Locating Gender in Space:

Emily Dickinson's Conception of Gender

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Table of Contents

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List of Abbreviations

It is common within literary scholarship to quote Dickinson's work using letters and numbers to indicate which edition the primary material is quoted from. Because Dickinson did not title her poems, they are usually referred to by their first line and the number the perspective editor assigned them according to their chronological appearance, whereas the last known version of a poem is taken as reference, and earlier versions are given as variants. The letters J and F followed by numbers identify poems, whereas L followed by a number indicates a letter. In this dissertation, I use primarily Richard W. Franklin's 1998 variorum edition. At the time of writing, Cristanne Miller's *Emily Dickinson's Poems As She Preserved Them* (2016), which is organized according to the fascicles and fair copies the poet had made, is also available. However, because most of my dissertation was written while Miller's edition was still forthcoming, I was unable to incorporate it. The following letters and numbers refer to Dickinson 's work in subsequent editions:

F23 Poem number 23 "In the name of the Bee –" in Dickinson, Emily. *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*. Variorum ed. Ed. R.W. Franklin. Cambridge Mass: Belknap Press, 1998. Print.

J83 Poem number 83 "Heart, not so heavy as mine" in Dickinson, Emily. *Poems.* Ed. Thomas H. Johnson. Harvard University Press, 1955. Print.

L38 Letter number 38 "Were it not for the weather Susie –" in Dickinson, Emily. *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*. Ed. Thomas H. Johnson. Cambridge Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1958. Vol. I. Print.

1. Introduction

Rarely has there been a poet who has been portrayed in such contradictory ways and whose work has been misrepresented, misconceived, and instrumentalized to such different ends as Emily Dickinson. The poet has been represented as solitary nun, rebel against patriarchy, progressive genius, or oppressed lesbian, and her work has been read as the symptom of psychological trauma, manifestations of a lost love relationship, or plea for independent thought and subversive reimagination of the status quo. There are few things critics agree on except for Dickinson's nonconventional poetic style, and while feminist critics have struggled to free the poet from the image of the shy, solitary and reticent recluse secretly gifted with a poetic talent, this misconception stubbornly persists in public opinion. Decades have passed since early critics condescendingly stated that Dickinson's work and life lacked all evolvement into maturity, claiming that "[t]here are no marked periods in her career, no significant curve of development in her artistic powers, no progressive concern with different genres ..." (Ch. Anderson xii) and that her often open-ended poems failed to be anything but "great, repetitious wastes" (Blackmur 185). However, the perception of Dickinson as a poet who produced a few great poems and an abundant number of deficient ones endures time. These misrepresentations of the quality of Dickinson's poetry as static are grounded in the myth of the historical Dickinson remaining a spinster all her life, dressing exclusively in white and refusing to leave her father's house or to present herself to others than family members. This myth created a time capsule that already during her lifetime enveloped not only the poet,[1] but also her work, positioning her poems spuriously in a temporal vacuum, just as Dickinson's actual life was imagined as untouched by the concerns of her society and outside of her culture 's demands. The perception of Emily Dickinson's work is dominated by a "curious preoccupation with her personal effects and her corporeal remains" an attitude that differs greatly from the appraisal of other literary figures (Wolff "Constructions" 109). Even critics like Porter who highly value her work and recognize her artistic powers do not escape this trap, deeming Dickinson to be "the only major American poet without a clearly discernible project, that is, an inhering and evolving axis of thought" ("Themes" 189-190).

Despite the apparent lack of progress in Dickinson's thought and poetic mastery, Dickinson's position within literary history remains unchallenged. Dickinson dominates American poetry as "the foremost woman poet of the American canon," as Porter puts it ("Themes" 183). As such, her work has influenced and motivated other poets to the present day. Especially for women poets, the discovery and publication of her poetry proved to be significant, as it allowed the poetic work of women to be seen as products of not only a

diminutive ‘poetess,’ but as genuine ‘poetry’: “After Emily Dickinson’s work became known, women poets in America could take their work seriously” (Walker *Burden* 116). But not only within literary history do Dickinson and her work’s importance occupy an unchallenged position. American feminism is unthinkable without Dickinson, as her life and poetic endeavor have continuously been used as mirrors against which its advocates try their new ideas, concepts, and approaches: “as feminist criticism has developed and matured,” Dickie states, “ Dickinson has remained at its center, the figure against which it has been able to test its insights, its theories, and its ambitions” (342). The result is a highly divergent image of the poet, portrayed as rebel by some, victimized as the prisoner of her culture and time by others, and empowered as a self-confident actor fashioning her own image by yet another academic faction.

All feminist approaches have at their core the endeavor to release Dickinson and her work from their apparent time capsule and to apprehend them within their historical context. My venture to locate Dickinson’s conception of gender spatially is in accordance with such historical placements as well as with feminist methodology. Space is a defining factor for individuals and their identities, and therefore never neutral, but has to be understood in its social and historical contexts. As a white nineteenth-century woman belonging to the middle class of New England, Dickinson lived in a society that stringently associated women with the domestic, assigning only decorative responsibilities in addition to their duties of care and reproduction and limiting their sphere of action to the private. It is not accidental, I claim, that Dickinson continually uses spatial language in her poetry. Examples of this strategy are numerous, but her imagination that the soul, a by definition immaterial and highly abstract concept, possesses “Caverns” and “Corridors,” is symptomatic (F877). The use of spatial terms and imagery enable the poet to productively delineate abstract concepts such as eternity or death in order to make them intelligible for expanded or new attributions of meaning. In “We pray – to Heaven –” (F476) Dickinson mockingly asks “Is Heaven a Place – a Sky – a Tree?” only to reject a concrete localization of the afterlife: “Location’s narrow way is for Ourselves –/ Unto the Dead/ There’s no Geography –” (F476). By expressing the difficulty of picturing abstract terms, Dickinson acknowledges the human need to think spatially. At the same time, she rejects simple imagery as inadequate for complex concepts and declares this need to be uniquely human. Thus, she identifies spatial conceptualizations as a cognitive strategy that is potentially productive, but she also acknowledges that they might not apply beyond human cognition. Similarly, the projection of social relations from the cultural realm into the space of untamed nature allows Dickinson to rearrange social power structures. This strategy unleashes her imagination and encourages the exploration beyond conventional categorizations. Exemplary of this tactic are her poems featuring the moon and the sea which

ask whether human relationships need to be hierarchical, like the moon directing the sea's tides, or whether power structures are mutual and interdependent.[2] My project explores Dickinson's strategy to think spatially and therefore focuses on how her poetry which uses spatial language challenges patriarchal structures and maps new spaces. The spaces her poetry creates offer room for a gendered subject beyond the confinement of the social roles prescribed to women and enables envisioning a female identity beyond the domestic and private sphere where they would only be acknowledged in relation to a male such as a husband or father. My thesis is that Dickinson reshapes the space ascribed to women and even goes beyond, locating female identity in a less fixed territory with shifting and fluid boundaries. This new gender identity provocatively inverts conventional patterns of domesticity and repression, stereotypes of humility and the reduction to a purely ornamental and representative status in relation to a male family member.

The spaces occupied by Dickinson's speakers are numerous, ranging from outer space to concrete spaces such as closets to in-between places "Behind the Shelf" (F706), and are often defined in abstract terms that become increasingly limitless and ambiguous in their dimensions. The characteristics of these spaces, I argue, correspond to the way Dickinson portrays her gendered subjects. Typically, her poems initially provide a speaker and a setting that seemingly conform to cultural expectations. In the course of the poem, these cultural expectations are deemed inadequate and are transgressed. An analysis of "They shut me up in Prose –" (F445) featuring a little girl in a domestic setting demonstrates all these aspects in practice and, at the same time, provides an illustration of my methodological approach, which centers on close reading.[3]

"They shut me up in Prose –" (F445) features a little girl who is disciplined by being locked away in a closet:

F445

They shut me up in Prose –
As when a little Girl
They put me in the Closet –
Because they like me "still" –

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

Himself has but to will
And easy as a Star
Look down opon Captivity -
And laugh - No more have I –

We are confronted with the cultural stereotype of the quiet and "still" little girl in this poem. Although punished, the speaker boldly claims that physical captivity cannot discipline her mind, which is free and flies like a "Bird" or "Star," ascending high above her captors. Unlike the closet, here the "Brain," the physical organ of thought contained inside the skull, provides an open and potentially endless space that allows for free thinking. While the child in the poem seems to submit to her punishers by indeed staying "still" inside the closet and letting her thoughts "go round" quietly and out of sight as expected, the grown woman speaker does not keep "still": being locked in the closet is equivalent to "Prose," but what we are presented with in this poem is, of course, poetry. Not only does the speaker recount her childhood experience in a different genre than prescribed by her culture that reserved the poetic genre only for male poets, but she also left the "Prose"-closet and transgressed into a space reserved for men. That writing poetry, as opposed to fiction or "Prose," was indeed an unconventional act when undertaken by a woman[4] is strikingly summarized by Virginia Woolf:

> Fiction was, as fiction is still, the easiest thing for a woman to write. It is it difficult to find the reason. A novel is the least concentrated form of art. A novel can be taken up or put down more easily than a play or poem. … [L]iving as she did in the common sitting-room, surrounded by people, a woman was trained to use her mind in observation and upon the analysis of character. She was trained to be a novelist and not a poet. (Woolf 46)

A woman's social everyday reality not only not favor abstract thought and its concentration in art, but often did not allow room for it due to the lack of personal space and time in women's lives. Poignantly, Woolf mentions the preconditioning of women on observation, refraining themselves from inert analysis of social settings rather than speaking up in front of others. Consequently, Dickinson's poem presents us with a cultural norm of the quiet female child. Her rebellious speaker finally submits to cultural expectations by over fulfilling them in not only staying "still" but appreciating the closet for teaching her the value of free reasoning, rebelling not overtly but only in her mind, and the transgression of the norm and demolition of the cultural closet's boundaries by the adult female speaker who does not comply.

The poem exemplifies Dickinson's typical strategy to simultaneously present the cultural and social norms and stereotypes of her time, to offer an exaggerated acceptance of this stereotype, which in its extremity is reinterpreted as a kind of subversive freedom that irritates the limits of such confinement and the transgression of cultural prescriptions at the same time. The speaker does not only free herself but declares the concept of captivity naught altogether when she declares in the last line that she does not even "look down" or "laugh" at it any more: paradoxically, captivity sets the mind free, making any punishment ineffective and deconstructing the dichotomy between freedom and confinement. The poem succeeds in

challenging the status quo by declaring the spatial limitations on women and the exclusive cultural restrictions inadequate. The speaker moves through time (from the little girl to the adult speaker), space, and literary genres, marking them as elusive categories, and thereby declares also gendered identity as shifting.

As “They shut me up in Prose –” illustrates, Dickinson’s use of spatial images cannot easily be categorized using the criteria of abstract versus concrete classification. Although the poem offers the concrete space of the closet, we cannot easily limit the setting to this locality. From the very beginning, it becomes clear that we cannot read in such a straightforward way. The opening line “They shut me up in Prose –” states that this confinement is similar to the punishment of the child who is locked up in order to keep her “still.” Evidently, “Prose,” a literary genre, must be classified as abstract. The verb ‘shut up’ normally refers to silencing someone, and while this meaning is obviously intended to resonate, the preposition ‘in’ also suggests the verb “to shut someone away’, which would stand in accordance with the child’s detention in the closet. The “Brain,” a physical entity, loses its concrete character when it is seen “go round. ” Of course, it can be assumed that “Brain” alludes to the mind. However, it becomes clear that space is emphasized in this poem as we have multiple doublings of the metaphor of captivity here: the poet in the “Prose”-prison, the child in the closet, the “Brain” in the implied skull, and in the second stanza the “Bird” in the “Pound.” Yet, all these spatial confinements are transgressed or declared inadequate: After all, it is absurd to lock a bird in a cage for the act of “Treason” of singing. Firstly, it is as natural for the bird to sing as it is for the poet to produce poetry, and secondly, the “Pound” cannot hinder the “Bird” from singing, just as “Prose” cannot silence as it still allows for speech and artistic freedom, and therefore cannot keep the poet from singing, as physical detention cannot prohibit thoughts just as the “Brain” does not contain them.

The following sections of this introduction provide an overview of the three spaces which serve as the basis of my analysis of gender and space in Dickinson’s poetry: Nature, the house, and the grave; each of which is discussed in a separate chapter. Furthermore, the following sections in this introduction present an outline of the employed theoretical concepts on space and gender and summarize influential research on the poet and her poetry, attempting to answer some of the many important questions in Dickinson scholarship.

1.1 Nature, the House, and the Grave

In addition to illustrating my claims of how Dickinson links spaces, their social attributions and the spatial division in society with gender issues, my reading of “They shut me up in Prose -” alerts us to the difficulty of administering categories such as concrete and abstract spatiality to

Dickinson's poetry. Nevertheless, my analysis is guided by three concrete spatial settings that feature prominently in Dickinson's poetry: nature, the house, and the grave. These three localities are particularly well suited for my purpose as they all represent spaces that are closely associated with women in the nineteenth century, and the ideologies associated with all three spaces underwent considerable change during Dickinson's lifetime, marking them as cultural constructs and scenes of the concerns and interests of nineteenth-century American society.

A large number of Dickinson's poems are set in the natural world. The choice of nature as a setting for poetry, especially for female poets of the nineteenth century, is neither surprising nor unconventional as such (Petrino 6-7). The space of nature is heavily laden with cultural trajectories, however, and Dickinson deals with these in a number of different ways. The female body has been closely associated with nature since ancient times (Westling 8).[5] This connection between the natural world and female nature intensified with the settlement of Europeans on the American continent: the wilderness was perceived as a virgin country that had to be tamed and fertilized (Kolodny 8). The newly cultivated land personified as Mother Nature was not only supposed to accommodate and feed the increasing number of settlers pushing westward, but was thought to give birth to a new nation where people with different cultural backgrounds could live side by side in harmony (Kolodny 26-7). Dickinson relates to the idea of a female nature as being both wild and nurturing in her work, and questions the corresponding notions of the feminine as untamed and as subject to nature, as well as the nature–culture dichotomy and the need to civilize the wild. Her poetry questions assumptions about women's nature and emphasizes the fact that the characteristics ascribed to the female body are cultural constructs, just as the concept of nature is a cultural construct (Crumbly *Winds of Will* 174) With transcendentalism and Emerson's influential treatment of nature as medium to sublimity, nature was appropriated for different purposes during Dickinson's time, marking it at the same time as opposite to culture and as an essential pillar of this very concept: Through metaphor and symbol, nature was excluded and simultaneously incorporated into culture.

The house, also a very frequent setting of Dickinson's poetry, is defined as segregated from nature. Although explicitly a cultural space, the house is also intimately associated with the female in nineteenth-century America (Logan 26, Klein 101). New ideals of domesticity and the segregation of the public and the private sphere became prevalent during this time, assigning women the duty to create a home for their husbands to flee from the morally corrupted public world into a private heaven (Kross 386, Wolosky *Public* 677, and Fuss "Chambers" 4, 8). The housewife represented virtue, purity, and goodness, making her an essential part of the home (Welter 152). The lady in the house was responsible for the

arrangement of the furniture and decoration of the interior, all thought to represent the character of its inhabitants and to transmit essential moral values (Welter 163, Logan 35). The purpose of childrearing and education was to turn children into good American citizens, and the home and the American family were seen as a microcosm of the nation (Bayley 27).

The realm of the dead, the afterlife, and the space of the grave are my third area of analysis. During the nineteenth century, a cult of death and memorizing the dead arose. At the same time, the first garden cemeteries were constructed in the US, granting every grave a marked off individual space. This individualization of death was contrasted starkly during the Civil War, when reports of deaths became omnipresent and the sheer number of the fallen soldiers and casualties raised the question of how the bodies should be buried and the individuals memorized. The number of poems in which Dickinson deals with death is striking, despite the fact that mourning poems were a frequent genre women poets referred to. Furthermore, Dickinson′s poetry on death differs significantly from her contemporaries' treatment of the subject. Not only does she blur the line between life and death when she portrays the afterlife as an extension of life, or, in contrast, characterizes alive speakers as numb and dead, but she also literally locates the setting of her poems in the grave. In this space, perception, communication, and even love are possible beyond the confines of conventions and social norms. Given that nineteenth-century literary tradition portrays dead female bodies as the essence of beauty (Poe 982), Dickinson's voice from beyond empowers: corpses are neither silent nor objects of art, but shape for themselves a world of possibilities between life and death in the space of the grave.

1.2 Theoretical Spaces

Given that Dickinson's poetry is characterized by the use of spatial conceptualizations, a closer look at the concept of space, both in its metaphorical and concrete dimensions, is required. Furthermore, in order to support my claim that Dickinson via the use of spatial language creates new spaces to accommodate an alternative female identity defying conventions, we need to consider theories of space and gender and theoretically illuminate the alliance between the two.

Several critics have analyzed Dickinson's extensive use of spatial metaphors. 'My Business is Circumference′ Dickinson states in a letter to Higginson on 2 July 2 in 1862, revealing to her mentor her favorite geometrical form and central metaphor (L412). When defining concepts in her poetry, Dickinson mentally circles the denotational range of her target term, delineating her definition by discriminating between that which lies inside the designation and that which is situated beyond. Instead of objectifying her subject or drawing on definitions,

Weisbuch explains, Dickinson "create[s] Emersonian circles, concentrics or spirals of meaning rather than allegorical lines and pointings" ("Prisming" 205). In the course of the poem, Dickinson typically expands the space within the lines of the definition, pushing the limits of her semantic circles further into the territory beyond and blurring the lines between inside and outside. Eberwein identifies Dickinson's "Circumference" with death, which then becomes the dividing line that separates consciousness from everything beyond, such as immortality and the ultimate unknown (Eberwein *Strategies* 164-5).[6] What Dickinson aims to achieve through poetry, according to Eberwein, is to transgress circumference to widen her perception, to "gain a perspective of the mysteries beyond circumference without passing through death" (*Strategies* 165). The advantage of this approach expanding meaning, or consciousness, rather than pinpointing it, according to Weisbuch, is that "[i]t is as if usual ways of ordering phenomena had been cross-sectioned or tipped over, revealing intricate networks otherwise unseen" ("Prisming" 205). When Dickinson does this, the spatial perception of her concepts is crucial. In her cognitive analysis of Dickinson's metaphors, Freeman highlights the role space plays in Dickinson's thought, concluding that Dickinson's conceptual universe is dominated by the metaphor of "LIFE IS A VOYAGE IN SPACE" (269, capitalized in the original). Fuss agrees with the centrality of space in both Dickinson's poems and her personal life, maintaining that her relationship to space was eccentric (*Interior* 49). As the historical Dickinson had a reputation of shying away from visitors and only speaking to them from behind doors, Fuss concludes that the presence of the poet's bodiless voice "lyricizes space," turning the domestic interior into "something as a lyre – an instrument of sound" (*Interior* 65). Space, and especially a bounded space like a room or a house, then becomes a precondition for poetry. Accordingly, Dickinson uses spatial metaphors to accommodate her main subjects, which Fuss identifies as "joy, despair, death, time, and immortality" (*Interior* 25). To Fuss, the house and its interior remain at the center of Dickinson's spatial metaphorics which defy all orientation conventions, radically reversing spatial categories: "In Dickinson's upside-down, inside-out world, the direction is radically dislocated and the space itself unhinged. The inside subsumes the outside, transforming the exterior into a mirror image of the domestic interior" (Fuss *Interior* 65). An important element of Dickinson's poetic idiosyncrasy is the distraction of space with the unconventional use of orientational metaphors which allow for the simultaneous accommodation of converging implications in one poem.

1.2.1 Social and Cultural Space

The centrality of space in Dickinson's poetry cannot be denied, yet the question of how space signifies and what it does in Dickinson's poems seems to be answered in different ways and, above all, only partially in Dickinson studies. To be able to answer this question, it is necessary

to investigate what space does not only in the literary genre of the lyric, but also in the social world. Lakoff and Johnson identify spatial thinking and conceptualization as basic human behavior and ground it in our anatomical preconditions, which allow us to categorize space according to our field of vision (Lakoff and Johnson *Metaphors* 29-30). Although they relate the creation of territories to our physicality, they emphasize that such abstraction is largely metaphorical and involves mapping mental representations onto the world and not in reverse (Lakoff and Johnson *Metaphors* 30). I use the word metaphor in a broader sense than just its linguistic definition. In line with Lakoff and Turner, I emphasize the role as conceptual structure that allows cognitive processes (133). Even before perception becomes conscious, our mind automatically sorts stimuli to reduce the cognitive workload, using analogical thinking to group similar phenomena (Fitter 21). As a result, the world we perceive has always already been structured into a "system of correlations: 'The earth and its forms, sounds and impressions exist in our consciousness from the outset as a great web of correspondences, types and oppositions'" (Fitter 21). Therefore, I do not distinguish between proper metaphor and simile, as according to Lakoff and Turner, both figures of speech understand one concept in terms of another and, therefore, both use conceptual metaphor (133). Our bodily reality, our vision, precondition us for the perception of space, but the mental abstraction of space into territories categorizes it in ways that are not preceding. Spatial entities thus are to be located somewhere between the concrete and the abstract, as space as such cannot be touched, but it can only be perceived by the eye (Vandeloise 37).

In her critique of the categorization of space in traditional geography, Rose scrutinizes the idea of the "landscape," arguing that it can only be maintained as a unit through vision, as it is produced by the eye ("Geography" 342). However, the concept of landscape is deeply social and cultural, making it clear that the eye perceiving eye is not neutral or objective but has adopted a certain mode of seeing (Rose "Geography" 344). This mode of seeing is at the same time distinct at different points in history and subjective (Fitter 2). Fitter traces the emergence of landscapes as an independent subject in both painting and poetry, and finds their first evidence in ancient Greece but then notices their total lack during a millennium after the fall of the Roman Empire only to reappear during the Renaissance (9). Therefore, the concept of 'landscape' "transpires to be but an historical contingent form for the representation of 'nature'" (Fitter 9).[7] "Landscape" then is a cultural term, representing cultural values and social hierarchies, among them class and gender (Rose "Geography" 346-7).[8] This seems paradoxical as we typically think of space as simply the distance between objects, and as such perceive it as empty (Niranjana 34): space is "an open rectangle within which material objects are located" (Niranjana 34). Objects, in turn, are commonly defined by the space they occupy (Niranjana 34). However, objects also structure space, and so do people moving through space

or occupying a certain space. This correlation between space and social matters is a crucial property of the concept of spatiality. Soja explains the following:

> … spatiality is socially produced and, like society itself, exists both in substantial forms (concrete spatialities) and as a set of relationships between individuals and groups, an "embodiment" and medium of social life itself. As socially produced space, spatiality can be distinguished from the physical space of material nature and the mental space of cognition and representation, each of which is used and incorporated into the social construction of spatiality but cannot be conceptualized as its equivalent. (Soja 120)

Alongside other defining factors for identity such as gender, class, or sexuality, abstract and concrete space thus is relational, as Soja states. Gender and space, according to Niranjana, are "*sets of relationships* between phenomena, groups or persons, negotiated within certain given frames of reference" (34 original italics). These sets of relationships are dynamic and constitute "socio-spatial contexts and locales," illustrating that gender relations are constructed and negotiated in space (Niranjana 37).

