Voice of a "Bride of God" who respected no doctrines and claimed to have written a "Diagnosis of the Bible" scored a major victory for her destiny-pattern, for women the world over, and modern art by providing us with her own theory of truth, told with forthrightness and great conviction: "Estranged from Beauty—none can be—/ For Beauty is Infinity—" (J 1474/F 1515). To keep a vision of the Cosmos ever in her mind was the poet's main task:

The Infinite a sudden Guest
Has been assumed to be—
But how can that stupendous come
Which never went away? J 1309/F 1344

We will try in this book therefore to take a modest role, as many feminist critics have before, of speaking up for Dickinson as an advocate for what she taught in a down-to-earth psychobiography that puts her in cultural context as a disseminator of a new vision of women's rights in a patriarchal society that could not understand her because they failed to appreciate the beauty of her poetry in its natural eloquence, just the way she wrote it. We will do this in two primary ways: 1) from a *psychological angle,* we will attempt to explain what she means by equality and show how her poetry relates to freedom, liberty, and equal rights for everyone (animals, plants, reptiles and amphibians included). 2) from a *spiritual angle,* we will try and demonstrate how her aims as a Medicine Woman were to administer a shamanic cure to a creedal and male-dominant culture that could not agree on doctrinaire matters, and that desperately needed and still needs to be questioned today.

Dickinson's voice-as-Wife is one of the most *powerful* voices in American poetry. This may sound contradictory since power is typically measured in our culture in a career sense, by the impact of one's vocation upon the world in one's lifetime. Yet by the cherishment of her own introverted power and fierce protection of her style, Emily gave birth to *the explosive power of her calling* as a poet of the Infinite. "To see the Summer Sky / Is Poetry", she said (J 1472/F 1491). "Expanse cannot be lost—/ Not Joy, but a Decree / Is Deity— / His Scene, Infinity—" (J 1584/F 1625). As a poet-shaman, Dickinson's vision of God subsumed the entire Universe with all of its galaxies. This is the image of God that she married. Such a stupendous vision that rendered not only many of the sciences, but religious doctrines superfluous was vouchsafed to her through a *syzygy* (an alchemical term for union) with an infinite Deity, embracing the whole Cosmos. She made such a vision possible in her generation through the newest developments in geology, astronomy, and natural sciences from her place of sacred worship: "Vesuvius at Home."

"Perhaps you laugh at me!" she wrote in a letter to her friends in defiance against the typically sexist attitude of America, "Perhaps the whole United States are laughing at me too! *I* can't stop for that! *My* business is to love."[10] Her business was to love for the sake of her own and

10 *L*, II, p. 413.

humanity's Immortality. This was not a doctrine of prayer to a heavenly Father who demanded of his flock a faith in God, but a natural *theology of love* for the nations of the world that she hoped to disseminate her wisdom-medicine to: "This ecstatic Nation / Seek—it is Yourself" (J 1354/F 1381), she said. "Of Course—I prayed—" she cried out and then answered ironically: "And did God Care?" (J 376/F 581).

In a society that prided itself on the principles of human freedom and equal rights for everyone, did it matter that her voice be heard in the press in the 1860s? Does it matter today that we publish another book on her? What can we learn from a feminist poet who saw herself as an equal with men, a second Jacob? What can a nation founded on religious liberty learn from her when human rights are still being threatened with patriarchal oppression and condemnation by chauvinist forms of government? That she felt such bigotry from her fellow men in the field of her art is without a doubt: "When they dislocate my Brain! / Amputate my freckled Bosom! / Make me bearded like a man!" (J 1737/ F 267). Despite the attempts that were made to amputate the style of her feminine poetry in her lifetime, she never compromised her integrity. This conviction to stay true to her natural voice is what gives her singular power today to speak to women and men in all nations of the world and to hopefully help it to become a more civil and humane place for all of us to live in.

I

EMILY DICKINSON: A MEDICINE WOMAN FOR CHALLENGING TIMES

This book is about Emily Dickinson, whom I regard as one of America's foremost poet-shamans—an intuitive take on who she was, what she thought, and what (from my perspective) she is really about. To think of her as a poet, an honor that eluded her in her lifetime, because her work remained all but unpublished at the time of her death, is not new. Yet to think of her as also a shaman is, and so that description, which will be applied to her in this book, does need some unpacking at the start. I call her a *poet-shaman.* This is a bit heretical, even in the literature on shamanism, which is now a budding library.

For a long time, anthropologists maintained that shamans were the epileptics, neurotics, or schizophrenics of the tribes. Such pathologizing views of their personal styles have since been dispelled by cross-cultural and ethnographic studies, which have revealed them as deliberate wounded healers. It is also clearer than ever today that what some of our most extraordinary-personality-poets like Dickinson was doing, along with her contemporaries, Walt Whitman and Herman Melville, is with aesthetic force paving a way for Spiritual Democracy and using Western American poetry pragmatically to promote that idea.

In this opening chapter, I will stress the intuitive, psychological side of Dickinson as a forerunner of the apotheosis in American thought of an analytical depth-psychology, which opens access to the spirit more democratically than traditional religions by drawing on a therapeutic, shamanistic level of psychological experience common to all. Such sha-

manism finds religious mystery in everyday human experience and can be compared to the way Native American religion celebrates life as actually lived in extended families and tribes. Such a homespun spiritual attitude infuses Dickinson's poetry.

Like shamans and not unlike C.G. Jung, who coined the term "analytical psychology" for his approach to understanding the human psyche, anyone who is called to separate from the collectivity and follow an urge to personal spiritual individuation runs the risk of being viewed by the majority of humanity as insane, psychotic, or deranged, if not also condemned as a heretic. Historically, there are reasons for this, and it is evident that many who have followed the shaman's path into as yet unknown registers of spiritual exploration have found that the hostile forces of traditional civilization and culture punish them severely for their liberties. It requires caution to embark on an endeavor that is not commonly undertaken by most people and survive.

If, however, the few who are called by the shamanic archetype[11] to move along such a path, perhaps more deeply *do* by luck and good fortune happen to make it back to the safe shores of the known world, they become initiators of new perspectives in their cultures and (like Dickinson, Whitman, and Melville) tutelary figures within the cultural milieu they have enriched. They illustrate, in their poetic triumph that shamans *are* uncommon, but absolutely necessary for a culture to survive. Where would American literature be without them—if we had only Cooper, Irving, Hawthorne, Longfellow, Emerson, and Twain to show for the 19th Century? The shaman-poet is even more than Shelley knew the unacknowledged legislator of a worldview.

The price paid by anyone who embraces shamanism in the course of a modern life is usually quite high. For instance, some of the psychoanalysts who congregated around Sigmund Freud during the apostasy with C.G. Jung in 1912, declared that Jung was insane ("As regards Jung he seems all out of his wits, he is acting quite crazy" wrote Freud to his later biographer, the English psychoanalyst Ernest Jones. Jones regarded Freud as his Viennese master at the time).

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11 S. Herrmann, "Donald Sandner: The Shamanic Archetype." In *The San Francisco Jung Institute Library Journal*, Vol. 21, No. 2.

Similar claims were also made about Emily Dickinson in her day. By pre-psychological standards, the reclusive female poet appeared to some of her privileged contemporaries as a bit crazy. Her mentor and spiritual advisor, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, a former Harvard divinity student and radical Unitarian minister actually called her "my partially cracked poetess of Amherst," and Higginson's wife is reported to have asked this literary man who meant so much to Dickinson as her one hope for publishing her work, "Oh why do the insane so cling to you?"[12]

Despite such attempts to categorize her in her own time as a sort of mad woman in the attic, Emily Dickinson was in fact mastering her literary vocation as they spoke, by incorporating into her work the shamanic technique of inducing ecstasy with the hope of ministering to ministers. Half a century later, the literary critic, Yvor Winters put words to the now-common view that she is "one of the greatest lyric poets of all time."[13] What Dickinson herself said, however, is more instructive with regard to the shamanic root of her lyricism:

> Take all away from me, but leave me Ecstasy,
> And I am richer than all my Fellow Men—
> Ill it becometh me to dwell so wealthily
> When at my very Door are those possessing more,
> In abject poverty— J 1640/F 1671

Unfortunately, depth psychology has done precious little to help us understand either Dickinson's personality or her poetry from *inside* her Door. In a later chapter, we will make an attempt to crouch within her Door to comprehend what she meant when she said she was "richer" than all her "Fellow Men."

Under the spell of Tennessee Williams' portraits of fragile heroines, Julie Harris' performance as "The Belle of Amherst" only reified the image of the schizoid, emotionally inadequate "highly sensitive" Dickinson, who could only retreat from life. By our present, diagnosing-prone mental health establishment (no less prejudiced toward her than the 19th

12 *S*, 1: 6.

13 Y. Winters, "Emily Dickinson and the Limits of Judgment." In *Emily Dickinson: A Collection of Critical Essays*, p. 40.

century) she has been misdiagnosed with such pejorative labels as bipolar disorder, paranoia, agoraphobia, panic disorder, and schizotypal personality.[14] Such labels do nothing to inform us about the extraordinary nature of her exceptional mental states, which are actually shamanic ecstasies, revealing her vocation as a *healer*.

In this book, we will examine her calling and urge to life as a Medicine Woman, that is, someone in whom the technique of ecstasy can evoke in the reader, no less than in the poet herself, a shamanic state of mind. As any of us can attest, the simple act of reading her is enough to adjust one's spiritual orientation to the present moment of life. That, as a poet, is all that matters for Dickinson, for *that* level of communication is all there is for a poet to impart. As she said to Higginson during their first meeting at her Amherst home: "I find ecstasy in living; the mere sense of living is joy enough."[15] She meant, she was telling him to make that experience available to all in her poems.

During her states of ecstasy from childhood to the very end of her life at the age of 55, she centered her mind on her subjective states of consciousness as specifying her vocation, i.e., what she had to tell the world. When outer success was denied to her, the disappointment in her justified ambition to write a "letter to the World / That never wrote to Me—" (J 441/F 519) led her to an excruciating experience that could be compared to the alchemical tortures depicted in the visions of Zosimos.[16]

Not to be able to communicate passion and be heard is one of the most painful human experiences. In the language of shamanism, such agonies are referred to as dismemberment journeys, wherein the shaman's body is cut open and filled with quartz crystals. The aim is to achieve the attitude that is superordinate to any outward blows of fate after leaving the safe shores of traditional religion behind for Ecstasy. In *Shamanism,* Eliade states: "the shaman, and he [she] alone, is the great master of ecstasy. A first definition of this complex phenomenon, and

14 S. Winhusen, "Emily Dickinson and Schizotypy." In *The Emily Dickinson Journal*, Vol. 13, No. 1, pp. 77-96.

15 *L*, p. 264.

16 C.G. Jung, *CW* 13: ¶¶ 85-144. (Note: *CW* refers throughout this book to *The Collected Works of C.G Jung*.)

perhaps the least hazardous, will be: shamanism = *technique of ecstasy*…the shaman specializes in a trance during which his [her] soul is believed to leave his [her] body and ascend to the sky or descend to the underworld."[17] Ecstasy is an experience that can include different types of emotions, joy and agony, sorrow and happiness, grief and rapture, etc. And Dickinson was, no less than any successful shaman, a master of it. We need to recognize her robustness in this regard.

One has to be robust to be religious in the context of modernism. The first depth psychologist to take on the modern problem of holding onto a sense of the sacredness, rather than just the secularity of individual experience was Jung, fully a half-century after Dickinson, with his active imaginations in the wake of the death of the heroic image of Siegfried, son of Sigmund, mirroring his own break with Freud. For Jung, the task of finding a new religious attitude during the passage at midlife was one of risking what he had inherited from birth as a parson's son.

