

Charles University in Prague

Faculty of Education

Department of English Language and Literature

# **Finding of Direct Line in Possibility Dwelling**

## **Recurrent Social Themes in Emily Dickinson's Poetry**

**Diploma Thesis**

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I hereby declare that this thesis is my own, unaided work and that recognition has been given to the references used.

Furthermore, I hereby declare that I have no objection against publishing or lending of my diploma thesis or its parts, with the consent of English Language and Literature Department.

Date: 22 November

  
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## **ABSTRACT**

The thesis explores recurrent social themes in Emily Dickinson's poetry and letters. The main objective of the thesis is to present Emily Dickinson as a poet who was highly interested in social issues.

The research is based on the analysis of poems and letters and it is supported by academic works by recognized Emily Dickinson scholars.

In particular, the explored areas are "Publication and Role of Poet", "Effects of Civil War on Society", "Religion and Faith", and "Interpersonal Relationships". The research revealed that the areas share common features. On one hand, there is a strong feeling of seclusion from the society presented in Dickinson's poems, but, on the other hand, a reader can appreciate the poems for their brilliant observation and description of the social environment that was surrounding the poet.

Dickinson may have been physically isolated from the society, but she understood its problems with clarity that could have been envied by many her contemporaries.

## **ABSTRAKT**

Diplomová práce zkoumá opakující se sociální témata v poezii a dopisech Emily Dickinsonové. Hlavním cílem práce je představit Emily Dickinsonovou jako básnířku, která se velmi zajímala o sociální témata.

Výzkum je založen na analýze básní a dopisů a je podpořen odbornými pracemi od předních akademiků zabývajících se Emily Dickinsonovou.

Mezi zkoumaná témata patří „Publikace a role básníka“, „Dopady Občanské války na společnost“, „Náboženství a víra“ a „Mezilidské vztahy“. Výzkum odhalil, že zkoumané oblasti sdílejí společné prvky. Na jedné straně je zde přítomný silný pocit vyřazení ze společnosti. Nicméně na straně druhé může čtenář ocenit básnířčinu schopnost pozorovat a popisovat prostředí, které jí obklopovalo.

Emily Dickinsonová byla možná fyzicky odloučená od společnosti, ale zároveň patrně dokázala pochopit její problémy stejně dobře, ne-li lépe než většina vrstevníků.

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## INTRODUCTION

There has arguably never been as enigmatic and, at the same time, influential poet as Emily Dickinson. Despite being a member of the most important family of her home city, Amherst, she never got involved in public social affairs and drew herself back from the public life. However, one can find clear evidence that although she chose to be rather separated from the society for most of her life, she also struggled with problems the society had to cope with and found her own way to communicate her opinions, experience and ideas – through her poems and letters. “... , she became a hidden presence in other’s lives by means of her letters and poems.” (Habegger 583) Her legacy is still valid even in our time and one can always find a poem or a letter that corresponds with their lives.

Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to explore Emily Dickinson’s opinions on the most essential social issues of her time, taking both the public and private parts of these into consideration. In Dickinson’s poems, letters and in distinguished biographies about the poet, one can find several social topics that seem to be of a high importance to Emily Dickinson. They have been divided into five chapters in the thesis: “Publishing and the Role of a Poet”, “Effects of Civil War on Society”, “Religion and Faith” and “Interpersonal Relationships”.

Dickinson’s poetry cannot be, by no means, taken as purely biographical, as even Dickinson herself states in one of her letters to Higginson: “When I state myself, as the Representative of the Verse – it does not mean – me – but a supposed person.” However, there is no doubt that opinions expressed in her poems and letters belong to the poet, and that she is reinterpreting and transcending her own experience. Quite paradoxically, one can see this tendency mainly in the poems which were discovered

after she died and which she wished to be burnt after her death. These “secret” poems could be the key to the way Emily Dickinson thought of herself, her family and friends and they could also inform about the society and culture surrounding her.

The biggest challenge of this thesis is to find direct and steady lines of thought that go through her poems and that are often hidden behind a heavy curtain of Dickinson’s fantasies and imagination – “her Possibility dwelling”. (Franklin 466)

Although there is no point in searching for biographical data in her poems, it is definitely possible to find the tracks of her thoughts and to try to piece together and recreate a picture of Emily Dickinson as a thoughtful human being who is sensitive to the events happening in the world surrounding her.

Her “secret” writing just gave her the opportunity to be as free and imaginative as she wanted to, but there is no doubt she got inspired by real life situations. There was no need to step outside her house because:

The Brain - is wider than the Sky -  
For - put them side by side  
The one the other will contain  
With ease - and You - beside -  
(Franklin 598)

The thesis will interpret the social themes in Dickinson’s work, bearing in mind the high degree of poet’s imagination being projected in her poems.



## **METHODS**

### **Understanding the Poems**

Before the research can begin, there are certain rules that need to be followed in order to understand Dickinson's poems correctly. These rules have been stated by Dr.E. Scheurer and David Porter from Amherst University and they prove to be very useful.

- 1) Read the poem aloud
- 2) Find the sentences: subjects and verbs

It can be extremely difficult to find the connection between a subject and a verb in Dickinson's poetry and one must be very careful. Otherwise, the poem can be easily misinterpreted.

- 3) Do the verb inflections – number and tense – make sense?
- 4) Identify pronoun referents

It is not always clear what a pronoun refers to – such as in “What would I give to see his face?” (Franklin 266) poem.

- 5) What do the abstractions refer to?
- 6) If possible, look at the manuscript version, checking Dickinson's variants as well as alternations made by the editor. How does this add to the meaning?

The variants in Dickinson's poems are of a high importance. In some poems, there are no changes at all, in some poems, there are changes in a hyphenation and capitalized letters; in others, there are changes in words and personal pronouns; and in some poems the changes are so enormous that it is almost necessary to approach the variants as separate poems. One can reach all the variants due to Franklin's publication

of all the variants of Emily Dickinson poems: "The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Variorum Edition from 1998".

- 7) Consider the rhetoric of the poem. What is the role, the attitude, of the speaker? The addressed listener/ reader? Do these roles/ attitudes change? How?

One of the most interesting, and many times confusing, components of Dickinson's poems is a sudden switch of speakers or speaker's attitude as in:

His Losses made our Gains ashamed-  
He bore Life's empty Pack  
As gallantly as if the East  
Were swinging at his Back -

In this part, the speaker writes about someone else's struggle, but, in the following part, the observing position is changed and the speaker writes about his or her own life:

Life's empty Pack is heaviest  
As every Porter knows -  
In vain to punish Honey -  
It only sweeter grows -  
(Franklin 1602 C)

- 8) Use Webster's dictionary from 1848 and Emily Dickinson Lexicon. The last rule is added as a new one. Emily Dickinson used Webster's dictionary from 1848 while searching for new words, or looking for words' meanings. Some words have changed their meaning since Dickinson's time and so it is necessary, if there is some confusion about a word, to look its meaning up in Webster's dictionary which can be found on the web page of Emily Dickinson Lexicon.

## **Searching for themes**

David Porter believes that “a seeker after themes discovers that poem after poem, perhaps as many as half of the entire canon, resists a fixed interpretation, evades a definite thematic expression, instead activating unbridled reader-response free play”. (Porter 188) There are 1775 poems by Emily Dickinson and one can find several themes in each of them. The starting point of “the search for major social themes” was to read Habegger’s biography. Several social issues significantly stood out. While establishing the themes to be included in the thesis, it was also necessary to find the themes in the poems. Rosenbaum’s “Concordance to the Poems of Emily Dickinson” was very helpful in this search. Finally, twenty poems were chosen for close reading in relation to each theme. Although not all of them are mentioned in the thesis, they are used as a backdrop during the writing process.

As stated in the introduction, this thesis is balancing on the boundary between Dickinson’s great imagination and her biographical data. Though the thesis does not look for biographical elements in Dickinson’s poetry, it must bear them in mind. Habegger’s biography, supported by other academic works, is used as the main source of the information about Dickinson’s life.

## **Formatting of Thesis**

The MLA Formatting is used for the thesis as it seems appropriate for the chosen topic.

## PUBLISHING AND THE ROLE OF A POET

Emily Dickinson published only eleven poems during her life. She never showed real interest in publishing and she even refused to publish several times. One can observe this attitude in one of her letters to Higginson – Dickinson writes, “... it was robbed of me –“(L 316). It is a reaction to a secret publication of one of her poems by Susan Dickinson. There is another instance of Dickinson’s resistance to get published. She was friends with the writer and poet Helen Hunt Jackson who persuaded Dickinson to publish one of her poems: “You are a great poet – and it is a wrong to the day you live in, that you will not sing aloud. When you are what men call dead, you will be sorry you were so stingy.” (Habegger 557) Dickinson finally gave the consent to the publication, but she, apparently, did so only to satisfy Helen Hunt Jackson: “When Sue recognized the published lines and mentioned them to Dickinson, thus unveiling her, she went ‘so white’ her sister-in-law regretted having spoken.” (Habegger 559)

It seems obvious that Dickinson really resented the publication of her poems. This chapter explores the reasons for such decision. Subsequently, it analyses Dickinson’s understanding to the role of the poet.