1.2.2 Feminist Geographies

Social geography, as opposed to traditional geography that is often dominated by a masculinist gaze, emerged in the nineteen sixties and seventies studying social relations and the spatial structures that underpin those relations. At a first stance, social geography concentrated on social injustice in society and later shifted its focus to issues of identity and representation (Valentine 2001). Early social geography operated with a naive understanding of space as being identical with the physical structures and areas examined, viewing it as simply a container for social relations without taking into account that space is experiential and acquires social meaning. Feminist geography, in contrast to more traditional work in the field, looks at space not only in physical terms, but also in its symbolic and cultural dimensions. Feminist geography theoretically links gender issues with space and, therefore, offers a background to my analysis of Dickinson's use of spatial metaphors to create new spaces for unconventionally gendered subjects in her poetry. According to one of the most influential thinkers in feminist geography, Doreen Massey, "geography matters to gender," as spaces make the ways in which gender is created and seen by people visible (177,179). The association of the woman with home, childbirth and unpaid labor and her exclusion from public life serve as examples of cultural concepts that influence the division of actual geographical spaces (McDowell "Part I" 165). However, the opposite is also true: as Barkley Blaustein maintains, space actively contributes to the construction of gendered subjectivities, as gender is among other things an effect of segregation along spatial terms (15). Barkley Blaustein even goes so far as to ascribe

agency to spaces when she insists on the existence of a "normalizing dimension of the house, that is to say, the agency of this spatial structure in the constitution of male and female subjects" (Barkley Blaustein: 15). Spaces thus mirror ideologies and social patterns as they communicate cultural norms to the subjects. According to such a view, houses function as an instrument to maintain social divisions (Valentine 65). This insight is probably the reason why feminist geographers for a long time predominately focused on the segregation of the genders in accordance with the public/private division in order to analyze the structures power takes in space (Blunt & Rose 2). In contrast to that tradition, Doreen Massey develops a model of space that does not function along the dichotomy of private and public; instead, she views spaces – in a postmodern sense – as open, always temporary, hybrid, and shifting (155).

According to Blunt and Rose, the construction of the gender dichotomy is directly related to the assignment of some spaces to men and others to women (3). Furthermore, gender must be viewed as an inequality in power, which becomes visible in the unequal accessibility of space according to gender (McKinnon 8). The distribution of space along gender lines, Blunt and Rose say, functions as reinforcement of the power relations between the genders (3). As the reconstitution of gender divisions is dependent on interpretation and decoding according to social notions about space and gender, the notions of power, gender, and space are not rigid but might be contested and renegotiated (Blunt & Rose 3). Focusing on power relations rather than on its specific effects such as gender, Foucault also connects power to space:[9] according to his theory, people negotiate power relations from within a "sphere," which can be both a social or cultural situation and a place, and form a power pattern that structures the interactions between the people within this "sphere," creating the "grid of intelligibility of the social order" (*History* 92-93).

Spaces thus constitute and at the same time mirror ideologies and social patterns as they transmit cultural norms. The close connection between cultural norms and spaces suggests a dependency of the latter on normalizing structures. Via the manipulation of spatial settings, a destabilization of social segregations could therefore be achieved, unsettling cultural codes of behavior while changing the spatial parameters where they are played out. " Imaginative geographies," Bondi argues, intersect with our ideas about real social and physical places and are therefore important to cross boundaries and reshape our conceptual world (241). This statement largely corresponds to the observation Lakoff and Johnson make: The advantage of metaphorical thinking grounded in space is that "conceptual metaphor allows us to rationalize about the target domain in a way that we otherwise would not" (Lakoff and Johnson *Philosophy,* 82). However, while metaphors allow us to venture beyond common paths of thought, they also channel the way we think about things: "For the same reasons that schemas and metaphors give us power to conceptualize and reason, so they have power over

us," Lakoff and Turner argue (63). They take into consideration the formative power metaphors have on the way we perceive and judge: "To the extent that we use a conceptual schema or a conceptual metaphor, we accept its validity. For this reason, conventionalized schemas and metaphors have *persuasive* power over us" (Lakoff and Turner 63, italicized in original). If we think of uncultivated natural landscapes as virgin country that has to be tamed in order fulfill its intention as nurturing space, this not only legitimizes the intrusion into wilderness and its annexation, but also serves to connect the farmer, or husbandman, to his land in a metaphorical marriage. The cultivated land perceived as female now is imagined as a Mother Nature figure, and the people who are provided with the agricultural products become her children and are therefore her rightful heirs, regardless of their origin. The metaphor that imagines nature to be female therefore enables colonization and the expropriation of natural space perceived as awaiting husbandry. Thus, it is not unimportant which concepts we use to talk about another metaphorically, as this might influence the way people conceive of a certain topic. But metaphors also provide a means to consciously shape the course of thought, and to create new associations, or to award a subject previously negatively correlated with positive value. "It is through such conceptualizing ability," Freeman summarizes the power of metaphorical thinking, "that we make our world real" (270). Again applied to the concept of a female nature, the emphasis on the circle of life and the continual recurrence of the seasons, the realm of nature might be seen as a manifestation of eternity, and the passive Mother Nature can be transformed into a life-giving, empowered goddess. Thus, thinking metaphorically is crucial for innovative and progressive thought and therefore potentially a driving force in the reconceptualization of gender in Dickinson's work. I argue that Dickinson's use of spatial metaphors and unusual spatial conceptualizations enable her to envisage gender anew. Her strategy is spatial insofar as it reinstates, emphasizes, and penetrates explicit and implicit cultural stereotypes: By exploiting expected female conduct such as humility or sacrifice to the absurd, Dickinson transgresses the norm. Thus, she explicitly locates female identity within her own culture by employing stereotypes, simultaneously revealing the inadequacy of these categories which situate her speaker outside of these conventions.

1.2.3 Gender in Theory

I understand gender as a purely social and cultural construct opposed to sex, which distinguishes between female and male bodies on the basis of physical characteristics. Consequently, gender is not a priori or essentially given, but, in accordance with Judith Butler, is produced in and fashioned by discourse. According to Butler, no individual ever represents maleness or femaleness perfectly, but in a performative act and via gender roles recreates his or her gender identity in social interaction: "the substantive effect of gender is performatively

produced" (Butler Gender 24). It is important to note, however, that on an everyday basis, this is not done consciously or intentionally, neither does the performative act take effect in an arbitrary or theatrical manner, but happens as a matter of habit and convention framed by discourse and ideas about how boys and girls, men and women act (Kilian 204). "Performativity has to be understood not as a singular or deliberate 'act,'" Butler clarifies, "but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names" (*Bodies* 2). Discourse determines how gender has to be performed and enacted in order to be recognizable as male or female by the majority of a given society, and this has a normative effect. A very open understanding of discourse as I proclaim it defines it as all spoken, written, visualized, or enacted utterances, attitudes, performances, and expressions concerning a certain theme, topic, object, person, or abstract concept. According to Butler, everything as we perceive it is constructed through discourse, and as we are all subjects to discourse, we do not have access to a 'pure' reality that precedes and is located somewhere outside of discourse (*Bodies* 8). Furthermore, although the word is generally used in its singular form, there exist always more than just one discourse about a certain subject, and no clear segregation can be made between allowed discourse and forbidden discourse, or between dominant discourse and alternative discourse. Rather, there is a multiplicity of discourses or discursive elements with a different effect depending on "who is speaking, his position of power, the institutional context (…)" (Foucault *History* 100). There are, therefore, a number of factors that determine discourse and its effects, and the distinctions made between discourses that have normalizing effects and those that are deemed subversive are the results of abstractions which have to be reevaluated in every specific situation.[10]

As gender has to be performed in every social situation to be recognizable, it is fluid, shifting, and decentralized and, therefore, needs constant reaffirmation. Discourse decides which aspects are not regarded as inherent to a certain gender and, therefore, need to be rejected. Discourse is constructive in all domains of our lives, and as a consequence, Butler believes that even our physical bodies and their sex are subject to discourse, as we cannot think their materiality or perceive their physical reality independently from discourse:

> … to claim that discourse is formative is not to claim that it originates, causes, or exhaustively composes that which it concedes; rather, it is to claim that there is no reference to a pure body which is not at the same time a further formation of that body. In this sense, the linguistic capacity to refer to sexed bodies is not denied, but the very meaning of 'referentiality' is altered.
>
> (Butler *Bodies* 10)

Butler does not deny the existence of the material body and its sexed attributes, but emphasizes that the way we conceptualize these bodies and especially the significance we assign to sex are always mediated through and by discourse. This also explains the

dependence between sex, the body, and gender Butler suggests. As individuals cannot exist without having recognizable bodies and without being gendered, and because we cannot think about bodies without thinking of them as gendered, the body itself only exists as a construction[11] (Butler *Gender* 8). A concept of gender as shifting and destabilized, in contrast to conventional understandings, does not view male and female characteristics as binary oppositions but as part of a specter that theoretically allows for a plurality of identifications anywhere between the poles of male and female identity. Reiteration, repetition with a difference – stabilizes such fluid gendered subjectivities, but also bears the potential for change (Butler *Bodies* 2, 12-13).

1.2.4 The inside and outside Space of Gender

The construction of identity via exclusion and abjection is inherently spatial, as it creates an inside and an outside: it distinguishes between characteristics that are desirable and those that are not, producing dichotomies (Butler *Gender* 3). Every subject thus not only consists of what it represents, but likewise, but hidden away, of what it is precisely not, contributing to the instability and fluidity of concepts such as gender (Butler *Gender* 116). As Butler puts it, " the subject is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection, one which produces a constitutive outside to the subject, an abjected outside, which is, after all, 'inside' the object as its own founding repudiation" (*Bodies* 3).This complicates not only a spatial conceptualization of gender, culture, or discourse as I pursue it in my analysis, but also exacerbates a critique of the norm: Dichotomies as inclusions and exclusions produce a 'here' and a 'there,' but because they depend on each other by definition, the distinction between 'here' and 'there' is in fact unfeasible. According to Kilian, the attempt to address the abject or 'other' is thus always at risk of lapsing into the logic of the dominant discourse that initially produced and defined the abject (235). To Butler, the consequence of this is that we can never really venture beyond the cultural boundaries, but we can only imaginatively create such a space at the brink or elsewhere:

> … For there is an "outside" to what is constructed by discourse, but this is not an absolute "outside", and ontological thereness that exceeds or counters the boundaries of discourse; as a constitutive "outside", it is that which can only be thought – when it can – in relation to that discourse, at and as its most tenuous borders. (Butler *Bodies* 8)

Therefore, it is not the elsewhere or the beyond as outside of culture which is the focus of my reading of Dickinson's poetry, but the relationship between outside and inside, and especially the hovering at the margin, at the boundary, and the movement across that boundary and back which Dickinson so frequently portrays.

De Lauretis positively values the existence as marginal outsider, calling the margin a "position of resistance and agency" ("Eccentric" 139). She starts her argument based on Butler's theory that the production of gender functions through exclusion and thus creates an inside and an outside: being a woman, she states, means residing in a paradox, because as the opposite of the man and excluded from the male world[12], the woman is "at once captive and absent in discourse" (De Lauretis "Eccentric"115). De Lauretis later calls this paradoxical position which is restricted, but neither integrated nor completely outside of discourse, a "position of resistance and agency" that strongly resembles Butler's "zone of uninhabitability" which is similarly locates on the margins of the norm and of culture (Butler *Bodies* 3). This zone is the "defining limit of the subject's domain" and "that site of dreaded identification" which constitutes and contrasts the subject according to Butler (*Bodies* 3). De Lauretis illustrates the redrawing of discursive boundaries and thus resistance to dominant culture as a movement forth and back across the line between 'inside' and 'outside':

> It is a movement between the (represented) discursive spaces of the positions made available by hegemonic discourses and the space-off, the elsewhere, of those discourses: those other spaces both discursive and social that exist ... in the margins (or >between the lines, < or >against the grain<) of hegemonic discourses and in the interstices of institutions, in counter-practices and new forms of community.
>
> (De Lauretis "the Technology of Gender" 26).

Marginality as location both inside and outside of culture and discourse according to De Lauretis grants access to a language that lies in the border land of discourse beyond the usually graspable ("Eccentric" 139). Marginality, as she states in *Eccentric Subjects*, is thus a "practice of language" that has subversive and potentially transformative character (De Lauretis "Eccentric" 139). It offers the possibility of resistance and agency through a creative and unconventional use of language that allows for difference. Speaking from the margin, Butler states, may induce the redefinition of the boundaries between inside and outside discourse prescribes: "A subject who speaks at the border of the speakable takes the risk of redrawing the distinction between what is and is not speakable[13]" (Butler *Excitable* 139). This corresponds to Foucault's understanding of resistance, which locates the possibility of changing power structures in their dependency on discourse: "Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it" (*History* 101). Both Butler and De Lauretis emphasize the importance of language in redefining discursive space from the margin, but also mark it as a contested and potentially dangerous space that does not facilitate speech, as naming the ' other' and speaking for the abject without succumbing to normative discourse is a difficult endeavor: the marginalized position is "a place that is risky, that is not only emotionally but conceptually other; a place of discourse from which speaking and thinking are at best tentative,

uncertain, unguaranteed" ("Eccentric" 138). To De Lauretis, this is the position that feminists committed to a new feminism have to take. Hovering on the margin between the dominant discourses of gender and beyond, she states, they need to be aware of the difficulties this position entails and of the cultural imprint they themselves are subjected to: "The subject that I see emerging ... is one that is at the same time inside *and* outside the ideology of gender, and conscious of being so, conscious of that twofold pull, of that division, that doubled vision" (De Lauretis *Technology* 10, original italics).

For my purposes, the feminist geographer Gillian Rose's understanding of geography is especially fruitful: Rose pleads for the use of spatial images that allow for difference and therefore constitute a paradoxical geography that could accommodate a feminist vision as De Lauretis demands it (*Feminism* 150-1). Spaces, Rose argues referring to Butler's concept of gender, are equally structured through discourse as all other aspects of culture (*Feminism* 17). Two-dimensional models, she claims, are inadequate for mapping the complex dimensions of identity, which she likewise understands as relational and structured through dynamics of power and discourse in a postmodern way (Rose *Feminism* 5-6). A paradoxical kind of mapping, she argues, allows for conceptualizations of identity as being simultaneously at the center and the margin, being at once inside and outside a certain space (Rose *Feminism* 151-3). Rose's paradoxical kind of mapping allows for conceptualizations of subjectivity as shifting and not fixed to a certain space, but located within and outside of a given area simultaneously. Dickinson invents speakers who assume such a marginal position in a paradoxical space outside the conventions of dualism and dichotomies, and it is this spatial way of conceptualizing subject positions through language that enables her to create a new female subject that does not restrict herself to the female sphere and female gender roles.

1.3 Dickinson Studies up to Date

Emily Dickinson's poetry and letters have been the subjects of a very large number of academic studies as well as of numerous appropriations within popular culture. On average, Messmer states, there are more than fifty new entries of scholarly contributions, including five to seven booklength analyses in the MLA listings each year, demonstrating a worldwide interest in Dickinson's work (299). The amount of scholarship on Dickinson is extraordinary, especially since the first complete publication of her poems and letters appeared only in the 1950s. According to Sewall, this publication made a strong impression: "It was as if America (and now the world) had discovered a new treasure" (Sewall "Introduction" 6). But only in the 1980s and nineties did Dickinson's work receive what Sewall calls "official sanction" for its

literary importance across the United States and internationally, and the poet gained the attention of a wider public ("Introduction" 6). Today, Dickinson is "an icon in popular as well as literary, art, music, and even cinematic and television cultures" (Smith "Forever" 120). This chapter attempts to map the major tracks in Dickinson studies and, above all, aims to illustrate the dynamics from the earliest days of Dickinson scholarship and later contributions to today. Furthermore, I want to provide an overview of the range of answers to some of the most prevalent questions in Dickinson studies and to clarify my position regarding those ongoing discussions.

The very first criticism Dickinson's posthumously published poems received before 1890 consisted mostly of male journalists' reviews that focused on the idiosyncratic vocabulary and irregularities of form contradicting the genteel standards of the time and marked it as inferior despite the positive popular reception and the many positive reviews by female reviewers (Messmer 302). In the 1930s, academic criticism of Dickinson's poetry exceeded the reviews by journalists and promoted new critical interpretations concentrating on the interrelationship of form and meaning, and Dickinson's ability to merge sensitive and cognitive perception (Messmer 305). At the same time, other scholars continued to collect biographical information (Johnson: *Emily Dickinson: An Interpretive Study* (1955), Leyda: *Years and Hours of Emily Dickinson* (1960), and Sewall: *Life of Emily Dickinson* (1974)) about the poet and to speculate about an "elusive 'lover'" (Messmer 305). In *Riddle of Emily Dickinson* in 1951, Rebecca Patterson was the first who suggested that Dickinson was involved in homosexual relationships with women, namely her sister-in-law Susan Dickinson and her friend Kate Scott Turner Anthon. Since the 1970s, feminist and psychoanalytic scholarship has been prevalent, foregrounding gender as a crucial factor of a poet's creativity, calling for a canon of female poets, reinterpreting Dickinson's reclusiveness as empowerment, and discussing her poetic personae.[14] During the last two decades, questions concerning the order of reading (Cameron *Choosing Not Choosing* (1992), the audience of the poems (Bennett *Poets in the Public Sphere* (2003), Wolosky *Poetry and Public Discourse in Nineteenth-Century America(2010))* the relationship of poet, poem and reader (Miller, Juhasz, and Smith, *Comic Power* (1993), Jackson *Dickinson's Misery* (2005)) as well as the poet's interest and participation in political and social discourses of the time (Crumbly, *Winds of Will* (2010), Miller *Reading in Time* (2012)) have been analyzed. Increasingly, studies taking into account Dickinson's social class (Murray, *Maid as Muse* (2009)) and her poetry's affective politics (Orzeck and Weisbuch, *Dickinson and Audience* (1996), McKenzie and Dana, *Wider Than the Sky* (2007)) and issues related to editorial practices and the problems of adequately representing Dickinson's poetry (Werner, *Gorgeous Nothings* (2013)) are coming into focus.

1.3.1 Who is Speaking? Voice, Identity, Identification

Since 1890[15] when the first posthumous publication of a collection of Dickinson poems appeared in print, scholars have portrayed Dickinson's work, the circumstances of her productive life and the facts of the historical character Emily Dickinson in highly diverse ways. After more than a century of academic research, scholars still seek answers to the questions why she did not publish her work, chose to stay inside the house, and what or whether she was hiding a secret. The highly varied range of scholarship on Dickinson's work is not only due to the myth surrounding the poet but must be identified as, on the one hand, consequences of changing editing practices over time, and, on the other hand, as a result of the distinctive character of Dickinson's poetry and epistolary writing, which, according to Orzeck & Weisbuch, provokes a "uniquely intimate response" in the reader (3). Many readers seem to hear the voice of the poet, who uses the first person single pronoun, creating a distinctive voice, speaking directly to them. Wolff terms this tone, a certain vividness and intensity that transmits the feeling of being spoken to, as characteristically "Dickinsonian" ("Constructions" 110). Although Dickinson distinctly distanced herself from this voice, declaring it to be an imaginative speaker[16], many readers and scholars cannot resist the temptation to read Dickinson's poems biographically. This has led to a highly problematic acceptance of biographical readings even within scholarly circles, an aberration unique for Dickinson studies. "While we generally remind ourselves to differentiate between speaker and author in a work of literature, there seems to be a puzzling propensity for conflating the two when discussing Dickinson," Schöberlein criticizes this unprofessional slant within Dickinson scholarship (48). Wolff explains this with the urge to search for a referent to the "I" of Dickinson's poems, an impulse she believes was intended by the author: Dickinson "seems to have enjoyed making the speaking 'self' (and its illusion of corporeal reality) the most profound riddle (or joke) of all. Thus, her verse is saturated with the first person singular" (Wolff, "Constructions" 110). However, the "I" does not necessarily have to be identified as a person, as many of Dickinson's poems can be read as riddles, with the "I" as "the thing that has to be guessed" ("Constructions" 118). Sewall warns readers who want to access a (biographical) reality behind Dickinson's poems because of the wide variety of experiences described prevents cohesive readings: Dickinson's "poems contain the language of almost every conceivable action, from the most gentle to the most violent – passionate love, torture, shipwreck, battle, murder and … rape" (Sewall, *Life* 239). These extremes and discrepancies unsettle the construction of a coherent narrative. Nevertheless, Sewall does not conclude that Dickinson deliberately fostered misconceptions, but, on the contrary, accredits her with a sincere interest in telling the "truth," understanding the reccurrence of many themes as proof of a "continuous effort to expand, deepen, clarify, and be ever more precise" in order to clad various experimental states in words (*Life* 240).

Barnstone sees the reason for the intense and intimate reader response in the use of the second person pronoun in Dickinson's poems which calls for either identification or dissociation on the part of the reader, involving the percipient of her poetry personally: "In either case, these opening lines immediately engage the reader within their intimacy" (Barnstone 25). Barnstone calls this effect a "seduction" and "betrayal" at the same time, because the reader is tempted to understand Dickinson's poetry as direct communication between the reader and the author, but ultimately must understand that this assumption was misleading (25). Juhasz, Miller, and Smith maintain that Dickinson intended the readers to participate in the process of meaning making, and therefore "perform as co-authors" (*Comic Power* 12). The communicative effect of Dickinson's poetry is reinforced by the fact that the poet sent the majority of her late poems included in letters to her friends, upsetting contemporary notions of a poem being sacred and containing truth independent of the reader and the writer, creating instead a "radically relational poetics," or what Juhasz, Miller and Smith call an "'open poetics'" (Barnstone 26/ Juhasz et al. *Comic Power* 12). Orzeck and Weisbuch also identify the inclusion of poems in letters as the reason for the intimate response that Dickinson's poems provoke. Dickinson's letters, they say, are "wonderfully empathic and yearning", they provoke an "intense response," and they bear the air of intimacy. The poems included in those letters, although it is often not clear how the poems relate to the letters they accompany, therefore "bear the mark of communication" (Orzeck & Weisbuch 2-3). The "uniquely intimate response" of Dickinson's poems is attributed to a language "refusing the circumstantial and biographical" and therefore offering the ground for "an archetypal autobiography" that allows for identification by anyone (Orzeck & Weisbuch 4). Porter similarly emphasizes the possibility for readers to project their personal concerns onto the poems: About half of Dickinson's poems, Porter estimates, engage in "reader-response free play," as they cannot be definitely interpreted and therefore cannot be assigned a topic or theme, but leave room for interpretation (Porter *Themes* 187-8). Wardrop approaches Dickinson's poetry from a different angle, not searching for overarching topics, but emphasizing their versatility: "Any one poem behaves like a map with many cellophane overlays, changing the terrain with each reading" (Wardrop, *Gothic* xiii). Porter proposes that we acknowledge the absence of themes and concludes that ignorance and the exclusion from comprehension were central concerns to Dickinson (Porter, *Themes* 189). Most interestingly, Orzeck & Weisbuch observe that most readers react with intimate attachment and not refusal to the omissions and to the lack of personal information about the poet in the poems (2). The engagement of the reader and the individual's response, Orzeck and Weisbuch agree with Porter and Juhasz, Miller and Smith, becomes the center of attention: "it is the responding, the reading, that finally means more than the initiating event," and "reading becomes as or more essential than what is read" (4). This observation

foregrounds the affective processes of reading poetry and explains Dickinson's vast public appeal. But, I argue, it is not only the possibility of identification and the personal and intimate engagement during the reading process that explain Dickinson's popularity and the resulting diversity in the interpretation of her work. Instead, it is the discrepancy between the mark of communication that her work transmits and the simultaneous refusal of contextual information that appeals to the reader: Dickinson engages her readers emotionally but at the same time keeps them away, creating a distance. Bayley asserts that Dickinson's poetry transmits "a shadowy sense of an underlying drama, whose characters never quite take solid form," which insistently urges to be identified ("Ghost" 47).[17] The special appeal of Dickinson's poetry, I claim, lies in the tension that results from this voyeuristic distance: the reader perceives the poetry intimately and, at the same time, is kept away, allowing indulgement in the poetry only for a moment. From the outside, still reading the poem, the emotionality of the text is perceived from afar, as comprehension is thwarted by a language that eludes identification. The urge to dig deeper to unearth the mysteries surrounding this poet arises when the reader tries to transfer his or her individual emotional response to the poet, who denies this closeness. I agree with Porter that for any "earnest Dickinson reader" as well as for literary scholars, purely biographical readings are not an option (Porter *Themes* 184). Therefore, any academic analysis must withstand the voyeuristic curiosity provoked by the poems and must accept the "indefiniteness and indeterminacy" of Dickinson's poetry, which, according to Porter, is unprecedented before postmodernism (Porter, *Themes* 184).