On January 5, 1922, for instance, Jung had a conversation with his soul concerning his vocation and the fate of *Liber Novus,* or the *Red Book,* in which an inner feminine voice said to him: "You should listen: to no longer be a Christian is easy. But what next? For more is yet to come. Everything is waiting for you" and "above all your calling comes first." "But what is my calling?" Jung asked her. "The new religion and its proclamation" she said. "Oh God," Jung answered reluctantly "how should I do this?"[18]

But astonishingly, Dickinson had already "done this" through her poetry. We might do well to cross-reference them, therefore, for they illustrate each other and shared a common interest in the transformation of the traditional Judeo-Christian God-image. As both Jung and Dickinson teach, there is no way to arrive at the goal of spiritual transformation except through an experience of symbolic death. Death is the great liberator and no poet teaches us about the importance of temporary moments of ego death as eloquently and as brilliantly as Dickinson. "Do we die— / Or is this Death's Experiment— / Reversed—in Victory?" (J 550/F 666) Emily asks us to consider.

17 Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, pp. 4-5.
18 C.G. Jung, *The Red Book*, p. 211.

Dickinson's mythopoetic descriptions of dying to her former self, so that a new religious attitude, a new state of consciousness that is acutely aware, could be born in her are at times a painful process to experience at first, yet as we follow her we will be led into states of liberation. Her death to her former life and rebirth into a Medicine Woman is one of the clearest poetic renderings of a shamanic journey in the annals of American poetry.

In her poetry, Dickinson wrestles fiercely with historical Christianity and Judaism and emerges transformed with a new religious revelation, a shamanic evocation of a new religious attitude that the new democracy of world-readers can share: the same global religion Whitman, at just the same time, and without the benefit of her example, was calling Religious Democracy.

In Emily's year of study at Mount Holyoke Seminary in 1847, when it was in vogue to devote one's life to traditional creeds of faith, she broke away from a conventional path of religious piety and heeded the shaman's call[19] to assume a new dress. As Dickinson wrote to an Amherst friend from her childhood years in 1850 at the age of 20: "The shore is safer, Abiah, but I love to buffet the sea—I can count the bitter wrecks here in these pleasant waters, and hear the murmuring winds, but oh, I love the danger!"[20]

What Dickinson experienced through listening to her inner voices is what Jung describes (in his book *Aion*) as an experience of the syzygy, the union of masculine and feminine opposites, on the road to a full realization of the Self. Jung writes:

> There are far more people who are afraid of the unconscious than one would expect. They are even afraid of their own shadow. And when it comes to the anima and animus [the masculine and feminine soul-images] this fear turns to panic. For the syzygy [or spiritual marriage] does indeed represent the psychic contents that irrupt into consciousness in a psychosis (most clearly of all in the paranoid forms of schizophrenia). The overcoming of this fear is often a moral achievement of

19 S. Herrmann, *William Everson The Shaman's Call*.
20 *L*, I, p. 102.

> unusual magnitude, and yet it is not the only condition that must be fulfilled on the way to a real experience of the self.[21]

Dickinson overcame her fears and panic by turning to an elixir within. Rather than shutting her inner voices off with Western medicines, she conducted an experiment in active visioning techniques through verse, in a straightforward style she invented that is uniquely her own. Jung was not amiss when he used the words "fear" and "panic" above to describe the conjunction of masculine and feminine opposites that come together during the inner marriage of the soul with God (or the Self). It is a fate that cannot be escaped on the road to full Self-realization and the symbols that do emerge during the process of confrontation with the unconscious form a central piece of individuation.

Anyone who enters the seas of the collective unconscious is faced with a fear that may border on terror, not unlike a child who enters the ocean for the first time and then learns not only how to swim, but to find great joy in it.[22] Indeed, *Joy* is a hallmark of the shaman's way of being. Had she met Walt Whitman before she died in May of 1886, she might have found a kindred spirit and a brother to sympathize with her in verse: "The ship is clear at last, she leaps! / She swiftly courses from the shore, / Joy, shipmate, joy."[23] Without a doubt, Dickinson was by nature an ecstatic, and when she wrote her poem about Ecstasy to Helen Hunt Jackson in 1885 above, she was thinking of the night sea journey, for Jackson was in Santa Monica, California at the time, and looking across the vast Pacific towards Japan from California shores, the very spot Walt Whitman had looked to as the place where his dream of Religious Democracy might be fulfilled in the Far West.

"But what next?" What is "to come?" What is the "new religion?" In a sense, Dickinson, who died of kidney failure (Bright's Disease) at the age of 55, had this to say in a letter to Mrs. Edward Tuckerman, who was grieving over the recent loss of her husband: "'Eye hath not seen nor ear heard.' What a recompense! The enthusiasm of God at the reception

21 Jung, *CW* 9.2: ¶ 62.

22 S. Herrmann, "The Transformation of Terror into Joy," *Journal of Sandplay Therapy*, Vol. XVI, No. 2, pp. 101-113.

23 Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, p. 608.

of His sons! How ecstatic! How infinite! Says the blissful voice, not yet a voice, but a vision, 'I will not let thee go, except I bless thee'"![24] What she is saying is that she is convinced beyond any doubt that her husband will be received as a son by God on the other side of death's door in ecstasy. On the other hand, for much of her lifetime she wrestled with this burning question of immortality. Holding these opposites for herself and readers keep this question vitally alive for all of us.

Not unlike Whitman and Melville, Emily Dickinson was strongly influenced by science. Her life was self-described as experimental. As Dickinson puts it, her life was one of an intense "internal / Experience between / And most profound experiment / Appointed unto Men—." This experimental attitude towards her spiritual experiences was viewed as an "Adventure" into the secret of her "own identity" (J 822/F 817).

Dickinson admits that in such states, she did indeed skirt madness, but her capacity for metaphor led her to articulate, and not psychotically mind you, the *aims of her spiritual individuation*. "Had Madness," she said "had it once or twice / The yawning Consciousness" (J 1323/F 1325). By "Consciousness" she means not ego's awareness but what Jung would have called a Self-experience: the vast consciousness of the Cosmos, the very same unity of being that the great geologist and world-explorer Alexander von Humboldt had probed in his scientific writings starting in 1844, when he published the first of five volumes that are known in German as *Kosmos.* Emily says in a description of the objective psyche: "The Brain—is wider than the Sky— / For—put them side by side— / The one the other will contain / With ease—and You— beside—" (J 632/F 598).

The expansion of Consciousness is the aim of human life, a Consciousness as we shall see in Chapter 11 that is Aware. This is the realization she puts forth as a central article of her faith, an experiential sense of *knowing* the ultimate meaning of life, which is to be Resurrected—like Christ—in body, soul, and spirit. We will learn much from her about the meaning of Resurrection in what follows.[25]

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24 *L*, III, p. 898.

25 See Endnote D.

In the face of death, Dickinson is often fearless. She *knows.* This is the knowledge of immortality born of the experience of having died and been resurrected while still living. This is not the conventional view of Christianity that was being disseminated at Mount Holyoke in the "Bride-of-Christ" tradition; hers was a "Queen's endeavor" (J 617/F 681) to disseminate the "vital light" that inheres "as do the Suns—": the resurrected light of "Circumference—" (J 883/F 930), and by Circumference she means the Cosmos.

What we will demonstrate herein is what happens to Dickinson when she allows herself to pass beyond her fears of insanity, and assumes full responsibility for her fate and destiny in space and time as a Medicine Woman. As a bearer of a new American myth, Dickinson joins Whitman and Melville in celebrating the new American-born—and borne—vision of Spiritual Democracy.

In Mircea Eliade's view, "it is unacceptable to assimilate shamanism to any kind of mental disease,"[26] so to use psychopathological terms such as Higginson and his wife did above to describe Dickinson in her shaman-poet-aspect, is far from satisfactory, psychologically speaking. We will therefore use a Jungian method of interpretation to examine her "irrational" vocation and the poetic discipline she brings to performing it.

As we will see, what Jung would describe as a *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, a spiritual marriage is at the heart of Dickinson's own claim to authority as a poet-shaman (though of course she found her own way of describing her poetic identity); as "Wife" of the Cosmos. I would like to introduce one of her many poems that takes us straight into the psychic atmosphere of the "syzygy," the conjunction or inner marriage of opposites, and describes the fears, which Dickinson eventually overcame. I do this now because it will take us into the main subject of my book, which is spiritual marriage and its supreme meaning for our time.[27]

Upon first reading, the following is a poem that may leave readers feeling uneasy, because of its stark resemblance to schizophrenia, a "splitting" of the mind, and an entry into the darkness of unreason, not

26 M. Eliade, *Shamanism*, pp. xi-xii.

27 See Endnote E.

unlike the "eclipse" of consciousness that the astronomical syzygy, the passage of moon against the sun, so awesomely produces. Yet it is just such a darkening conjunction in the subconscious that makes possible the supreme integrity of the Self in the process of artistic creation. I find it helpful and relevant to remember Jung's interpretation of the syzygy, which he says "does indeed represent the psychic contents that irrupt into consciousness in a psychosis (most clearly of all in the paranoid forms of schizophrenia)."

No person who attempts to integrate psychic opposites, such as solar and lunar consciousness, within a single person recognizing these as a *union of sames* even though they are apparent opposites, can rush the process of Self-realization or individuation of integrity that eventually emerges. For as in alchemy, the opposites must be separated first before they can be combined:

> I felt a Cleaving 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 raveled out of Sound
> Like Balls—upon a Floor. J 937/F 867 (b)

The "Balls" may be likened, in the thread we're following, to round images of the Self's original wholeness. The poetess is making a heroic attempt to unite the opposites through poetry, but since the opposites have already been united in her by this point, she must be describing a more *integral* process here, something that has only become Self-aware since the dawning of neuropsychology, with its emphasis on integration of the two hemispheres of the cerebral cortex and its central axis of interhemispheric communication at the corpus callosum.

Language becomes the vehicle that seams the two sides of the brain (imaging the metaphor a hundred and fifty years before it became popular through neuroscience!) together into a single unit. The pay off, the "gold," as Dickinson might put it, was won by diligent work at her

craft: "I never told the buried gold / Upon the hill—that lies—/ I saw the sun—his plunder done / Crouch low to guard his prize/…Whether to keep his secret—/ Whether to reveal—/…Atropos decide!" (J 11/F 38). Atropos was one of the three goddesses of fate and destiny. Known as "inflexible" or "Inevitable," Atropos chose death to end each life of humans by cutting their mortal thread with her "abhorred shears." Along with her two younger sisters, the three fates were called by some, Daughters of the Night, or *Nyx*. We'll hear more about the Fates in what lies ahead.

There is of course a certain quality about "I felt a Cleaving in my Mind—" that might rightly lead a reasonable reader to question the poet's sanity, and indeed, to postulate that she herself was "half-cracked," as did Thomas Higginson to his wife. But since the poem dates from 1864, and is cast in the past tense, I believe she is looking back at a cleavage that took place *earlier* in her life and, even in the life of a now divided nation engaged in Civil War. She was, in other words *meditating* (and recollecting in relative tranquility) on an experience of psychic opposites that had occurred earlier in her own and her nation's history and now was already capable of at least poetic resolution.

As a national and transnational poet of Spiritual Democracy, she is writing out of the nation almost to culminate Civil War. She knew by then opposites can be contained in the mind. Let us recall her 1862 poem above about the brain: "The Brain—is wider than the Sky—(J 632/F 598). Though she writes of a time when the cleaving in her mind that "split" her brain in two and was now splitting the nation could not be seamed, or "yoked" together, there is a larger sense that her poem is equal to the task of bringing them together as aspects of her own embodied consciousness—her Brain—through an image that however rending shows them present in one and the same mind.