There is no clear explanation of Dickinson’s refusal to publish. It seems that there are more factors that influenced her reserved attitude towards publication. One of them is the opinion of Dickinson’s father on women poetry and publication, which was clearly stated in papers on “Female Education”, published in “The New-England Inquirer”, Amherst’s first newspaper: “Before a young woman has a chance to acquire a taste for the pursuits of literature and science, she finds herself engaged in the affairs of domestic life...Does not follow that, just as women have less muscular strength than men, so in literature and science, They are naturally inferior to us?” (Habegger 23)

Another Edward's opinion was that "if women occasion little sensation abroad, they produce much happiness at home". (Habegger 46) It seems that Dickinson respected her father's opinion a great deal and it could be one of the reasons why she decided not to publish. She shares his opinion in "Publication - is the Auction" poem:

Publication - is the Auction  
Of the Mind of Man -  
Poverty - be justifying  
For so foul a thing

Possibly - but We - would rather  
From Our Garret go  
White - Unto the White Creator -  
Than invest - Our Snow -

Thought belong to Him who gave it -  
Then - to Him Who bear  
Its Corporeal illustration - Sell  
The Royal Air -

In the Parcel - Be the Merchant  
Of the Heavenly Grace -  
But reduce no Human Spirit  
To Disgrace of Price -  
(Franklin 788)

In the poem, Dickinson criticizes publication as "the Auction Of the Mind of Man". The poem is influenced by "the common 19<sup>th</sup> century fear that the world of the spirit would be erased by the market and by the rise of industrialism and commercialism". (Barnstone 118) "Her seclusion and her unwillingness to publish [is connected with] New England upper-class conservatism. Its cultivation of the private is a gesture of defiance against the cultural transformations of the modernizing process and the increasing vulgarization of the public sphere." (Ickstadt 60)

The "mind" is a synonym to soul, in the first stanza. Dickinson believes that to publish means to sell one's soul, or, by extension, to become a marketable commodity. The only reason that "Possibly" justifies such a foolish trade is poverty, which Dickinson definitely did not suffer from. Therefore, in the second stanza, she states that

the “true” poets would rather die than to “invest” their souls. In the third stanza, Dickinson states that the “Thought” belongs to God and then it belongs to those who bear its “Corporeal illustration” – to people or to the poets, more specifically. Dickinson believes that one should share thoughts with others, but should not sell them, because it reduces one’s spirit when the thoughts are disgraced with price. The thought comes from God who does not sell it and gives it to poets; and so the poets also should not sell the thoughts because these do not belong to them.

In this poem, Dickinson seems to view publication as something unworthy and she assumes that her thoughts are too valuable to be measured by price and she wants to share them only with her friends, acquaintances and family. However, she lived at

the moment when American women poets generally had come of age as artists, not as domestic ideologues. Indeed, by the last decades of the century, the women poets were beginning to outpublish men even in the most exclusive venues...the dominant mainstream women poets... were all consummate professionals, enjoying formidable public reputations. (Bennett 216)

From the cited passage, it becomes clear that publishing women poets were not “rare creatures” anymore and that the traditional position of a woman as “the angel of a house” was not as dogmatic as it used to be. Dickinson was well-aware of the women poets and she was definitely influenced by their work: “She did not manufacture her style out of thin air any more than she lifted it full blown from other writer’s pages.” (Miller 159) Although she criticizes the publication, she admires many women writers as can be seen in her commemorative poem about Barrett Browning, for instance: “I read that foreign lady -/ The Dark - felt beautiful -/” (Franklin 627)

Therefore, even if it may seem that Dickinson did not publish because of her traditional father (i.e. chauvinistic by modern standards), there were other reasons that were more important to her. Another one was the way the print “violated the characteristics of Dickinson’s poems... because of the conventions of established poetry”. (Cameron 240) When her poem “The Snake” was published in “Springfield Weekly Republican”, Dickinson writes to Higginson: “...it was... defeated too of the third line by the punctuation. The third and fourth were one – I had told you I did not print – ...” (L 316) It seems that Dickinson was well aware of the importance of the form she used in her poems and this letter proves it. Therefore, she decided to publish “privately” – via sending letters.

Dickinson cannot be seen as a figure that was secluded from social life. She may have been separated physically, but the number of letters she wrote during her life shows a very high interest in social interactions. She often attached her poems to the letters and so she, actually, published those. The advantage of such “publishing” was that she knew who the readers would be and she could choose the right poem for them. She even manipulated the receivers of her letters as can be seen in another letter to Higginson from 1862: “You asked how old I was? I made no verse – but one or two – until this winter.” (L 261) In this letter, she lies to Higginson in order to protect herself from being criticized – she states she wrote only a verse or two while she has written hundreds of poems already. The anxiety of being judged and exposed in public could be another reason for choosing not to publish, then. She achieved her objective by sending elaborate letters containing poems. The people she cared for acknowledged her as a genius poet and were dazzled by her unique style. “Recognizing how special Dickinson’s work was, those who received her poems often shared them with equally fascinated friends. This seems to be how Dickinson wanted to be read.” (Habegger 390)

Jerome Loving believes that: “She would not publish, of course, but she would expose enough of her work to become *known* as a poet.” (60) Dickinson found her way to obey her father’s wish, to protect herself from the public exposure and criticism, and to fulfill her need to have her poems read and appreciated by others.

Nevertheless, there are hundreds of poems that she never showed to anybody, not even to her closest friends. It seems that to be recognized as a poet was not the major objective of her poetry writing:

Dickinson not only made little or no effort to clean up and organize the poems she continued to write, but failed to take steps to ensure that her work would reach readers at large. On the contrary, she exacted promises from Vinnie and Maggie that they would burn her papers, possibly including her manuscript books [fascicles] and ungathered verse. No doubt this was largely owing to her continued aversion to all forms of public exposure. (Habegger 603)

For Dickinson, the secret poetry writing was a way to escape the life full of restrictions and conventions. She created her own private world based on her immense imagination and invention. The “secret” poems were not meant to be read by anybody else, which was also the reason why Dickinson instructed her sister Lavinia to destroy them after her death. Fortunately, Lavinia preserved the secret fascicles for the next generations.

Dickinson described her fight with both social and stylistic restrictions in “They shut me up in Prose –“poem:

They shut me up in Prose -  
As when a little Girl  
They put me in the Closet -  
Because they liked me “still”-



Still! Could themselves have peeped -  
And seen my Brain - go round -  
They might as well have lodged a Bird  
For Treason - in the Pound -

Himself has but to will  
And easy as a Star  
Abolish his Captivity -  
And laugh - No more have I -

(Franklin 445)

In the first stanza, Dickinson compares “Prose” to the restrictions she had to face. She was supposed to be “still” – not to draw attention towards herself and to suppress everything in her that could be found odd or unusual – that would mean even her poetic invention. In the second stanza, the speaker claims that if those who shut her knew what creativity and imagination means, they would know that there is no way to silence one’s inner thoughts. In the third stanza, she compares her artistic freedom to a bird that can just laugh at the imprisonment. Sarah Blackwood states that “Dickinson had a profound commitment to the investigation of both abstract and structural freedoms. For Dickinson, the inner world of the imagination was the place where it most mattered to be free”. (56) However, the speaker must live in the real world surrounding her. She cannot fly away, as she writes in a letter to Susan Gilbert in 1851: “...for our sakes dear Susie, who please ourselves with the fancy that we are the only poets, and everyone else is *prose*, let us hope they will yet be willing to share our humble world and feed upon such aliment as *we* consent to do.” (L 56)

For Dickinson, “prose” is associated with restrictions while “poetry is the mode of expression that goes against the grain and that reflects the ecstasy of human experience and poetic creation”. (Raab 290) Dickinson feels free only when writing poetry because it is the “realm of Possibility” (Raab 290):

I dwell in Possibility -  
A fairer House than Prose -  
More numerous of Windows -  
Superior - for Doors -

Of Chambers as the Cedars -  
Impregnable of eye -  
And for an Everlasting Roof  
The Gambrels of the Sky -

Of Visitors - the fairest -  
For Occupation - This -  
The spreading wide my narrow Hands  
To gather Paradise -

(Franklin 466)

The poetry offers Dickinson freedom of expression – it has more “windows” and more “doors” that can be opened. Moreover, she feels safe within its “Impregnable” chambers and so she can fully use her creativity and imagination, without being afraid that someone will penetrate her private space. The safety of the place is also expressed by the “Everlasting Roof”. The hard cedar wood used for the chambers also represents the stability that poetry offers to Dickinson. It is a place which she can escape to and nobody can follow her in there if she does not want to. Barker believes that “poetry for Dickinson is the antithesis of bland, tired phrasings, of the status quo”. (83)

It seems that Dickinson did not want to publish because she wanted to choose whom she will let in her “house” of possibilities, which chambers will be shown to the visitors and which ones will stay closed. Therefore, she used her own way of publication. It is apparent that to be famous was not as important to Dickinson as to have a private space, where she could project the ideas and thoughts which she could not share with anybody or with few close friends:

The Products of my Farm are these  
Sufficient for my Own  
And here and there a Benefit

Unto a Neighbor's Bin.  
(Franklin 1036)

In 1862, Dickinson writes to Higginson: "I smile when you suggest that I delay 'to publish' – that being foreign to my thought, as Firmanent 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- " (L 265) Consequently, a question arises: What did Dickinson think of her role as a poet?

A letter written in the summer of 1862 may help understanding Emily Dickinson's view of her role as a poet. She wrote Dr. and Mrs. J.G.Holland about her poetry writing:

Perhaps you laugh at me! Perhaps the whole United States are laughing at me too! *I* can't stop for that! *My* business is to love. I found a bird, this morning, down – down – on a little bush at the foot of the garden, and wherefore I sing, I said, since nobody *hears*? One sob in the throat, one flutter of blossom – 'My business is to *sing*' – and away she rose! How do I know but cherubim, once themselves, as patient, listened, and applauded her unnoticed hymn? (L 269)

In this letter, Dickinson expresses her awareness of being an outsider. However, she will not surrender even though she might be laughed at by everyone, because it is not the fame she is searching for; there is a higher purpose that dragged her to poetry writing. It does not matter if anyone "hears" her poetry in this world because she believes that it can be heard in Heaven, which reminds one of the last two lines of "I dwell in Possibility -" poem: "The spreading wide my narrow Hands/ To gather Paradise -".

The last two lines of the poem show that Dickinson uses poetry writing as a means of communication with God. In her letter to Higginson, she writes about her friend Benjamin Franklin Newton “who taught [her]... Immortality – “(L 261) and “who told [her] that he would like to live till... [she] had been a poet”. (L 265) Habegger believes that “Newton’s basic lesson was to trust oneself: all things exist for the creative mind, and no institution of precedent or prohibition is ever binding. He was not afraid to oppose common sense, to be unintelligible, to rest his case on image and metaphor – on ‘fancy’. [He also claimed that] faith does not mean ‘giving up’ but bestowing respectful attention on what is ‘grand of beautiful’ in nature and books”. (218)

Dickinson seems to have followed his advice and she grew to understand poetry writing as a way to find her faith and the truth about the world surrounding her. She believes that even if she will be ridiculed in this world, there is a higher purpose of her work. She thinks highly of poets because she believes that they are the only ones who are able to describe the world in its “true colors”.