1.3.2 Why Did Dickinson Not Publish? Poetics, Omissions, Audience

Whether the emotional response to Dickinson's poetry was intended by the poet or not is unknown and subject to ongoing discussions about how we should read Dickinson's work. Unlike her male contemporary poets who, assuming an audience and an interest in their poetic practices, wrote "poetic manifestoes,"[18] Dickinson did not leave us instructions on how to understand her poetry (Nekola 32). The only direct statement towards a definition of poetry she made emphasizes the physical and affective response that poetry should provoke, making poetry more of an intimate experience than a strictly cognitive one:

> If I read a book and it makes my whole body so cold no fire can ever warm me, I know that is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry. These are the only ways I know it. Is there any other way? (L342a)

The lack of a poetic manifesto, or clear instructions on how to understand Dickinson's work and whether one should read her poetry in chronological sequence or rather according to

theme,[19] signify an empowerment in Cameron's eyes (*Choosing* 40). Cameron, who studied Dickinson's fascicles[20] extensively, suggests that Dickinson "refused to make up her mind about how her poems should be read," providing us with a further omission or mystery (Cameron, *Choosing* 40). This refusal, she claims, is crucial to understanding her poetry, because it allows maximal inclusiveness (Cameron, *Choosing* 40). The readers are then forced to question their own categories and their boundaries whenever they want to assign a poem one single subject.

In 1960, Leyda first called the frequent apparent reference gaps in Dickinson's poetry her „omitted center," which by many is seen as characteristic of her poetry (1: xx). According to Sewall, there is an "unexplained gap between rhetoric and reality," which, Sewall explains, is the result of a general "problem of organization and coherence" (*Life* 240, 239). The result is Dickinson's "fiery mist, her rhetorical virtuosity," which Sewall sees as a protective shield (*Life* 239). Two decades later, Benfey still argues similarly, speaking of "her enigmatic poems and cryptic letters" and, referring to her sheltered life, is convinced that they served Dickinson as "a verbal thicket against intruders" (Hummingbirds 3). Because Dickinson refrained from publishing but nevertheless made her poetry available to be found - Dickinson did not publish her poetry but did keep booklets of fair copies to be found after her death -, Orzeck and Weisbuch conclude that, paradoxically, "Dickinson did and did not wish to keep the poems a private affair among herself, God, and a few friends" (3). Wheeler explains Dickinson's reluctance to publish and the evasive character of many Dickinson poems with the poet's gender, the cultural values of her time, and the style of her poems. "Dickinson wrote at a time when the ideology of womanhood promoted ideals of passivity, silence, and domestic sainthood for white middle-class women," Nekola summarizes the demands for white upper-class woman at the time (31). Dickinson's "esthetics of reserve," Wheeler states, are protective (10). Dickinson chose to maintain a low profile that was in accordance with virtues like modesty, just as other women writers at the time did, "allowing them to downplay gender and avoid the stigma of 'poetess'" (Wheeler 10). This explains why even today, "Dickinson is as often as not," as Smith puts it, "an icon of uniqueness, for the unusual, for the unexpected," as her character combines both conventionality and alterity at the same time, puzzling her readers ("Forever" 120). Diehl states that women poets during Dickinson's time "perceive themselves as exceptions, as isolates, departing from, rather than building up, a tradition" (*Romantic* 2). Bennett and Vietto show that quantitatively, this perception does not correspond to reality: there had been a considerable number of female poets who actively published their work in newspapers and periodicals addressing a wide area of issues since the Revolutionary area at least, if not since colonial times (Vietto 2, Bennett 5-6). Nekola notes that contemporary female poets such as Elizabeth Barret Browning, Emily Bront, Helen Hunt Jackson, and Mary

Coleridge express ambivalence towards language and the ability to express reality, while male poets such as Emerson, Wordsworth, and Whitman stress the “fitness between being a male speaker and being a man” (Nekola 32). The female authors mentioned above very frequently worry about their ability to use language, according to Nekola a sign that they had concerns about their entitlement towards using a certain language, their authority, and their ability to be understood by their readers (32).The fact that an audience is always public and that this publicity, connoted negatively, could “mark the end of their definition as women, bring on confusion or lack of gender” make claiming one’s own voice highly problematic (Nekola 32). However frequent women’s poetry was, the cultural imperatives of true womanhood still represented an obstacle to publishing, although it was not an obstacle that could not be overcome. After all, Helen Hunt Jackson, a very close friend of Dickinson, was a popular writer and poet and decidedly “career-oriented,” and, according to Wheeler, offered an “alternative model ... for feminine identity” (24).

In addition to cultural norms, the characteristics of the literary genre could also be the reason for Dickinson’s reserve; Wheeler argues that contemporary expectations of proper behavior for a woman writer coincide with literary practices that gradually evolved into modernism. Modesty and “proper feminine discretion,” according to Wheeler, closely resemble the “elisions of modernism,” suggesting that this new literary mode might have suited women precisely because it allowed for the accommodation of both conventional reserve and secrecy (8). Dickinson’s poetry, she insists, “initiates aspects of modernism” (Wheeler 9). The modern lyric, Wheeler argues, is characterized among other things by “telegraphic brevity, favoring “juxtaposition over explanation” (9). Therefore, she ascribes Dickinson’s poetry to an “alternative modernism” (Wheeler 10). The fact that Dickinson’s poetic oeuvre is characterized by offering variant wordings, irregularities in meter and rhyme, and eschews contemporary ideas of what represented poetry offers further support for her unwillingness to conform to publishing standards. Kilcup argues that Dickinson, familiar with critical reviews, refrained from publishing because she feared “significant critical chastisement for experimenting with rhythm, rhyme, and metaphor, and for exploring troubling psychological states” (25). The few poems that were reprinted during her lifetime all underwent severe normalization. However, there is no evidence that this severely troubled Dickinson, leading Miller to conclude that “instabilities in textual representation were not a primary concern” of the poet and that the risk of editorial normalizing intervention cannot explain her abstination from publication (*Time* 178). Rather, Miller maintains, Dickinson actively delayed the publication of her work to a time after her death by replying to willing publishers in such an “anomalous, coy, and elliptical” style that they could not take her intentions seriously (*Time* 183). Therefore, Miller emphasizes that we do not know exactly “to what extent she deliberately sabotages her effort” to publish (*Time* 183).

Most recently, Crumbly tries to answer the question why Dickinson's attitude towards publication was so negative by looking closely at the poetry that tackles the subject. "Publication - is the Auction/ Of the Mind …" (F788), one of her most cited poems starts, and in "I'm Nobody! Who are you?" (F260) she clearly dismisses "to be – Somebody!" and "To tell one's name" as vulgar and attention-seeking "like a Frog" that continuously and monotonously makes its existence known by croaking. Crumbly provides an insight into how Dickinson thought of the relationship between poet, poem, reader, and publication by looking at her understanding of the word 'revolution.' For Dickinson, Crumbly argues, this word does not primarily refer to political social revolution, but is characterized as a circular movement, much akin to her 'circumference' ("Back Talk" 9). For Dickinson, Crumbly demonstrates, a poem is worthy of fame when it enters the world of language and gains an autonomous status, resurfacing in variant forms and novel ways as part of other literary productions in a revolutionary fashion independent of its creator ("Back Talk" 1-3). "[T]he written text did not define the poem," Miller also concludes, as Dickinson herself changed various elements of her poems very frequently (*Time* 182). In Dickinson's mind, the act of writing is what defines the poet, and not her past products of artistic endeavors, which can hinder the poet from continuing her writing if they become a preoccupation (Crumbly "Back Talk" 7). The relationship between poet, poetry, and fame is paradoxically inverted in Dickinson's understanding, as fame is not to be pursued by the artist. Instead, poems are supposed to gain an independent life and seek the artist second hand (Crumbly "Back Talk" 15). As Crumbly puts it, "… the poet who seeks to write revolutionary poetry capable of entering and altering the linguistic stream must risk anonymity" ("Back Talk" 17).

However, biographical studies and research of the historical context in which Dickinson lived suggest that Dickinson was known as a poet to a much larger degree than has been assumed so far (Dandurand 269). Dandurand shows convincingly in her very comprehensive study of the literary groups active during Dickinson's lifetime that the poet was a presence in the literary field, and her life and work was discussed in certain circles. Even though Dickinson only published a few poems and did so anonymously, she did have an audience: The poems that got published and reprinted appeared in papers that were available nationwide and had very large readerships (Dandurand, 255). Each of her published poems, Dandurand states, "had a potential readership of thousands" (255). Once a poem was published, it became public propriety and could potentially be reprinted by any newspaper (Dandurand 257).[21] When exploring the question of Dickinson's contemporary audience, Dandurand reminds us that it is important to acknowledge that newspaper poetry held an important place in popular culture, that it was part of most newspapers by the middle of the nineteenth century, and that it was common for readers to cut out poems,[22] to memorize them and discuss them with friends (257).

Each of the closest correspondents of Dickinson, Susan Dickinson, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Samuel Bowels, and Helen Hunt Jackson, shared her letters and poems among friends (Dandurand 260). This is supported by the fact that the paper of many poems Dickinson had written bears marks of circulation: fingerprints with traces of food and drink, glue, coffee and wine stains, tears and even blood, multiple folds that show that the poems had been tucked away and then taken out again and unfolded, and small holes that are proof that they had been pinned to something (Smith "Forever" 122-3). This is particularly interesting in light of the fact that several of Dickinson's correspondents and friends moved in the literary world, and the friends with whom they shared their letters would include influential people (Dandurand 260). Dickinson's Norcross cousins organized readings and had "prominent literary people" as friends (Danduarnd 261). In fact, Louise and Frances Norcross were in repeated contact with Emerson and other influential people through their numerous political and cultural involvements (Ackmann 19). In contrast to Dickinson, the Norcrosses led very social lives and participated vigorously in public discourses, openly challenging traditional stances and representing new ideas. According to Scharnhost, Louisa characterized herself as "an ardent crusader for women, a whole-souled suffragist, and a lover of every progressive 'ism'" (484).Through her Norcross cousins', her mentor Thomas Wentworth Higginson's, and Helen Hunt Jackson's cultural and political involvements in the abolitionist and women's rights movements, Dickinson in turn had access to the influential figures of her time, and was far from isolated in her home in Amherst. As her father was active in Whig politics, the family's guests included prominent political personalities (Erkkila, *Politics* 139). Fuss emphasizes that Dickinson's home was public to a large extent, as both Dickinson's father and her brother were important public figures (52). Barnstone also asserts that Dickinson's withdrawal does not equal isolation, as her life was still filled with her family, friends, and her large group of correspondents (Barnstone 5). Dandurand illustrates that Dickinson knew about the public interest in herself and her poetry, as she frequently received requests to make contributions to magazines (Danduarnd 268). Higginson excited much interest when he presented some of Dickinson's poems at the New England Women's Club in 1875, a fact that is all the more important if we consider that the members of this club included "many of the leaders of literary Boston," among them Louisa May Alcott, and the honorary members Henry James, John Greenleaf Whittier, and Emerson (Dandurand 267). Meanwhile, the general public was also aware of Dickinson the poet, Dandurand claims, as in 1878, several papers considered Dickinson to be the author of several stories written by Helen Hunt Jackson using a pseudonym some years earlier (272). It is striking that already then, before Mabel Loomis Todd's famous letter to her parents describing Dickinson as an eccentric hiding in her home, Dickinson was

characterized as a recluse, isolated from the world, having interest in flowers, extremely timid, and only wearing white (Danduarnd 272-3).

Addressing the frequency of women's publications of poetry, Vietto emphasizes that the female poets who refrained from presenting their work in print did so because they favored the circulation of their manuscripts among a more restricted readership (120). Erkkila interprets Dickinson's choice within an economical framework, arguing that her refusal to publish was a statement against a capitalist economy and society. Dickinson maintained "a separate community of language and desire" in a circle of female friends, Erkkila argues, in order to counter patriarchal economy, which made women objects of exchange between men, and lived "among women another kind of trade" ("Homoeroticism" 161).[23] Miller agrees that publication, whether open or anonymous, would have required Dickinson to manage "market economies," and, therefore, there were no options for the poet: "Neither were appealing propositions for a well-to-do and ambitious lawyer's daughter, whose seriousness about writing coincided with her increasing reclusiveness" (Miller *Time* 190). If we consider the amount of letters Dickinson wrote and if we take into account that, as Dandurand suggests, these letters and the accompanying poems were indeed shared and in some instances even copied and handed on, we can assume that Dickinson reached a very large audience indeed. While the question why she did not publish cannot be answered, recent studies such as Dandurand or Crumbly suggest that Dickinson might simply not have felt the need, given that the current interest in her poetry assured her posthumous publications and that she viewed poetry as independent from the poet, gaining its own life.

1.3.3 Why Did Dickinson Stay inside? Choice, Performance, Effect

Recent studies try to reconnect Dickinson's work and the circumstances of its production with the historical context of the society the poet lived in and her contemporary poets and writers. Especially Dickinson's choice to remain "housebound," as Wheeler terms her reluctance to leave her father's house, has been subject of scholarly scrutiny (23). Critics struggle to restore Dickinson's preference for staying at home, which culminated in her complete refusal to leave the house after the age of thirty, as either intentional and empowering or conventional in order to counter interpretations which pathologize the poet's behavior (Wheeler 23). Feminist scholarship during its early years counters the image of Dickinson as conformist or suffering from a psychological trauma. Eberwein is convinced that the negative choices Dickinson made, namely not publishing her poetry, never to get married, and not going beyond the limits of her father's grounds, were made consciously and deliberately. To only focus on the restrictions of nineteenth-century culture posed on women is an oversimplification, Eberwein contends,

insisting that women did have choices regarding certain matters, including their religious life, clothing and fashion, the furniture and decorations of houses, and their own medical treatment (*Strategies* 44). That Dickinson confronted these options by not taking advantage of them is not surprising, as it was indicative of a woman of the higher social classes to abstain from that freedom in favor of modesty and renunciation (*Strategies* 44). Juhasz, who was among the first to study Dickinson's work and life from a feminist perspective, does not disagree with the interpretation of Dickinson's renunciations as part of a proper woman′s behavior of the nineteenth century. "*Renunciation*," she announces, "is really a particular form of appropriation upon which Dickinson relied" (Juhasz, "Introduction" 10, original italics). Eberwein agrees that Dickinson's disavowals occurred on an extreme scale, which emphasizes existing cultural norms and limitations on women and thus criticizes them: "Emily Dickinson shaped her life, by a startling consistent pattern of negative choices, in a way that intensified every limitation upon her, exaggerated every barrier. And she did so consciously…" (*Strategies* 45-46). Eberwein's statement echoes Juhasz's earlier claim that "from a feminist perspective, Dickinson's life was neither a flight, nor a cop-out, nor a sacrifice, nor a substitution, but a strategy, a creation, for enabling her to become the person she was" (Juhasz, "Introduction" 10). Juhasz and Eberwein transform the image of Dickinson as timid recluse into that of a rebel against patriarchal restrictions. To Erkkila, Dickinson's voluntary seclusion is a reaction and objection of the increasing modernization of nineteenth-century life, especially visible in the increased mobility and exchange of goods and people that the railway brought to Amherst (*Politics* 142). Dickinson's retreat, Erkkila suggests, "was an act of political and social resistance against the disruptive democratic, commercial, and technological forces of her time" (*Politics* 142-3). For my purposes, although I prefer a more cautious approach to the question of whether Dickinson was a rebel against patriarchy or not, especially Juhasz's observations prove to be of the greatest value. Juhasz not only reinterprets Dickinson's negative choices as acts of liberation, but spatially reconnects them with patriarchy and power dynamics: "saying 'no'[24] … was for Dickinson an act of autonomy. It cleared space. A space wherein *transformation* might occur. But a space within the patriarchy. For transformation is the kind of magic that turns what is there at hand into something else" (Juhasz, "Introduction" 19, original emphasis). Juhasz speaks of the possibility of transformation here, which might be achieved by an individual appropriation of conventional patterns, exploiting limitations to find freedom within their frame, as Dickinson turns the cultural association of women with the domestic sphere into a space for imagination: the house becomes an expandable structure as the dividing walls within it and towards the outside offer a space for contact rather than restriction, just as the cultural limits Dickinson emphasizes by exaggeration are not society's anymore, but become her very own frontier.

More recent studies emphasize that Dickinson's refusal to leave her father's house coincides not only with cultural values of proper womanhood, but also with contemporary ideas of individualism and a poet's source of creativity.Therefore, her refusal does not necessarily have to represent a conscious rebellion against a patriarchal society, but it can also be viewed as part of a literary tradition. According to Barnstone, Dickinson's withdrawal fits the time's " myth of America" that advocates reliance on the self and individualism, and builds on the idea of independence from all others, including both contemporary and historical influences (5). "Dickinson was not alone among nineteenth-century American writers in choosing to live self-reliantly by claiming originality and by being a recluse," Barnstone writes, but "[h]er withdrawal from society and her eschewal of literary influences were, paradoxically, part of a literary tradition" (6). As examples, Barnstone lists highly influential poets like Emerson who advocated the search for truth within the self without being influenced by other poets and thinkers, whether contemporary or classic. This is reminiscent of Emerson's 'Self-Reliance,' which calls for independence from others and a poet's autonomy in finding the truth (*Complete Writings* 138). Whitman also rejects the influence of other writers, demanding that his readers rely on themselves for insight in the lengthy "Song of Myself*"*in *Leaves of Grass*. Thoreau, who wanted to test Emerson's ideal of 'Self-Reliance' far from civilization, spent two years in isolation in the forest and later published his experiences in *Walden; or, Life in the Woods*.

As illustrated earlier, the assumption that Dickinson lived in isolation is a misconception, as she was in contact with numerous friends and acquaintances, exchanging letters with them, and received a variety of guests at her home. Dickinson was known for making memorable entrances, introducing herself in a highly theatrical way, dressed solely in white and holding lilies (Fuss, *Interior* 23). To some, like Mabel Loomis Todd, who was her brother's lover and one of the first publishers of her work, she only spoke from behind the door, displaying a "preference for being heard without being seen" (McCormack 595). Fuss introduces the aspect of performativity in her discussion of Dickinson by observing that the poet had "a finely tuned sense of the theatrical" (*Interior* 21).). Juhasz and Miller also state that Dickinson understood "life as drama" ("Performances" 110). According to Pollak, Dickinson engaged in an "exhibitionist art of insistent self-display, self-advertisement" (19). It becomes apparent that these theatrical acts are highly performative in Butler's sense when we consider that the greeting of and attendance to guests was highly ceremonial in nineteenth-century society: "The practice of calling can, in fact, be understood as a *highly ritualized system of entering and leaving domestic space,*" Logan explains (31, my italics). The staging of this ritual, Logan continues her illustration, was more important than the content of the words exchanged: "From one perspective, in fact, this *carefully orchestrated exchange of spatial intimacy*, rather than conversation, was precisely the point of the call" (Logan 31, my italics). If Dickinson presented

herself in such an eccentric manner, she emphasized the theatrical aspects of the call, and by exaggerating the ritualistic moves, she revealed that she was playing a role and that the domestic setting of the encounter with the guest was her space and stage for self-display. Gilbert highlights that by making such memorable performances, Dickinson actively fostered the image of herself and contributed to the myth that developed around her person. As Gilbert puts it, Dickinson enhanced the "process of self- mythologizing" by using "all the materials of daily reality" (Gilbert 23). Dickinson directed her image and created a characteristic appearance by drawing from female stereotypes such as the housewife deeply emerged in domesticity or by crafting identities such as the "New England Nun," as Gilbert suggests (23).

The way Dickinson actively steered the impression she made on others makes it clear that she understood gendered identity as a performative creation and invites us to treat the personae in her poetry likewise, e.g., as constructs that are deliberate – and consciously so. Sewall also pleads for a view of the speakers in Dickinson's poetry as performing: the "hyperbole and exaggerated rhetoric" that "poses," wears "masks" and lets "personae" speak unsettles readers who expect an authentic voice (Sewall, *Life* 240). Fuss answers the question why Dickinson stayed inside the house and why she chose to present herself in such an eccentric way by pointing to a poem that states that "the deepest hid is sighted first" (F1076) and concludes that for Dickinson, "hiding is simply the best way to be seen," (*Interior* 60). This corresponds to my findings in "I was the slightest in the House –" (F473) where the exaggeration of the speaker's smallness highlights the advantages of this stature and instead of isolating her, pinpoints her embeddedness in the family. Wolff argues that Dickinson's speakers frequently appear "extravagant, carnivalesque" and crave reader attention to an unusual extent ("Constructions" 101-111). Pollak is convinced that Dickinson's theatricality was rebellious: "it was her intention and her fate to undermine orthodoxies, whatever their point of origin" (Pollak, *Anxiety* 21). However, Pollak argues, this attitude is not without paradoxes, as while Dickinson countered the subordinate status of women in her time, she also "reacted against her culture's failure to subordinate its women sufficiently," thereby disrupting views of the poet as a rebel (Pollak, *Anxiety* 21). This means that the deliberate choice to restrict herself to the domestic sphere is at the same time a rebellion against the limitation of women's radius of action and their association with the home. Simultaneously, the appropriation of the space traditionally assigned to women also represents a concession to these traditions. The fact that Dickinson succeeded in transforming her house into a stage and in shunning public life paradoxically serves as a reminder of the insufficiency of a repressive system that condems women to a purely decorative status, denies them a voice in public matters, and restricts their radius of action. Juhasz agrees with Pollak in that Dickinson's performances of extreme stereotypes of female characteristics manifest a protest against the limits imposed on women:

"*Subversion*, *appropriation*, *derivation* are all kinds of *sabotage*, working upon the system within the system, using its own elements to turn them on purpose to her purposes," (Juhasz "Introduction" 19, original italics).