Dickinson suffered out her solitary fate as a *literary* Wife whose destiny was to become wife to "nations to come."[28] In fact, she does appear to have seen herself as a "Bride" of the nations, holding a bouquet of flowers between the USA and other world countries, with Emily, as their eloquent minister of a post-Christian vision of equality between all reli-

28 *L*, I, p. 115.

gions, all races, and all sexual orientations. Flowers negotiated in her poetic imagination between her world of experience and the true spirit of Democracy that is potentially realizable in all lands.

> Between My Country—and the Others—
> There is a Sea—
> But Flowers—negotiate between us—
> As Ministry. J 905/F 829

No doubt the loss of women and men whom she deeply loved *equally* with endless fire took its toll on her, and Dickinson herself had retreated into a solitude that would enable her to contemplate without challenges what she had in fact experienced pragmatically in the quiet of her own room. She had, after all, only herself to turn to and to the few she loved to communicate her quenchless passion.

The following passage comes from an 1870 letter to a friend: "I never had a mother. I suppose a mother is one to whom you hurry when you are troubled."[29] Jung understood that individuation begins with the realization, "I am an orphan" and I am all alone. It was Emily's fate and destiny to suffer that kind of aloneness in a patriarchal age that failed to understand what a spiritual marriage between opposites and sames can *be*, and since Dickinson did not marry the mystery man she pined after for a short time (the "Master"), we need to ask moreover what she meant by "*Wife*?"

As we shall see, Emily's references to being married, a housewife, and betrothal are not reflective of any superficial thinking on Dickinson's part, but anticipate by 160 years where we are today in political debates regarding the marriage question. The question of who should be granted the right to marry entered the courtrooms of America and marriage equality won, and the world may in time follow. Why is it, we might ask, that Whitman, Melville, and Dickinson *all* foresaw this change in our Civil Rights? We might chalk it up to the fact that they were all visionary geniuses, intuiting in their poetry what would one day be a political position that could prevail and recently in 2015 has become a reality, but there is something much deeper to their simulta-

29 *L*, II, p. 517.

neous claims for the value of a *union of sames* and opposites (both being *equals*) that requires a more intrapsychic and penetrating reading. That is the impulse to follow the way of the shaman: an archetypal dynamism with a pre-history that extends back 70,000 years, requiring of the shaman a marriage of opposites within the Self of the *healer*, and not infrequently married in same-gender relations with those who could accept such a bi-erotic man-woman or male-female identity.

Dickinson's own integral identity was not one familiar to traditional Western societies, nor was she referring to herself, in a Puritan sense, as a "Bride of Christ." As we will see, Dickinson's notion of marriage is quite exceptional, extraordinary, really, and is patterned upon an archaic, shamanistic archetype: the *typos* of bi-erotic marriage. As the late American poet and Dickinson scholar Adrienne Rich said about Emily: "I have come to imagine her as somehow too strong for her environment, a figure of powerful will, not at all frail or breathless."[30]

According to anthropological evidence the typos of bi-erotic marriage has been preserved as a marriage custom in historical documents and is based on an *archetype that is timeless*; bi-erotic marriages were widespread throughout societies in Tibet, China, and the Far East.[31] How old these marriage customs really are cannot be confirmed fully by anthropology, ethnography, or social science. Yet dreams of a collective nature provide us with some clues of its longevity. One of the best surveys of anthropological and ethnographic literature to date is Mircea Eliade's book *Shamanism.*

Eliade tells us that in Japan for instance girls destined for shamanhood often received shamanic instructions from adult shamanesses from the remarkable age of three, to seven years! Often there would be, after the four-year initiation period culminating in a new "birth," a mystical marriage to a tutelary god. This (3-7-year-old stage of development) is a period when a girl-child also has a close connection to her unconscious. Such future female shamans were put through an excruciatingly exhausting, physical ordeal, whereby the girl novice fell to the ground,

30 Adrienne Rich, "Vesuvius at Home: The Power of Emily Dickinson," *Parnassus: Poetry in Review*, V, No. 1, p. 51.

31 Eliade, *Shamanism*, p. 463.

in a state of unconscious Ecstasy, rapt in trance. They were then visited by a spirit-husband and became thereby a Spirit-Wife.

The states of mental and physical exhaustion in these rituals led to the novice's initiatory experiences of death and "rebirth," whereby she died and then *married* her tutelary deity, thereafter donning wedding garments. In the Far East, such "spirit-women" were commonly referred to as shamanesses, "Divine Mothers," or "Holy Mothers."[32]

The remarkable thing about Dickinson in this regard is that she followed this same archaic initiatory pattern through her own imaginal processes, processes Eliade described as "spontaneous election," and election (a metaphor Dickinson uses for spiritual marriage is the *White Election*) was based solely on her dreams, visions, and ecstatic experiences. Such visions led Dickinson, like shamans in all world cultures, to soar to vistas of her spiritual vocation, or her *call to shamanhood*, and as well to a conscious androgyny made possible through a bi-erotic channel.

Dickinson's experiences of spontaneous Election were, in my view, the catalyst for her now famous "Master Letters": three letters which didn't emerge until they were released in 1955 for public viewing. (We'll return to the subject of these letters in the chapters that lie ahead.) To follow the idea I am developing about Dickinson's exceptional experience of the syzygy—as bi-erotic: homoerotic[33] and heteroerotic—it doesn't matter who the Master Letters were actually addressed to. What's most important is that we *see* the therapeutic value of the relationship between her Master and the mature Dickinson as protégé-poetess in *transferential terms*. By transferential we mean in Jungian terms the psychology of the transference, which as Freud and Jung agreed, forms the alpha and omega of analysis.

Although the precise dates of the three Master Letters are not known, it has been generally assumed that they were written between 1858 to

32 Eliade, *Shamanism*, p. 463.

33 For a discussion on the homoerotic imagination as it applies to the poetry of Whitman, see Herrmann, S. (2007b). "Walt Whitman and the Homoerotic Imagination," *Jung Journal: Culture and Psyche,* Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 16-47.

1862, which seems to be consistent with the emotional tone of many of her poems during this time; particularly regarding recurrent themes of the West ("Sundown,") literary greatness, Love, marriage, explosive force, cosmic Consciousness ("New Horizons" of the Universe that were boundless and tremendous), healing ("Balm,") and a death to her puerile ego; accompanied by the losses of significant love-objects on the outside; and to some kind of real imaginary death within herself (i.e., to a death *in* her "Brain,") which suggests not only the temporary loss of her *logos*-function, but a real life-embodied experience.

In the poems and letters we will examine up close, we'll see that she had an extra-ordinary experience of a shamanic dismemberment, followed by the Ecstasy of spiritual marriage, evidenced in her question to her anonymous Master: "What would you do with me if I came 'in White'?"

In some of Dickinson's best poems the marriage symbolism is clothed in conventional Judeo-Christian metaphors, which has led some critics to conjecture that she was merely repeating the "Good News" of the Gospels, but in others she parts with convention altogether to create her own completely *new images* of God. These images, we'll be exploring the meaning of form portraits of instinctive dynamisms patterned on shamanic structures of the objective regions of the collective psyche.

Dickinson takes us beyond traditional interpretations of what it means to be a "Bride of Christ" (sometimes mistaken for the meek and mild historical Jesus spoon-fed to us by fundamentalist interpretations of the King James Bible) to new Cosmic visions of spiritual marriage that are shamanistic at their fiery core and show us how stunningly progressive she truly was in her religious thinking. She writes in one of her gems: "Given in Marriage unto Thee / Oh thou Celestial Host— / Bride of the Father and the Son / Bride of the Holy Ghost" (J 817/F 818).

The Holy Ghost is not a masculine symbol of Jesus. It is, for her, Trinity, yet perhaps especially the Holy Spirit, which is inclusive of the Divine Feminine, the male friend and lover and female friend and lover *combined* a truly bi-erotic union that leads her to experience an anguish and rapture that connect her through death to the life of the very Cos-

mos, Sun, Moon, Awe and Night, all of which are synonymous in her lexicon with the Beloved.

As a little girl, she tells us she was taught Immortality, which she referred to as her "Flood subject." From that point onward she followed the call of her Snake and other medicine-animals as her spirit-guides. Snake was her tutelary-helper, an animal *power*, and one of her most powerful poems is addressed to him in adoring Fellowship. Medicine powers such as Snake, Butterfly, and especially Hummingbird endowed her with a capacity for cultural *healing*; she transformed language from the very foundations of her shamanistic personality into a genre that can have no imitators because her style is the signature of the "columnar Self," the axis of her art that can never be broken by reductive diagnoses or pathologizing. Her marriage with Christ was to a Cosmic Divinity, transcendent of gender categories, and this is the "simple News" she wishes to convey to her readers:

> This is my letter to the World
> That never wrote to Me—
> The simple News that Nature told—
> With tender Majesty
>
> Her message is committed
> To Hands I cannot see—
> For love of Her—Sweet—countrymen—
> Judge tenderly—of Me. J 441/F 519

Calling Nature "Her" is also a reference to her own erotic nature, to which she had by this time become married; though in my opinion this was a bi-erotic nature. The inner marriage Dickinson had accepted was to the deep feminine, which is not infrequently realized as bisexual Eros. "News" she has to share with the world is the News of "Nature's God," or the God our founding fathers preserved in the Declaration of Independence. In Dickinson's view, Immortality is everywhere—in trees, woods, sky, moon and sun: "The only News I know / Is Bulletins all Day / From Immortality" (J 827/F 820).

How different Dickinson's tropes are from the King James Bible that she had on her writing desk! Like Whitman and Melville, Dickinson

moved beyond Judeo-Christian images of God into an "Undiscovered Continent." "The Bible is an antique Volume—" she wrote wryly, "Written by faded Men" (J 1545/F 1577). The "News" she has to share is shamanistic and aims to put an end to fundamentalist feuding about whose religion is better than whose or what creed or what marriage equality means according to Scripture. Says Emily: "Soto! Explore thyself! / Therein thyself shalt find / The 'Undiscovered Continent'— / No settler had the Mind" (J 832/F 814).

Before white Christian settlers came to North America there was an age-old practice that filled the land and Dickinson tapped into this: the spirit of shamanism. The medicine she dispenses for our benefit and blessing is not traditional; her marriage goes deeper to include the Feminine, the vulva of the flower, and Night. She is Bride of the Holy Spirit that comes after Christ, in preparation for the Age of Aquarius.

Dickinson's spiritual marriage takes the Judeo-Christian dispensation and the teachings of the monotheisms far, far further to include all people in the ritual of betrothal. For the "Other Betrothal shall dissolve—" (J 817/F 818) she asserts. She gives birth to a new symbol of wedlock, which is older than the historical teachings of Moses, Jesus, or the Prophet. She goes beyond these Sons of the Father and the Messenger, to include the News Nature told—of sleeping with her sisters, female friends, and lying down on the grass of her Volcano—Vesuvius—with the Goddess.

What Dickinson is after in her *ecstatic questing* for a theory of truth is to provide a vision of psychological and spiritual transformation for everyone; children included—as she is the only poet whose verse is still commonly read by school children! Her aim is to put forth a new spiritual dispensation, where everyone is valued, as equivalents. Traditional notions of "Wedlock of Will, decay—" she foresees. "Only the Keeper of this Ring" will "Conquer Mortality—" (J 817/F 818). Dickinson's aim is to disseminate "a Theme stubborn as Sublime" (J 1221/F 1210) and that is theme of being spiritually married to God and Goddess, Christ and Cosmos, Sun and Night.