On one hand, she presents the poets as martyrs, and the humblest creatures, in her poems:

The Martyr Poets - did not tell -  
But wrought their Pang in syllable -  
That when their mortal name be numb -  
Their mortal fate - encourage Some -

The Martyr Painters - never spoke -  
Bequeathing - rather - to their Work -  
That when their conscious fingers cease -  
Some seek in Art - the Art of Peace -  
(Franklin 665)

The poets and painters are seen as martyrs in the poem. They had to sacrifice themselves to preserve their art. A strong self-denial is present in the poem – there are

poets who do not tell and painters who never speak because they do not want to, or, more probably, they cannot. Their work is evaluated only after they have made the final sacrifice. The same idea occurs in “God made a little Gentian” (Franklin 520) poem. It describes a difficult journey of a poet towards artistic mastery. The poet is presented as a humble little flower that is laughed at by other creatures, during the summer because it wants to be a rose – it is a metaphor to Dickinson’s own struggle with the society’s restrictions and conventions. But then the winter comes and everyone is about to die. It is this very moment when the poet “blooms”, instead of dying:

The frosts were her condition -  
The Tyrian would not come  
Until the North - invoke it -  
Creator – Shall I – bloom?

Dickinson believes that the artistic mastery can be obtained only through immense suffering. The searching of the right path never ends - the lack of the poet’s confidence can be observed at the end of the poem – “Shall I - bloom?”

On the other hand, poets are introduced as craftsmen, creators, messengers of the truth and visionaries who are not afraid to fight against the whole world:

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

...

(Franklin 660)

In the first stanza, the poet is very daring because she knows that she has “Power in her Hand” – it is the power of poetry that helps her to fight against the restrictions of the world and that gives her the confidence. While the poetry was a cause of suffering in the previous poems, it is a source of strength and knowledge now as it can be read in the first two stanzas of “I reckon - when I count it all -“ poem:

I reckon - when I count it all -  
First - Poets - Then the Sun -  
Then Summer - Then the Heaven of God -  
And then - the List is done -

But, looking back - the First so seems  
To Comprehend the Whole -  
The Others look a needless Show -  
So I write - Poets - All -  
(Franklin 533)

The speaker believes that the poet's imagination and artistic mastery can easily absorb and describe Sun, the summer and Heaven. As a consequence, they become a "needless show". It is rather daring idea, especially when compared to the "humble" poems mentioned above.

Moreover, Dickinson believes that her writing skill was given to her by God: "It was given to me by the Gods -/ When I was a little Girl -/" (Franklin 455) She does not have to go through the painful journey, anymore.

The poets become very powerful figures in these poems, as they know how to use the language:

There is a word  
Which bears a sword  
Can pierce an armed man -  
It hurls its barbed syllables  
And is mute again -  
(Franklin 42)

Dickinson is well-aware that words can be precious and powerful if used well, but they can also be redundant if used carelessly. She is, therefore, very careful while using them: "I hesitate which word to take, as I can take but few and each must be the chiefest." (L 873) It is an everlasting struggle finding the right way to express herself and to describe the world surrounding her. The right choice of words is also the reason why she offers two different points of view on the role of a poet (there is the "humble"

and the “victorious” poet) – even if she is capable of a very fine verse, there is always something escaping her right in front of her eyes:

I found a word to every thought  
I ever had - but One -  
And that - defies Me -  
As a Hand did try to chalk the Sun  
(Franklin 436)

Dickinson, as a poet, is the seeker of the truth who never surrenders and fights again and again to capture it in her poetry. It is a fight that she cannot win and she is well-aware of it. Yet, it is the only way of life that she finds meaningful.

## RELIGION AND FAITH

Emily Dickinson was the only member of her family who did not convert to the Amherst Congregational First Church during her life. The issue of religion and faith is one of the most interesting and problematic ones in Emily Dickinson's poetry. Because she did not convert, she had to face a high pressure both from her family and from the society. "I am already set down as one of those brands almost consumed – and my hardheartedness gets me many prayers." (L 30) Calvin stressed that "Christ's atonement applied exclusively to those granted the gift of faith. No action performed in a person's natural state of depravity contributed toward salvation". (Ebberwein 73) She was well-aware of the fact that she, according to the official religion, would not be able to meet with her beloved family and friends in the afterlife and she really suffered because of that: "There is an aching void in my heart which I'm convinced the world can never fill... I continually hear Christ saying to me Daughter give me thine heart." (Habegger 168) But, on the other hand, she was not able to accept doctrines that were part of the organized religion. "She coped with a disposition that could neither believe, nor be comfortable in... unbelief." (Ebberwein 69) She always doubted and questioned the organized religion but also tried immensely to find her faith and she did so by writing the poetry:

Emily Dickinson was the product of a harsh Puritan environment that stifled her spirit and inspired her poetic rebellion... This dire Puritanism oppressed the gifted young woman. Only through heroic resistance... did Dickinson manage to define herself in contradiction to it... [and] adapted and transformed that inherited [Calvinist] faith in her art... (Lundin 13)



Dickinson's stay in Mount Holyoke Female Seminary during 1847 – 1848 can serve as a good example of the pressure Dickinson had to cope with, while young. It could even cause her unwillingness to except "given truths" of the official religion. Students at the seminary were forced to converse under a strong psychological pressure. A ceremony that opened the school year is a good example of this pressure: "Students were asked to rise, it was ascertained whether they were saved [conversed] or not, and they were then placed in the appropriate class... - those who had reason to believe they were saved and could thus profess their faith were called 'professors'. Those who had 'a hope' had some basis for thinking they were in preparation for grace. The third group consisted of students who did not yet 'have a hope' and were thus 'impenitent'. This was Dickinson's class." (Habegger 199) Emily described this event in one of her letters as extremely uncomfortable: "I cannot tell you how solemn it was, as one after another class arose. I saw more than one weep as her name was put down 'no hope'. There is a large class of this character will it be so at the end of the year?" Dickinson herself belonged to the "no hope" class. The brainwashing was persistent during her whole stay at Mount Holyoke and most of the students converted. However, Dickinson was not one of them and as "... [one of the teachers] asked all those who wanted to be Christians ... to rise, Emily was one of those who remained seated". (Noble, Pollak 34)

This chapter explores the conflict between official religion and Emily Dickinson's personal faith and will raise these questions, in particular: Did she finally find a way to except the official religion and God or did she reject it completely? What was her interpretation of religion? How did she cope with the fact that she should be separated from her converted family? Did she think that there was a way for her to get to "Heaven" without accepting the "proper" religion? How did she approach Immortality and what did it mean to her?

“Why do - they shut me out of Heaven?”(Franklin 268) is a poem that expresses Dickinson’s awareness of being excluded out of Heaven. It has only one known variant:

Why - do they shut me out of Heaven?  
Did I sing - too loud?  
But - I can say a little “minor”  
Timid as a Bird!

Would’nt the Angels try me-  
Just - once - more -  
Just - see - if I troubled them -  
But don’t - shut the door!

Oh, if I - were the Gentleman  
In the “White Robe” -  
And they - were the little Hand - that knocked -  
Could - I - forbid?

This poem begins with a question and is followed up by another question, “Did I sing - too loud?” The first line, “Why - do they shut me out of Heaven?” can be read in a serious and sincere tone, which gives the reader a sense of exclusion. Dickinson seems to be troubled that she was not let to Heaven. However, the second question undermines the first one because the speaker, now in the role of an innocent little child, believes they did not let her into Heaven because “she sang - too loud” which seems to be quite superficial reason to “shut someone out of Heaven”. This notion of superficiality brings up the question what does the pronoun “they” refer to – it seems that “they” aren’t Angels and God but the society which sets up the superficial rules that must be obeyed to get to Heaven. This idea brings us back to Dickinson’s experience at Mount Holyoke, where girls converted just to avoid the psychological pressure and thus they believed only on the surface. Dickinson uses the voice of an innocent and inexperienced child who does not understand these rules to emphasize the difference between society’s beliefs and the pure thinking of a child.

However, the speaker is willing to be “tested” again in the second stanza. She wants the Angels themselves to decide whether she should be shut out of heaven – she

wants one more chance. The line "But don't - shut the door!" represents the rigidity of the official religion that, with no mercy, excludes all those who do not obey all its rules.

In the third stanza, Dickinson criticizes the approach of the society towards faith and projects herself into the position of "the Gentleman - / In the 'White Robe'/" and claims that she would not refuse to let a child into "Heaven" even if the child would not behave strictly according to the rules. She shows the absurdity of some rules which can determine if an innocent and pure person gets to Heaven. The notion of "the Gentleman" also points to the rules being established by the society ruled by men. "Dickinson intuited the connection between submissive behavior... expected of the young women as wives in patriarchally ordered Christian homes." (Ebberwein 79)

It seems that for Dickinson, "'Heaven' - is what I cannot reach!" (Franklin 310), but the notion of it is always teasing her and she cannot help to think about it:

What is "Paradise" -  
Who live there -  
Are they "Farmers" -  
Do they "hoe" -  
Do they know that this is "Amherst" -  
And that I - am coming - too -

Do they wear "new shoes" - in "Eden" -  
Is it always pleasant - there -  
Won't they scold us - when we're hungry -  
Or tell God - how cross we are -

You are sure there's such a person  
As "a Father" - in the sky -  
So if I get lost - there - ever -  
Or do what the Nurse calls "die" -

I shan't walk the "Jasper" - barefoot -  
Ransomed folks - won't laugh at me -  
Maybe "Eden" a'n't so lonesome  
As New England used to be!