According to Juhasz, Dickinson thus exploits cultural norms to her ends and thereby opens a path for action. However, critics do not agree to what extent Dickinson's poetic voices, which over-perform, exaggerate, or appropriate female stereotypes, represent a protest or an initiation to effective change. Nekola, who emphasizes the cultural imperative of silence for women, deems Dickinson's poetry writing brave and rebellious, but, as she considers womanhood and being a poet irreconcilable at the time, denies Dickinson's poetry any confidence and the ability to successfully promote alternative views that challenge repressive power structures:

> The poems' speakers begin to talk but will not claim too much; they will name only the crumb, only the mute or the wound, as their own. Or, if they announce authority, they eventually unravel their own claims. Definition begins with negation. Desire is approached only to be denied. The hesitations and silences of such a poet would not appear to offer what is traditionally known as bardic authority: the ability to proclaim, state, name, or impose one's vision upon the world at large.
>
> (Nekola 38)

Crumbly aims to reconnect Dickinson's poetry to public matters by analyzing the "female citizen's expression of sovereignty" in her domestic settings and her frequent employment of royal imagery and tropes (*Winds* 33). Dickinson's approach to political contents is not, Crumbly explains, to present problems and to offer a solution at the end of the poem, but to "stage dramas of sovereignty and consent" that force the readers to come to their independent conclusions, foregrounding the question of the "political significance of choices made in the domestic sphere" (*Winds* 34). To be able to provoke this cognitive process in her readers, Crumbly continues, Dickinson "thwart[s] conventional social expectations attached to the spaces inhabited by women in order to instill in her readers the understanding that the way they think and act in those spaces has political significance" (*Winds* 34). This end, he claims, is reached by fostering the reader's distrust of the speaker, thereby creating a distance necessary for the reader to judge critically and independently (Crumbly, *Winds* 34): "When this is achieved, the separate spheres of public and private, male and female, become more porous, and domestic space becomes a site for political action" (Crumbly, *Winds* 34).

1.3.4 How Should Dickinson's Work Be Represented? Editing and Genre

Not just the style of her work, the often ungrammatical sentence structures and frequent ambiguous or elusive wordings, but also the very materiality of Dickinson's poetry provides space for speculations about the author's intentions. Many poem manuscripts bear evidence in the form of stains, folds, pinholes, and various traces suggesting that they were not considered precious secrets that had to be protected from the world, but were circulated at dinner tables, performed in groups, handed on, adorned with cutouts, and pinned to objects, making them part of everyday life and providing access for a very homogeneous readership (Smith "Forever" 122-3). Between 1858 and 1864, Dickinson made fair copies of her poetry, destroyed all her notes, and sewed the copies into forty booklets, called fascicles, suggesting an order by theme (Barnstone 21; Cameron, "Fascicles" 140). When her writing practices changed and her work was not identifiable as either poetry or prose anymore, but became something in between, Dickinson stopped making fair copies (Barnstone 21). The poems we know from this period have been collected from letters and scrap paper that had not been organized or categorized into themes (Barnstone 21). Speculations about why Dickinson made the fascicles but left them to be found only after her death allow the conclusion that the fascicles represent a kind of private publication (Cameron, "Fascicles" 139). This assumption prompts the question of how Dickinson's poetry should be represented in print. A further problem is that we do not know which version of her poems Dickinson regarded as authoritative, as she continued to send variant poems to friends after copying them and sewing them into fascicles (Cameron "Fascicles" 140). Smith does not provide a solution to that problem when she concludes that both fascicle books and letters were channels for Dickinson to publish her work without letting it appear in print, because she had deemed this medium inadequate (Smith, " Manuscripts" 117). The issue of representation in print is further complicated by the fact that Dickinson's last thirty fascicles contain variant wording as part of the fair copy, confronting editors with the question of whether to include them in print versions or to make selections among the variants (Cameron "Fascicles" 140).

Other issues that have troubled editors are Dickinson's idiosyncratic spelling and punctuation. Certain characteristics of Dickinson's poetry, such as her ubiquitous dashes, were normalized in favor of conventional punctuation in early editions. However, it becomes clear that replacing a dash with a full stop, for example, changes meaning noticeably when we consider poems like "I reckon – When I count at all –" (F533) where Dickinson makes a list clarifying hierarchies between poets, time, nature, and god, proclaiming "And then – the List is done –," and thus ends her list not with a final full stop but a dash, which negates her final statement. Juhasz also observes that Dickinson often ends poems with a dash and concludes that this indicates the openness of the poem and deems definition never as final, but

processual and continuing (Juhasz “Irresistible” 23). Mahoney believes that the dashed line signalizes the “pure movement, pure thought” of crossing out the word that could have been there in its place (58). Dashes, Denman argues, are signs “not only beyond language but beyond punctuation,” enabling Dickinson to “turn ... the silent and nonverbal into language” (Denman 201). Of course, the dash both joins and separates at the same time, providing a space for possible meaning. This space, Jung is convinced, is foremost a “space of the affective,” which “cannot be seen, but can only be felt” (3). Similarly foregrounding the limits of accessability, Fagan maintains that Dickinson’s dashes stand for silence, signifying that “ language ends” (72-73). The dash, she believes, can also be read as a “thread between the sayable and the unsayable” (Fagan 70). Like Fagan, Wolosky makes a link between the visual quality of the dash and a thread that portrays composing poetry in terms of sewing: “… the dashes that at once mediate and disrupt her flow of syntax suggest the sewing thread on which she strings her words, yet in doing so dramatizes the fragile connections they weave” (Wolosky *Poetry* 23). The activity of sewing, employed to produce the fascicles and echoed in her dashes, reconciles the domestic with the poetic realm, Wolosky suggests (*Poetry* 23). Furthermore, Jung note, the dashed line enables readers to repeat the writing process when following the lines with their eyes, reenacting Dickinson’s “process of writing mimetically in its hesitations and stutters” (19). McCormack is reminded of telegraphic signs by Dickinson’s gaps and dashes, which he understands in terms of a Morse code (574). The telegram, McCormack argues, provided Dickinson with a new mode of linguistic representation (598).[25]

“Dickinson was by nature a nonconformist,” Walker insists, and “her poems in toto sound like no one else’s” (Walker *Context* 197). Commenting on Dickinson’s awareness and relationship to her culture and other female poets, she states: “Her strategies of defamiliarization and compression, her playfulness with abstractions, her evocation and revocation of gender constructs – these separate her from *most* of her sisters. … The most accurate judgement we can make is that her work remembers others’ poems even as it forgets them” (Walker *Context* 197, original italics). Walker concludes that while Dickinson was influenced by other women poets and that her work shares similarities with them in several aspects, Dickinson’s differs from them since only Dickinson’s work appears modernist or postmodernist (*Context* 197). However, scholars do not agree on to what extent Dickinson’s poetry corresponds to contemporary requirements of poetic form, even though it is described as a precursor for poetic genres that only emerged at the end of the nineteenth or during the twentieth century. In fact, most of Dickinson’s poems employ a common meter consisting of iambic pentameter in hymnal quatrain, characteristic of church songs. Although Dickinson’s rhythmic patterns vary, this meter emerges as overarching. This consistency stands in stark contrast to her frequent experiments with form. “No consensus exists, then, on the extent to

which Dickinson practices a formally closed or radically open version of the lyric, although all agree she at least alludes to traditional forms, especially hymnody, and also that she violates them by various means," Wheeler summarizes the ongoing discussions (Wheeler 20). The representation of Dickinson's poems in stanzas consisting of four lines as practiced by both Johnson and Franklin, I believe, reinforces a view of Dickinson's poetry as advocating a certain form. However, this does not do justice to especially her late poetry, which blends the genres of letter, poem, and fragment (Barnstone 26). Miller adds that Dickinson varied the lineage of her poetry considerably in various instances, presenting the same poem with longer or shorter lines in fair copies and letters, suggesting that she "experiments broadly with the rhythmic variation offered by meter and syntax …" (*Time* 115). Miller concludes that Dickinson, as a "poet of restless revision," perceived the difference between the written form and the acoustic quality of a poem when performed as tension (*Time* 116). Because she understood "the poem as performative – dramatic, implicitly spoken, staging a perspective or attitude …," and because she herself varied line length, the visual presentation of the stanza and metric form extensively, Miller concludes that Dickinson did not perceive of a single version of any of her poems as authoritative, as this would not have been coherent with her understanding of a poem gaining its own life and not being caught in a given performance or written manifestation (Time 117). Furthermore, Dickinson′s late poetry, which was not copied into fascicles by the poet and has only been transmitted on scrap papers, envelopes and wrapping paper, cannot be justly reproduced with traditional editorial means. As Barnstone contends, Dickinson plays with the surface of the paper she writes on, foregrounding its materiality (Barnstone 27). Because "Dickinson used the page itself, and the placement of words in relation to embossments, attachments, and margins to convey meaning, and in ways that typography cannot sufficiently transmit," Hart and Smith conclude that manuscript studies are crucial to understanding Dickinson's approach to poetry and its production (xxiii).

With modern technologies of reproduction and the possibilities of digital representation, a new range of questions about the way we should represent Dickinson′s poetry. Electronic and publicly accessible databases, such as the *Dickinson Electronic Archives* (DEA), a collaboration between the Emily Dickinson Collection at Amherst College, and the *Emily Dickinson Archive,* associated with the Houghton Library and Harvard University Press, provide scans of original manuscripts.[26] One advantage of this is that scans do not conceal stains and marks of circulation, and therefore allow a much more accurate placement of the poetry in everyday life and part of social interaction, as sterile and orderly prints do that remove the poems from their context (Smith "forever" 123). Most recently, literary scholar Martha Werner and visual artist Jen Bervin chose a more radical approach in *The Gorgeous Nothings*, not just scanning but reproducing Dickinson's envelope poems and poems on scrap paper in

their entire materiality, providing replicas and presenting them as they were found in a container, without giving them an imposed order.

However, the publishing history of Dickinson's poetry cannot be summarized by listing only purely editorial problems. The personal relationships between the early editors and their connection to the Dickinson family equally shaped the process of publication: "For centuries now … the editing of Emily Dickinson's poetry has been entangled with human passions, sex, and blindered partiality, as though the editors were (and sometimes they were) … despairing lovers tossing on their beds," Benfy famously summarizes the situation just after the discovery of Dickinson's poems by her sister Lavinia to today (Benfey, "Mystery" 39). Dickinson's younger sister discovered a box containing hundreds of poems and personal letters in her room after her death. Lavinia burned the letters according to the deceased's instructions and then passed the poems on to Susan Dickinson, Emily Dickinson's sister-in-law and lifelong companion, with orders to make them fit for publication (Smith, "Manuscripts" 119). Susan successfully placed several poems in literary magazines and journals, but did not embark upon a publication of Dickinson's entire body of work, which resulted in Lavinia reclaiming the poems from Susan Dickinson in order to consign the task to Mabel Loomis Todd (Smith, "Manuscripts" 119). Mabel Loomis Todd was Dickinson′s brother and Susan Dickinson's husband's mistress, a fact that explains Benfey's statement. A direct result of the enmity between Dickinson's sister in law and her brother's mistress, Erkkila demonstrated, is the misrepresentation of Susan Dickinson's influence on the poet, who, after all, was the most important person in Dickinson's life, the person she loved, with whom she started writing poetry and discussed her creative work: Susan's influence, Erkkila insists, has been systematically "erased, mutilated, demonized, and sentimentalized" (Erkkila, "Homoeroticism" 162-163). While Austin Dickinson sought to erase his wife's role in Dickinson's life, Amherst residents literally demonized" her, calling her a villain, devil or even Satan (Erkkila "Homoeroticism"163). After their mothers' deaths, Susan's and Mabel's daughters Martha Dickinson Bianchi and Millicent Todd Bingham continued their editing with the heavy bias provoked by the (erotic and sexual) tensions that had existed between their mothers. In her 1924 edition of Dickinson's work, Martha Dickinson Bianchi tried to restore the reputation of her mother by portraying a "sentimentalized version of the relationship between Dickinson and Sue as an idyllic friendship between sisters," ignoring the erotic aspect but also, as Erkkila points out, the tensions and sometimes wounding disagreements between the two women ("Homoeroticism" 163). These two aspects, Erkkila emphasizes, are important in regard to Sue's role in Dickinson's life, because it was Susan "through whom and against whom she defined herself" ("Homoeroticism" 163). Dickinson's love relationship with Susan Dickinson, Erkkila claims, has political dimensions, as she interprets it as "a form of saying no to the masculine and

heterosexual orders of church and state in order to say yes to herself and to her own poetic creation" ("Homoeroticism" 165). The early editors' partialities, Benfey insists, were later adopted by Johnson and Franklin in different, but still passionate ways ("Mystery" 39). [27]

In my analysis of Dickinson's poetry, I treat Dickinson's choices as deliberate and pay special attention to the performative character present in many poems. I draw on the most recent findings of Bennett and Wolosky that, despite Dickinson's reluctance to publish during her lifetime, her poetry had an audience that included not only a variety of readers, but also the fellow poets of her time. Taking into account that the Dickinson homestead was accessible to friends, acquaintances and influential progressive thinkers of New England's society, I do not view Dickinson as isolated and disinterested in the social and political debates of her time, but consider her poetry as answering and taking part in these debates. In my close readings of Dickinson's poetry, I pay respect to Dickinson's understanding of poetry as performative, asking what the individual poems do with respect to gender and space. In a second step, I analyze how this effect is achieved and what it implies in relation to the cultural values of the time. Assuming that Dickinson had an audience and that she was aware of this audience, I concentrate on Dickinson's poetic speaker's ability to appropriate, transform and subvert conventional female characters and their attempts to accommodate a new gendered subjectivity within or at the brink of normative culture, evaluating whether Dickinson's poetry succeeds in carving out an alternative space for identity, characterizing the dimensions of this space.

2. Nature

2.1 Locating and Reshaping Gender in Nature

Although ‘nature’ is a much less concrete place than other frequent spaces where Dickinson unravels her poetry like the house or the grave, I want to consider it as a space as it offers a much less determined or bounded ground for poetic creativity than some of Dickinson’s other settings but nevertheless is highly culturally branded. I want to examine how Dickinson portrays this space that is characterized by her contemporaries as being exactly the opposite of culture, as lying beyond everything that has been structured by humans, but nevertheless is thought of and depicted in terms that can only be understood from within the perspective of exactly that culture. ‘Nature’ is thus no void space, but one torn between the assumption of signifying the uncivilized as the antithesis to human society and moral codes, and its instrumentalization as such, defining the limits of how far culture reaches and thus defining it. Dickinson is aware of these tensions, I claim, and when she moves in nature through her poetry, she does so on specific terms, reflecting on notions of her time and transforming them. Of course, besides recognizing nature as a space deeply rooted within her society’s mind set, Dickinson also has to relate to a certain literary tradition if she writes poetry in which ‘nature’ itself as well as fauna and flora figures.

Nature in its various forms, such as landscapes, members of the fauna like birds or small insects such as butterflies and bees, objects from the flora like flowers, especially the daisy and the rose, or personifications as Mother Nature or nature goddess, are constant presences in Dickinson’s poetry. In total, the word “nature” alone appears 110 times (Rosenbaum 865). It is not surprising, then, that the second edition of Dickinson’s poetry by Mabel Loomis Todd in 1891 summarizes Dickinson’s reclusive life in close connection to nature:

> Storm, wind, the wild March sky, sunsets and dawns; the birds and bees, butterflies and flowers of her garden, with a few trusted human friends, were sufficient companionship. The coming of the first robin was a jubilee beyond crowning of monarch or birthday of pope; the first red leaf hurrying through “the altered air,” an epoch. Immortality was close about her; and while never morbid or melancholy, she lived in its presence. *(Dickinson 1982:XXV)*

Views of Dickinson as Todd promoted them were readily embraced by contemporary readers and reviewers alike. The poet was pictured as embedded in nature and highly receptive and emotionally connected to all processes which take place in the natural world. “Like all truly poetic souls Miss Dickinson was deeply in love with Nature, and richly enjoyed all Nature's

wealth of beauty with almost painful intensity. She saw and understood all that goes on in the rural world during the passing year ...," a reviewer characterizes Dickinson's relationship to nature in 1894 (Buckingham 380).[1] To reduce Dickinson to a nature poetess of course does not do justice to the wide range of topics she discusses sophisticatedly in her poetry. The fact that Dickinson features nature so frequently in her work and the way she does so have to be understood in relation to the romantic tradition of the time and the restriction for women who did engage in poetry writing to do so within the range of sentimental discourse, floral language, and landscape poetry (Petrino 6-7).

There is a long tradition in Europe and especially the United States to engender landscapes and nature as female, and Dickinson alludes to this vision when she attributes the female gender to natural phenomena. But it would not have been characteristic of Dickinson had she moved within traditional conventions of the genre when nature became the subject in her poetry. It can be assumed that Dickinson, alluding to the sentimental and romantic discourse of the pastoral tradition and referring to her time's discourses about nature, does this consciously and strategically in order to satirize and emphasize the premises of a culturally constructed nature. To illustrate how Dickinson's contemporaries perceived nature, how the image of a feminized nature was constructed in its historical context, how Dickinson deals with these discourses in her poetry and which strategies she employs to reshape and rewrite nature's realm into a space for positive and empowering female identification is the subject of this chapter.

2.1.1 The European Pastoral and the American Settlement

The European pastoral tradition and the early American settlers share a view of nature and the land as essentially feminine. This metaphorical understanding of "land as woman" finds its expression in the pastoral literary tradition that uses a specific vocabulary portraying nature as mother, mistress, or virgin anticipating nature's passivity and availability for man.[2] The European pastoral glorifies nature and describes it as paradise and Garden of Eden. The origins of the Pastoral can be traced back to the ancient Greek poet Theocritus and the Roman poet Virgil who, in his *Eclogues*, creates the symbolic landscape Arcadia, identified by Marx as a "delicate blend of myth and reality" (19). The landscape of Arcadia is described as a green oasis beyond which there exists only chaos: the wilderness of the marshland and the noise and decadence of the city of Rome. Arcadia thus constitutes a space in between, an idealized place that reconciles the destructive forces of wild nature and erroneous civilization (Marx 23). In this delightful place ruled by the pleasure principle, the environment provides peace, leisure and economic sufficiency that are produced virtually by nature itself (Marx 23). In sixteenth century Europe, the fantasy of a nurturing landscape which stands in stark contrast to the

grinding poverty haunting large populations repeatedly emerged from a longing for a place where the availability of food would be secure and a rich harvest could be achieved without hard labor (Kolodny 6). In such an idealized world, the pastoral fantasy promises, humanity would coexist in “noncompetitive fraternity” and would, therefore, return to the “lost state of innocence” and to the “primal warmth of womb or breast in a feminine landscape” (Kolodny 6).

The European pastoral tradition, Kolodny emphasizes, perceived of the gendered landscape as a “dead convention” and used the traditional female image of nature consciously as a purely literary implement (8-9). The first American settlers, on the other hand, applied the metaphor uncritically, as Kolodny’s analysis of some letters and documents from the first colonies shows. The grounds of this naive manner of thinking nature and land as female, Kolodny argues, has to be located in early promotional tracts that aimed at attracting settlers to the new world (4). These promotional tracts fostered a belief in a paradise on earth and naturally fertile land that just needed to be claimed. The idea of a fantasy becoming everyday reality found its expression in the “uniquely American pastoral vocabulary” that had as its basis the idea of the landscape as feminine (Kolodny 8). Kolodny analyzes this language in her work and shows how it indeed became part of everyday life. She suggests that the reason for the American pastoral’s adaption to everyday life was a need of the settlers to perceive of the land as welcoming and nurturing to successfully conquer their fear of the unknown; they achieved this by “casting the stand of human relations” upon the land by viewing it as woman and mother (9). Untamed nature was perceived as a terrifying wilderness, and the dependence of the first settlers on natural resources transformed it into an arena where survival was contested (Merchant 27). The wilderness was seen as distinct from civilization, and a clear division between nature and culture was made. The settlers constructed their villages at the edge of the forest and surrounded them by fences “symbolizing the demarcation between the wilderness outside and their own identity and central community inside” (27). The task of the settler, then, was to tame nature in order to turn the wild terrain into fertile ground (Stein 1). Early Americans, Stein argues, saw nature and the land as vacant and in need of domestication by Europeans (5-6). Consequently, the new society growing on the newly tamed land was seen as “an incarnation of natural law” (Stein 6). In the course of this conception of nature and the land, the frontier and nature were feminized: As, in a biblical sense, humans were supposed to rule over nature and accommodate it according to their needs, nature was seen as passive and object to the settler’s desires (Stein 8-9, 16). In line with the pioneer protagonists being exclusively male, the landscape was eroticized, being pictured as a willing virgin, providing a womb for the new nation, offering open access to “her private bodily territories” (Stein 10). In this claim, Stein uses the spatial metaphor in a double image: the

territory as well as the female body representing it are seen as spaces inhabited by cultural ideology.

As, according to Kolodny, there is a "close correlation between what we say and how we act," nature is not only thought of as female by the first immigrants to the New World, but is essentially treated and experienced as such (149). Accordingly, the experiential reality of early settlers is expressed in a range of images specifying elements of that experience like eroticism, penetration, raping, embrace, enclosure, and nurture (Kolodny 150). Sexual and violent imagery was justified by the wild and dangerous temper of the land that had to be conquered by men (Stein 9). This tense relationship to the land is revealed by Kolodny who observes that in many letters, the transformation of the land is portrayed as a mutilation or even rape of the "generous maiden country" and generates feelings of betrayal, anger and guilt (7-8).

Such contradictory perceptions of the land and its gendered implications show that two notions of the landscape's femininity existed simultaneously: the image of nature as a nurturing, welcoming and generous mother that gives birth to a new nation and embraces the American people as her children, on the one hand, and on the other hand, the seductive, savage virgin that had to be tamed and owned to be transformed into fertile ground and a reproductive womb. Both images were equally strong, and the accusation of incestuous violation of "a generous mother raped and violated by her own children" suggested itself, as the land, characterized as sexually accessible, was worked with plough and spade by the farmer (Kolodny 14). The relationship of farmers with their land was thus perceived as very intimate and delicate. The farmer is idealized and called "husbandman" or "freeman" in many early accounts, and an "almost erotic intimacy in the bond of man and soil" can be observed (Kolodny 27). Kolodny identifies a tension between the urge to return to the maternal landscape and the wish to master and take influence on the female land (27). This becomes evident in the range of literary pastoral expressions between intimacy, reciprocity and destructive behavior. The pastoral thus forces a paradox onto the farmers: if one wanted to work the fields, this could only happen at the cost of "emotional and psychological separation" from Mother Nature (Kolodny 28). In accounts on mining, the sexual imagery of an exploited nature is expressed even more radically: the ground is understood to be "impregnated" with natural resources, and the mining is a continuous penetration, destroying the once fertile ground ceaselessly (Kolodny 29).