What is the "Ring" Dickinson seeks to bequeath to us? As we shall see the gold of spiritual marriage is bi-erotic, a style of feminine expres-

sion that is neither heterosexual nor homosexual. It is inclusive of and transcendent of these psychic opposites, yet it is not the same. I would not even call it bisexual. It is *bi-erotic*, in the sense that it is transcendent of both genders and particular sexual "orientations" as to object choice. Such bi-eroticism does not demand a partner, for it may also serve as a prototype for a celibate nun, or a brother in monastic life, who never marries, and it also subsumes the *union of sames*. About this state of marriage that is open to everyone, she writes: "And now, I am different than before, / As if I breathed superior air— / Or brushed a Royal Gown—" (J 506/F 349).

When Dickinson says "superior" air here, she means she is breathing in an advance of previous notions of marriage, an air of Spiritual Democracy that has always been present on this beautiful planet spinning in space. Here is another example of her suggestive meanings: "The Soul's Superior instants / Occur to Her alone" (J 306/F 630). I think Dickinson felt she was alone because she was at least a century and a half in advance of her times; perhaps she really felt she was a pioneer, because no other woman in her century was bold enough to write a new version of the Bible that could revolutionize Christianity and still maintain her adhesion to its main article of faith while diagnosing it.

The Christ she wedded was not the traditional image of God that was being taught in the Churches. Whitman and Melville were putting forth images of same-sex marriage, but who were the women who were brave enough to do this with a spiritual attitude as robust as theirs? "What this one had to do" writes Adrienne Rich, "was to retranslate her own unorthodox, subversive, sometimes volcanic propensities into a dialect called metaphor: her native language."[34] Dickinson breathed superior air because she had found a new way. "Superiority to Fate" she wrote, "Is difficult to gain / 'Tis not conferred of Any / But possible to earn" (J 1081/F1043). That fate included having in life to remain a spinster (the adult form of being "an orphan" and all alone) and yet to be ever at risk of exposure as an eccentric who was passionately in love with *both* women and men in enduring friendship and loyalty.

34 A. Rich, "Vesuvius at Home," p. 51.

Emily Dickinson, who published merely seven poems in her lifetime, one of which was her "Snake," shows that it is only by staying true to one's destiny, one's *vocation*, that the attitude of superiority to fate can be achieved; by refusing to change her style at the hands of male editors who insulted her brilliance, she followed the powerful hand of her destiny. The real irony is that she wrote 1,775 poems, 1,049 letters and 124 prose fragments in her lifetime, and was the only 19th century American poet who was in her own way as powerful as Whitman! How could she have endured her incredible isolation from her national audience, which became so huge after her death that it even surpassed Whitman's in his own lifetime? What gave her the strength and immense power to endure her suffering without much bitterness, resentment, or envy creeping into her poetry? Sure, she felt such fleeting emotions, as we all do at times, but they did not stop her from fulfilling her destiny-pattern as a Medicine Woman.

The idea of superiority to Fate appears in the ancient wisdom-text from China (the *I Ching* or *Book of Changes*) in Hexagram # 11 *T'ai* or "Peace," and we have just seen what Dickinson had to say about it in (J 1081/F1043) from *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson.*[35] Under changing line number three, in Hexagram # 11 of the *I Ching*, it is written: "As long as man's inner nature remains stronger and richer than anything offered by external fortune, as long as he [she] remains superior to fate, fortune will not desert him [her]."[36] Dickinson, who represents this attitude, more supremely perhaps, than any other poet writing in America, wrote simply and eloquently that becoming superior to Fate is an attitude that may in fact be *earned* through practical devotion to her spiritual inheritance, which in her case was her Art. It is not conferred on one; it must be earned pragmatically through the only means we have and that is our vocation to *sacred action*: our call to spiritual activity.

Hence, we need to inquire what type of healing follows the emotional distress within herself and her Puritan culture when Dickinson

35 Emily Dickinson, *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson.*

36 Richard Wilhelm translation rendered into English by Cary F. Baynes, *The I Ching or Book of Changes*, p. 51.

withdrew into seclusion at the age of thirty, all dressed in white, and began to act differently from the majority. What is the psychological meaning of her withdrawal from the world into her dreams, visions, and ecstasies? Her donning of a white wedding dress signifies a *living symbol* of betrothal, I hypothesize, to the spirit of her shamanistic art and it will be my aim, as author of this book and as a marriage and family psychotherapist, to make its meaning translucent for the reader.

2

A WOMAN WHITE TO BE

A solemn thing—it was—I said—
A woman—white—to be—
And wear—if God should count me fit—
Her blameless mystery—

A hallowed thing—to drop a life
Into the purple well—
Too plummetless—that it return—
Eternity— J 271/F 307

Like Walt Whitman and Herman Melville, Emily Dickinson is a mediator between the world of the living and the world of the dead during a time in our nation when grief and death was everywhere knocking at democracies hallowed door. "Death," she writes, "is a dialogue between / The Spirit and the Dust. / 'Dissolve' says Death—The Spirit 'Sir / I have another Trust'—" (J 976/F 973). This dialogue of the human spirit with death may be the most important theme in all of Dickinson's art. "A woman—white—to be—" is a symbol for Dickinson's spiritual transformation. The colloquy that emerges does indeed have a goal it can "trust"—*spiritual* marriage, which transcends the inevitable evolution of flesh into dust. We have to inquire in this chapter what the symbol of white meant to Emily. On one hand, it means death to the ego, while on another hand, it might represent death's apotheosis, which is immortality.

What the causal origins of the poet's pre-occupations with death as a path to immortality were, has long been a puzzle to Dickinson scholars.

Even more mysterious is the symbol of whiteness, which can be found at the convergence point of her spiritual center. "Each Life," she writes, "Converges to some Centre— / Expressed—or still— / Exists in every Human Nature / A Goal—" (J 680/F 724).

Convergence towards a center is an idea we find in many parts of the world and in practically all world religions, the center is usually seen as a symbol of the goal of Self-fulfillment.[37] In sacred geometric diagrams from alchemy, this is known as the quintessence of the work, and the center is placed in the middle of a four-cornered square, where diagonals may cross. Dickinson is thus expressing a perennial truth when she claims that the fear of death can be overcome through accepting a vocation to become centered in the course of transforming development, and for her, such acceptance came through a submission to the practice of her art. Her donning of a white wedding dress at some time in 1860, or thereabouts, near the outset of the Civil War, suggests, moreover, that she was in the process of mourning for the many loves that would be lost in the War; as well as for her own personal losses; and her whiteness is an insignia of her function as a poet-shaman who administers the medicine of fearlessness towards an event that is typically terrifying to the ego.

In her center is the sacred marriage to herself that seems to have replaced, or internalized her youthful passion for other women, in gender like herself, whom she found within as her own "society," as well as her passion for a number of different men. Thus, a same-sex union as well as a heterosexual union became the path to an ever-burning bi-erotic spiritual marriage, an outcome that left Dickinson not just a reclusive New England single, but also a true "Bride of Awe"—"Awe" being the appropriate feeling toward such an unexpected, but fully satisfying inner outcome that culminated in *whiteness* as a permanent part of her daily dress.

> Circumference thou Bride of Awe
> Possessing thou shalt be
> Possessed of every hallowed Knight
> That dares covet thee J 1620/F 1636

37 See Endnote F.

By "Circumference," she means the universe. As "Bride" to a new nation dressed in white, she sought to convey pride in a country that concentrated the best intellectual unity of her century in a language that grasped the great phenomena of the infinite universe through a free exercise of thought that saw power and love as the most forceful influences over the destinies of nations. By then Dickinson had married her poetry to her own country of Spiritual Democracy, America, which was no less important to her than it was to her male contemporaries, Whitman and Melville. By "Bride of Awe" she means, therefore, that she has married the entire Cosmos.

Like Whitman and Melville, who more openly chafed at the limitations of his homeland, Dickinson took into account the "higher point of view" of the idea of the Cosmos that was made possible by Alexander von Humboldt in his book *Cosmos: A Sketch of the Physical Description of the Universe*.[38] Humboldt's "rational empiricism" which the New England transcendentalists embraced, concerned "facts registered by science,"[39] but Dickinson took that notion of a cosmic order into the domain of spiritual ideas in an effort to expand the God-concept in Christian theology. She would challenge the traditional notions of faith with the new knowledge of science.

Dickinson's reflections on the unity of the Cosmos pervading the diversity of Creation convey the alchemical idea of the *unus mundus,* one world, that Jung rediscovered in the 20th century for modern psychology. She was without any doubt influenced by Humboldtian science. The language of Humboldt's vision is too close to hers to be merely coincidentally significant. Her "Circumference" being "wider than the Sky" clearly suggests Humboldt's *Cosmos*.

To be sure, Dickinson's vision truly echoes Humboldt: "earnest and solemn thoughts awakened by a communion with nature" and like him, she intuits "a presentiment of the order and harmony pervading the whole universe."[40] This is the vision that informs "A solemn thing—it

38 Alexander von Humboldt, *Cosmos: A Sketch of the Physical Description of the Universe*, Vol. 1, pp. 56-57.

39 *CS1*, p. 49.

40 *CS1*, p. 25.

was—I said— / A woman—white—to be—" and of "the size" of her "small" life swelling "like Horizons" in her "vest" (J 271/ F 307). Dickinson means here *horizons of the whole Cosmos*.

Her poetry is a celebration of what Humboldt called "an image of infinity revealed on every side, whether we look upward to the starry vault of heaven, scan the far-stretching plain before us, or seek to trace the dim horizon across the vast expanse of ocean."[41] Her scope of visionary seeing was from the shoulders of Humboldt, who, as we've seen, had scaled Chimborazo. That Dickinson had encountered Humboldt, along with Melville, Emerson and Whitman is more than likely because she names Chimborazo in a poem and had in her library four volumes of the geological works of the Reverend professor and president (from 1845 to 1854) of Amherst College, George Hitchcock, one of Humboldt's main disciples in the United States, and who spoke at Mount Holyoke Female Seminary in the fall of 1847, during Dickinson's first term there.

Dickinson employed the "term *volcanic,* in the widest sense of the word" possible to describe not only every "action of the interior of the planet on its exterior crust" or "surface of our globe," as Humboldt had done,[42] but widened its horizons to include *circles of commotion* that emanate from the very depths of the human psyche, whether in individuals, cities, or nations. Humboldt in *Cosmos* was enabled to transport readers to see everything in the universe as *equivalents*.[43]

Riding on these Humboldtian currents, Dickinson soared to meet her destiny as a Bride of Awe, who dispenses her awareness of Circumference as a World-teacher of "an intimate connection existing among all phenomenon."[44] "Dare you dwell in the *East* where we dwell?" (Dickinson asked one of her female friends, Kate Scott Anthon in a letter from around 1859), "Are you afraid of the Sun?"[45] The Sun was Dickinson's favorite symbol for ecstasy and its rising symbolized the energetic warmth of what Dickinson clearly enough referred to as the joy of consummated marriage: "A Wife—at Daybreak I shall be— /

41 *CS1*, p. 25.
42 *CS1*, p. 45.
43 *CS1*, p. 51.
44 *CS1*, p. 50.
45 *L*, II, p. 349.

Sunrise—Hast thou a Flag for me? / At Midnight I am but a Maid, / How short it takes to make it Bride—" (J 461/F 185). We can see how much these two men of science meant to Dickinson in the following poem, but we should keep in mind her own feminine way of integrating their knowledge into her own melodies that contain many insights that transcend science.