(Franklin 241)

In this poem, Emily Dickinson imagines the afterlife, which paradise is often referred to, as New England. Through asking questions, she compares the life in Paradise with the life of the society in Amherst. At the end, she asks if “they know of Amherst and that I - am coming - too -“. She, actually, asks if she herself and people in Amherst are going to be accepted in Heaven. She excludes herself from the society as if she was the one that might not be expected to go to Heaven.

In the second stanza, she questions again, as in the poem 268, if she is good enough for Heaven. Line seven, “Do they wear ‘new shoes’ in ‘Eden’” refers to the idea that everyone in Heaven, or “Eden”, in this line, must have faith (shoes) superior (newer) to hers. She even questions the joyful life in Heaven – she imagines that people might be hungry in Heaven and that they could even misbehave. This part introduces another feature connected to Dickinson’s “Heaven poems” which can be also found in “‘Heaven’ - is what I cannot reach!”(Franklin 310) poem. She cannot reach Heaven not only because she is not good enough for it, but also because once the Heaven is reached, it does not look as “heavenly” as it used to. Suddenly, people are hungry there and they are scolded if they behave badly – it is “an illustration of the dreary thought that only by failure to achieve the thing sought can be the thing remain worthy of the seeking...” (Weisbuch 199). This is another reason to doubt.

In the third stanza, Dickinson questions the existence of “Father” who will help her anytime she gets lost – when she loses her faith, God will help her to find it again. Under this condition, she will be accepted in Heaven and she will walk in the “new shoes” through the “Jasper”, which means “Pearly Gates” of the entrance to Heaven. However, if the “Father” does not exist, or will not help her when her faith weakens, she will have to walk barefoot through the gate and everyone will laugh at her because her faith will not be strong enough.

In the last two lines, she expresses the hope that “Eden” really might be a better place than Amherst because she will not feel so lonesome. In Heaven, she might be in contact with the “Father” whom she is not able to find in the earth-life, which is also the reason why she feels so uncomfortable among people. New England was “lonesome” because Dickinson remained outside the believing community and an alien in her own family circle. She doubts if she can meet with him even in Heaven and as there cannot be Heaven without the “Heavenly Father”, she, simultaneously, doubts the existence of Heaven (afterlife) itself, as in:

We pray - to Heaven -  
We prate - of Heaven -  
Relate - when Neighbors die -  
At what o'clock to heaven - they fled -  
Who saw them - Wherefore fly?

Is Heaven a Place - a Sky - a Tree?  
Location's narrow way is for Ourselves -  
Unto the Dead  
There's no Geography -

But State - Endowal - Focus -  
Where - Omnipresence - fly?  
(Franklin 476)

Dickinson asks in this poem if Heaven is a real place or just an idea to comfort the living. Heaven is regarded with such almightiness and the notion of being bigger than death, so grand that we “pray to Heaven”, but one does not really know if it exists. The second stanza pulls the idea that heaven may just be an idea for the living; “ourselves” can be referring to the living that are still able to pray to Heaven and talk to their neighbors about how and when the person died; “location's narrow way” can be referring to Heaven. The last two lines of the second stanza state that the dead cannot find the place that they were supposed to go to – so does the place really exist? At this point in the poem, it seems that Heaven is just an idea and has no substance after death,

but Dickinson does not leave it at that. The last two lines make the reader think about the place “Where - Omnipresence - fly”. Dickinson does not want to say by this poem that the afterlife does not exist. She just wants the society to think more about the destiny of human beings, she wants them to search for God. She condemns the easy way the society has chosen – they just blindly believe in Heaven and God and they passively wait for getting to Heaven, which might be fatal for them because if they do not search actively before they die, they will not find Heaven when the death comes. Emily presents herself in this poem as a passionate searcher of the truth who never gives up, even though she is well-aware of the fact that she may not ever find it.

Emily Dickinson doubts not only the existence of God and Heaven, but she also doubts any purpose of our existence:

I reason, Earth is short -  
And Anguish - absolute -  
And many hurt,  
But, what of that?

I reason, we could die -  
The best Vitality  
Cannot excel Decay,  
But, what of that?

I reason, that in Heaven -  
Somehow, it will be even -  
Some new Equation, given -  
But, what of that?

(Franklin 403 B)

The speaker acknowledges life is short and pain is an automatic side-effect of life, but does it matter? The speaker believes that everyone will die, even the best humans and the best souls cannot escape it, but does that matter? Then the speaker claims that everything will be different in heaven and everyone will be equal, but does even that matter? Moreover, Dickinson even doubts thinking and importance of the

reason, which is one of the major qualities she always admired – such as in “The Brain - is wider than the Sky -“(Franklin 598). The poem expresses disappointment of Emily Dickinson with God – as in “It’s easy to invent a Life“(Franklin 747), where she accuses God from only playing with humans and not taking care of them. It seems that Dickinson reached the existentialism. She feels left alone in this world, not being able to understand the meaning of her life and even if she will believe in God, it will not change anything as God, who created her, did not mean to give any special meaning to her life – he just enjoys observing.

...for Emily Dickinson the authenticity of this God, particularly as the Heavenly Father, was dependent upon an ability to hear her prayers and keep the promises He had made. Dickinson was willing to accept the orthodox God, dogmas and all, provided that He would grant her certain promises she felt He had made as the Heavenly Father; ... she finally rejected this God only after she realized that these promises which she had prayed for ...would not or could not be kept. (Molson 405)

There are several poems in which Dickinson approaches God in a very critical way – such as in “Of God we ask one favor, that we may be forgiven” (Franklin 1675 B) and in “God is indeed a jealous God” (Franklin 1752). In both of these poems, Dickinson imagines God as someone who just plays games with the humans. He wants the humans to “play only with him” and not with each other – to love and obey someone else than God. He does not want the humans to be happy – therefore he used the notion of the original sin – so that the humans have to behave according to his rules in order to be forgiven. Dickinson doubts the original sin and sees it only as God’s tool to overpower the human race. The humans could find happiness “that too competes with Heaven” in their earthly lives, but because they think they need God’s forgiveness, they

are not able to reach it although they “rather not with Him/ But with each other play”.  
(Franklin 1752) The official and rigid religion makes people obey rules given to them  
by God, but the rules were made to oppress the humans and to suck the happiness from  
their lives. These two poems are the most extreme ones in Dickinson’s “religion  
rejecting” poetry and it can be assumed that she, actually, recognized the importance of  
the basic rules “given by God” for the society:

Those - dying then,  
Knew where they went -  
They went to God’s Right Hand -  
That Hand is amputated now  
And God cannot be found -

The abdication of Belief  
Makes the Behavior small -  
Better an ignis fatuus  
Than no illumine at all -  
(Franklin 1581)

In the first stanza, she compares the approach towards religion in the past with  
the present approach – previously, people were certain that after they died, they would  
go to God’s safe arms. However, people’s faith is weakened and so is the safety offered  
by God because people do not believe in the happy afterlife as they “cannot find God”.  
It seems that God has hidden as a little child because he is hurt by the lack of faith.

The second stanza explains the consequences of such a situation – when people  
do not have belief, their personality gets worse. So, although Dickinson always doubted  
the religion, she believed that it was important to preserve moral qualities in the society.  
People need faith, even a false one (“Ignis fatuus”). Otherwise, there is no hope for the  
society. “Ignis fatuus” can be also translated, according to Emily Dickinson Lexicon, as  
a “will with a whip”. It is another interesting point – at this moment, Dickinson  
recognizes the official religion with its rigid rules to be better than no religion at all.



It is clear that Dickinson found the religion very important for others and she definitely acknowledged its importance even for herself. So the question is: How did she transform the “jealous God” with the “Right hand amputated” into the hope and light, at the end of her journey?

In “I know that He exists,” (Franklin 365) poem, she describes her seeking for the faith as a game that can be funny only if it is not for real:

But - should the play  
Prove piercing earnest -  
Should the glee - glaze -  
In Death's - stiff - stare -

Would not the fun  
Look too expensive!  
Would not the jest -  
Have crawled too far!

In the third stanza, the speaker imagines that at the time of her death she finds out that God and Heaven are real and she will have to go to hell because her faith is not strong enough. So, in the last stanza, she asks herself if she should stop doubting because she could pay a very high price after she dies. It seems that the speaker admits the danger she is in and, moreover, she even thinks about changing her attitude towards the religion and faith.

It seems that Emily Dickinson felt much more comfortable while thinking about the religion when connecting it with Jesus, the son of God. She admires his sacrifice and *she finally gets from Jesus what she could not get from the distant God – she can be sure that he was really interested in the humans because he was even willing to suffer for them and live among them while treating them as the equal ones:*

I like the look of Agony,  
Because I know it's true -

...

(Franklin 339)

The speaker can believe without a doubt to the truth of Jesus' suffering and so she turns onto his humanity that is closer to her than his divinity. It seems that through the humanity of Jesus' life and death, she is able to believe to the divine part of his:

Life - is what we make of it -  
Death - we do not know -  
Christ's acquaintance with Him  
Justify Him - though -

He - would trust no stranger -  
Other - could betray -  
Just His own endorsement -  
That - sufficeth Me -

All the other Distance  
He hath traversed first -  
No New Mile remaineth -  
Far as Paradise -

His sure foot preceding -  
Tender Pioneer -  
Base must be the Coward  
Dare not venture - now -  
(Franklin 727)

"This poem declares an assured faith in Jesus..." (Harde 325) In the first stanza, Dickinson claims that she believes in Jesus because he died and he met with Death and so he can understand it and he can tell others what it is like to be dead and what happens afterwards.

In the second stanza, she expresses her conviction that she can trust Jesus in what he can tell her about Death. In the last two stanzas, Jesus, as the "Pioneer" who has covered the entire distance to Paradise, removes the speaker's fear of Death – the "stranger." In the last two lines of the poem, she claims that after the road has been explored by Jesus, no one could possibly be afraid anymore, not even Dickinson. It seems that Dickinson "saw him as an affirmation of both life and afterlife" (Harde 325),

which helped her believe that she can get to Heaven, even if she does not completely accept the official religion. She even sees Jesus as an ally in her private “war” against the official religion. In the poem “He preached upon ‘Breadth’ till it argued him narrow -“(Franklin 1266 B), Dickinson ridicules an incapable and false preacher:

Simplicity fled from his counterfeit presence  
As Gold Pyrites would shun -  
What confusion would cover the innocent Jesus  
To meet so enabled a Man!