It becomes clear that the images of a naturally fertile land of abundance were strongly engraved into the settlers' minds when Kolodny stresses that in the early colonies, even prevailing problems as starvation, poor harvest and difficult weather conditions did not alter the view of nature and the land as produced in the promotional tracts (6). As Westling reports,

about half of the settlers to both Jamestown and Plymouth died of diseases and starvation within the first year (34). However, instead of the idealized vision of a Garden Eden, the farmers were blamed for their reluctance to engage in hard labor. But not just the unwillingness of the "soft, slack" farmers to cultivate their land properly was seen as the cause for the difficulties many colonies faced, but some locate the root of their failure in the character of the land itself: the abundance the land offered was perceived as "virtually suffocating, a paralyzing superfluity": "the source of this evil condition is the lush green land itself", and the " undemanding generosity" of the Virgin Land "invites her human children" to violate her (Kolodny 15). The pastoral, therefore, did not only legitimate the settlement and cultivation of the land, but also bore psychological dangers: "[the] pastoral in America was not only a habit of mind, but also, a habit of action" (Kolodny 16). According to the at the popular time Kantian theory of perception, the imagery of the landscape penetrates the mind, thereby creating a " new consciousness, the American 'philosophy,'" as Marx puts it, that could manifest itself both in positive and negative ways (110).[3] Similarly, Kolodny links the use of a certain language and metaphors directly to the concrete everyday experience of the landscape and the interactions with the soil. She therefore ascribes constitutional power to the early settlers' way of thinking about nature (Kolodny 16). According to Kolodny, even today American national identity is built on the pastoral idea of rebirth "within the bosom of a maternal landscape" where people from different national heritage are living harmoniously side by side as a "primal family" and where they form a "new race of men" and a new nation (26-7). Consequently, to conserve the democratic and egalitarian idea of the families on small farms working side by side, superior large-scale farming was not promoted in the U.S for a long time.

2.1.2 American Politics and the Vision of a Pastoral Society

The almost infinite availability of arable land and the potential of wealth on a scale never before imaginable became subject to political and economic theory from early on. Already in the early days of settlement, diverging visions existed about how America could come to the importance of an empire: one idea was that America would take command over the sea, and the other visualized a large society populating an entire continent. The two visions required two different economic models, one being based on trade and manufactures, the other one on an increase of the population as a result of agricultural expansion (Smith 12).[4] Even when the colonies were still under the rule of the crown, Benjamin Franklin recognized the importance of North America for the development of the British power and anticipated America's future with great accuracy (see Smith 6). Agriculture, he was convinced, would constitute America's main economic form for a very long time, and as an agrarian he studied its development closely. Birth rates in the colonies, he realized, were significantly higher than in Europe, and he

estimated the American population to double every twenty years. The consequences of this increase in population were that the colonies would outgrow England, making a centralization of power in Europe unpractical (Smith 7). By 1774 the idea of America becoming the seat of the English empire was already widespread in England (see Smith 8). After the independence, the agrarian social theory Franklin had contemplated on from the 1750ies onward gained prominence (Smith 125). The theory of a new society employed as its premises two connections between the people and the land: according to the first premise, every man had a natural right to his own land, and secondly, the labor invested in cultivating one's own land entitled the farmers to righteous ownership of their land, which granted them independence, social status, dignity, virtue and happiness (Smith 126). Furthermore, Franklin's contemporaries imagined three divisions within their future society according to the state of Westward expansion: in the West the backwoods settlements at the fringe between wilderness and civilization, the prosperous farms in the middle regions, and to the East cities of growing wealth and commerce (see Smith 126-7).

Marx identifies Thomas Jefferson, who later became the third president of the United States, as a promoter and disciple of the pastoral idea and follower of Franklin.[5] By 1785, when Jefferson wrote his *Notes on Virginia*, the American pastoral ideal had become an overall accepted and absorbed ideology in the New World (Marx 88). Jefferson, Marx argues, is often falsely identified as an agrarian, whereas in effect he did not support an economy based on agriculture based on monetary reflections as Franklin did, but because he believed that small-scaled farming on largely self-supporting family-sized farms were the key to a moral and virtuous life (Marx 126-7). The coupling of moral stands with a rural lifestyle, of course, is exactly what lies at the core of the pastoral ideal. In tune with a pastoral conviction, Jefferson argues against the establishment of manufactures in America and prefers the shipment of raw material to Europe and, in turn, the importation of refined product despite financial absurdity. In his *Notes on Virginia,* he clearly links the mode of production to a people's moral character:

> … but, generally speaking, the proportion which the aggregate of the other classes of citizens bears in any state to that of its husbandmen, is the proportion of its unsound to its healthy parts, and is a good enough barometer whereby to measure its degree of corruption. While we have the land then, let us never wish to see our citizens occupied at a workbench, or twirling a distaff. … but, for the general operation of manufacture, let our work-shops remain in Europe. It is better to carry provisions and materials to workmen there, than bring them to the provisions and materials, and with them their manners and principles. *(Jefferson "Query" XIX)*

What Jefferson envisions for America is a classless society of landowners "free from the tyranny of the market" (Marx 127). This view demonstrates that the pastoral serves to develop

and support a “theory of society” (Marx 4). Marx argues that this was already the case in antiquity in Virgilian poetry, where the pastoral followed political purposes, as it served to reconcile the tensions between the rich and the poor by letting a simple shepherd talk sophisticatedly, thus “combining the best of both worlds” (Marx 129). In its American version, the pastoral advocates a classless society which is independent from the demands of the marketplace. During the eighteenth century, negative aspects of civilization are similarly questioned, and the farmer′s prestige increases creating a cult figure (Marx 98, 101). The American pastoral highlights the contrast between the free American farmer and the dependent European workman bound to the manufacturers and constrained by class affiliations. The farmer who cultivates the land represents a “middle state” reconciling the stark contrast between the American wilderness with its “savage” native population and the civilized early industrial societies in Europe (Marx 102). The ideal position of the American farmer between those extremes represents the idea that man, in order to be recognized as human, has to depart from nature, but that he should nevertheless maintain a harmonious relationship to the land and not depart too far from his origins in order to achieve virtue.[6]

Evidently, the land in Jefferson’s pastoral idea is not merely a physical space fit for agriculture but functions as a metaphor: The American land is a “*landscape* – an image in the mind that represents aesthetic, moral, political, and even religious values” (Marx 128. Italics in original). The effect of the pastoral on the conception of “real life” becomes visible when Jefferson uses images of an idealized rural life stemming from a literary tradition to refer to supposedly real life conditions. According to Smith, the influence of pastoral imagery on the imagination was so significant that the settlers who looked at the American landscape and wrote down their impressions could only do so “through a haze of rhetoric” (131). This initiated the emergence of a “new pastoral idiom” which stressed the view of the landscape as a space for regeneration and offered the possibility of a “‘resurrection’” of a new society living in equality rooted in nature and agriculture Jefferson uses in his texts (Marx 111). When Jefferson wrote his *Notes on Virginia*, ninety percent of the American population still consisted of farmers, and industrialization did not occur before an additional fifty years (Marx 115). Jefferson’s utopia of a classless nation in harmony with nature thus did not seem pure myth to his contemporaries. The landscape was perceived as a space of possibility, a potential Garden of Eden, and the dream of a virtuous rural society was a collective ideal, a “mode of belief” that offered the basis for a new “theory of society” as Jefferson was advocating it (Marx 142-3).

2.1.3 The Puritan View of Nature

In New England, where the Puritans had settled, the feminine landscape was not perceived as overflowing with riches as in the South, but the emphasis was laid on the need of hard labor in

order to elicit sufficient aliment. Promotional tracts of the time mention the pleasures the fruitful land holds almost synonymously to the work needed to achieve it: man can find fulfillment in cultivating his own ground, planting vines, taking care of his own herb garden... (Kolodny 20-21). Nature was perceived as naked when untamed, and the need to dress is by transforming it into a "beautiful and prosperous garden" is highlighted in many such tracts (Kolodny 21). Contrary to the perception of nature in the South, the Puritans understood the wilderness as the opposite to the Garden of Eden. In fact, it was often associated with the realm of Satan (Westling 35). The Puritans identified with Adam and Eve who were driven out of paradise into wilderness and now had to labor to transform this wilderness into a garden (Merchant 35).[7] They saw the cultivation of the land as an allegory to the purification of the soul and, thus, transformed the labor on the land and its subordination into a religious experience (Merchant 35). The Genesis[8] provided them with a legitimate "mandate from God giving them dominion over the earth"(Merchant 28). In addition to Adam and Eve, the Puritans also identified themselves with the Hebrews who spent forty years in the desert in search for the Promised Land (Merchant 28). Even though nature was admired for its ability to renew itself each year, it was humanity that was linked to immortality, not the land. When the Pilgrims and Puritans arrived, they perceived the wilderness as terrifying, as it challenged their survival. To protect themselves from the dangers of wild nature, the Puritans built fences around their settlements, creating a clear demarcation line (Merchant 27). Individual ownership and privacy were emphasized by additional fences around each house.

The Puritans transformed the land on which they lived and farmed considerably. The settlers adopted the Indian corn, beans, squash and pumpkin polyculture and added wheat, rye, oats and barley from Europe. They also imported pigs, cattle, goats and oxen to the New World. The cattle transformed the ecological nature of New England, as it relayed on meadows for food (Merchant 29). By the early eighteenth century, the wind could roam New England's landscapes freely, as timber had been cut down, and the air had become less moist and the hillsides drier, which caused erosions and, consequently, drove out animals such as beavers, otters, bears and foxes as well as birds, and diminished the variety of flowers (Merchant 31). Tin addition, the settlers drained marshes and river ponds, robbing fish of their natural habitat. As Merchant summarizes, "[t]he forest was a vastly different place than that occupied one hundred years earlier by Indians" (31).

Accordingly, the perception of nature and wilderness shifted from a savage place to a sublime place between 1600 and 1850. By the end of the eighteenth century, ideas of the sublime first introduced by Edmund Burke in England became widespread (Merchant 35). Phenomena and manifestations of nature were now seen as beautiful and "manifestations of God's goodness" (Merchant 35). The sublime as a religious experience and the idea of nature

as a cathedral, temple, and Bible were expressed in literature of the romantic period. The devil did not occupy nature any more, as it had been the case in wilderness before (Merchant 35). In contrast, the Puritans believed that nature provided evidence of God's design, and therefore, they promoted the study of natural systems such as geology and astronomy (Stein 25). Nature thus became a transcendental screen for the supernatural. As the wilderness began to disappear, Americans began to appreciate and romanticize it. The uncultivated terrain remaining besides horticulture was now reclaimed as 'wilderness' and declared as worthy of protection (36). Kolodny observes that by the eighteenth century, an awareness of the human impact on the world is prevalent in American literature, and a longing after a return to a lost childhood and a natural garden Eden is expressed (Kolodny 21). As Merchant shows in her introduction, the perception of the American wilderness changed from being a threat to the first settlers and the "home of the devil" to being identified as the "land of the sublime goodness and picturesque beauty" (Merchant 37).

2.1.4 Women and Nature as a Feminist Space

Women have been associated with this fertile ground for a long time, and, according to Stein, have been reduced to reproductive bodies, given the duty to give birth to the population of the new American nation just as nature and the new land were imagined as feminine by American settlers and perceived of as, on the one hand, nurturing mother, and on the other hand, savage virgin that had to be invaded, tamed and turned into fertile ground, (2-3). During the eighteenth century, the logical consequence of an association of women with nature was the idea that they, like the wilderness, had to be tamed and, therefore, should be kept away from the dangerous wild exterior world and confined to the domestic sphere (Stein 11). [9] Medical discourses embraced the connection between women and nature, and in the course of the nineteenth century, physicians increasingly considered women's physical and mental health to be delicate and fragile, subjected to the hormonal imbalances of their menstrual cycles and reproductive capacities (Smith-Rosenberg 23). "From puberty to menopause," Smith-Rosenberg asserts, "these [reproductive] processes established the reason and the rhythm of women's lives" (23). Women were deemed to be destined for reproduction, and women who remained childless, favored occupations outside the home, or who engaged in intellectual activities not only contravened the Cult of True Womanhood which linked women to the domestic sphere, but according to nineteenth-century medical discourses they endangered their health, as their idle reproductive organs would eventually turn against themselves, causing "cancer, insanity, and a wasting death" (Smith-Rosenberg 23). Accordingly, women's engagement with nature was seen as appropriate only as long as it was "properly feminine," such as flower painting, bird watching, and gardening (Stein 14-15). Dickinson's voluminous

herbarium containing specimens of a wide array of plants to be found in Amherst's forests and wetlands conforms to the standards for proper occupations for a nineteenth-century upper-class woman. Botany, in contrast to other scientific disciplines, was a subject women were permitted and advocated to study (Parks 8). Herbarium-making, an accepted pretext to venture beyond civilization, allowed the younger Dickinson to explore the natural environment of Amherst, but it did so in a systematized fashion, as her search for flowers and plants was aimed at categorizing them in the Linnean fashion. However, Parks points out, Dickinson's herbarium is not ordered according to a recognizable system, as she did not abide by the hierarchies and groups according to which Linnaeus had categorized the different species of plants and flowers (8). This fact and the unfathomable landscapes like the swamps Dickinson describes in her poetry, Parks concludes, suggest that to Dickinson "disorder was the pattern through which the natural world expressed its wilderness" (Parks 8).

Although Victorian England women were similarly restricted, the need to regulate a woman's relationship to nature was especially pronounced in America. Since the early 1800s, New England's wilderness had been transformed into domesticated farmland, and nature no longer represented a threat, and could therefore be idealized as a "tranquil garden" or even an "endangered Eden," and the frontier could be romanticized from the distance (Stein 24). As rural technologies advanced, white middle-class women were relocated within the house, as their labor in direct contact with the land was no longer needed. Therefore, the Victorian home and garden became a heavily gendered domain of the female. Dickinson's interest in horticulture and extensive gardening, including keeping a greenhouse, accordingly corresponded with her society's idea of proper female occupation (Stein 25).

Alaimo states that during the eighteenth century, "woman," reduced to her reproductive sexuality, was associated with nature and, consequently, excluded from the "domain of human subjectivity, rationality and agency" (2). The association with nature is repressive as it entails the reduction of those attributed with it to a diminutive status. Alaimo exposes the circular logic underlying this principle: even today, she asserts, women are seen as inferior to men because of their alleged closeness to nature, which per se is seen as inferior to culture and is associated with men. And women, Alaimo concludes the erroneous reasoning, are perceived as inferior to men because nature supposedly created them as such (3). Stein points towards the potential for racism and discrimination through the association of people – and she underscores her argument by exemplifying the discrimination of Native Americans – with nature and thus highlights the construction of the American wilderness as the antithesis to culture as a potential weapon for othering (19). Merchant follows in the same footsteps, emphasizing that the core of this exclusionary American concept was the pride for a nation that had "emerged from a wilderness in less than four centuries" and the idea of this wilderness as being empty, devoid

of culture and a threat to civilization (37). Wilderness as the contrast to civilization is thus identified as a deeply social and cultural construct that bears a precarious potential for discrimination and subordination.

Alaimo identifies several common strategies that feminists or feminist writers use to counter the inferiority/nature argument: One tactic is to strategically dissociate women and nature (Alaimo 7). However, this approach is ineffective, as it entails the perpetuation of the nature – culture dichotomy when feminists likewise deem nature inferior and try to associate women with culture instead (Alaimo 7). Ecofeminism, which does not dissociate women from nature but locates them firmly within it, according to Alaimo, does not provide a solution to the repression of women due to their alliance with the natural world either, as it reinforces the nature-culture dichotomy uncritically (9). In contrast, ecofeminism imagines nature as a space beyond the cultural, existing independently "as a realm untouched by the stalwart reach of patriarchial culture" (Alaimo 8). Instead of distancing women from nature, it focuses on their assumed ability to connect mind and body and to integrate themselves into the natural world (Alaimo 8). These unique female abilities, Ecofeminism maintains, represent a basis for the development of a more harmonious society (9). However, the uncritical embrace of nature as opposite to culture requires women to associate themselves with traditional female gender roles. Thereby, the fact is ignored that these roles are a product of ages of oppression (9). A poststructuralist vision of gender and nature, according to Alaimo, likewise conveys the danger of reasserting the nature– culture division, however: exactly because poststructuralism views culture as dynamic and ever-changing, it presumes its opposite, a realm governed by stasis, which Alaimo claims to be synonymous with nature (11). Thus, nature becomes a category outside the reach of poststructuralism: it signifies "a discursive vanishing frontier, a space of enabling alterity for the cultural or textual, a space that disappears with the approach of logos" (Alaimo 11). If we categorize nature as a realm outside of culture, Alaimo argues, every attempt to approach it by language inevitably fails (12). Although this space might enable the existence of an alternative cultural identity, it cannot be appropriated by feminist movements that want to contest the subordination of women and nature to culture, as speech and action is impossible from within a space that lies beyond culture. Every attempt to bring forth change thus has to arise from within the settings and discourses that produce the discriminating dichotomies of male/female and culture/nature.

A more promising strategy to counter the stigmatization of women and nature as inferior to men and culture is to argue that the female gender role is a social and cultural construct and that the association of women with nature and the assigned inferiority is likewise a construct that does not stand in any relationship to biological givens. The best approach to raise women's status in society, Alaimo agrees with Irigaray, is not to reject or correct the discourse

regarding nature, but to work from within it to dismantle its contradictions (7). This means that the constructed character of nature, which serves as a mirror and opposite to an ever-changing culture, must be emphasized in order to unravel its potential as an alternative space to dominant culture. Nature, then, provides a space for women to engage with and to appropriate for themselves. The contradictions inherit in a concept of nature that simultaneously serves as the negative of culture and society but houses women, who evidently are part of this society, offer a space for critique. Alaimo sees the potential the space of nature offers as the most effective means to counter the subordination of women:

> Nature" becomes the most pernicious and potent weapon when it is paradoxically both devoid of and overflowing with meaning … . Always oversaturated with meanings yet never pointing toward any particular meaning, nature serves to hold in place a multitude of other, always shifting meanings. (Alaimo 19)

Alaimo understands nature as a space of possibility, as it is simultaneously pictured as an empty place, lacking form, structure, or independent meaning, and as a space possessing cultural importance as the abject, which in turn allows for a multitude of interpretations and leaves room for a range of appropriations. Nature's status representing the abject, therefore, grants it the potential power to redefine or influence dominant discourses if its relationship to culture is exploited. Accordingly, Alaimo identifies nature's space as a paradoxical space that is constantly changing shape and allows for contradictory perspectives within the same frame.

To feminist theorists like Donna Haraway, the relationship between nature and culture is captured not only in spatial terms of exclusion and inclusion, but their link can be seen in terms of economical notions of production. According to a declaredly oversimplified perspective based on production, "[n]ature is only the raw material of culture, appropriated, preserved, enslaved, exalted, or otherwise made flexible for disposal by culture in the logic of capitalist colonialism" (Haraway "Situated" 592). This implies that nature is the stuff culture is made of, and that nature is passive while productive culture extracts, shapes and transforms anything that is available in the natural world to turn it into cultural matter. Sex and gender, Haraway adds, can be viewed in an analogous way: from that perspective, sex is a category that only makes sense because it is made meaningful by the concept of gender, which in turn feeds its assumptions by highlighting sexual difference (Haraway "Situated" 592). However, Haraway warns, this approach entails the danger of conceding to an "appropriationist logic of domination" ("Situated" 592). A concept that categorizes entities like nature and culture according to economic principles of resources and production is not only reductive but reiterates the passive/active dichotomy, bestowing culture and gender dominant power and objectifying nature and sex instead of picturing them as active agents within their own contexts ("Situated" 592). In opposition, Haraway pleads for a model of nature and culture or sex and

gender that is based on “conversation” instead of a one-way model of exploitation, and recognizes the complexity of reality as a “heterogeneous whole” that does not simply wait to be interpreted: “The world neither speaks itself nor disappears in favor of a master decoder” (Haraway “Situated” 593). This view both grants nature an autonomous existence and meaning and acknowledges its relationship to culture as constructive.

For Dickinson’s female contemporaries, the image of nature drawn in pastoral literature was appealing nevertheless, despite its negative connotations including colonialist, racist and misogynist dispositions (Alaimo 18). The focus on its positive aspects regarding nature, Alaimo maintains, allow femaled authors to adopt it as a discursive space as well as a space off this same discourse, permitting the formation and expression of alternative ideas about female identity and nature (17). In American literature, Alaimo specifies, the pastoral has an ideological character, and focusing on nature’s democratic values and function as the “conscience of culture” offered especially women room for progressive thought (18). In the pastoral, nature becomes an “imaginative space for equality and freedom” (Alaimo 18). The positive aspects our concepts of nature offer can be used to guide conceptions of gender: “Feminist conceptions of nature do not stand outside of dominant cultural views; they stage dialogues, protests, and contests for the meaning of ‘nature’ and the ‘natural,’” Alaimo states, and emphasizes the impossibility to appropriate nature for feminist purposes without relating to the existing prevalent discourses (21).

Dickinson employs several of the outlined strategies when talking about nature. She does not construct a completely new space outside of all conventional connotations, but moves within them, emphasizing positive aspects and revealing or satirizing disturbing associations. In Stein’s opinion, Dickinson identified with mysterious female powers associated with nature to escape the confinement of the Victorian domesticity (19). Alaimo, too, emphasizes nature’s potential for signifying a realm outside of the domestic which has not been tamed, and she thus identifies it as a space for escape and rebellion (16). In the case of Dickinson, I believe, the focus is rather on the reconstruction of a positive female image of nature and the emphasis on cultural (de)construction of the paradigm rather than rebellion. Even if pictured as outside of culture, nature and natural landscapes are never innocent, but communicate a “specific moral agenda” to the reader or viewer as well as to the poem’s figures who move within it (Dowler 7): morality, understood as “an act of transgression of or obedience to moral codes” is highlighted in many Dickinson poems featuring speakers who venture beyond civilization’s confines into wilderness, especially bogs and swamps, revealing transgression into nature to be related to gender (Dowler 7). Even though nature may offer an alternative space beyond dominant culture, power and control are still exercised via issues regulating access (Dowler 7). Dickinson, I maintain, challenges the nature – culture dichotomy by creating a space within

nature through writing much as Heydt describes it: Heydt emphasizes nature's construction in culture, bridging the apparent discrepancy between experience and writing, claiming that the fact that writers experience landscapes and record that experience in written form is an act that transforms and structures the constructed nature: By writing their landscapes, authors "build a human place within it" (Heydt 4).[10] My aim for the following analysis is to exemplify the specific way Dickinson chooses to create a room for her female self within a nature that seems simultaneously paradoxically empty and culturally over-determined.

2.2 Exploration of the Space of Nature in Dickinson's Poetry

Dickinson's usage of the trope of nature is manifold: A multitude of poems are set in nature, at the brink between domestic space and the wilderness which lies beyond, or contain objects or animals that are associated with nature. Yet other poems personify nature, bestowing it autonomous power or alluding to the gendering and erotization of nature Dickinson's culture was engaged with. In my analysis, I first look at poems that clarify how Dickinson defined the realm of nature and how she positioned herself as a poet towards it, negotiating discourses of her contemporary poets who describe the relationship between the poet, nature, the transcendental and the role of poetry. The poems criticizing religious maxims further evaluate this relationship. The gendering of nature and her personification both resonate in Dickinson's poetry with Mother Nature, foregrounding an association of nurturing at one end, and as object of an eroticized gaze and desire at the other end of the spectrum. Dickinson playfully deconstructs the stereotyped view of nature as maternal personification or projection of the wish to conquer and tame the wilderness called Virgin Land. My analysis mainly draws from Stein who shows in *Shifting the Ground* (1997) how in Dickinson, the understanding of womanhood and nature are interrelated, how her time determined those concepts reciprocally and how Dickinson reconstructs the space of nature as a space of possibility that questions Victorian notions of gendered space. Dickinson often draws on the concept of wilderness as the opposite of culture and civilization, locating scenes of transgression, often linked to gendered concepts of morality, in nature or at the brink between cultivated and untamed landscapes. This allows her, I claim, to voice tabooed topics like sexuality, and to criticize the limitation of women to the sphere of the house founded on the perceived vulnerability of women out in nature acuminated in the threat of sexual violation. I especially focus on poems describing positive and negative erotic experiences here, and discuss the (gendered) inaccessibility to such erotic spaces and the vulnerability of the female protagonists who venture beyond the cultural realm, risking the impending dangers of violation. Finally, I show how Dickinson cleverly relocates relationships between men and women from culture into

nature and how she uses presumingly rigid natural forces like gravity and gendered ascriptions to natural phenomena as metaphors for the hierarchies between men and women only to deconstruct them in favour of a progressive, dynamic model of gender and power.