I have never seen "Volcanoes"—
But, when Travellers 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— J 175/F 165

The "fire, and smoke, and gun" (an echo of the "right to bear arms" in our second Amendment to the Constitution) could be seen as a working trope in our national discourse in 1860 on the verge of Civil War. Dickinson was fascinated with the volcanic force at the earth's fiery core (J 1705/F 1691). Dickinson loved volcanic metaphors. Everywhere in Humboldt's reflections on volcanoes[46] are his own meditations on the "manifestation of force in the interior of our planet, or the upheaval of strata" that are "manifested in craters."[47] Scattered throughout this 28 page tour de force section on "Volcanoes" in his *Cosmos,* moreover, are numerous reflections on Chimborazo, Vesuvius, Etna, Tenerife, the Andes of Quito, Popocatepetl, the snow-capped Himalaya, and the crowned summits of the Cordilleras, all of which Dickinson mentions in her poetry and letters, and that she is enabled through her knowledge

46 *CS1*, pp. 227-245.
47 *CS1*, p. 226.

of Greek mythology to transform into working metaphors on the meaning of fate and human destiny.

When Dickinson writes in a letter to Higginson: "I had no Monarch in my life, and cannot rule myself, and when I try to organize—my little Force explodes—and leaves me bare and charred,"[48] this is surely an embodied, sexual metaphor for an internal eruption from her emotional core; she is, as a woman poet breaking out as an American literary heroine who is writing powerfully with volcanic force from her own home and her transformed body. She has become a bride of the nation who alights on a still and active volcano that can erupt at any time as an incarnation of Gaia, the Earth Mother, who bears the boiling heat of the Cosmos in her womb.

> Volcanoes be in Sicily
> And South America
> I judge from my Geography—
> Volcanoes nearer here
> A Lava step at a time
> Am I inclined to climb—
> A Crater I may contemplate
> Vesuvius at Home. J 1705/F 1691

Here, she makes it clear that she finds enough variety in her private world, contemplating the geography of her inner Cosmos' central-most-point, whose eruptions she traced with the same intent as any Humboldtian explorer of the Americas to the origins of all life, which is fire and its blazing *whiteness* at the forge of her poetic vocation. With "No Monarch" to rule her life, this poetically embodied woman was indeed *volcanic.* Yet, to be sure, the source of her inner fire was far more than sexual. It was, at its psychobiological core, *force,* pure and simple: explosive, ecstatic, mythopoetic, emotional. The time of the monarchies of Europe, Russia, and the Middle East had since passed and an age of Spiritual Democracy, ruled by the feminine world soul and able to realize itself in bi-erotic ways, and not simply through masculine conquest of the feminine, or female body, had dawned to the pleasure of Ameri-

48 *L*, II, p. 414.

can poets.[49] Yet to the nation that was descending into the madness of the Civil War, her words fell on deaf ears. Writes the Medicine Woman:

> Much Madness is divinest Sense—
> To a discerning Eye—
> Much Sense—the starkest Madness—
> 'Tis the Majority
> In this, as All, prevail—
> Assent—and you are sane—
> Demur—you are straightway dangerous—
> And handled with a Chain— J 435/F 620

To be sure, Higginson and his wife were amongst the "Majority" of writers, friends, and critics in her century who failed to understand her. Such "Madness" also pertains to Higginson's views of Whitman. In an 1871 essay in the *Atlantic,* Higginson wrote, for instance: "It is no discredit to Walt Whitman that he wrote 'Leaves of Grass,' only that he did not burn it afterwards and reserve himself for something better."[50] This statement's own value lies in the way it exposes the prudishness and shallowness of Higginson's mind. Dickinson herself complained to Higginson in 1866 that one of her most prized poems, "The Snake" (J 986/F 1096), one of only seven published in her relatively short lifetime, had been "robbed" of her in the way it had been edited for publication.[51] "Much Madness" was in a way its own "volcano," because it exposed and exploded the lack not only of insight, but of empathy in Higginson's attempts to appreciate her "Snake" amongst other poems.

The "Snake" demonstrates that Dickinson in fact knew her mythology quite well, as is evidenced from her wide reading of Greek myths and poetry. She knew from her geography that Mount Vesuvius was a stratovolcano on the Gulf of Naples that had erupted many times and could easily lift its lid again, with massive hydrothermal pyroclastic flows to engulf the "new city" of Pompeii. In another poem, she had

49 The Self of the poet can be seen as an image of the world soul, or what Emily Dickinson called "The Ethiop within" (J 422/F 415). "Ethiop" was a term in common usage in the mid-19th century and had become more or less synonymous with "African."

50 *S*, p. 574.

51 *S*, p. 6.

written, "If some loving Antiquary, / On Resumption Morn, / Will not cry with joy 'Pompeii!'" (J 175/F 165). Settled by the Greeks, Pompeii was long used to the power of Vesuvius' *violence* (one derivation for the word Vesuvius is "hurling violence") that testifies to the unimaginable force of the Cosmos to level entire cities of man in an instant, "Taking Villages for breakfast / And appalling Men—" (J 175/F 165) and this force was portrayed in decorative frescoes in many household shrines as a Serpent.

Thus, the "Snake" she felt had been stolen from under her white wedding dress was one of Dickinson's best symbols for great *shamanic power*. No doubt she had suffered an eruption of authorial outrage at having her poem so conventionally edited. But, there was a spiritual issue as well for the now mature poet-shaman who had burned pure in the fires of her Andean *Whiteness*. To tamper, even a little, with its style or syntax was to insult the sacred and set off an earthquake from the "little Force" of her "Universe," her righteous indignation and Himalayan "Flags of Snow" (J 481) she could evince.

Her "Consciousness that is aware" (J 822/F 817) as an artist of its source as the center and circumference of a Cosmos reacting to human intervention could blow red hot or freezing white cold. Dickinson's fascination with Circumference and being a "Bride of Awe" dressed in white may have its origins in the sense of boundlessness that was conveyed to her as a little girl at the age of 2, when she beheld the spectacle of the Lightning and called it "the *fire."* As a child, the future poet must have had a passionate nature, furthermore, because her parents wanted her "still." She writes for instance: "They shut me up in Prose— / As when a little Girl / They put me in a Closet— / Because they liked me "still—" (J 613/F 445).

Thus, in "A still—Volcano—Life—" her "Solemn—Torrid—Symbol—" is written in "A quiet—Earthquake Style—" (J 601/F 517). Another verse reads as follows: "I never spoke—unless addressed— / And then, 'twas brief and low— / I could not bear to live—aloud— / The Racket shamed me so—" (J 486/F 473). She speaks further of "A loss of something ever felt I— / The first that I could recollect / Bereft I was—of what I knew not / Too young that any should suspect" (J 959/F 1072). The loss left her an orphan of the Cosmos and a child of the fiery

Abyss. "The reticent volcano keeps / His never slumbering plan— / … Can human nature not survive / Without a listener?" (J 1748/F 1776). To disseminate her "vital Light" of Consciousness to humanity, Dickinson was impelled to write: "I work to drive the awe away, yet awe impels the work."[52]

Awe was Dickinson's parent, for as she said: "We were never intimate Mother and Children while she was our Mother—" and only "when she became our Child, the Affection came—"[53] Despite Dickinson's mother-and-father-wounding in infancy and childhood, she soothed her childhood complexes throughout her art and arrived at the realization of her creative destiny. No wonder that when she was fully mature as a poet, she refused to let any critic, editor, or mentor change her.

> Me, change! Me, alter!
> Then I will, when on the everlasting Hill
> A Smaller Purple grows—
> At sunset, or a lesser glow
> Flickers upon Cordillera—
> At Day's superior close! J 268/F 281

Seeing Dickinson as an American explorer who was destined to "climb the Hill of Science" (J 3/F 2), I will show how she summons her poetic thunder to release a lightning bolt of shamanic Ecstasy to awaken us from our slumber. If we attune our ears to her sonorous and solemn tones and fill our minds with her "Bolts of Melody" (J 505/F 348), we may be led to understand precisely what she means by spiritual marriage, as a wedding to the *All-in-White*: "Take your Heaven further on— / …An Eternity—put on— / …Dressed to meet You— / See—in White!" (J 388/F 672).

> The Himmaleh was known to stoop
> Unto the Daisy low—
> Transported with Compassion
> That such a Doll should grow
> Where Tent by Tent—Her Universe
> Hung out its Flags of Snow— J 481/F 460

52 *L*, II, p. 500.
53 *L*, III, pp. 754-755.

Dickinson knew her source of power was the volcanic Word, which could be either searing hot or cold-white as snow, and which she felt was needed to ignite a revolution in human consciousness. "Dare you see a Soul *at the White Heat*?" she asks "Then crouch within the door—" (J 365/F 401). Dickinson, like other shaman-poets, sometimes imagined that *sacred violence* had produced her own voice.

> Nor Mountain hinder Me
> Nor Sea—
> Who's Baltic—
> Who's Cordillera? J 1029/F 1041

As we shall see, Dickinson's preoccupation with death, violence, and metamorphosis (change or transformation symbolized by *whiteness*) was not morbid or pathological in the least. As she wrote to Kate Scott Anthon in 1859: "Insanity to the sane seems so unnecessary—but I am only one, and they are 'four and forty,' which little affair of numbers leaves me impotent…I am pleasantly located in the deep sea."[54] Dickinson saw death as a semblance of the only reality, which is to become immortal like snow-capped mountains: "'Is immortality true?' I believe that it is true—the only reality—almost; a thousand times truer than mortality, which is but a semblance after all."[55] What was the basis for this fascination with immortality, whiteness, and death in the poet's childhood and early adolescence?

As Richard Sewall tells us, Dickinson's mother, Emily Norcross Dickinson, had a "tremulous fear of death" that she could not help convey to her children.[56] Such fears were not uncommon in 1830, when Dickinson was born. Infant mortality was quite high on both sides of the Dickinson family, especially along her maternal line. Yet, the poet's mother appears to have had intense anxieties in the face of death bordering on acute panic.

In 1844, when Emerson was calling for a national bard in his essay "The Poet" and Humboldt's *Cosmos* had just been published in its origi-

54 *L*, II, p. 356.
55 *L*, III, p. 731.
56 *S*, 79, p. 80.

nal German, Dickinson was still an adolescent girl, beyond her years at age 14. In this fateful year, she experienced four consecutive deaths in her family that traumatized her youthful and playful psyche and led her to feel deep sorrow on one hand, and a secret gladness over the certainty of immortality on the other. For the third of these deaths was the devastating death of her second cousin, Sophia Holland, who died of typhus, and Dickinson was present, just before the moment of her untimely death. "It seemed to me I should die too," Emily wrote the following year at fifteen, "if I could not be permitted to watch over her or even look at her face." Emily apparently took off her shoes and went to the doorway and peered in as Sophia "lay mild & beautiful as in health & her pale features lit up with an unearthly—smile."[57] Dickinson let herself be led away, but that golden "smile" that lit up on Sophia's face formed an indelible impression on the poet's mind, a memory-imprint that stayed with her, until she herself stepped through the door and became a "Soul at the White Heat."