Dickinson’s opinion on this preacher may generalize her experience with preachers during her life. She was very critical to the preachers she met with and there were only few she really admired. The preachers were the symbols of the old-fashioned approach towards religion and, in this poem, she doubts their right to preach about Jesus and God because she does not find them able to express the essence of the religion and they often preach against Jesus’ creed.

Nevertheless, it is not only Jesus that helped her develop her unique approach towards religion – it was also the nature, safety of her home and love that helped her find an alternative to church worship – an informal communion with God.

Dickinson, with her instinct for gaps in this [Calvinist] tradition, intuited the paradox at the heart of Calvinism: that, in light of predestination, no church is needed to mediate God's grace. Spirituality may be defined as the thoughtful love of life, a phrase that certainly calls Dickinson to mind. (Juhasz 18)

In one of the famous letters to Susan Dickinson, one can see a clear evidence of uniqueness of Dickinson’s faith: “I could not find a *ching* to put the worthy pastor; when he said ‘Our Heavenly Father,’ I said ‘Oh darling Sue’... I kept singing how I loved you... while all the rest of the choir were singing Hallelujahs.” (L 88) Dickinson

found God in things or people she knew best and they became part of her private religion as she clearly states in:

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

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

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

(Franklin 236)

In the first stanza, she states that she keeps the sermon at home and she has flowers from her garden to present a Dome and a Chorister – the nature is a better place to worship God. In the second stanza, she describes the simplicity of such sermon which seems to be more pleasant for her than the solemnity of a sermon in the church.

In the last stanza, she presents God as a preacher – she does not need anyone to mediate the creed – she is in a direct contact with God; and, unlike the sermons in church, this one is never boring and never too long – only important things are being said. The speaker is on his way to Heaven, but she does not need to reach it because she enjoys the searching. The speaker finds herself excluded from the majority again – because she does not accept the given truth of the official church, she is walking all along, not being sure if she ever reaches Heaven. However, she seems to be satisfied in her private worshipping and she is not anxious any longer about not getting to Heaven because it is the road and searching that matters.

One can see a strong confidence in this poem, which can be also seen in “I’m ceded – I’ve stopped being Their’s -“. (Franklin 353) The poem deals with the baptizing of little children. According to Ebberwein, “Baptism was ... an expression of the community’s trust that children are, in a sense, included in the faith of their parents, partakers with them in their covenant, and brought into a peculiar relation to God, in view of it”. (15) The speaker in this poem, who was baptized as a child “before, without a choice”, declares her freedom to choose her own belief that is different to the belief of her family and the society. No longer the passive recipient of “sacramental grace”, “Crowned - Crowing - on my Father’s breast - ,” she is rejecting the faith that was given to her and chooses her personal one which is superior to the given one because it is based on her life experience and on a decision she has made on her own.

So, finally, through rejection and rebellion against the official religion and against the society that forces her to accept the “given truths”, she finds her quiet and peaceful way to communicate with God. She is satisfied with her life that is full of struggle of finding her faith which is, in its doubt, stronger than faith of others who do not doubt at all:

God gave a Loaf to every Bird -  
But just a Crumb - To me -  
I dare not eat it - tho’ I starve -  
My poignant luxury -

To own it - touch it  
Prove the feat - that made the Pellet mine -  
Too happy – for my Sparrow’s chance  
For Ampler coveting -

It might be Famine - all around -  
I could not miss an Ear -  
Such Plenty smiles upon my board -  
My Garner shows so fair -

I wonder how the Rich - may feel -

An Indiaman - An Earl -  
I deem that I - with but a Crumb -  
Am Sovereign of them all -  
(Franklin 748 B)

Dickinson's religious poetry surprises us by its up-to-date character. The idea of the little faith being more valuable than the faith without a doubt is very inspiring for all those who lost their faith in the hectic modern world and try to find it again.

## EFFECTS OF CIVIL WAR ON SOCIETY

The theme of Civil War in Emily Dickinson's poetry was not found important and worth noticing until 1980s: "Dickinson specialists would have been hard put to it to identify more than a small sprinkling of poems that might have even hinted at the Civil War." (Berkove 1) One of the reasons to consider the theme of the war in Dickinson's poetry as a major one is the fact that "this major historical event of Emily Dickinson's lifetime coincided with the poet's most productive years". (Marcellin 64) Another reason could have been the involvement of Dickinson's father in the political life. "The Bell-Everett/Constitutional Union party nominated Edward Dickinson for lieutenant governor, and, by extension, nominated Emily Dickinson for lieutenant governor's daughter." (Hutchinson 16) Edward Dickinson declined this offer and it was definitely noted by Emily Dickinson – in her letter to Louise and Frances Norcross, dated mid-September 1860, the poet writes: "Won't Fanny give my respects to the 'Bell and Everett party' if she passes that organization on her way to school? I hear they wish to make me Lieutenant-Governor's daughter. Were they cats I would pull their tails, but as they are only patriots, I must forgo the bliss. . . ." (L225) One can see that Dickinson shared the mixed feelings of her father who declined his nomination, but was still a supporter of the party.

Dickinson was not involved in the public support of the war – she, "unlike many patriotic women, refused to help make bandages". (Habegger 402) Nevertheless, she found her own way to get involved in, as she writes in one of her letters: "I shall have no winter this year – on account of the soldiers – Since I cannot weave Blankets, or Boots – I thought it best to omit the season – Shall present a 'Memorial' – when the Maples turn." (L 235) Instead of offering material support, the blankets and boots, she

offers her poems. Dickinson copes with horrors of the war by writing poetry. It is also a way to put together the world that is falling apart in front of her eyes. Therefore, the main and the most important reason to recognize Dickinson as a major Civil War poet is the fact that her poetry offers elaborate and complex view on Civil War and its effect on the society.

There are three social issues included in Dickinson's war poetry. The first one is the effect of the war on the society, as a whole. Dickinson questions if any cause is worth the price and if it is possible to achieve the true and righteous victory through bloodshed. The second theme is the effect of the war on soldiers and she also asks what their attitude towards their mission in the war is. The last theme is the effect of the war on those who lost someone.

The first theme is a rather public one. Dickinson, unlike many other poets of her time, stays skeptical towards the provident reason that caused Union's involvement in the war. Many Dickinson's contemporaries in the North looked upon the war between the states as an "over-determined narrative - as a crusade in which God advocates the Union's cause and in which his righteous natural law must finally prevail" (Lee 1124) and thought that the war was "a direct expression of divine disapproval for America's sins, notably the sin of slavery, which had not been sufficiently protested". (Cody 39) Bloodshed and suffering were explained not only as inevitable part of the war, but they were "even found necessary within the divine plan as sacrificial offerings". (Cody 40)

Dickinson condemns this approach towards suffering as very insensitive and she does so by using nature imagery to describe the horrifying events of the war, such as in "A Slash of Blue!" (Franklin 233 B) and in "The Name of it is 'Autumn'" (Franklin 465) poems. Both these poems were considered to be only describing the nature, at first.



They are full of beautiful images, but if one approaches them as the war poems, the images suddenly become very violent. “The name – of it – is ‘Autumn’” (Franklin 465) poem was considered to describe the beauties of the autumn season, which is full of colorful, reddish leaves that cover the landscape. But, if the reddish leaves stand for blood, the images become really terrifying and one can vividly imagine the basins full of wounded soldiers whose blood is all over the place. This poem is less enigmatic than “A Slash of Blue!” (Franklin 233 B):

A Slash of Blue! A Sweep of Gray!  
Some scarlet patches - on the way -  
Compose an evening sky -

A little Purple - slipped between -  
Some Ruby Trowsers - hurried on -  
A Wave of Gold - a Bank of Day -  
This just makes out the morning sky!

At the first glance, this poem seems to describe a beautiful painting which depicts beauties of the evening and the morning sky. However, when one reads the poem closely, it is obvious that the poem is about a battle. “Blue”, in the first line, represents Union troops and “Grey” represents Confederates, as these are the colors of their uniforms. “Scarlet patches - on the way -” represent the blood from soldiers’ wounds. The same can be said about “Ruby Trowsers” that “hurried on” – they represent wounded soldiers that can be either running from the battle or attacking the enemy. “A Wave of Gold” stands for the cannon flashes. Cannons are in the row and as the soldiers see the flashes, it can look like “a Bank of Day”.

This description of battle is very ironic – it “gives a contrast to romantic notions of war and as a reduction to absurdity of the notion of subordinating human suffering to some abstract conception of beauty”. (Berkove 4) Dickinson shows how absurd it is to approach suffering as something beautiful and necessary for nation’s salvation. “The

matter of which side wins or loses is irrelevant in this poem, for its subject is not victory but war.” (Berkove 5) The victory is not relevant to the soldiers in the battle – the only thing that matters is if they will die or live. A victory that is achieved through bloodshed is not righteous and tenable.