2.2.1 Definition and Identification: Nature and the Poet

About a fifth of Dickinson's poems can be classified as so called "definition poems" (Deppman 49). "Nature is what We see –" (F721) is one of them. In her definition poems, Dickinson tries to scrutinize the meaning of a word to find its essence. But instead of providing clearer meanings of words, she often arrives at opening up the spectrum of what is commonly associated with the term, or extracts the definition by exclusion, eliminating all the aspects that do not capture it. These definitional poems, Deppman insists, express Dickinson's "most focused and topical thinking" and reveal her "epistemological desire to delimit and express important areas of experience" (49). But Dickinson's aim is not to render thinking easier. On the contrary, many of her definition poems evade direct characterization, either avoiding it by using a negative strategy, or by refusing to name the subject of the poem, thereby creating a defamiliarizing effect (Leonard 20). Leiter characterizes this strategy as a teasing of the reader who anticipates a certain clarity in a definition but is left with the insight that there might be "a second complex reality behind the first" (147). "Nature is what We see –," (F721) she observes, provides deviating voices adding complexity to the attempt of defining nature (Leiter 147):

F721

"Nature" is what We see –
The Hill – the Afternoon –
Squirrel – Eclipse – the Bumble bee –
Nay – Nature is Heaven –

"Nature" is what We hear –
The Bobolink – the Sea –
Thunder – the Cricket –
Nay – Nature is Harmony[11] –

"Nature" is what We know –
But have no Art to say –
So impotent our Wisdom is
To Her Sincerity –

Nature is first defined as a visual experience, then auditory qualities come into play, and finally a cognitive definition is put forward. In stanzas one and two, contradictory voices label nature

once as “Heaven”, equalizing it with the supernatural, and once as “Harmony” or “Melody”, an alternative provided by Dickinson for this line (Ch. Anderson 93). Juhasz understands the poem and the competing voices as debating on whether “Nature” is a sensual or cognitive experience and locates it in our mind (*Undiscovered* 39). “Heaven” and “Harmony”, she argues, are no properties that can be directly perceived, but are the result of ordering and arrangement of perceptual input in the mind (Juhasz *Undiscovered* 39). Other critics such as Ch. Anderson and Weisbuch also center their analysis on the relationship between mind and nature: For Ch. Anderson, Dickinson’s last two lines express “ironic limitations on her ability to know” and the impenetrable character of nature that constitutes its remoteness from our realm of understanding (83). For Weisbuch, it is not nature’s remoteness that withdraws her from our comprehension, but “cognitive limitations” that Dickinson wilfully stresses in order to increase nature’s distance from the familiar (“Poetry” 68). I rather agree with Weisbuch, as I do not see evidence in this poem that nature is thought of as remote or inaccessible.“‘Nature’ is what We know -/ But have no Art to say –”suggests that nature is familiar. The verb ‘to know’ adds complexity to this seemingly simplistic statement, as it is ambiguous, containing both the meaning of knowing as experiencing and of capturing nature as a concept in the mind. Both experience and conceptualization in the mind make nature an intimate element of our lives, declaring nature to be an element that unites the experiential and cognitive levels of perception. The fact that we cannot transform our knowledge into language suggests that “Nature” defies articulation, and thus refuses to be defined and fixed, emphasizing the concepts elusiveness and fluidity. The second part of the last stanza puts this knowledge into perspective, as it is called “impotent.” Again, I consider this not to be a denial of our ability to perceive nature, but argue that Dickinson’s pronouncement of our “Wisdom” to be “impotent” in respect to nature is a declaration of “Her” independence and autonomy apart from human categories expressed in language. The last two lines thus reconnect with the beginnings of the first two stanzas that identify nature with objects and phenomena present in the natural world and reject the idea that nature is foremost a construct of our mind like “Heaven” and “Harmony.” Nature then exists on its own terms and independent from human perception.

In that respect, Dickinson shows no awareness of nature as a cultural construct. Rather, it expresses a desire to think of nature as something that exists apart from culture and the social realm, as the inability to transfer knowledge of and on nature into spoken language demonstrates.[12] As Juhasz summarizes, Dickinson does not deny the existence of a world out there (*Undiscovered* 39). In fact, Juhasz’s interpretation emphasizes the tension between the mind and nature that the poem creates: according to Juhasz, the poem plays off nature against the mind, as the mind is able to incorporate nature, while nature can adopt an “existence of its own and is not a projection of the mind” (*Undiscovered* 40).[13] This interpretation contradicts

my claim that Dickinson understands nature as a cultural construct. Nevertheless, I maintain exactly that: as many of Dickinson's poems suggest, we are not to draw quick conclusions. First, we are not to forget, and Juhasz also makes this point, that even though Dickinson portrays "Nature" as being outside the realm of language, her poem nevertheless constitutes an act of definition through language (*Undiscovered* 40). This corresponds to Haraway's argument that culture exploits nature as a resource in order to form the cultural realm ("Situated" 592). Thus, Culture produces itself from nature.

Furthermore, it is crucial to my argument that Dickinson identifies "Nature" as female when she talks of "Her Sincerity." "Nature" is thus personified and gendered. Both acts, the personification and the gendering, are cultural constructions that do not have any constitutional correspondence in the exterior world. The personification contrasts the fractural elements of nature listed in the first two stanzas:

> The Hill – the Afternoon –
> Squirrel – Eclipse – the Bumble bee –

and

> The Bobolink – the Sea –
> Thunder – the Cricket –

The poem describes "Nature" as consisting of parts, as fragmented and multiple. When the poet chooses to personify "Nature" and engender "Her," she unifies and superimposes an abstract wholeness to a phenomenon that she earlier characterized as consisting of numerous elements differing from each other in size, concreteness, stasis or flexibility, temporality and animation. The plurality of the natural phenomena mentioned, I argue, are not coincidental and create a tension between the personification of the last two lines and the listings as well as within the first two stanzas, in which the listed animals and temporal, weather related and cosmic occurrences are countered by an interpretation of their concentrated effects.

The personification as well as the gendering of "Nature" in the concluding line are especially interesting as they combine the two aspects discussed earlier in the poem; perception and its interpretation. The effect of the personification and the claim of our mind's inadequacy compared to "Nature's" "Sincerity" first grants "Her" an autonomous and independent existence apart from the human realm. "Nature" exists on her own, on her own terms and cannot be altered by our approach to her. Of course, it is exactly the personification which makes the concept of an autonomous nature thinkable. The question the poem poses is not, as Juhasz rightly observes, about what nature is, but about what nature means (*Undiscovered* 39). Although the poem refuses a final definition of "Nature," it superimposes an understanding of the term as unified, abstracted and thus definable. "Nature" is thus always already a construct according to Dickinson, and her concept corresponds to Bulter's, who

denies the possibility of access to a 'pure' reality that is preceding and located somewhere outside of discourse (*Bodies* 8).

The spontaneity and implicitness with which the personified "Nature" is gendered female indicates how deep-rooted the equation of nature with femininity is in culture and in language use. The construct is so familiar to the reader that it does not need an explanation. The scope Dickinson grants feminized nature in this poem is especially interesting: According to Leiter, Dickinson alludes to nature's "varied magnitudes" when moving "from the small to the cosmic and back to the small" when first introducing the squirrel, expanding to an eclipse and returning to a bumble bee in line three (148). The same shift in dimensions appears in line six and seven where the vast sea and the threatening thunder are linked to the small and familiar bobolink and cricket. These examples illustrate Dickinson's understanding of nature as consisting simultaneously of the very big and the very small, reaching out to the skies and the universe and including the dimension of time, as the "Afternoon" in line two attests. The "Afternoon" as well as the "Eclipse" bring in planetary movements and light conditions, widening nature's scope further. Dickinson extends nature's scope to the cosmic and inaccessible without declaring it remote, as she associates it with the "homey" squirrel, bobolink and croquet as well as with cosmic events (Leiter 148). Thereby, Dickinson pictures a female independent authority that exceeds our understanding of magnitude and still contains the tiniest being, representing a feminine character that cannot be measured, catalogued or defined and consequently cannot be tamed, as the American myth of the wilderness prescribes. It is a feminine authority that requires our admiration and awe.

How Dickinson relates to this nature incorporating the huge and the small, the familiar and the inaccessible is illuminated in "This is my letter to the world" (F519), where Dickinson's speaker clearly associates with nature, thereby empowering herself:

F519

This is my letter to the World
That never wrote to Me –
The simple News that Nature told –
With tender Majesty

Her Message is committed
To Hands I cannot see –
For love of Her – Sweet – countrymen –
Judge tenderly – of Me

Dickinson grants nature "Majesty," thus freeing it from passive and subordinate femininity. She also claims that nature tells her own news, and is not a mere medium of God,

as is the case in transcendentalism. In Dickinson's poem, nature is not limited to communicate the truth that God projects via nature to the poet. The poem thus denies God's dominance over nature and gives it an autonomous status: "Dickinson wittingly replaces God's logos with nature's 'News,' reversing standard gender roles" (Stein 35). The writer and "Nature" overlap in the poem, allowing for a "reciprocal and fluid identification" "based on their shared gender" which abandons common hierarchies (Stein 36). The poet is the direct messenger of the " News" that "Nature" reveals to her. The speaker, associating with nature and declaring to be nature's spokeswoman, claims authority for herself and elevates nature above God.

The poem is provocative in two senses: the independent and active position Dickinson grants nature in her poem denies God's power over matter, and the fact that nature speaks and that the speaker of the poem associates with it contradicts the Romantic notion that poets should be men. Poets like Wordsworth and Coleridge, but especially Emerson, Homans writes, elevate the poet to a status parallel to God's: poetry, in this view, is divine, and the male poet therefore the creator of this divinity (*Women* 31). Emerson defines the poet's position as at the center of beauty, not subordinate to God, but active creator alongside him:

> The poet is the sayer, the namer, and represents beauty. He is a sovereign, and stands on [sic] the centre. For the world is not painted or adorned, but is from the beginning beautiful; and God has not made some beautiful things, but Beauty is the creator of the universe. Therefore, the poet is not any permissive potentate, but is emperor in his own right. (Emerson vol.III: 8)

The poet names the world's beauty and thereby makes it accessible to humanity.
The poet as "namer" is paralleled with Adam in the Genesis, Homans points out, where Adam is given the privilege to name the animals (*Women* 30). Only Adam converses with God, while Eve never hears his voice but is associated with the serpent, the Fall of humankind, and sin (Homans *Women* 30-31). Her word therefore is to be considered a lie and is consequently unfit for the public world (Homans *Women* 31). The idea that the poet should be male thus has its roots in the Old Testament, and Emerson's definition of the poet draws on this tradition that assigns men the power to speak and to create poetry that reflects divine powers, while women are unfit for the task. But not only religious traditions would impede the association of women with poetry making, but also nineteenth-century medical discourses declaring women to be victims of their reproductive system and to possess a frail health, denying them any control over their bodies and deeming them unsuited as serious poets (Smith-Rosenberg 23). Crumbly shows the role of medical discourses in debates about women author's copyright, highlighting that the notion that women were incapable of original creation was rooted in medical theories asserting women's lack of control over their own bodies (Winds 177). At the time, privacy was understood as a precondition for the production of poetry, but women, who had to rely on

physicians to interpret their bodies, could not meet that requirement, and could thus never be genuine poets (Crumbly *Winds* 177).

When Dickinson writes a poetic "letter to the World," implying the speaker to be herself, confederating with female nature and claiming poetic authority, she transgresses the prerogatives of religious, medical and literary discourses at the same time. When she commits her poetry "To hands I cannot see –", implying that her poetry may be handed on beyond her reach and possibly to future generations, this defies the Victorian ideal of womanhood committing women to modesty and public invisibility. The strategy of associating with nature not only grants the speaker herself authority and significance, but allows her to address the public boldly and even to estimate the influence of her "News" to continue after her death.

According to Crumbly, Dickinson aims in her poetry at heightening her (female) readers ' awareness of the constructed nature of gender associations and preconceptions about women's physical constitution in order to make room for alternative perceptions: "One of Dickinson's chief aims was to clarify the extent that the public perception of the female body was itself a cultural creation and that woman readers had to begin questioning broadly held cultural assumptions about female nature if they were to begin imagining forms of female experience not dictated by cultural precedent" (Crumbly *Winds* 174).

In the last two lines of "This is my letter to the World" (F519), the tone of the poem changes drastically: When begging her contemporaries to "Judge tenderly" of her, the speaker takes on a humble, typically female position. This position seems unmotivated now that the speaker has risen to an empowered status, and thus mocks and satirizes common gendered behavior. It is typical of Dickinson to play with conventions while transgressing and maintaining them at the same time, thus drawing attention to their limits and abusing them with an empowering effect. Leiter calls this strategy Dickinson's "characteristic mixture of self-effacement and grandiosity" (206). The humble position the speaker takes on in the last two lines, I believe, serves to reintegrate her into her contemporaries' cultural framework. As a poet, and especially as one unknown to the public, as the speaker in "This is my letter to the world" maintains to be, the criticism and approval of her readers are crucial for her success, particularly if future generations are supposed to appreciate her poetry. Of course, Dickinson was not completely unknown during her lifetime: Even if all but a handful of her poems were only published posthumously, the poems that did circulate in print reach a substantial number of readers (Dandurand 255). Many of Dickinson's poems were read and commented on by her correspondents, among which the most important were her lifelong intimate friend Susan Dickinson, the editor, author and political activist Thomas Wentworth Higginson and the editor Samuel Bowels (Dandurand 260).

The humble pose functions similarly in the last two lines as in the first two lines, and we need to read them in a similar manner: they serve as a damper to the extraordinary claims they frame. The poet thus speaks from two positions simultaneously: from a place elevated above everybody else, including God, acting as Nature's "direct and universal conduit," and from a position looking up to her contemporaries, asking for acceptance (see also Leiter 206). The shifting perspective from the insignificant to the extravagant and back to the subordinate does not weaken the poem's demands for authority, however. The shifts are exactly the means that allow Dickinson to perform such a claim without having to face the sanctions it entails. This represent a strategy to maintain the female identification without having to either fully incorporate traditional gender associations or having to abandon everything non-male.

I find it highly interesting that in fascicle 24, as Franklin writes, the last two lines are split into three (Dickinson 1998: 528):

> For love of Her – Sweet – country –
> men –
> Judge tenderly – of me

The fascicle version thus emphasizes "men" and besides reducing the speaker's critics to men and excluding women, a tension is created between nature's and the poet's female identification, the typically female humble voice the speaker uses, and the mighty men judging her poetry. The isolation of "men" as the only word in a single line explicitly addresses men, and not women. We can only speculate whether the speaker expects a more friendly judgement from women who share her gender, or their judgement is considered less important than men's. The isolation of "men" sharpens the contrast between them and the speaker, highlighting the unusual situation of a woman poet among men.

"This is my letter to the World" (F519) is an intriguing poem on many levels. The poem is representative of Dickinson's identification with nature and her self-definition as a poet. It offers an answer to Emerson's vision of the poet as interpreter of nature, creating meaning alongside God (Homans *Women* 31). Dickinson's nature is independent from God, and the female poet associating with nature is empowered. The space of identification nature offers is significant as it grants not only empowerment and authority, but also a certain independence and a means to negotiate her own terms within the framework of her culture's and gender's conventions. Nature, as opposed to religion or nineteenth-century culture that denies women a voice, lets the female poet speak and thus serves simultaneously as a mouthpiece and a stage for her poetry.

2.2.2 Resistance to Traditional Religion: Alternative Spirituality in Nature

The relationship between nature, religion, the poet's own reservation towards her contemporaries' beliefs, and the Church are recurring themes in Dickinson's poetry. Nature takes a special role in this contest with religion and signifies a space offering alternative views as well as a place of tensions between cultural and perceived religious and natural experiences. "Four Trees – opon a solitary Acre" (F778) reflects Dickinson's conception of nature as a space and as a realm existing outside of God's dominion:

F778

Four Trees – opon a solitary Acre –
Without Design
Or Order, or Apparent Action –
Maintain –

The Sun – opon a Morning meets them –
The Wind –
No nearer Neighbor – have they –
But God –

The Acre gives them – Place –
They – Him – Attention of Passer by –
Of Shadow, or of Squirrel, haply –
Or Boy –

What Deed is Their's onto the General Nature –
What Plan
They severally – retard – or further –
Unknown –

In this poem, Dickinson gives a portrait of a landscape, describing a space dominated by four trees arranged haphazardly. The trees' stasis is contrasted by the wind's and sun's mobility, passing them. The trees signify a fixed point of attention while time and weather are variable. The acre they are standing on serves as a stage, a frame for the trees, and in turn receives significance by granting the trees space. The acre is "solitary", which emphasizes its remoteness, possibly from human dwellings, possibly from other acres. The trees occupying the acre stand isolated from other trees or vegetation and this isolation is further emphasized by the acre's remoteness. The subject of remoteness and isolation is deliberated on further when God is introduced as the "neare[st] Neighbor" in the second stanza. But the remoteness and isolation is put into perspective in the third stanza when different lightening conditions occur and an animal and a child pass the trees. It is these beings' recognition that

acknowledges the acre's existence, not the neighborhood to God. God only features as an " Unknown" here, a reminder of a purpose although there is no purpose recognizable and in fact does not seem to exist. Dickinson is reflecting on the anticipation that everything is supposed to be part of a plan, and that every being and natural element is supposed to have a "Deed" as in Transcendentalism. Emerson defines nature as a "symbol of the spirit" and equalizes " natural facts and spiritual facts" (Emerson vol.I: 26).[14] Mayer suggests the poem to be read as an "existentialist manifesto" that reveals the absurdity of the human assumption that everything is supposed to be meaningful and to create coherence (275).[15]

Instead of offering us an explanation of the arrangement or encouraging a spiritual interpretation of the scene, Dickinson simply supplies a starkly geometrical visual experience: a horizontal space dominated by four vertical figures.[16] She offers us a view of the same scene progressing in time, featuring different weather and lightening conditions only disturbed by an occasional animal or human passer-by.[17] There is no change of angle, and there are no sounds described. The poem's aim seems to be the focus on visuality, making the point that it is the eye that catches and frames sceneries in nature, and the human mind looking for coherence in every spatial arrangement. What Dickinson hints at here corresponds to Rose's concept of 'landscape' as a unit only produced by the human eye ("Geography" 342). As a product of the human need to order input, to delineate it according to our visual field and to treat it as a totality, 'landscapes' are cultural constructs that reflect a certain mode of seeing (Rose "Geography" 344). Human perception, Rose insists, is therefore never neutral or objective (Rose " Geography" 344). As soon as we look at or try to describe or portrait a scene, we transform it into a landscape. Therefore, we do not have access to nature as something that does not convey meaning. Viewed according to Emerson's concept of nature as mediator between God and the poet, this phenomenon could be explained. Nature would then be speaking to the poet and impose a cultural reading of nature understood in the terms of 'landscape'. However, Dickinson's poem does not suggest that this is the way we are supposed to interpret the scene her poem provides. On the contrary, the visual input she transmits is one of haphazardness and purposelessness.

This poem, I suggest, invites us to consider natural scenery as a simply visual experience. A mental image is invoked. Nature is simply to be gazed at and appreciated in its appearance without forcing meaning unto it. In this poem, there is no wild or enchanting virgin, no medium for God, no Mother Nature. There is no instrumentalization, and the purposelessness of the arrangement is left unsolved. The "Unknown" at the end constitutes a gap that is meaningful. It points to the fact that we expect nature and landscapes to convey meaning, to signify in some sense. The unbiased gaze the poem requires of the reader is an uncommon one, one that we desire to resist. Yet, the message is simple: we are not used to

understanding natural scenery as empty of cultural meaning. In fact, we hardly succeed in the exercise of changing perspective as Dickinson suggests.

Mayer interprets the poem as “a declaration of the absurdity of the human habit of making meaning out of nothing, or, rather, out of something that does not speak to us” (275). She offers an alternative reading and points to the fact that in each reading, God’s place in nature is problematic. She focuses on the two ending lines of stanza two and the two beginning lines of stanza three, suggesting that the “Him” in stanza three is ambiguous, referring both to the acre and God in the last stanza. The second reading, she maintains, implies that it is God and the acre simultaneously that give place to the trees, and it is God who receives the attention of the passing beings (Mayer 275).[18] In this interpretation, an Emersonian view of the relationship between nature and God is presumed, the first symbolically representing the latter. However, the poem does not translate the symbol of the trees on the acre and does not function as the poet’s medium to tell the truth, as an Emersonian poetics demands. Even Mayer admits that the last stanza fails to explain God’s role in the pictured scene and denies the existence of purpose: The occurrence of God, Mayer explains, happens only as a contingency, a randomness and at most grants him an “off-stage presence” (275). This view of God and nature, Mayer maintains, is typical for Dickinson:

> … each of the God figures that Dickinson employs in her nature poems serve a similar function. None of them explains anything, but nudges us towards a more honest appraisal of the awkward fit that consciousness makes for us in the natural world. Rather than allowing an exit into some other, transcendent realm, the God and goddess figures function as projections of our fearful, loving, and incomplete connections to our own animal and distinctly human natures and to the non-human world that surrounds and sustains us. (Mayer 275)

Mayer’s comments not only clarify Dickinson’s understanding of the relationship between God and nature, but, as pointed out earlier, by labeling him an outsider to the natural world, Dickinson pictures nature as independent from God. Nature then is autonomous, and not governed or created by a sovereign. Of course, the assumption that there is a realm outside of God’s reach is provocative, denying God omnipresence and challenging the very definition of divine power. Barnstone answers the problem of God’s role in this poem differently, focusing on the term “Neighbor” in the second stanza, not placing him above or beyond nature, but beside it, on equal terms (106). By imagining nature and God on an equal level, Barnstone believes Dickinson creates a “horizontal and antihierarchical spiritual world” that allows for neighborly communication (106-7). Leiter offers an interesting interpretation of stanza one, informing us that a variant for “maintain” in line four is “Do reign”, definitely granting the “Acre ” and the “Trees” “a certain dignity and strength” (79).

With these statements in mind, it becomes clear that this poem tries to reconstruct the order of power. By delivering a picture of nature in apparent disorder, Dickinson distances herself from religious and Emersonian concepts of nature as subject to God and symbol of the divine that the poet has access to. Rather, she pictures nature as a realm on the same level as God with its own order that is not directly related to God nor dependent on the human eye to receive its meaning. Therefore, nature is self-sufficient and meaningless at the same time, finally representing nothing but the ultimate "Unknown." Dickinson is aware of our difficulty to think outside of conventions and our tendency to impose meaning on all phenomena in our surrounding world. Even just looking at a scene means appropriation, as we perceive visual input as framed and limited to our visual field, always fragmented. As easily as the poet earlier adopted and employed the feminization of 'Nature,' she now distances herself from the prevalent transcendentalism and especially Emerson's theory, renouncing any cultural meaning in nature, instead drawing our attention to our difficulty of refraining from reading the natural world as a meaningful structure that communicates to us as God's messenger like a text.