Dickinson's consolatory letters on the death of little children and the immortality of the soul are quite remarkable; one in particular was sent to her sister-in-law, Susan Gilbert, after the death of Dickinson's little nephew, Thomas Gilbert Dickinson, who lived with her brother Austin and Sue next door, and was affectionately called by them "Gilbert," or little "Gib." This was a horrible death for everyone in the Dickinson family to have *felt*, for the latency-aged boy Gib had just turned eight years old. In 1883 the boy contracted typhoid fever. Emily, who had not been in her brother's and Sue's home for fifteen years, was present at the lad's bedside the terrible night he died. She stayed with him until 3 A.M., began to feel ill, went home and vomited, and was violently ill for weeks. Dickinson wrote to the boy's grieving mother, her dear friend Sue, that little Gib's death had been a triumph, a transcendent and heroic soaring of his spirit into Eternity: "Gilbert rejoiced in Secrets—/ His Life was panting with them…/ No crescent was this Creature— He traveled from the Full— / Such soar, but never set…/ Without a speculation, our little Ajax spans the whole…"[58] Ajax, a mighty warrior in

57 Alfred Habegger, *My Wars Are Laid Away in Books: The Life of Emily Dickinson*, p. 172.

58 *L*, III, pp. 800-801.

the *Iliad,* was a figure of great strength and power. But in another letter about Gib, also to Sue, Dickinson uses the gentler, though no less forceful American metaphor of a spirit boat or spirit canoe, a motif in shamanic mythologies the world over for the boat of the dead: "Moving in the Dark like Loaded Boats at Night, though there is no Course, there is Boundlessness."[59] Space, Boundlessness, Tremendousness, and Infinity are frequent synonyms for Immortality in Dickinson's oeuvre and so too is the "kind" behind the door. As she wrote to her "little children" the Norcross Cousins: "Tis not that Dying hurts us so—/ 'Tis living—hurts us more—/ But Dying—is a different way—/ A Kind behind the Door—" (J 335/F 528).

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Dickinson reported in a letter to Elizabeth Holland (as if she were a modern-day parapsychologist, investigating end-of-life-experiences!) that Gib's last words were: "open the Door, they are waiting for me." Dickinson then added in her letter: "*Who* were waiting for him, all we possess we would give to know—Anguish at last opened it, and he ran to the little Grave at his Grandparent's feet—All this and more, though *is* there more?" she asked. "More than Love and Death? Then tell me its name!"[60]

In all of these musings we can find what Dickinson called her "main business" as a poet, which was to comprehend the ultimate: "—My Business is Circumference—"[61] As she wrote in another letter to the Norcross cousins: "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'?"[62] Thus we are returned to the *violence* of her own intent to rob others of their complacency. "Vesuvius at Home" is the place of *volcanic vocation*, the violence or wildness from which Dickinson wrote. There were probably minor eruptions that came to her in her childhood and latency years, but the major eruption, her "Earthquake Style" and "lips that never lie— / Whose hissing Corals part—and shut— / And Cities—ooze away—" on "this side Naples—"

59 *L*, III, p. 801.
60 *L*, III, p. 803.
61 *L*, II, p. 411.
62 *L,* III, p. 670.

(J 601/F 517) is a style she perfected at around the age of thirty, and only came much later to say in 1885, a year before she died:

> Go thy great way!
> The Stars thou meetst
> Are even as Thyself—
> For what are Stars but Asterisks
> To point a human Life? J 1638/F 1673

Here, Dickinson's goal is clearly in sight: the way of stars led her to her stardom in the integrity of a human life. As we shall see, Dickinson was a master of the technique of shamanic ecstasy. This was her calling, her vocation: to give assurance to the world, through the voice of one who *knows* that we needn't fear death. We would be wise therefore, to take instruction from Dickinson as a mistress of Spiritual Democracy dressed all in white, which as we've seen is a symbol for death and spiritual transformation. At the age of twenty-eight, she wrote "Ah! dainty—dainty Death! Ah! Democratic Death!…Say, is he everywhere? Where shall I hide my things?"[63]

This book shows a *way* through Dickinson's life, relationships, and art that elucidates for students of psychology, theology, literature, and shamanism the basic pattern of the shaman's call, upon which her *destiny* was patterned. What she disseminates to us through her oeuvre is nothing short of a new myth, as "Bride" to a grieving nation, caught in the conflict of Civil War. As she wrote to Higginson: "When much in the Woods as a little Girl, I was told that the Snake would bite me, that I might pick a poisonous flower, or Goblins kidnap me, but I went along and met no one but Angels, who were far shyer of me, than I could be of them, so I hav'nt the confidence in fraud which many exercise."[64] And about publication, Emily said to Higginson, on June 7, 1862, after he told her to delay publishing: "I smile when you suggest that I delay 'to publish'—that being foreign to my thought, as Firmament to Fin—If fame belonged to me, I could not escape her—if she did not, the longest day would pass me on the chase—and the approbation of my Dog, would forsake me—then. My Barefoot Rank is better—You think my

63 *L*, II, p. 321.
64 *L*, II, p. 415.

gait 'spasmodic'—I am in danger—Sir—You think me 'uncontrolled'—I have no Tribunal…The Sailor cannot see the North—but knows the Needle can—."[65]

What was she talking about here? We have already seen the connection between her barefoot rank and her rebellion against patriarchal authority. Here, she asserts her authority to this rank *consciously*, for she has forsaken not only her career to publish by this time; she has ceded her call to wed, as well. She has given up both careers, and these two losses have led her to *choose* her own destiny and overcome the fractures of her fate. Interestingly, these two decisions arose during a moment in time when she renounced Christianity in its limiting sense altogether:

> I'm ceded—I've stopped being Theirs—
> The name They dropped upon my face
> With water, in the country church
> Is finished using, now,
> And They can put it with my Dolls,
> My childhood, and the string of spools,
> I've finished threading—too—
>
> Baptized, before, without the choice,
> But this time, consciously, of Grace—
> Unto supremest name—
> Called to my Full—the Crescent dropped—
> Existence's whole Arc, filled up,
> With one small Diadem.
>
> My second Rank—too small the first—
> Crowned—Crowing—on my Father's breast—
> A half unconscious Queen—
> But this time—Adequate—Erect,
> With Will to choose, or to reject,
> And I choose, just a Crown— J 508/F 353

Dickinson had stopped going to Church by this time, so this poem is obviously not about conventional baptism or confirmation, Christian rites she no longer found meaning in at all; this poem is about, therefore,

65 *L,* II, pp. 408-409.

her experience of being "twice-born" as an American bard. Yet, I believe she means this in an entirely new sense, one that may not be found in the Hebrew-Christian Bible. That new status she calls "Adequate" is superordinate to that from which she has been "ceded." Her new "Second Rank" is the Birth of the Self, in herself, and by way of her vocation in the world soul of humankind. Aware of herself now and this time "Erect," she is "Called" to her "Full" to embody not just the crescent of her existence, but "Existence's whole Arc, filed up, / With one small Diadem." Her second rank is therefore the shaman-poets' *exuberance* at the transformative powers of her art. She has consciously chosen "just a Crown—" and her "Crowing" as a "half unconscious Queen—" leads to her great pride in herself, for she has solved the riddle of her life in time, which is to attain the diamond body. "Crowing" on her "Father's breast—," with "Will to choose, or reject" whatever title she may bestow she has married God and the Goddess, "Her sweet Weight on my Heart a Night" (J 518/F 611).

These poems find their spiritual orientation well beyond the dogma of traditional Christianity and chart a new way ahead to comprehend the transformations and symbols of her creative energies as an artist. But there are also many Christian roots, of the more arcane sort, such as in "Nicodemus'" central "Mystery" (J 140/F 90) of rebirth: "But how shall finished Creatures / A function fresh obtain? / Old Nicodemus' Phantom / Confronting us again!" (J 1274/F 1218). The mystery of Nicodemus was the question of how a man can enter into his mother's womb a second time and be born, to which Christ answered only via water and spirit can such a second birth be fully realized. In "I'm ceded" Dickinson uses a political trope ("ceded") to cast doubt on the conventional notion of the only way to the new Jerusalem being strictly through a symbolic rebirth through the mother's body, to include a rebirth in imagination on her father's breast, and to assume thereby a marriage "Crown" that encompass' a fuller bi-erotic "whole" that includes All. Thus, her "Barefoot Rank" that she proclaims to Higginson, himself a minister, was an act of "Crowing" and Crowning that signaled her acceptance of her own authority as a sovereign poet whose style was not to be tampered with. "A Woman White to Be" in fact *is* what she became for herself, her fam-

ily and friends, and for the world: a mediator between life, death, and a pointer to the way of spiritual transformation.

3

FATE AND DESTINY

Fate and destiny are notions that have appeared across the centuries in the myths and philosophies of all nations. Arthur Schopenhauer dignified them for philosophy, and they are central to the practice of psychotherapy today. For instance, each time a patient struggles with something that keeps happening, transformation takes place when she or he can learn from that experience and *take charge* of what becomes of her or his life. In so doing, such a patient's fate can indeed be transformed. One does not typically think of these variables—fate and destiny—as pressing issues for Emily Dickinson; however, as we've seen, she was a poet who overcame her second-class status as a single woman to achieve total independence and liberty as a writer, while still suffering the stigma of unmarried life in her father's house in Amherst.

Emily is sometimes claimed as an ancestor of modern-day feminists because she embraced the American spirit of personal *empowerment* as a woman at around the same time of the first feminist gathering in the United States at Seneca Falls in 1848. In her own time, Dickinson had little choice but to accept the way of financial dependence upon her family, but she learned to claim her freedom in the widest sense possible through her poetry.

Powerful, fierce, and transformative, she speaks for herself as someone who not only surpassed her father Edward and brother Austin in intellectual prowess, but mocks her own status in the family from a place of supreme dignity. She wrote ironically, we saw in "I'm ceded," that she crowed proudly on her father's breast. Similarly, she never surrendered in any relationship to a man that might have forced her to

relinquish the sovereign power of her Wife's Voice, even though she fell in love with more than one man in her lifetime.

Even more telling, she never sacrificed her bi-erotic vision of loving both men and women passionately, which suggests that she loved both sexes *equally*. As we'll see, her psyche became victorious over fate, through the invincibility of the relatedness and compassion she brought to her art.

Nevertheless, she was a woman of her times, and it is obvious that in the domain of marriage, Dickinson failed to fulfill her heart's desire. She suffered the stings of the arrows of love that is the fate of many humans, whether married or unmarried, on a material plane; yet, on a spiritual plane, she was free, and transcendent. The Christian Church was all-powerful in her immediate community and at times she turned to "Jesus Christ of Nazareth" for inspiration and love. But her image of Jesus is not the traditional view of the historical man who walked the streets of Galilee. It is far deeper and far higher; deep as the fiery crust of the earth and vast as the sky. "At least—to pray—is left—is left— / Oh Jesus—in the Air— / I know not which thy chamber is— / I'm knocking—everywhere—/ Thou settest Earthquake in the South— / And Maelstrom, in the Sea— / Say, Jesus Christ of Nazareth— / Hast thou no Arm for Me?" (J 502/F 377).

She imagines wedlock with Christ during moments of her deepest anguish. Yet her truest lover was not, however, this immediate Divinity, but the entire Cosmos, a realm beyond names and forms that is not limited to male or female avatars of its supreme and unnamable magnificence.

In this way, she was able to change her fate as an unmarried woman to a destiny that enabled her to speak up for all humans. Accepting that she had been called to be a different kind of woman from other women in her generation, she took her charge to vocalize the "simple News" of Nature, news of the immortality of the whole Universe:

> This is my letter to the World
> That never wrote to Me—
> The simple News that Nature told—
> With tender Majesty J 441/F 519

Such overcoming of fate by someone with an unmarried and unpublished life, through the inner good fortune to know about God through His writings in Nature, is as much a Greek idea, as any other. It's part of the perennial philosophy that became in the 19th century an American prerogative to call upon. Walt Whitman called it Religious Democracy. Dickinson needed many people around her, young and old, male and female to inspire her.[66] As a writer of poetry and letters, Dickinson arrived at a linguistic method whereby she could hold the opposites between fate and destiny in a beautiful way and what she learns from her relationships she dispenses to us in her writings for purposes of our own personal and cultural transformation.