Dickinson’s attitude towards the victory can be well seen in “Victory comes late -” (Franklin 195 B) poem. Dickinson doubts the religious background of the war – can the society be so sure of God’s consent? The poem sets an image of a dying soldier who cannot “taste” the victory (salvation) that was promised to him by the society. The only thing the soldier feels is the coming death. He asks if “God was too economical” to offer even a “drop” of the promised victory (salvation). However, the victory was not promised by God, but by the society and Dickinson doubts its validity in this poem. It is not sure if any of our deeds leads towards salvation and it is not the society’s right to decide who will or will not be saved. Therefore, when the soldier prays to God to accept him, in the last two lines, there is no confirmation of his acceptance, at the end of the poem, and the salvation remains uncertain. Dickinson shows the cruelty of the promise that was made only to comfort the society’s conscience. In this poem, Dickinson criticizes the

popular press that assured their tender readers that fallen soldiers were Christian martyrs and that the casualties of holy war were destined for heavenly dues. Dickinson, however, cannot imagine God's "Bravoes" without misgivings; the deadly line of a bullet is an undeniable truth, but there is, for the living, only oblique evidence about the status of souls. Knowing this, how can anyone take assurance in a soldier's demise? (Lee 1127)

Dickinson is in opposition to the society that only wants the soldiers to sacrifice their lives and makes questionable promises. However, Dickinson respects and sympathizes with soldiers' bravery and suffering:

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

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

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

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

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

Throughout the poem, Dickinson doubts that the society is worth the soldiers' sacrifice and she compares the soldiers to the "piles of dollars" – which is the way the society sees them. The word "Liberty", at the end of the third stanza, is the reason why the soldiers lost their lives – at first, many of them must die – the dead bodies "must be piled" so that the "Liberty" can be obtained. The "Liberty", according to Wolosky, is the Union's ideology, but Wolosky also believes that it means "possessions". (122) This explanation of the word "Liberty" works well with the comparison of the piles of dead bodies to the piles of dollars. In the fourth stanza, Dickinson asks again if the price of "Liberty" is not too high – if "such Enormous Pearl/ As life -" can be "dissolved in

Battle's – horrid Bowl". Although Dickinson uses form of a question, she also gives a clear answer to it – it is not worthy and we do not have the right to ask anyone to lose their lives for our sake.

In the last stanza, Dickinson claims that the soldiers who lost their lives for the "Liberty" "Present Divinity -". She compares them to Jesus Christ by calling them "Saviors". It seems that Dickinson believes that they will be able to reach Heaven. But will others (the society) get to Heaven when they sent the Saviors to death, like the Jews sent Jesus? This question remains open in Dickinson's poetry.

Dickinson is very interested in the soldiers' painful experience and it is the second theme she explores in her war poetry. It seems that she confronts the society by showing the real feelings of the soldiers in the poems. She puts the "soldier" poems in contrast with the "society" war poems.

Poem "My Portion is Defeat - today - "(Franklin 377) could be put in contrast with "A Slash of Blue!"(Franklin 233 B) poem. The latter one describes the war through the eyes of a politician or within the framework of a political agenda that wants to manipulate public opinion and to show the war as something aesthetic and beautiful. The first poem shows the horrifying images in a very bold way, as can be seen in the second stanza:

'Tis populous with Bone and stain -  
And Men too straight to stoop again -  
And Piles of solid Moan -  
And Chips of Blank - in Boyish Eyes -  
And scraps of Prayer -  
And Death's surprise,  
Stamped visible - in Stone -

“’Tis” refers to the defeat in the war and the second stanza describes the consequences of a lost battle. It is not an aesthetic description of heroic deeds of those who were finally defeated, but a description full of blood, dirt, stains, moaning soldiers and corpses. The presence of Death is perceptible throughout the entire battle scene. It is definitely not an image an honorable citizen would like to see – there is no God or “his divine plan” present in the scene. The soldiers have changed into scared and confused little boys who try to pray, but cannot, and one can hear only fragments of prayers. The only thing that is present is Death and it is undeniable and unavoidable – it is cut “in Stone -“. The soldiers are surprised by Death – they did not have time to prepare to leave this world peacefully, neither did they receive absolution.

However, even those who gain the “Victory” are not jubilant for a long time, as in “My Triumph lasted till the Drums” (Franklin 1212) poem. The soldier felt triumph, at first, but once the war drums (the emotions from the battle) went silent, the soldier realized that many of his mates had died: “And then I hated Glory/ And wished myself were They”. The capital letter in “They” might (apart from Dickinson’s typical idiosyncratic capitalization) show respect to those who died and it may also be seen as a tribute to their value and the high price they had to pay. Suddenly, the victory seems unimportant in comparison to the death of the soldiers and “A Bayonet’s contrition/ Is nothing to the Dead”. There is no way the soldier who survived could ever forgive himself for being alive while his comrades are dead. The soldier, in this poem, does not value his life anymore. He prefers to be dead than to experience the horrors of the war again. One can see the same feelings in “He fought like those Who’ve nought to lose -“(Franklin 480) poem. He “invites Death - with bold attempt -“, but Death is shy of him and although many of his friends die, in the third stanza, he is still alive, “But He - was left alive Because/ Of Greediness to die -“. He wants to die, he exposes himself to the

bullets, but Death does not want to take him. Death prefers to take those who are afraid of him (Death's gender is masculine in English) and value their lives. The indifference towards one's survival seems to be even more horrifying than the dread of dying in the war.

However, the fear of what comes after death is present in most of Dickinson's war poems. In "Our journey had advanced" (Franklin 453) poem, Dickinson describes soldiers preparing for their last battle – they have to fight to get to Heaven. The retreat route is sealed and they cannot come back to life, but they are also afraid to move forward – to die. The soldiers are standing on the "odd Fork in Being's Road" which is called "Eternity - by Term" and they are not able to move. They know that they have to die and that the eternity is awaiting them, but there is God standing at every Heaven's entrance and they are not sure if He lets them pass through the gates. This poem also seems to be dealing with the problem of soldiers' salvation, now from the soldiers' point of view. Seen from their prism, their salvation is not certain at all. Soldiers have to fight to get in and God is presented as a guardian of the gates they need to go through to be saved.

Dickinson tries to deal with this haunting image by writing poems, where the speakers are mourners who are shattered by the death of their loved ones.

"It dont sound so terrible - quite - as it did -" (Franklin 384) poem has been identified by a number of critics as a poem about the effect of Frazar Stearns' death on Dickinson's brother Austin. "... [He] was shocked and numbed by the death of his friend." (Marcellin 72) Frazar Stearns was a son of Amherst College's president and he was a close friend of Austin. Dickinson writes in one of her letters to Samuel Bowles that "Austin is chilled – by Frazer's murder – He says – his Brain keeps saying over

'Frazer is killed,' just as Father told it – to Him. Two or three words of lead – that  
dropped so deep, they keep weighing –“(L256) Austin’s feelings inspired Dickinson to  
write the poem mentioned above:

It dont sound so terrible - quite - as it did -  
I run it over – “Dead”, Brain, “Dead.”  
Put it in Latin - left of my school -  
Seems it don’t shriek so - under rule.

Turn it, a little - full in the face  
A Trouble looks bitterest -  
Shift it - just -  
Say “When Tomorrow comes this way -  
I shall have waded down one Day.”

I suppose it will interrupt me some  
Till I get accustomed - but then the Tomb  
Like other new Things - shows largest - then -  
And smaller, by Habit -

It’s shrewder then  
Put the Thought in advance - a Year -  
How like “a fit” - then -  
Murder - wear!

In the first stanza, the speaker repeats over and over the word “Dead” and he  
hopes that the word will lose its meaning and that he will get used to it. He even uses  
Latin, which helps him cover the word’s terrible meaning. In the second stanza, the  
speaker tries to turn the word a little, so that he does not have to face its meaning. He  
also tries to repeat clichés such as “When Tomorrow comes this way -/I shall have  
waded down one Day.” that will help him to cope with the death of a close friend. In the  
third stanza, he thinks that, after a while, he will get used to the fact that his friend was  
killed.

The last stanza gives a “recipe” as to how to cope with the death of a beloved  
one. One should prepare in advance for such a situation and then it will not be difficult  
to consider “Murder” to be just “a fit”. The last stanza is apparently ironic – one can

never be prepared for such a loss and it would be absurd to try to deal with it in advance. Although it seems obvious that many people will die in the war, one is never prepared to lose those he cares for. On the other hand, war really changes the way people look at the involuntary death as it becomes part of their everyday lives: "Sorrow seems more general than it did, and not the estate of a few persons, since the war begun; and if the anguish of others helped one with one's own, now would be many medicines." (L 298)

In the poem mentioned above, the speaker expresses his sorrow and anger caused by the death of a dear person. One can see the same feelings in "Robbed by Death - but that was easy -" (Franklin 838) poem. In this poem, the speaker even feels robbed by the death and condemns the war for "Liberty" that offers only a "Hint of Glory" to those who have to fight for it. The speaker believes that it is not worth fighting. The speaker suffers mainly because she spends the days wondering when and if a soldier will be killed.

However, Dickinson offers a contradictory poem, too. In "When I was small, a Woman died" (Franklin 518), the speaker expresses belief, in the last two stanzas, that a mother and her son, a soldier, will meet again in Heaven:

But, proud in Apparition -  
That Woman and her Boy  
Pass back and forth, before my Brain  
As even in the sky -

I'm confident, that Bravoes -  
Perpetual break abroad  
For Braveries, remote as this  
In Yonder Maryland -



The mother is already in Heaven awaiting her son who was killed in the war. The pride is stronger than the loss in this poem and it seems that the speaker believes that the soldiers will get to Heaven be once they have been killed and that their sacrifice will be highly appraised.

One can see the same opinion in "He gave away his Life" (Franklin 530) poem. Dickinson portrays the death of a soldier as a noble sacrifice, as perfect as a ripened fruit. The speaker explains that the sacrifice means everything to us but little to the soldiers and describes how he has moved out of reach of those who loved him by entering the Heaven. In the last two stanzas of the poem, the speaker compares the mourners' lives to that of the fallen man:

'Tis Our's - to wince - and weep -  
And wonder - and decay  
By Blossom's gradual process -  
He chose - Maturity -  
  
And quickening - as we sowed -  
Just obviated Bud -  
And when We turned to note the Growth -  
Broke - perfect - from the Pod -

Marcellin counts this poem among four that she believes were directly inspired by Frazer Stearns's death (68), but it would certainly apply to any soldier who believed in the just cause of the war. She also notes the "Christ-like quality of the sacrifice" (68) which can be found in other war poems, too. "To know just how he suffered would be dear" (Franklin 688) poem is another example of this attitude. In these poems, there is no doubt that the soldiers will get to Heaven.