The poem was written when Dickinson was 31 years old, a year after she had stopped attending mass. Nevertheless Leiter suggests that "Some keep the Sabbath going to church" was in tune with popular taste and not perceived as provocative by Dickinson's contemporaries as it is among the few that were published during her lifetime (174). Dickinson obviously deemed it worthy to be included in the first poems she sent to her future mentor Thomas Wentworth Higginson who, after her death, published it in collaboration with Mabel Loomis Todd in the 1890 *Poems* edition (Leiter 174). Leiter explains the poem's contemporaneous adequacy with the "new antebellum religious style" that emerged during the time, allowing humour, imagination and diverting narratives in sermons (174-5). Dickinson was familiar with the movement, as she frequently corresponded with Reverend Charles Wadsworth who preached according to the new style (see Leiter 175).

The relationship between nature and religion is explored in "Some keep the Sabbath going to Church -" (F236). The poem questions the practice of churchgoing, arguing that worship is not dependent on a place or the structural site of a church, but that "staying at Home" equally allows for a celebration of the "Sabbath," and that an "Orchard" is an equally spiritual place as any "Dome." This poem makes a comparison between religion practiced in churches and dominated by rituals and a religion rooted in nature. Dickinson clearly opts for the second one, declaring nature the proper space for worship. Apart from Dickinson's clear rejection of the church and conservative Puritan thought in this poem, references to the space of nature and the space of home as well as the poet's negation of an afterlife in heaven deserve close attention:

F236

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.

The poem is set in the familiar space of the home. But even though it is set in the domestic, private realm, it does not take place in a built structure, but a garden, or, as the poem explicitly states, in the even larger and wider space of an orchard. The sermon the poem describes takes place in nature, and thus forms an even sharper contrast to sermons held in churches, buildings that are characterized by their height, dimness and coolness. The animal world is ever present in the poem's sermon, not reducing worship to a strictly human business. The fact that in "Some keep the Sabbath going to Church —," God's word is transmitted into song, not words, is crucial. The sermon's melodic quality is foregrounded here, turning the perception of the sermon more into a meditative and sensual experience than an authoritative instruction based on content. God's word is not uttered at all, strictly speaking, just the sounds of the natural world are omnipresent, and a minister who translates God's messages is not needed.

In stanza two, the speaker wears "Wings," identifying with the singing birds, but of course also alluding to the wings of an angle, implying an affiliation to the divine world. The identification with the songbirds also implies that the speaker transmits God's "word" alongside with the birds, which suggests an association of the speaker as poet with a divine messenger, a role otherwise reserved to angels or priests. This view corresponds to Emerson's notion of the poet as especially sensitive to nature's transcendental qualities and functioning as an interpreter with a mandate from God. However, the poem does not declare that the ability to perceive God trough nature and to interpret phenomena in the natural world like birdsong as worship is limited to poets. The poem explicitly states that "Some keep the Sabbath going to Church –," but not all, implying that there are other ways of "keep[ing] Sabbath," and that the speaker's choice to stay at home is just one among many. In contrast to the previous poem,

Dickinson stays in tune with Emersonian thought here, and seems to use the omnipresence of transcendental meaning as an argument against church-going.

However, the critique voiced in “Some keep the Sabbath going to Church –” is not limited to practices of worship and the question of accessibility to transcendental truth, but extends to the next world: The last stanza contains a provocation in the last two lines, the speaker declining an afterlife in “Heaven” in favor of an enduring existence at “Home” or in the “Orchard”. The final line “I’m going, all along” is ambiguous as it suggests on the one hand that the speaker is going on without end, implying eternal continuation, and on the other hand alludes to the verb “to get along”, denying any contradiction to dominant discourses. Both readings are fruitful. The second implication has to be understood in connection to the new antebellum religious style, relocating worship from the strict setting of a church to everyday places and granting each individual the authority to communicate with God directly, omitting the minister. The implication to eternal continuation rejects a concept of time as linear, as Western culture primarily perceives it, and alludes to cyclical or circular time, as we observe it in nature.

If we consider the rejection of “Heaven” in the third line of the final stanza, we can read the poem in two ways: The first reading implies that there is no “Heaven” that is worth aspiring for, and the second suggests that nature, the “Orchard,” is the closest possible approximation to heaven and therefore replaces an afterlife beyond the physical world. The poem thus elevates nature to the divine sphere, granting it significance independent of the doctrine of any church. By locating nature and the “Orchard”, evidently not an untilled but a cultivated place, close to the home or even in the home, the poet blurs the lines between inside and outside, and domestic, civilized space dominated by humans and a seemingly uncultivated nature attributed to animals. “Some keep the Sabbath going to Church —” merges the “Home”, the everyday, and nature, declaring them to be spaces of sublime experience, claiming independence from religion and declaring their own significance.

Dickinson explores different spiritual possibilities in her poetry that are not centered on the traditional patriarchal tradition with a single male God to be worshipped deferentially. Nature, possessing a benevolent rather than demanding authority and associated with the female rather than the male gender, depends less on a hierarchical relationship to the worshipper than the traditional Christian God, and thus offers a space for an alternative, reciprocal spirituality. “Sweet Mountains – Ye tell Me no lie-” (F745) illuminates Dickinson’s understanding of religious devotion that eliminates the hierarchy between worshipper and worshipped. Transforming the distant single male God of the Christian tradition into several female “Madonnas” that are located in her more immediate surroundings allows Dickinson to decentralize faith and allows an encounter with the divine face to face.

F745

Sweet Mountains – Ye tell Me no lie –
Never deny Me – Never fly –
Those same unvarying Eyes
Turn on Me – When I fail – or feign,
Or take the Royal names in vain –
Their far – slow – Violet Gaze –

My Strong Madonnas – Cherish still –
The Wayward Nun – beneath the Hill –
Whose service – is to You –
Her latest Worship – When the Day
Fades from the Firmament away –
To lift Her Brows on You –

The poem stresses the alterity of both the speaker, who describes herself as "Wayward Nun," and the worshipped mountains which, "strong" as "Madonnas" "Never deny" and never lie. The relationship between the speaker and the godly mountains is different to traditional worshipping, as it is not one-directional, but the intensity and constancy are exhibited by both parties alike. Equality is stressed here: the nun looks at the mountains as they in turn look at her with the "same unvarying Eyes", and both seem to worship each other.[19] The gaze and communication is thus reciprocal (Stein 43). A change of perspective happens between the first and second stanza: we first see the mountains from the nun's perspective, and then the nun from the mountains'. The silent mountains do not require any special "service" of the "Nun," but remain permanently faithful to her, no matter what, tending to her with the "same unvarying Eyes" and "cherish[ing]" her at all times. In return, the speaker pays her respect to them by acknowledging their existence and admiring their sanctity. Acknowledgment and recognition are the proof of piety here, an act of religious commitment, as to Dickinson, Leiter explains, "perception itself is an act of devotion" (180). According to Leiter, the "Nun – beneath the Hill-" is a "figure of Jesus" who was renounced by his Apostles (179). As a female Jesus, " [s]he receives greater forbearance, greater forgiveness from the feminine Mountains than she would from the masculine, punishing Calvinist God" (Leiter 179). The mountains, in contrast to the "Royal names" of the holy Trinity are called upon "in vain," while the "Madonnas" remain favorable throughout. In contrast to the omnipotent God, Mayer argues, the sublime mountains do not promise protection and therefore cannot fail or "lie" (273). The role of the silent mountains, Mayer believes, is simply to be reflective (Mayer 273). Mayer's interpretation implies that, as the mountains are reflective, the speaker only sees herself when the "same unvarying Eyes" look at her, eliminating the power of the "Madonnas" and relocating sovereign

power solely with the speaker. Accordingly, Mayer represents a “static sublime” dependent on the acknowledgment of humans to gain power (273-4). Therefore, the “Madonnas[‘]” power is only a projection, and the existence of divine control is denied. However, I believe that the aim of “Sweet Mountains – Ye tell Me no lie-” (F745) is not on eliminating deific existence altogether, but to stress the independence of a godlike nature. The speaker recognizes this authority and independence in awe, and the personification of the mountains as “Madonnas” emphasize the spiritual character of the speaker’s devotion.

While the mountains, or the landscape containing the mountains, replace God, it is significant that Dickinson not only feminizes the divine and locates it in nature, but also pluralizes deity: there is not just one mountain but several, and there are many “Madonnas,” stating that the worship of nature cannot be translated into the Christian tradition easily: Dickinson does not simply transfer religious devotion and power from the masculine Christian God to another figure within this tradition, but proposes a different spiritual system that lacks hierarchy, multiplies authority, is rooted in nature and the immediate environment rather than a space beyond this world and time, and transgresses gender norms. By assigning divine power a female gender, Dickinson expands the scope of female control into the limitless.

2.2.3 Mother Nature: Extending the Realm of Female Authority

Dickinson′s nature poetry reflects not only on the relationship between God, nature and the poem and questions the hierarchies implied by that relationship, but also question gender roles and the limits that are posed on women. “Nature – the Gentlest Mother is,” (F741) summons up all the stereotypes that are associated with Victorian motherhood such as devotion, patience, gentleness, understanding, piety, moral integrity, domesticity, and fairness.[20]

F741:

Nature – the Gentlest Mother is,
Impatient of no Child –
The feeblest – or the Waywardest –
Her Admonition mild –

In Forest – and the Hill –
By Traveller – be heard –
Restraining Rampant Squirrel –
Or too impetuous Bird –

How fair Her Conversation-
A Summer Afternoon –
Her Household – Her Assembly –

And when the Sun go down –

Her Voice among the Aisles
Incite the timid prayer
Of the minutest Cricket –
The most unworthy Flower –

When all the Children sleep –
She turns as long away
As will suffice to light Her lamps –
Then bending from the Sky –

With infinite Affection –
And infiniter Care –
Her Golden finger on Her Lip –
Wills Silence – Everywhere –

"Nature - the Gentlest Mother is," (F741) according to Mayer offers a "childlike reverence" to a "nature goddess figure" (272). In contrast to the male cruel God described earlier, this nature goddess is benign despite of her power. Mayer interprets the Mother Nature that puts her children to sleep as a goddess bringing death: According to her view, there is a tension between the gentleness of the mother and her killing force (Mayer 272). This tension is annihilated by the fairness displayed in the poem, as death is democratic and the destiny of every living creature, without exception, as part of the ecosystem. According to Mayer this creates the "myth" that death is good and the gentle Mother Nature "trustworthy and benevolent by definition, 'good' because she is indiscriminate ..." (272). Mayer notices the lack of any humans as "children" of "Mother Nature," which emphasizes her independence from mankind, and identifies nature as a closed system that does not depend on human recognition.

It is interesting that Dickinson gives nature full authorial power, expressed in the ability to 'will' the world into silence and to tame wild squirrels and "impetuous Bird". Yet, Nature exercises power in an unconventional way: "Her" weapons are patience, affection and care. Dickinson thus invents a nature that takes control and does not leave room for untamed behaviors, but yet is not restrictive by using force; instead, nature uses a different strategy that does not rely on oppression. Dickinson pictures Mother Nature as a naturally sovereign figure worth to be worshipped without attributing "Her" with conventional markers of domination. As Stein puts it, nature provides Dickinson with a model for "autonomous, non-transcendental female power" (39).

But “Nature the gentlest Mother is” (F741) not only deifies nature and marks it as female, but by portraying it as idealized mother situates her within the domestic sphere, just as Victorian culture prescribes. The domestic and the natural realm are thus merged into one. From within this framework, Dickinson then extends the sphere of nature and simultaneously declares the reach of female domesticity to limitlessness, thus breaking up the confinement to the house, claiming “the reaches of nature, from earth to stars, as proper female realm” (Stein 39). Dickinson claims limitlessness for nature repeatedly, declaring nature’s “haunted house” to be “stranger yet” than we are able to imagine in “What mystery pervades a well!” (1433). Nature, Stein summarizes, is thus “finally an impenetrable and unknowable domain, eluding and riddling even those who ‘know her’” (51). Comparing nature to a house then “serves to dislodge Victorian gender ideology” and puts the naturalness of separate spheres based on gender into question:

> If we are ultimately estranged from nature’s house, what are we to make of our own houses and of the physical and social walls that both hem us in and lock us out?
>
> (Stein 51).

Dickinson thus rewrites “the reaches of nature as woman’s home”, making opposites between public and private, wild and domestic and female and male untenable within this new universe (Stein 40). As Stein concludes, Dickinson portrays nature as an “irrepressible, uncontainable and ultimately unknowable female whose freedom questions normative Victorian social boundaries” (47).This strategy not only empowers the feminized Mother Nature, but also enhances the status of women in general: Dickinson uses adjectives and characteristics typically associated with females and mothers favourably in “Nature the gentlest Mother is” (F741), deifying typically female characteristics and extending the space of female presence to the limitless.[21]

However, the personification occurring in this poem in order to assign nature and women power also creates problems. As Homans rightly observes, the personification of Mother Nature logically has the effect of estranging her from the natural world and elevating her above singular natural phenomena (*Women* 199).The flowers and animals described in the poem are thus reduced to objects dominated by a supreme powerful figure. The poem is therefore not effective in revising traditional highly hierarchized Christian religions in favour of a more equal order of the divine powers. According to Homans, the clash between “actual, unnameable nature” and personified nature is something Dickinson was aware of. The personification, Homans claims, has to be read as a declaration of the figure of Mother Nature as a human construct and Dickinson’s awareness of its creation as “only a fiction among other fictions” (*Women* 200). I attribute to Dickinson alertness not only to the definition of nature as the opposite of culture and its inevitable inclusion into the cultural realm, but also to the

problematics this entails. On an initial cursory reading “Mama never forgets her birds,” (F130) portrays an omniscient Mother Nature who lovingly cares about every single one of her “birds. ” At second sight, however, we realize that “Mama” might not be as benign as anticipated, but that her knowledgeability might have more sinister consequences:

F130

Mama never forgets her birds,
Though in another tree –
She looks down just as often
And just as tenderly
As when her little mortal nest
With cunning care she wove -
If either of her “sparrows fall,”
She “notices,” above.

The last three lines of the poem seem ambiguous to whether this “Mama” is benevolent or not. The loving care and devoted attention she displays not only imply safety and motherly attention, but also control and possible chastisement. The “cunning care” of the mother may reveal her character’s duplicity: the “’sparrows fall’” is set in quotation mark, implying that the poem is not about actual birds falling out of a nest, but referring to the Fall of humankind and thereby to human sinfulness, which the all-powerful figure above “’notices.’” The fact that “ Mama” only notices, but does not seem to help the fallen “bird,” also suggests that something is wrong here. A genuine motherly instinct demands instantaneous action when one of her young is in danger. Rather than portraying a benevolent and godlike Mother Nature, this poem thus refers to the traditional male Christian God who punishes sinners and keeps meticulous track of all people’s moral integrity. The poem, drawing on the figure of the caring mother, thus constitutes a critique of Our Father, who “wove” this world but then does not take proper care of his creatures. In context with other Dickinson poems featuring and empowering a Mother Nature that is similarly omnipresent and powerful as God, “Mama never forgets her birds,” (F130) makes clear how absurd the personification of nature is, as it bestows the natural realm with consciousness and willpower, something that evidently does not apply to cyclic nature that does not “notice ...” the fate of individual animals, but only knows death as renewal, and lacks morality.

While Dickinson employs personifications of nature in order to present a figure that is as powerful and worthy of worship as God, she is well aware of how ridiculous such cultural images are and how far removed from reality abstractions that bestow consciousness and intelligent design to nature are. But Dickinson does not only challenge the subjectification of nature, but also the objectification of natural landscapes as Virgin Land that discharges an

erotic quality. “The Day undressed – Herself –“ (F495) mockingly denaturalizes the idea of nature, here specifically the setting sun, as erotic female figure that tempts men:

F495

The Day undressed – Herself –
Her Garter – was of Gold –
Her Petticoat of Purple – plain –
Her Dimities as old

Exactly – as the World
And yet the newest Star
Enrolled opon the Hemisphere –
Be wrinkled – much as Her –

Too near to God – to pray –
Too near to Heaven – to fear –
The Lady of the Occident
Retired without a Care –

Her Candle so expire
The Flickering be seen
On Ball of Mast – in Bosporus –
And Dome – and Window Pane.

The poem frustrates the reader who expects an erotic presentation of the “Day,” or sun, undressing herself in the first line of the poem, but is presented with a desexualized old woman instead who, similarly to the poems featuring Mother Nature, is enlarged to the dimensions of a divine power. Stein emphasizes the voyeuristic and sexual element of the poem, calling nature a “grand mistress” (41). The erotic illusion is destroyed rather quickly however, and only lasts for the first part of the first stanza. Already the last word of the first stanza, “old,” might make a careful reader suspicious, and indeed the second stanza engages in a teasing revelation that the “Day” has not only existed for a long time, but that her age marked her body, leaving it “wrinkled.” The uncertainty about the degree of erotic satisfaction the reader wonders about when proceeding from stanza one to two can be described as a tease, a common strategy for Dickinson to humorously challenge patriarchal structures.[22] Dickinson unsettles conventional gender ascriptions and thus conventional hierarchies when she portrays the sun as female instead of male, portrays the female sun in a voyeuristic setting that recalls cultural ascriptions of erotic desire, and then frustrates these desires by unmasking the female object of the voyeuristic craving as adverse to this desire. Stein, who sees the stereotype of nature as “grand mistress” confirmed in this poem, misses the satirist elements which ridicule the

reader who readily follows the voyeuristic seduction (41). “The Day undressed – Herself –” (F495) only uses this stereotype as a starting point to challenge not only personifications of nature as erotic figure in need of male (sexual) control, gender norms and conventional patterns of desire that make women erotic objects, but also raises questions about the power relations between the reader, the poem, and the poet. The reader, whether male or female, is shamed for assuming a voyeuristic reader position and for uncritically adopting conventional gendered ascriptions. The poem (or poet) seems to say “I know you are watching, and I pretend to go along with it and deliver what you desire,” and then, surprisingly revealing an aged “Day,” seems to point at that reader, exclaiming “got you!” This experience is doubly painful for the unsuspecting reader as the “Lady of the Occident” can easily be identified as the setting sun, and watching the sunset is mostly understood as an everyday activity without further implications.

However, the sexual and voyeuristic components of the sun’s striptease are overpowering in this poem, and blended with references to outer space and a tone that rather fits prayerful romanticism creates a rather peculiar effect. Materiality, and thus the physical body, is foregrounded when the garments are listed, consisting of “Garder,” “Petticoat,” and “ Dimities” that the “Day” is taking off, their fabric possibly making them metaphors for clouds in the sky changing their color during sunset. The sun extends thus to the sky and the clouds, marking it all as “Her[s].” The sun’s presence is ubiquitous, as it can be seen from the sea or a boat’s “Mast,” from land as far away as “Bosporus,” from the ecclesiastical “Dome” as well as from any domestic “Window Pane.”[23] Besides gender roles, this poem once again challenges God’s omnipotence. The “Lady of the Occident” is as old as the world, and her wrinkly skin is compared to the stars and the “Hemisphere,” extending her realm and enlarging her to the infinite. The argument Dickinson makes in this poem is that nature is no object that exists in order to please erotic (male) desire but rather should be worshipped. Either, nature exists alongside God, the two sharing the universe, or nature and God collapsed into one single divinity and therefore indistinguishable, making a concept of an abstract God figure, after all an personification juts as Mother Nature or the Virgin Land, redundant.

2.2.4 Eroticized Nature and Metaphors for Female Sexual Desire

In the New World the objectification of the natural landscape as eroticized and the perception of wilderness as ensnaring landscape that is fertile but has to be tamed in order to nurture and bring forth a new nation was especially strong. However, the use of metaphors of nature and elements of nature, such as flowers and gardens, to express erotic feelings or experiences that lack decent, more discernible expressions was not a new phenomenon. Fitter attests that sexual and corporeal analogies to landscape and nature have been made by poets and

painters since ancient times (21). *The Song of Solomon*, the fifths book of the Christian Old Testament, celebrates sexual love likening the beloved woman to a private garden (Fitter 22):

A garden locked is my sister,
my bride,
a garden locked, a fountain sealed.
Your channel is an orchard of
pomegranates
with all choicest fruits,
henna with nard,
nard and saffron, calamus and
cinnamon,
with all trees of frankincense,
myrrh and aloes,
with all chief spices –
a garden fountain, a well of living
water,
and flowing streams from Lebanon.

(New Oxford Annoted Bible, Song of Sol. 4.12-4.15)

The example shows how a garden and its rich smells and tastes of fruits and flowers can be associated with a loved one, as the erotic encounter in *Song of Solomon* is described in sensual terms as an encounter with nature. Dickinson, as numerous other poets before and after her, also engages in the discourse of erotic desire expressed in floral language. Besides creating an alternative religious experience in nature, Dickinson not only identifies nature positively as female and enlarges its extent, but also eroticizes nature in unconventional ways, creating a homoerotic relationship between two females in her nature poems (Stein 46). Dickinson's erotic poetry, Stein argues, stages a female sexuality outside "confinement, fixed borders, firm separations and imagines another more interpenetrating, moving, and eruptive female subjectivity and sexuality" (46). According to Stein, "I tend my flowers for thee –" (F 367) expresses active female desire:

F367:

I tend my flowers for thee -
Bright Absentee!
My Fuschzia's Coral Seams
Rip – while the Sower – dreams –

Geranimus – tint – and spot –
Low Daisies – dot –
My Cactus – splits her Beard
To show her throat –

Carnations – tip their spice –
And Bees – pick up –
A Hyacinth – I hid –
Puts out a Ruffled Head –
And odors fall
From flasks – so small –
You marvel how they held –

Globe Roses – break their satin flake –
Opon my Garden floor –
Yet – thou – not there –
I had as lief they bore
No crimson – more –

Thy flower – be gay –
Her Lord – away!
It ill becometh me –
I'll dwell in Calyx – Gray –
How modestly – alway –
Thy Daisy –
Draped for thee!

As the speaker presents herself as "Thy flower" and "Thy Daisy", Stein argues that we can positively identify her as female and merge her with the flower (45):[24] The association of the woman with the flower, and of the flower as a female sexual organ is drawing on numerous examples in literature and poetry, but Dickinson, who was a botanist and enthusiastic gardener, knew that flowers were the actual sexual organs of plants, and, Stein is convinced, uses this image to express female desire in "sensuous detail scandalous to Victorian feminine propriety" (45). The speaker "Daisy" offers her "flowers" to an absent addressee, addressed as "Lord" in the last stanza, presenting her "Coral Seams" ripped open to a dreamy "Sower." That we are supposed to read the implications in the opening stanza as erotic metaphors and invitation to sexual intercourse becomes overtly clear in the third stanza, where the "Bees" added to the "Sower" establish the theme of reproduction. In the etymology of their name, the "Carnations," a kind of flower, highlight the physical nature of the scene, turning the flowers into bodies and willing flesh. As the bee takes the active part of insemination and the flowers signalize availability, we might assume that the sexual encounter implied is heterosexual in nature. However, even though the addressee is called "Lord," the imagery of the poem renders the ascription of definite gender both in the case of the speaker and of the addressee difficult.