Let us begin to tease out some of the shades of meaning Dickinson herself formed between these two concepts—fate and destiny—by looking first at a few of her poems and then at some of her letters.

> 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. J 1081/F1043

The way I read this poem is that the Soul, which can obviously become bogged down and depressed by bad fortune in love (its fate) may, with surprise, embrace the good luck of having been given a chance to look inward to the immense richness that inheres in *emotional experience itself.*

In fact, the dimension of the American Soul Dickinson enters into is so rich with gold and gems, inner light and love, that she can register an abundance of spiritual energy that is released simply by affirming the validity of her inner world and its royal unity, even when outer fulfillment has denied her, materially in matrimony. Becoming a poet *is* her

66 See Endnote G.

solution, and it allows her a full and richly satisfying inner life and a meaningful life in social and familial friendships.

On the other hand, even a destiny as grand as the one Dickinson envisioned to herself cannot ever erase the fate that occasioned it. The Fates are great teachers! There were three major blows of fate in Dickinson's life that we'll take a close look at in some detail in this chapter: 1) All of the men she fell in love with either died abruptly, or were married, meaning her dreams for marriage were forever frustrated in her lifetime by a perpetual "no" from the universe. 2) Only seven of her poems were published before her untimely death in 1886. 3) Some of her loves were almost certainly directed toward members of her own gender at a time when this was strictly taboo. Such outer frustrations were all transcended by Dickinson in her art, where she claimed the spiritual freedom and liberty that enabled her to embrace the men and women she needed, and give voice to the *secret of her fame*.

What she previously had experienced as a "pittance" of superiority could thus become a true spiritual "gain" from the Self through her writing. Her Soul could then distribute such "earned" superiority having achieved oneness across the many categories of her life. This abundance of opportunity for spiritual realization and Awe was not conferred by anyone on the outside, but was a genuine triumph over fate. The destiny she earned she could declare, along with her male contemporaries, Emerson, Whitman, and Melville, as an assertion of the independence of the American Self. Superiority to Fate is the introvert's embrace of spiritual independence. It is an intoxicant, as in "I taste a liquor never brewed" (J 214) as well as a psychological attitude towards personal suffering. She delights in Ecstasy in a way that indicates she knows about inflation even better than Whitman or Melville do. She is the most psychologically Self-aware of these three.

How did such a transformation of her fate to be so different than her contemporaries come about in Emily Dickinson's lifetime so that she could accept her *destiny* as a shamanic post-Christian American poet—any of which terms would have done many another New England woman in?

To answer this question, it is important to grasp the religious background she was born into. Dickinson's ancestors were fervent Puritans, who had shared in the dreams of a New Jerusalem in New England. Emily's first new world ancestor, Nathaniel Dickinson, had crossed the Atlantic in 1630 with no less a figure than John Winthrop during the Great Migration. This paternal ancestor became the governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, just as Dickinson would one day govern the commonwealth of her own Soul.

Emily's paternal grandfather, Samuel Fowler Dickinson, had graduated from Dartmouth and built Amherst's first brick house in 1813, and undoubtedly it was he who played the greatest influence on her sense of the importance of developing a spiritual identity as the happiest prerogative of being an American. Following teachings in vogue at Yale University, where Emily's father would go to college, Samuel had become a Trinitarian deacon of the West Church of Amherst. Trinitarian thought followed the theology of the 18th century Puritan pastor, Jonathan Edwards, the most important Christian intellectual of the American colonies, and Samuel Dickinson took it as his main task to promote this uniquely American brand of religious education at Amherst Academy, where Emily later attended elementary and middle school. Samuel Dickinson was also one of the founding fathers of Amherst College, a more doctrinaire school that defined itself, along with Yale, Williams, and Dartmouth, as resolutely Trinitarian, eschewing the schisms that had formed with the arrival of the liberal Bostonian Unitarians at Harvard. (This latter group would claim Emerson and Edward Everett Hale in the course of the 19th century).

From family documents, it is crystal clear that Samuel Fowler Dickinson was not a reformer, as Jonathan Edwards had been. His granddaughter, Emily, would become in time and in a real spiritual sense, in her own private way, anything but a religious zealot. Nevertheless, his love of education at Amherst extended across many branches of knowledge: history, philosophy, literature, languages, mathematics, art, sciences, etc. Having a broad educational base in his day was seen by university administrators as a way of consolidating institutional power, which corresponded to the dawn of the modern attitude in Europe following the defeat of Napoleon in 1815, to effect biblical doctrine and

thus to quell any doubts about the need to believe rather literally in Jesus Christ. For Samuel Dickinson, this meant He was Father, Son, and Holy Ghost in one Trinitarian dogma, not needing any new "fourth" identity of the divine feminine to be able to redeem mankind. As a woman, Emily would offer *herself as that fourth*, saying "I do not respect 'doctrines,'" something that would have been inconceivable for Samuel. The only question for him was which creed would play the leading role in defining the direction of religious life in the young nation, and he was determined to make it Trinitarianism, a dogma from which Emily ceded.

Emily Dickinson's father, Edward Dickinson, however, hardly dared dissent. He graduated from Trinitarian Yale with a law degree and returning to his childhood home in Amherst, opened a law office. In 1835 he became treasurer of Amherst College, where he carried on the community tradition of his father, with the important exception that he never proselytized for the Trinitarian Church to which he belonged. This was an important and great affirmation of all American's right to choose rather than be dictated to where religion is concerned. Spreading the Word of Scripture, in a nation that sixty years earlier had proclaimed in its political documents that no image of God save "Nature's God" would be established in its Declaration, was a typical American contradiction. It was one Edward Dickinson certainly recognized and that Emily would in turn defy, by defining her own quite different spiritual standpoint in a courageously outspoken way within her poetry. This is not unrelated to the other contradiction that so undermined the United States pretension to being a land where "all men are created equal"—slavery! That plague had yet to be eradicated by the insistence on racial equality that Lincoln underscored, but it is out of a similar struggle for real *democratic spiritual freedom,* among other things for women, that Dickinson found her true calling.

Dickinson's ability to chart out a path for both feminine and shamanic spirituality as a route to *true* spiritual freedom did not emerge in the same moment as the Civil War by accident. It was part of what Whitman recognized and celebrated in Lincoln in 1865, the need to keep on struggling in the American nation for political and legal rights for *all* people.

Fortunately for Emily, who was five years old at the time her father Edward became treasurer of Amherst College, in 1835, Edward did not share in *his* father Samuel Fowler Dickinson's messianic mission to convert all heathens to Christianity, and all Christians to a more truly Trinitarian Christianity. Rather, Edward thought that schools like Amherst, on the model of Yale and Harvard, should advance the American value of the Freedom of Religion.

Emily, therefore, was free to introduce a feminine fourth, a way to wholeness, into the masculine trinity and open up Christianity to a radically altered shamanistic version of faith that could include both sexuality and a *feeling* for the dead, the very values Freud and Jung were able to advance for the 20th century. She was really I believe that far ahead of her times.

At Amherst, Edward maintained a questioning attitude towards his father's faith. This questioning of theological values was taken up by his independent daughter, Emily, who like Whitman, refused to succumb to the all-too-frequent American fate of being swept up, unthinkingly, into a religious movement, whether Trinitarian, Calvinist, Methodist, Mormon, or Unitarian.

What Emily felt called to do in her lifetime was much more than to bridge the polarities of Unitarians and Trinitarians, in her own way. Rather, her ambition was more truly transcendent than that. She would not allow her Soul to become simply a convert to ecstatic Christianity. Instead, she attempted in her poetry a genuine marriage of spirituality and science. North America, to her mind, was a nation where ecstasy could function to unlock the secrets of Nature itself, and she as its prophet, a "Bride" not of Christ, but of the Universe. Her "God" would therefore never fully be named. Emily Dickinson became perhaps the first poet to be completely free of all historical God-images in an age where, as William James would later write, "'Science' in many minds is genuinely taking the place of a religion."[67]

A great Hope fell
You heard no noise
The Ruin was within

67 William James, *William James: Writings 1902-1910*, p. 58.

Oh cunning wreck that told no tale
And let no Witness in J 1123/F 1187

But before she could write this, she needed to get a good lesson in science and natural theology that was not hard for her to come by. While she was at Mount Holyoke Female Seminary there was someone at nearby Amherst College to give her a head start in this endeavor. This was the professor of natural theology there who became the first president of the new College: Edward Hitchcock. Hitchcock was as convinced about the finality of Christianity as Emily's grandfather, Samuel Fowler, had been. But he was far less dogmatic than Emily's grandfather. Hitchcock, to be sure, was like many Americans of that time a proselytizer, but his vision extended to the Cosmos as Humboldt had defined it for his generation.

Hitchcock founded the American Association of Geologists in 1840 and served as its first president; it is important to add that he was internationally active in discussing Humboldt's spiritually relevant scientific vision, whose influence was felt widely in the United States and Europe. Hitchcock had a direct influence, moreover, on the head teacher at Mount Holyoke, Mary Lyon, who was Hitchcock's especial protégé.

Miss Lyon's main mission in education and life in her New England circle was to make young women at Holyoke Seminary into "Brides of Christ." Her goal to save Emily Dickinson's soul would be resisted by "inner voices" of Emily's *destiny*, however. Emily's aim would be, like Whitman's, to transform religious institutional understandings into a personal relation to the boundless Universe.

Following the "Great Awakening," the religious revival that had been ushered in by Jonathan Edwards' teachings at Yale, a new science of religion had emerged as an "Argument from Design," bridging Christianity and Deism, i.e., the structure of God's world revealed by scientists like Newton and Humboldt. An 1802 work by William Paley, *Natural Theology*, which Emily avidly read at Mount Holyoke, laid out the implications.

Edwardsianism looked to the natural world for practical evidence of the resurrection of the soul. Coincident with this "Argument from

Design," Alexander von Humboldt found studying languages and cultures of indigenous tribes in Central and South America and Mexico a clearly spiritual pattern that was not incompatible with Christianity and in fact explained why the Spanish had so little difficulty converting the indigenous people to Catholicism. In other words, people are naturally theological.

Natural Theology was a subject that was dear to Edward Hitchcock. For Hitchcock and his colleagues at Amherst College the world and its secret "Design" could only be revealed to a person through perceptions of a "golden link" that exists throughout all Nature, and this ability to perceive God's great chain of being was something he felt called to proclaim as a theologian and teacher.

Natural theology appealed to Emily Dickinson because of its respect for the *aesthetic properties of Mother Nature*, which form the pattern of integrity and it elegies that so evidently exist throughout the universe for anyone with an eye or ear for beauty to attest. According to Hitchcock, this "Design" pattern could only be seen through an acquired grace, via the Christian faith, whereas for Emily, with her nature-aesthetic attitude, all one had to do to behold the miracle of God's glory was to glance at one's own garden, with its ever-transforming wondrous plants shimmering with verdant power. (It should be said that a New England garden was particularly suitable to such an interpretation, since the seasons are so sharply defined in that part of the world).

The spiritual fact of rebirth, metamorphosis, and ultimately resurrection of the soul after death, could then be made manifest as in a garden's plants through certain emblems, signs, or analogies, which could be detected once one had a Christian *aesthetic conscience* to perceive them.