While the soldier is accepted into Heaven, the mourners are condemned to pain and suffering. Dickinson believes that it is better to die in a battle than to be the one

who stays alive. It also seems that she believes there is hope that the soldiers will be saved after they are killed, but she does not express any hope for the mourners.

Dickinson describes the war and the loss of life from various perspectives that can even contradict each other: “We see the idealized sacrifices of soldiers and the tranquil grief of those who value their bravery as well as seemingly futile deaths of soldiers on bloody battlefields and mourners who are angry and resentful.” (Marcellin 72) Dickinson “dwells in possibility” again because she expresses the confusion and doubts of ordinary people who experience suffering caused by the war. However, there is no doubt that she objects the war as a tool to reach economic or political dominance. She respects the sacrifice of the soldiers, but she doubts the motives of those who sent them to death and she rejects to see the war as a crusade. The consequences of the war are too harsh, according to Dickinson, as it can be seen in “Those - dying then.”

(Franklin 1581) poem:

Those - dying then,  
Knew where they went -  
They went to God’s Right Hand -  
That Hand is amputated now  
And God cannot be found -

This poem is not usually considered as a war poem and it was also used in Religion and Faith chapter, but one can clearly see the consequences of the war being expressed in it. God’s “amputated hand” presents the suffering that was caused by the war and the loss of traditional values. The society has been thrown into chaos and people cannot find their beliefs anymore because they have experienced too much pain. Dickinson helps herself to overcome this agony by writing poems.

## INTERPERSONAL RELATONSHIPS

This chapter analyses and compares the types of relationship that often occurred in Dickinson's poetry – love, friendship and marriage. They seem to be one of the major sources of inspiration for Dickinson.

### **Love**

There is only one fulfilled love in Emily Dickinson's life. It is the one she experienced with a friend of her father's, judge Otis Lord. Lord was much older than Dickinson, but he shared a lot in common with Dickinson who seems to be very happy in the relationship: "It is that happy freedom and fearlessness that we see in Dickinson's astounding love letters to Otis Phillips Lord, an elderly judge on Massachusetts' Supreme Judicial Court. These letters ... raise presumption that, whatever her earlier experience, she had the thrill of mutual love with a man." (Habegger 584)

Otis Lord even proposed to Dickinson, but she declined his proposition, which is a very important fact for understanding her poetry that is dealing with relationships. In one of her letters to Lord, Dickinson writes: "Don't you know you are happiest while I withhold and not confer – don't you know that 'No' is the wildest word we consign to Language?" (L 562) Dickinson believes that only the unfulfilled love can really achieve what she is looking for – the wildest passion and the genuine love, in its purest sense. She can also "dwell in possibility" again because *the unfulfilled love leaves space for* imagination and creativity. It seems that Dickinson does not look for a real relationship, but she is interested in the feelings that it activates. She "feeds" on the feelings and her poems are the products of it. She talks about Otis Lord in the most passionate ways:

My lovely Salem smiles at me – I seek his face so often – but I have done with guises – I confess that I love him – I rejoice that I love him – I thank the maker of Heaven and Earth – that gave him me to love – The Exaltation floods me – I cannot find my channel – the Creek turns to Sea – at thought of thee... (L 559)

However, she never allows the relationship to become real because its qualities would be ruined for her, then – “The Exultation floods [her]” when she thinks about him, but she does not need the passion become physical. It is the typical feature that is present in the majority of her “relationship” poems. Dickinson prefers staying detached and longing for the person and she draws inspiration from the distance between the “lover” and herself:

I groped for him before I knew  
With solemn nameless need  
All other bounty sudden chaff  
For this foreshadowed Food  
Which others taste and spurn and sneer -  
Though I within suppose  
That consecrated it could be  
The only Food that grows  
(Franklin 1585)

There are strong passions present in the poem. The speaker gropes for the “fruit of love” with “solemn nameless need”. The speaker cannot find the right words to describe the passion she experiences. The “food” is overshadowed for her and she never tastes it – it is not, therefore, ruined for her as it is ruined for others who tasted it. Although she supposes that it could bring her a lot of joy and satisfaction, she never tastes it because it is the “only food that grows”. The “food” can still grow if not eaten as the love grows if not fulfilled.

Dickinson’s love to Otis Lord is, according to scholars, the only one that was mutual. However, the most famous love of Dickinson’s life remains still a great

mystery. She calls her secret love “Master”; and the scholars still argue who the “Master” could be. There are various possibilities – some suggest Susan Gilbert Dickinson, others, like Judith Farr, believe that it was Samuel Bowles (182), but the most probable person seems to be reverend Charles Wadsworth whom Dickinson met in Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. Nevertheless, it is not the objective of this chapter to decide who the “Master” was; it examines the character of the relationship.

In her letter to Master, Dickinson writes: “Master – open your life wide, and take me in forever, I will never be tired – I will never be noisy when you want to be still. I will be [glad] [as the] your best girl – nobody else will see me, but you – but that is enough – I shall not want any more – and all that Heaven only disappoint me – will be because it’s not so dear.” (L 248)

One can observe that Dickinson positions herself into a subordinate role and the “master” is more than God and Heaven for her. The love to Master can be compared to worshipping. Dickinson is well-aware that she can never reach the fulfillment of this love and that is what makes the beloved person sacred for her. There is only one way to meet with her Master:

I used to think when I died – I could see you – so I died as fast as I could – but the ‘Corporation’ are going to Heaven too so [Eternity] wont be sequestered – now [at all] – Say I may wait for you – say I need go with no stranger to the to me – untried [country] fold – I waited a long time – Master – but I can wait more – wait till my hazel hair is dappled – and you carry me the cane – then I can look at my watch – and if the Day is too far declined – we can take the chances [of] for Heaven. (L 233)

Dickinson believes that, after her death, it will be finally possible to meet with her beloved "Master":

I did not reach Thee  
But my feet slip nearer every day  
Three Rivers and a Hill to cross  
One Desert and a Sea  
I shall not count the journey one  
When I am telling thee.

...  
Three rivers and the Hill are passed  
Two deserts and the Sea!  
Now Death usurps my Premium  
And gets the look at Thee -

(Franklin 1708)

The poem describes Dickinson's life as an exhausting journey towards her lover whom she will meet once she has died. Armand believes that "Emily Dickinson fashioned her personal notion of a domestic 'Heaven' in which lovers would be rewarded not only with individual salvation but with the opportunity to consummate their love" (63) and Monteiro concludes that "Dickinson reached the conviction that immortality gained would enable, not a meeting of disembodied beings forever spiritualized and abidingly discrete, but the happy union of two lovers, physically and sensually joined at last and for eternity". (106)

There is both extreme joy and sadness in letters and poems, where Dickinson describes her love to "Master" because, on one hand, she nourishes from the love she experiences, but, on the other hand, she knows that the love can never be fulfilled, during her life. However, as it was mentioned above, Dickinson prefers thinking about loving someone to getting into the real relationship because it offers her the inspiration for poetry writing and the love can never be spoiled and remains strong, perfect and pure.

However, Dickinson does not always view love as purely platonic. In some of her poems, she expresses her sexual desire:

Wild nights! Wild nights!  
Were I with thee,  
Wild nights should be  
Our luxury!

Rowing in Eden!  
Ah - the Sea!  
Might I but moor - tonight -  
In thee!

(Franklin 269)

The poem is rather daring for the puritan environment. However, it is only hypothetical, as Dickinson uses words like “Were I with thee,” or “Might I but moor”. The nights would be wild if the speaker were with his lover, but he is not. Anderson considers “the wild nights to be stormy nights which the speaker is suffering from, but s/he also considers them to be nights of passion which the speaker longs for”. (169) The speaker is afraid to experience the passion, but, on the other hand, the speaker desperately needs to experience it.

“Luxury”, in the last line of the first stanza, is explained as “lust” in Webster’s dictionary, which emphasizes strong emotional context of the poem. The “heart in port”, in the second stanza, is the lover’s embrace. The lovers have no need for a compass or chart, which are used to get to a specific destination and are instruments of control and reason. The sea is a common image for passion; “Rowing” and “moor in thee” represent sexual intercourse.

However, Dickinson could only imagine such a passionate situation as she was a member of the puritan society:

Over the fence -  
Strawberries - grow -

Over the fence -  
I could climb - if I tried, I know -  
Berries are nice!

But - if I stained my Apron -  
God would certainly scold!  
Oh, dear, - I guess if He were a Boy -  
He'd - climb - if He could!

(Franklin 271)

Dickinson is lured by sexual desire, but she is aware that she would have to violate the rules given by the society and God. "Desire, if it existed for the unmarried woman, was 'dangerous'... without the legitimation of marriage, the single woman was forced into a controlled abstinence both her emotional and social self." (Burbick 76) However, she is still lured and she knows that it would not be difficult to climb over the fence if it were not for the restrictions. Yet, she is sure that if she would have "sinned" -- if she had stained her apron with strawberries, which could even mean the loss of her virginity, the society and God would judge her. She presents the desire in a very innocent way, as strawberries growing behind the fence, which may also represent her refusal of the given rules that are often unreasonable and old-fashioned and go against the nature of a human being. Dickinson believes that if the Puritan God became only a human, he would not be able to resist himself.

Dickinson oscillates between wild passion and restraint in her poetry and she definitely suffers because of that. Nevertheless, she is well-aware that the unfulfilled love inspires her writing more than the fulfilled one. Dickinson deliberately chooses to love those she cannot have because she will never be disappointed and her love will stay pure for the afterlife in Heaven, where it will last forever.



## Marriage

Marriage, in Dickinson's point of view, seems to be the opposite of love. It oppresses woman's freedom and uniqueness – the woman becomes just a wife who is only a part of her husband. Love was inspiring for the poet, but marriage seems to be the very opposite. Dickinson might have adopted this attitude because of her father's and mother's relationship. Dickinson's father was the head of the household, always controlling and giving advice while mother was overshadowed by his dominance. The marriage did not seem to be an unhappy one, according to Habegger, but it was definitely not a suitable institution for Dickinson's originality, which might have been one of the reasons why she never got married.