It was Dickinson's task to make such alchemy transparent. One of her favorite symbols was Hitchcock's preferred metaphor for change: the caterpillar's metamorphosis into a butterfly. (We will take a close look later at some of her most beautiful poems about Butterflies.) In this miracle of metamorphosis, obvious to any garden keepers, the butterflies morph into a winged creature of air, and they became one of Emily Dickinson's most beloved emblems for spiritual transformation, to which she returns frequently in her art. The ability of the emerging

butterfly to shed its cocoon and fly to its instinctively perceived sign stimulus—the flower—and migrate on wings of air over vast distances became the basis of her heartfelt confidence in her transcendence, assurance that her poetry could soar above the indifference to it of her contemporaries.

Dickinson imbibed Humboldt's cosmic vision directly from Hitchcock's teachings. She appears to have heard his remarkable 1848 lecture on the Book of Revelations at Amherst College on two consecutive occasions.[68] It was not long after Emily began her first semester at Mount Holyoke, in the fall of 1847 and just before her eighteenth birthday, that Edward Hitchcock gave the first of these, his famous sermon on Revelations 21, which was to become Dickinson's chosen chapter in the whole King James Version of the Bible.

Emily was present at this seminal sermon's delivery and it was one of those special moments in her lifetime. Hitchcock spoke of the building of the great city of pure gold (Revelation 21: 18) in a way that touched Dickinson directly. "I love this Seminary & all the teachers," Dickinson wrote to Abiah Root in Amherst at the age of eighteen.[69] Later, she wrote, before her final semester ended: "I have not yet given up the claims of Christ." She refers to this claim further as "my fate":

> I tremble when I think how soon the weeks and days of this term will all have been spent, and my fate will be sealed, perhaps. I have neglected the *one thing needful* when all were obtaining it, and I may never, never again pass through such a season as was granted us last winter. Abiah, you may be surprised to hear me speak as I do, knowing that I express no interest in the all-important subject, but I am not happy, and I regret that last term, when that golden opportunity was mine, that I did not give up and become a Christian. It is not now too late, so my friends tell me, so my offended conscience whispers, but it is hard for me to give up the world.[70]

68 Cynthia G. Wolff, *Emily Dickinson*, p. 560.
69 *L*, I, p. 59.
70 *L*, I, p. 67.

With this whispering of her *Nature-worshiping conscience*, Emily's fate was sealed. Hers was a spiritual vision that included not only good, but evil also, since both were evident in the operations of nature. She could never accept the Trinitarian point of view without her own metamorphosis of it into something entirely new, in effect adding to it a *fourth*, transcendently transformative element, the eternal femininity of Nature. If change in the masculine religious notions of her day was to happen in her culture, a woman was needed to lead America towards a more egalitarian vista. A feminine conscience would have to triumph, become victorious over fate. This was the way past convention that James Madison said was so necessary to democracy in the generation just prior to Dickinson's.[71]

When the storm of the Great Revival was blowing its religious fervor through Amherst, Emily Dickinson was somewhat differently stirred than most of her contemporaries. She knew that to completely realize the proffered redemption she had to accept the fall as well as the Savior from the proffering. This meant she had to heed not just the call of Christ, but that of the Serpent in the garden as well: her "Snake" would be the eventual result.

At first, she began to write poems in secret and to pronounce faithful syllables that were not merely "good." Her aim was to uncover a Design-pattern, not of the Bible, but from the depths of Mother Nature. (One wonders why her father Edward decided to withdraw Emily from the Mount Holyoke Female Seminary?)

She had already realized, by the time she was twenty, that it was *her destiny* to allow the Satanic voice inside her consciousness to be heard by others as well. It too, she saw, was part of God's kingdom, part of the "vivid ore" of the soul to be refined by a post-Christian alchemy.

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71 James Madison argued persuasively that "the civil rights of none shall be abridged on account of religious belief, nor shall any national religion be established, nor shall the full and equal rights of conscience in any manner be infringed." Madison might best be described as a Deist, for he could defend the Constitutional government by appealing to its progenitor as "God," who he described as "the supreme lawgiver of the universe." Derek H. Davis, *Religion and the Continental Congress 1774-1776*, p. 208.

Dickinson appears to have begun to realize the loneliness of her spiritual position when she wrote to her dear friend, Jane Humphrey, from Mount Holyoke, on April 3, 1848: "Christ is calling everyone here, all my companions have answered, even my darling Vinnie believes she loves, and trusts him, and I am standing alone in rebellion, and growing very careless."[72] This seeming reluctance was on account of the chthonic and feminine aspects of herself she could not simply suppress. The so-called evil in herself was equivalent to a goodness that she was called to embrace to fully become herself.

At first, of course, Emily saw herself merely as one of the unconvinced ones who had remained unconverted by Hitchcock's disciple, Mary Lyon. She wrote similarly, to her closest friend Abiah Root about her resistance to accepting the hand of the "Bridegroom" wooing her and all the young girls at Holyoke as a Suitor, to eternally Wed Him: "*I* am one of the lingering *bad* ones, and so *I* slink away, and pause, and ponder…and do work without knowing why—not surely for *this* brief world, and more sure it is not for Heaven—and I ask what this message *means* that they ask for so eagerly…will you *try* to tell me about it?"[73]

But there was more to her fallen state than any rude refusal of redemption here. It is clear from this letter that what Emily was pondering at this pivotal time in history was the *meaning* of spiritual marriage as a phenomenon of great significance in the evolution of humanity, outside the limited horizons of the Christian message of betrothal to a Lord of Heaven and His Kingdom and Glory. What she would cherish most was His, or Her invincible *Power*.

Hitchcock had already given Emily a key to solve the mystery of a wedding outside the conventional sense, when he brought together Revelations 21 and Emily's beloved geology in a single sermon, which she pondered over deeply. She was already imagining herself as a destined new "Bride" for the nation.

In a phenomenological way, the vocation she saw assigned to herself in this role involved exploration, experimentation, and experience. She was being called to do work not for this transitory world alone, but

72 *L,* I, p. 94.
73 *L,* I, p. 98.

also for the spiritual world of the dead and for eternity, a shamanic task requiring a mythopoetic journey into Night.

In May of 1848, at a time of rebellion in Europe, she felt her own American spirit of rebellion surface. Her fierce libertarianism became stronger than ever and her rampart in the Self became indomitable, impenetrable to the droves of "obedient" girls, like those around her flocking to Mary Lyon as sheep to their Shepherd.

As the "Bridegroom" continued to try and woo her, she did not relent and chose instead the path of one of the very few disobedient "bad" ones. In this sense, she became a rebel for *Liberty*, a poetess of democracy, who listens to the voice of evil, as well as good, in order to realize the fullest freedoms of the soul: "I have come '*to* and *fro,* and walking up and down' the same place that Satan hailed from, where God asked him where he'd been, but not to illustrate further I tell you [Abiah] I have been dreaming, dreaming, a *golden* dream, with eyes all the while wide open."[74]

In the fall of 1847, Emily, we've seen, had twice heard Hitchcock's famous sermon on Revelations 21, which describes the New Jerusalem as a city of pure gold, implying the alchemical process required to get there. This is also the chapter of the Christian Bible, which so directly spoke to C.G. Jung a century later, as he records near the end of his masterwork, *Answer to Job.* This vision of Heaven could no longer be contained by the conventional image she had heard her parents incant as a child, "Our Father who art in Heaven." Dickinson's "Zenith" included an image of Night, which she refers to tenderly as Her, with a capital H; a lover few if any spiritual patriarchies have ever tolerated.

In the actual America of Dickinson's dawning maturity, on January 24, 1848 gold had been discovered by John W. Marshall, a foreman working for Sacramento pioneer John Sutter, at Sutter's Mill in Coloma, California. By March of 1848, newspaper publisher Samuel Brannan had announced in the streets of San Francisco: "Gold! Gold! Gold from the American River!"

Dickinson is sure to have heard the newspaper shout from across the continent at Mount Holyoke. So, when she said to Abiah Root that

74 *L,* I, p. 99.

she'd been "dreaming, dreaming, a *golden* dream, with eyes all the while wide open," she meant what she said. Her eyes had been opened by the simultaneous co-discovery of gold in the Far West. Among the three leading East Coast poet-shamans, Whitman, Melville, and Dickinson, I would say Dickinson was the one who took the notion of a new alchemy most geologically, as Humboldt and Hitchcock would have wanted. Like Humboldt, she went West in imagination to find the furthest degree of development of spiritual ideas grounded in the majesty and mystery of what lay hidden in the earth. Where Whitman and Melville had also relied on the voice of Satan to compensate the sanitized images of God, Dickinson summoned the Goddess in so vivifying a way that her new Suitor had become as often a woman as a man. Satan had indeed tempted her to find her own "power" and pride two months before the first women rights meeting at Seneca Falls Convention in July 1848. From the beginning of her realization of her poetic vocation she was a ferocious fighter for Liberty. This is the same year, furthermore, that Lucretia Mott, a Quaker famous for her oratorical ability, was gathering her notes together for her speech at the historical Seneca Falls Convention.

Of the scant *seven* of Dickinson's poems that were published in her lifetime, her sixth, "The Snake," shows her embracing her destiny as feminist in whom the satanic voice was not demonized but equalized as a part of nature. Once "A narrow Fellow in the Grass" (J 986/F 1096) was released for publication in the press, her instinctive protection of it in the name of the Goddess Liberty became immediately self-evident. Dickinson's biographers, scholars and literary critics refer to "The Snake" often as the single verse she agonized over the longest. She also complained about it loudest after her sister-in-law, Susan Gilbert, published it with the help of their mutual friend Samuel Bowles, on the front page of the journal he edited: the *Springfield Republican.* The poem went into print on February 14, 1866,[75] which ironically was Valentine's Day!

Dickinson seems to have been in love with Bowles, despite the fact that he was a happily married man. He has sometimes been considered to be one of the two most likely candidates of her mysterious "Master Letters." With altered punctuation and the integrity of her lines seri-

75 *S*, p. 6.

eight hundred of her poems, assembled them carefully together in forty booklets, and bound them together with string in the form of a literary collection. What interests me most about these "books" is Oberhaus' examination of the fortieth fascicle, in light of the Christian "poetry of meditation" in Dickinson's library, such as Thomas á Kempis' *The Imitation of Christ.*

Another significant find made by Oberhaus was the remarkable coincidence that Dickinson cut out the words of God in the Book of Job in her Bible, along with the first two verses of Revelation's twenty-first chapter, which was of central import to F-40.[117]

The fact that Emily cut out these two sections of her Bible, suggests that she was preoccupied with them deeply, as central to her oeuvre, which as I've said, was essentially post-Christian. These two chapters, Job and Revelations, form, not incidentally, the very core of Jung's musings in his masterpiece, *Answer to Job.* So, the issues she takes on actually anticipate Jung in his attempts to transform the Judeo-Christian God-image through an inclusion of the feminine principle and the shadow into the Godhead.

At every moment of Emily's life, fate gave her an opportunity to turn defeat and death into victory. To be victorious over fate was the aim of her full spiritual realization, and in the domain of mortality, Emily Dickinson was fearless. She rode fearlessly in death's carriage, as a shaman-poet, whose main functions were, as we've seen, to mediate between the two worlds, the living and the dead, and to provide a medicine to those who would listen.

We can see her preoccupation to what we all owe to the dead as early as 1855, during her trip to Mt. Vernon, with Lavinia, Vinnie (her sister) for short. She told Mrs. Holland in a letter how after reaching the tomb of General George Washington, she and Vinnie walked hand in hand "within the door—raised the latch he lifted when he last went home—thank the Ones in Light that he's since passed in through a brighter wicket!"[118] She was preoccupied here with Washington's spirit having passed through the door into the brighter gate (horizons of Eternity)

117 Dorothy Oberhaus, *Emily Dickinson's Fascicles: Method & Meaning*, p. 14.
118 *L*, II, p. 319.