There are several poems that seem to touch on the subject of marriage. The transformation from a young girl to a "wife" is a typical feature for the poems as in:

The World - stands - solemn - to me -  
Since I was wed - to Him -  
A modesty befits the soul  
That bears another's - name -  
A doubt - if it be fair - indeed -  
To wear that perfect - pearl -  
The Man - upon the Woman - binds -  
To clasp her soul - for all -  
(Franklin 280)

The speaker describes how she has changed after the marriage. The world has become much more serious. It means that she must behave according to the expectations – she must be a respectable married woman. The speaker also suggests that, by accepting "another's name", she had to give up part of her pride and become more modest – obedient to her husband. She doubts if it is "fair to wear that perfect pearl" that the man bound to her. The "pearl" stands for the "happiness" of being a married

woman. The man rules the woman once they get married and the speaker is not sure if bondage with a man can be compared to a "pearl".

In another poem, Dickinson describes wife's role in a marriage:

Forever at His side to walk -  
The smaller of the two!  
Brain of His Brain -  
Blood of His Blood -  
Two lives - One Being - now -

Forever of His fate to taste -  
If grief - the largest part -  
If joy - to put my piece away  
For that beloved Heart -

All life - to know each other -  
Whom we can never learn -  
And bye and bye - a Change -  
Called Heaven -  
Rapt Neighborhoods of Men -  
Just finding out - what puzzled us -  
Without the lexicon!

(Franklin 264)

This poem is very sarcastic. At first sight, the speaker seems to be a wife that is completely devoted to her husband, but then it becomes clear that the speaker is mocking and complaining, at the same time, about the role given to women by the society. In the first stanza, the speaker cites clichés that are often used for the husband – wife relationship. The first woman, Eve was taken from Adam's rib and so she is supposed to be subordinate to her husband – she is "Brain of His Brain-/Blood of His Blood". Capitalization of "His" symbolizes the superior position of the husband. They become one body, but the wife is the smaller part of it – they are not equal – the wife is subordinate.

In the second stanza, the speaker describes the fate of the wife, who should, according to the society's opinion, take the worse part of life on her shoulders if she is really devoted to her husband.

In the third stanza, the speaker talks about the prejudice that women can never understand the man's world that is based on reason. However, when the death comes, everybody is suddenly equal and everything that the society put between the man and the woman falls down. Nevertheless, the question arises if it is not too late.

Dickinson believes that marriage is a prison for women, who have to obey their husbands and have to sacrifice their hopes and dreams for them. This attitude can be one of the reasons why she never got married and preferred to take care of her mother and father's household because she could keep the freedom of her spirit, at least.

## **Friendship**

Friendship is of a high importance for Emily Dickinson. The poems and letters written to her friends have a passionate character, which even led some scholars to the assumption that Dickinson was in love with her sister-in-law. However, there is no clear evidence for this opinion and therefore it will not be explored in the chapter. Pollak is very sensitive to the predicament of a woman in the nineteenth century in love with another woman: "Although some feminist critics have suggested that homoerotic female friendships in nineteenth century America were easily reconciled with heterosexual commitments and untainted by guilt, for Dickinson the bonds of womanhood are more confining." (145)

The theme of friendship will be described on the example of Susan Gilbert Dickinson. Susan was considered to be Emily Dickinson's best friend and she also

married Dickinson's brother Austin. One can follow the development of the relationship that lasted over thirty years. Dickinson, especially when younger, had many other friends, but lost them during her life. Susan was the only close friend who stayed and whom Dickinson met personally, on regular basis. Dickinson even wrote poems that were devoted to Sue or that described their relationship.

Susan was considered to be Dickinson's secret love, the "Master", by some scholars. However, it seems highly improbable because Dickinson treated other friends in the same passionate way in her letters. One of them was her friend Jane Humphrey, to whom Dickinson wrote in the late 1850s, after they have lost contact with each other: "How I wish you were mine, as you once were, when I had you in the morning, and when the sun went down, and was sure I should never go to sleep without a moment with you." (L 320) This statement, quite intense for the time, suggests one of the reasons why friends sometimes drew back from Dickinson. She required a very strong relationship from her friends: "Her love was generous, but it was also exacting and uncompromising, the expression of a powerful ego demanding that friendship live up to a high standard. Her sister-in-law understood this well, having been for thirty-five years one of the poet's select intimates." (Habegger 263)

Dickinson always exaggerated the relationships with her friends – she always tried to imagine her friendships as perfect ones and she believed that she could share any of her thoughts with them. Habegger believes that by writing letters to her friends she "was also aiming at sharing, controlling [their] inner life". (276) Therefore, Dickinson could never be satisfied with the friendships she had because no one could give her what she expected – their entire soul and mind, as it can be read in a letter to Susan: "...will you indeed come home next Saturday, and be my own again, and kiss

me as you used to... or am I fancying so, and dreaming blessed dreams from which the day will wake me? I... feel that now I must have you – that the expectation... makes me feel hot and feverish, and my heart beats so fast.” (Habegger 215)

Many friends drew back from Dickinson because of her high expectations and Sue did too, according to Dickinson: “Oh Susie, Susie, I must call out to you in the old, old way – I must say ho it seems to me to hear the clock so silently tick all the hours away, and bring me not my gift – my own, my own!” (L 154) This letter was a reaction on Sue’s and Austin’s engagement.

The letters that Dickinson wrote to her close friends who she lost contact with, seem to have a lot in common with the “Master” letters. Firstly, it is the extreme sense of separation from the beloved one that is present in the letters. Secondly, Dickinson experiences the loss of someone dear and it seems that she uses the “lost relationship” as a source of inspiration for her poems. There is clear evidence of it in another letter to Sue in which Dickinson expresses her grief that they have alienated: “You need not fear to leave me lest I should be alone, for I often part with things I fancy I have loved, - sometimes to the grave, and sometimes to an oblivion rather bitterer than death.” (L 173) The letter is ended by a poem describing Dickinson’s loss and hope for the friendship recovery:

I have a Bird in spring  
Which for myself doth sing -  
The spring decoys.  
And as the summer nears -  
And as the Rose appears,  
Robin is gone.

...

Then will I not repine,  
Knowing that Bird of mine  
Though flown  
Shall in a distant tree

Bright melody for me  
Return.  
(Franklin 4 A)

In the first stanza, Dickinson describes the loss of a friend and in the last stanza, she expresses her hope that, according to Habegger, “Sue can still restore the friendship by writing”. (324)

Dickinson’s frustration from losing her friends can be seen in many of her poems and she seems to suffer from it a great deal:

Whether they have forgotten  
Or are forgetting now  
Or never remembered -  
Safer not to know -

Miseries of conjecture  
Are a softer woe  
Than a Fact of Iron  
Hardened with I know -  
(Franklin 1334)

Dickinson’s pain is expressed rather explicitly in this poem – she prefers not to know about her friends “betraying” her. It is better to stay ignorant than to know for sure. It may be one of the reasons why Dickinson writes passionately to those who do not care for her, anymore. She seems to lie to herself to keep a sense of dignity. However, the frustration sometimes erupts on the surface, as it can be read in the first stanza of a poem about Sue’s alienation:

That she forgot me was the least  
I felt it second pain  
That I was worthy to forget  
Was most I thought upon.  
(Franklin 1716)

Dickinson feels like “worthy to be forgotten”, which she is ashamed for. She had to struggle all her life with the sense of being an outsider.

However, there is another similarity with the “Master” letters. Dickinson expresses the hope that she will reunite with her lost friends in Heaven again, as it can be read in the last stanza of a poem that was enclosed to a letter to Susan Dickinson in 1863:

Ungained - it may - be - by a Life's low Venture -  
But then -  
Eternity enable the endeavoring  
Again.

(Franklin 724)

Ellen Hart suggests that the stanza describes “the progression from live below, ‘Life's low venture -’ into eternity and paradise”. (242) Dickinson believes that she will reunite with her friend in “Eternity” again. Dickinson lets her imagination help her to reconcile with unsuccessful friendships.

Dickinson's relationships are often marked by the notion of separation from the society. On one hand, the poet suffers from the seclusion, but, on the other hand, it is a great source of inspiration for her. She also expresses the hope that she will meet with her friends and platonic lovers in Heaven, which reminds one of her struggle with the faith and religion and it shows how important the question of finding her faith was for her.

Dickinson desperately wants to be part of the society when the society rejects her, but, once accepted, she always runs away, as in the case of Otis Lord and his proposal.

## **CONCLUSION**

The thesis presented Emily Dickinson as the ultimate seeker of the truth. She suffered because she believed she was incapable of describing the world surrounding her precisely and this feeling is often expressed in her poems. However, she never gave up this fight and so she became one of the most truthful poets of her time. Due to her voluntary isolation, she observed the society from the distance, which helped her to describe its problems and issues very precisely.

Moreover, she never meant to publish and so her poetry brings authentic view on the society because she did not count on being admired by others. The poetry writing was a way to cope with the restrictions and the rules given by the society. She was not sure if her attitude towards life was the right one and she always balanced on the border between desperately wanting to accept the given rules and between knowing that they were unacceptable for her because she felt that they were not right, many times. It was an ultimate fight between extremely conscious self and the knowledge of the rules given by the society. Dickinson found the escape from this situation in her poetry writing.

The most important topic of her life was to find her faith and to find the power to resist the official religion. The theme of faith is present in all other themes: In “Publication and Role of Poet”, she tries to find her way to God through words. In “Effects of War on Society”, she doubts the provident reasons of the war and, in “Interpersonal Relationships”, the reunion in Heaven is her only hope to meet with her beloved ones again. Nevertheless, she is not sure of the existence of God and Heaven and she suffers from the doubts she experiences. Dickinson’s life is full of contrastive feelings, which cause her a lot of pain, but it is exactly this inner fight that makes her poems strikingly powerful and fascinating.



Dickinson is a modern poet, not only because of the uniqueness of her style, but also because of the modern view on the world and its issues. The thesis showed that her opinions are still valid, even in the postmodern world, as it could be read in “Effects of War on Society”, or in “Religion and Faith” chapters.

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