The poem transgresses gender limits on several terms: the flowers spill and rip themselves open, the female cactus has a beard, the hyacinth has a "vulval yet phallic" head, and notions of passivity and activity are reversed (Stein 47). While the erotic allusions are ubiquitous in this poem, it is impossible to say whether the sexual encounter implied in the poem has homosexual or heterosexual character. I only follow Stein's interpretation of a homoerotic or, as she states, a simultaneously homoerotic and autoerotic content as long as the floral metaphors in the text are concerned, but in contrast to Stein I think it is impossible to exclusively identify the relationship between speaker and addressee as homoerotic (47). Such a conclusion would, I am convinced, not do justice to the fluidity the poem creates between hetero- and homosexual readings.

As the speaker calls herself "Daisy," and as the absent lover is "Her Lord," we can assume that the relationship between them is, at least at the surface of the poem, heterosexual. However, the poem inverts common gender roles. The flowers in the poem, although traditionally associated with femininity, perform rather male acts in the second stanza, as they "tint," "spot," and "dot," disseminating their substances throughout. The "Cactus" in line three of stanza two "splits her Beard," which can be read as physical intercourse if the "her" is not read reflexively. The "Cactus" phallus, as well as the "Ruffled Head" of the hyacinth in stanza three imply a heterosexual context. However, "My Cactus – splits her Beard / To show her throat –" can also be read reversely, if we read the personal pronoun as the cactus', terming it female. The "throat" of the cactus is then not phallic but opens up inwards, the "split[ing] Beard" revealing a glimpse at the female sexual organ.

Certainly both interpretations, whether exhibiting male or female sexuality, are provocative and considered highly inappropriate for a female poet at Dickinson's time. That explains why in the last two stanzas, "Daisy" laments her boldness and wishes her "Roses" were not "crimson" but a more restrained "Gray." Moreover, the absence of the addressee is stressed again in the end, reminding the reader of the fact that the lovers are unable to meet physically, and that no physical union is achieved. The end of the poem, Stein insists, is full of ambivalence however: although the poem pretends to return to modesty, the wild and passionate female desire described earlier cannot simply be hidden. The word "Draped" both has both the meaning of 'to veil' and 'to exhibit' (46). Thus, the female sexuality that here forcefully makes itself seen is an argument against confinement and fixed gender categories and for a female sexuality that is "interpenetrating, moving, and eruptive[25]" (Stein 46).

The degree of explicitness and the erotic intensity of "I tend my flowers for thee –" (F 367) is not nonrecurring in Dickinson's poetry. "All the letters I can write" (F380) uses flower imagery similarly, and is read by many as highly erotic and as an invitation to cunnilingus.

F380

All the letters I can write
Are not as fair as this –
Syllables of Velvet –
Sentences of Plush,
Depths of Ruby, undrained,
Hid, Lip, for Thee –
Play it were a Humming Bird –
And just sipped – me –

The poet's "letters" and "Sentences" are declared inferior to "this," possibly the poem itself or an object accompanying the poem Dickinson sent to her cousin (Hennerberg 8). If the poem itself is "this", the first two lines simply state that the single letters and elements of words and language, such as "Syllables" and "Sentences," cannot represent the beauty of the whole text, which is more than just the sum of its elements. If Dickinson, as she often did, sent the poem along with an object such as a flower, the first lines state that the poem can never recreate the beauty of the real item. Lines three to six emphasize materiality: "Velvet" and " Plush" are fabrics, and the "Ruby," a gem, is representative for its deep red color. Initially, only the sipping hummingbird suggests that there is an erotic connotation made in this poem, expressed via the metaphor of botanical reproduction.[26] However, the speaker invites the addressee to imagine something that, as if it was a hummingbird, "sipped – me –," referring to him- or herself reflexively. The object the hummingbird sips, the flower, is simultaneously the poem, the product of the "Sentences" and "Syllables," and stands for the poet speaker. The hummingbird who sucks the nectar out of the flower extracts its core, its essence. Analogically, the reader who consumes the poem in the act of interpretation extracts its essence, the meaning, and when pronouncing the "Syllables" orally 'tastes' the words.

Stein reads the poem analogically to "I tend my flowers for thee –" (F 367), focusing on the reflexivity of "sipped – me –" in the last line, on the erotic connotation of the image of the hummingbird sipping the flower, and on the materiality and color of the "Lip": "(…) Dickinson offers herself, by means of literal and literary flower, to the addressee of the poem" (Stein 47). Stein's summary strongly outlines the role of nature in Dickinson's poetry:

> Nature serves as medium for this moment of union when the identification of woman with flower permits the meeting of speaker and recipient, thus paradoxically representing presence even in absence, and consummation even despite physical distance. (Stein 47)

This quote pinpoints how Dickinson creates space for the expression of – and even actual experience and living of – female sexual desire and identity. The poem is presented as flower,

and the flower received and consumed by the reader stands for the woman/poet, thus allowing for an intimate encounter. “The language of flowers afforded women, who were frequently depicted as flowers and encouraged to shy away from the harsh light of self-relevation and public scrutiny, a way to express their thoughts,” Petrino confirms, and “Dickinson uses floral lyrics to express emotions that were deemed unacceptable for women” (*Contemporaries* 7). The space the poem creates is manifold, not unified and hard to locate, as the erotic experience is not a simple projection unto an existing surface, but a creation that cannot be pinned down in reality. Stein develops this argument further, claiming for Dickinson’s nature to have a “mysterious” and “fluid power”, being undecidable and non-representable, thereby challenging fixed social categories (47). Stein’s reinterpretation illustrates how Dickinson creatively employs the flower, a symbol for femininity and female (sexual) vulnerability, in order to emancipate women from being negatively associated with nature and of being seen as part of this subordinate nature (Stein 47). The gesture of the female poet who turns her poetry into a flower and uses it as a vehicle for her own erotic desire is positive, as it enables her to voice, communicate and via poetry live that desire, which is prohibited for women in nineteenth-century Victorian New England. As the female poet presents her flower actively, she frees it from the connotation of passive object of desire for a male, and reinterprets it as a symbol of her own erotic yearning.

Henneberg approaches “All the letters I can write” (F380) differently, not concentrating on the erotic aspects solely, but instead focusing on the poem’s implications about writing. According to Henneberg, “her [Dickinson’s] speaker does not experience an ecstatic moment with a man or with a woman, but with a text,” which is “a source of sexual pleasure” precisely because it is ungrammatical, sometimes unintelligible and resists dualisms (7-8). Henneberg rightly points out that even though Dickinson sent “All the letters I can write “ (F380) to a woman, it is impossible to judge whether the sexual allusions of the text are homo- or heterosexual, as we do not know the gender of the speaker (8). The allusions to text and writing, Henneberg is convinced, suggest that what is portrayed here is not an erotic exchange, but “an interaction that reaches beyond gender and identity distinctions” (8). Indeed, even if we do not ignore the erotic charge of the poem, Stein’s interpretation of “All the letters I can write“ (F380) as an invitation to cunnilingus is not able to do justice to all the images and connotations of the poem. The image of the flower called forth by the “Velvet” and “Plush” describing the sensual experience of touching the soft petals does not necessarily have to be linked to a vulva, although the association of female sexuality and flowers is conventional, but might actually describe the “Lip” in the sixth line as a synecdoche for the mouth.

The “Lip” could indicate an erotic approach to language, as the pronunciation or vocalization of a poem can be experienced as pleasurable.[27] The poet’s mouth is then a

metaphor for his or her poetic creativity, and the addressee who vocalizes the poem while reading re-experiences that pleasure, just as the poet did, and thus, metaphorically lip on lip with the poet, experiences a poetic union. Dickinson uses the botanical reproduction between flowers and bees as an erotic metaphor to communicate desire to an addressee and to eroticize the relationship between speaker and reader. While elements of nature such as bees and flowers serve as vehicles to communicate active desire, natural settings and landscapes also offer room for the actualization of sexual yearning and the union between protagonists that possess contradictory and blurred gendered identities.

In "I started early – took my dog" (F656) Dickinson lets her speaker merge with the natural landscape and undergo a sexual experience culminating in ecstasy. While ascriptions of gender seem clear at the beginning, the poem offers a multitude of possibilities, allowing for contradictory readings at the same time[28]:

F656:

I started Early – Took my Dog –
And visited the Sea –
The Mermaids in the Basement
Came out to look at me –

And Frigates – in the Upper Floor
Extended Hempen Hands –
Presuming Me to be a Mouse –
Aground – opon the Sands –

But no Man moved Me – till the Tide
Went past my simple Shoe –
And past my Apron – and my Belt
And past my Boddice –too –

And made as He would eat me up –
As wholly as a Dew
Opon a Dandelion's Sleeve –
And then – I started – too –

And He – He followed – close behind –
I felt His Silver Heel
Opon my Ancle – Then My Shoes
Would overflow with Pearl –

Until We met the Solid Town –
No One He seemed to know –

And bowing – with a Mighty look –
At me – The Sea withdrew –

The speaker figure, assumed to be a little girl by Leiter, leaves civilization and enters an untamed natural landscape (119). Her "visit" to the "Sea" is characterized by fluidity and a lack of physical boundaries between "Sea" and "Sands", and only her return to the "Solid Town" reestablishes order. In the first stanza, the contrast between wilderness and structured cultural space is bridged by the metaphor of the "oceanic house," as Leiter puts it, which subdivides the vastness of the "Sea" into floors: the "Mermaids" reside in the basement and the "Frigates - in the Upper floor."[29] The familiarity of the house metaphor and the associated comfort deceive however, as in the second part of the second stanza the contrast between the size of the "oceanic house" and the speaker becomes visible. A sense of threat is prevalent when the mouse, associated with smallness, insignificance and helplessness, is chased by the sea's "Extended Hempen Hands –." In the third stanza, the sea reaches the speaker, penetrating inwards through her clothes, which disclose her female gender. The "Sea" is called "He" from the third stanza on, and the suggestiveness, which clearly goes beyond Leiter's "flirtation," makes a reading of the speaker as a little girl unsustainable (120). The male "Sea" forces its way through the speaker's clothes and, "as He would eat [her] up," threatens to overpower and drown her.

In the fourth stanza, the perspective switches from the impending danger of the immense sea to a trifling single "Dew." The metaphor of the "Dew" on the flower's petal is suggestive on several levels of meaning: first, the difference in size between the dew and the sea, both bodies of water, reinforces the impending danger of annihilation and emphasizes the power structure between the female speaker and the male figure. Secondly, the image of the flower symbolizes female sexuality, and the "Dew," spilled by the flower itself or reaching it as a herald of the male sea either signalizes the female speaker's sexual excitation or signifies the accomplished sexual union between the two. Breaking waves, according to Fitter, were associated with sexual ecstasy already in antique Greece (19). Therefore, the first interpretation ascribing the speaker sexual arousal is more cohesive, as the following stanza with the breathless "He – He" and the final "overflow with Pearl"[30] as the waves are breaking transmit increasing excitation culminating in an orgasmic peak.

"I started early – took my dog" (F656) is interpreted by many as a demonstration of power of the "Sea" which is understood as a "symbol for the masculine principal" (Leiter 120). S. Anderson, focusing on the images of vastness and small size in relation to power, reads the poem as a male sea's attempt to rape a female speaker and to annihilate her (91). Leiter concludes that the speaker only escapes an annihilating assault because of her "childlike persona," which functions as a "conceit that allows her to evade nascent sexual impulses"

(120). However, the threat of male aggression ends in the last stanza as the speaker reaches the town, which represents moral rules and society's standards that prevent sexual encounters such as the one described in Dickinson's 'wilderness' at the seaside.

Critics ascribe the town taming powers, representing the "conventions of society" that "deny the irrational" that the sea represents and simultaneously protect is against "our internal wilderness that would topple sense" (Weisbuch "Prisming" 204). The proximity to the town allows power relations to shift and transforms the sea from "seducer to gallant courtier," as Leiter puts it, or into a "suitor," as S. Anderson prefers (Leiter 120, S. Anderson 91-92). Such readings imagine a clear division between town and seascape, associating each with opposite properties regarding power, male sexual aggression and female vulnerability, and the protective efficacy of moral standards. However, the metaphor of the house describing different levels of the "Sea" in the beginning of the poem already deconstructs the division between wilderness and civilization. The wild sea is thus viewed through a domestic lens, imposing on it the domestic organization of the house with all its cultural connotations. A space outside of culture is thus not portrayed in this poem, and the encounter between the personified sea and the speaker is not free of all cultural inscription, but follows a socially and culturally prescribed course of action: the female who leaves the safe bounds of the home and enters wilderness is met with sexual danger and only barely escapes death.

In spite of this conventional setup, the poem plays with gender norms, offering room for inverted or alternated divisions of power between the participants. I resist a reading of the poem as a manifestation of "[t]he fragile feminine consumed by the overwhelming power of the male," as Leiter has it (120). The poem, I claim, offers more complex dimensions of power and preconditions for an erotic encounter than the classical heterosexual encounter. Although the poem clearly assigns gender to its protagonists via personal pronouns and unambiguously female clothing, the visual impressions it creates and the movement within the space described suggest that the ascription of gender is not definite. On an initial reading consistent with the given pronouns, it is the male sea who penetrates the speaker's clothes, and the waves' movement forth and back reinforce the association of sexual intercourse between an active phallic sea and a helpless female victim. But if we consider the visual scene provided by the poem, this view becomes problematic: In the first stanza, the speaker takes the initiative, entering the scene on her "visit …" to the patiently waiting sea. The speaker is an erect figure, actively walking into the water and slowly being engulfed by the "Tide," usually associated with femaleness rather than masculinity because of its creation by gravitational forces of the moon, which in turn is associated with the female menstrual cycle. The misconception of the sea mistaking the female speaker for a mouse disguise her active role as she walks into the water. In a reading focusing on visual impressions, the fifth stanza does not have to be interpreted as

a chase, but could as well be a mutual race to the climax or a synchronized dance between lovers functioning as a metaphor for sexual union. The orgasmic “overflow with Pearl” is then reached by both participants, and after the ecstasy has passed, the lovers return from the “ Sea” to the “Solid Town,” where order and orderly conduct are re-established, the “Mighty” sea bows, and the lovers part.

S. Anderson agrees that Dickinson “completely shifts the power relation” between the speaker and the sea in “I started early – took my dog” (F656) (91). The reversal of dimensions in stanza four initiates this shift, she concludes, because the simile between sea and speaker and “Dew” and “Dandelion …” “diminishes the sea’s power,” reducing it to a small drop (S. Anderson 91). At the end of the fourth stanza, when the speaker “started – too –,“ power structures have been reversed, as it is now the male sea following the speaker, and he acknowledges this reversal by bowing at her (S. Anderson 91-2). The shifting power relations resulting from a reading that take Dickinson’s spatial imagery and use of dimensions into account show that gender roles, the power hierarchies related to these roles, and the depiction of erotic desire are not rigid in this poem, but flexible and, above all, not necessarily corresponding. Even though the male figure as aggressor and the female as object of desire and helpless victim in “I started early – took my dog” (F656) seem to depict a heterosexual erotic encounter that conventionally portrays erotic desire as transgression, the poem’s imagery suggests otherwise, envisioning mutual erotic desire and shifting power relations. However, such an encounter on more equal terms and outside of traditional patriarchal structures can only take place in a space that is perceived of as free from cultural inscription, such as nature, as fulfilling sexuality is something that transcends social rules and therefore offers a moment of freedom, which has to be abandoned as soon as ultimate intimacy is achieved. Sexuality is then viewed as a space you enter, or in Dickinson’s poem “visit,” and although it is not completely void of cultural constraints, this space is flexible or fluid enough to allow for alternative configurations between the participants to offer a satisfactory experience.

2.2.5 Unsafe Outside: the Threat of Sexual Violence in Nature

Natural landscapes and ‘wild’ spaces associated with femininity often serve Dickinson as metaphors or settings that enable her to describe erotic encounters. These places are liminal, although not culturally blank spaces, but as far removed from everyday life and civil structures as possible. The swamp is such a place, perceived as wild but also historically associated with threat and “feminized otherness” (Parks 21). The swamp signifies as a liminal space in general, but especially for women, as “[a]ny occasion that a privileged white woman in New England could have to spend in proximity to a swamp,” Parks says, “would have been

limited" (12-13)[31]. In "Sweet is the swamp with it's secrets," (F1780), gender is ascribed in a rather traditional way, the swamp being associated with femininity functioning as a "cryptic metaphor for a damp, vaginal bog," and the snake as a phallic figure and religious symbol representing the male principal (Pagnattaro 36):

F1780

Sweet is the swamp with it's secrets,
Until we meet a snake;
'This then we sigh for houses,
And our departure take
At that enthralling gallop
That only childhood knows.
A snake is nature's treason,
And awe is where it goes.

The swamp, according to Parks, is characterized by its "refusal to be fathomed or tamed" and represents the "liminal, illegible, and wild" (12). However, in this poem, this is only applicable until the "snake" appears: at that instant, the swamp is not "Sweet" any more, and after its " secrets" have been discovered, the speakers flee the place in search for "houses." The speakers, apparently children scared of the snake, return to the security of civilization.

Unquestionably, Dickinson refers to the biblical narrative of the human Fall in this poem. The narrative is presented in a slightly unconventional way, ignoring Eve's role in the eviction from paradise and providing the intrusion of the snake as the sole reason for humanity's doom. After the Fall, the original sin, God's children are not innocent any more, and because they are now mortal, they have to reproduce sexually (Dollimore 44). The narrative of eviction makes clear that the biblical story as well as the poem are about space and ideas about who can occupy which spaces. The incident described is highly transformative, and although depicted in a playful and childish mood, the poem conveys more than meets the eye. In the bible, the reason for the eviction from paradise is Eve's treason. In Dickinson's poem, "nature's treason " replaces hers, leaving it open whether the treason being committed by nature indicates the absence from sin, as what happens is perceived of as natural, or whether the reader is supposed to understand nature, and thus the "Sweet" swamp, as sinful. Portraying the swap as culpable seems unfair, as it did not actively do anything, but in such a reading would have to be blamed for letting the snake enter. However, the poem does not overtly describe the snake as intruder, but only states that the children, themselves allegedly intruders to the swamp, "meet" the snake. The snake could thus be just a member of the fauna naturally found in swamps, and no crime, blame or offense can be located. Of course, transferred back to the biblical narrative of the Fall, "A snake is nature's treason," could also hint at the culpability of

God as the creator of the snake and nature, preprograming the eviction of humankind from paradise.

While the snake in the opening lines spreads fear and terror and is in fact recognized as a predator, it is to be admired and respected in the last lines. Wherever the snake is, there is "Awe." "Awe" has both positive and negative connotations, making the figure of the snake highly ambivalent: As a creature of God and nature, it deserves admiration, as a potentially dangerous predator, it has to be met with caution, as a phallic figure threatening with sexual violation, it is threatened, and as representative of Satan, it should be feared. Whatever its character, its effect is the same: eviction. Its potential danger causes the speakers to flee the "Sweet" swamp, and its appearance in the bible initiates the banishment from paradise. The phallic figure of authority is thus revealed as a construct that is produced through sexual and physical supremacy, and the division of space is legitimized through sexual vulnerability of the female and sexual potency of the male, which are reinforced by cultural and religious discourses.

While these interpretations explain the speakers' escape from the swamp and connect it to underlying cultural narratives that cement the division of space according to gender, they do not account for the light, playful tone of the poem. The speakers' escape is "enthralling," a word decidedly positive, and the need for protection does not seem to be very urgent, as they only "sigh for houses," but do not scream or shout. The allusion to childhood which triggers associations of childish innocence may tactically distance the poem from its sexual implications. When we recall Pagnattaro's interpretation of the swamp as "cryptic metaphor for a damp, vaginal bog," this is coherent (Pagnattaro 36). Furthermore, the onomatopoetic quality of the ambivalent "Awe" of the last line echoes the "sigh" in the third line. The poem might then describe the playful exploration of sexuality, either of two girls exchanging secrets and being disturbed by a male as Pagnattaro suggests, or including the phallic figure (Pagnattaro 36). The "sigh" and "Awe" would then be either expressions of regret or pleasure. I suggest a reading together with "I started early – took my dog" (F656), which allows for an interpretation of the "enthralling gallop" back to civilization and social order as erotic exhilaration to the climax.

In both "I started early – took my dog" (F656) and "Sweet is the swamp with it's secrets," (F1780) erotic desire and possible sexual union are projected unto a landscape. In nature and through nature, Dickinson succeeds to voice female desire, and she does so in a way that draws on conventional representation for sexuality, but subverts symbols like the flower or the swamp that are heavily linked to female sexuality in order to present erotic encounters that rearrange power dynamics and patterns of active and passive participations in unconventional ways. Even though Dickinson's erotic poems taking place in nature achieve

an emancipation from dominant depictions of sexuality, they retain a sense of transgression and danger. While this danger might contribute to the appeal of the encounter in poems as " Sweet is the swamp with it's secrets," (F1780) or "I started early – took my dog" (F656), this is not the case in "So bashful when I spied her!" (F70), a very early poem where a not explicitly named violation takes place, which leaves the reader with a strong sense of unease:

F70

So bashful when I spied her!
So pretty – so ashamed!
So hidden in her leaflets
Lest anybody find –

So breathless till I passed her –
So helpless when I turned
And bore her struggling, blushing,
Her simple haunts beyond!

For whom I robbed the Dingle –
For whom betrayed the Dell –
Many, will doubtless ask me –
But I shall never tell!

A female "her" trying to hide from a "male gaze" is mercilessly stalked and "robbed" by an unidentified speaker in this poem (Pagnattaro 36). I strongly disagree with Pagnattaro who inists that the purely "voyeuristic" relationship invoked by this poem "leaves no victims" (36). This poem, I claim, is a rape poem. This is supported if the female "hidden in her leaflets" is identified as a flower, and the poem is read as depicting an unconsented defloration as a metaphor for rape. The "breathless" and "helpless" victim is "passed" by the speaker, suggesting a chase and then "robbed" of her "Dingle," a narrow valley between hills that could be used as a metaphor for female genitalia. In the third stanza, the poem's tone changes radically, the speaker telling the reader that the defloration took place for someone else, and that the identity of that person would not be revealed. If we bear Dickinson's habit of sending poems along with a flower to a friend, the gesture of picking a flower for someone seems adequate. However, the dramatic voice of the poem and the unease the reader/recipient of the poem experiences while (involuntarily) taking on a voyeuristic gaze and witnessing the horrific struggle of the victim makes this poem's particular flower a very macabre gift. Therefore, I do not believe that the identification of the female defloration victim with a flower that is given away as a present is conclusive. Rather, I would like to suggest an intertextual reading referring to classical Greek mythology.

The chase and the “leaflets” the female tries to hide in strongly remind me of Ovid’s characters of Daphne and Phoebus in *Metamorphoses*, where the nymph Daphne who is determined to retain her chastity is turned into a laurel tree after fleeing from Phoebus who wants to rape her. The difference Dickinson makes in her poem is that the chase does not end when Daphne is turned into the laurel, but the speaker overpowers the victim nevertheless. This interpretation also does justice to the stasis and simultaneous dynamics ascribed to the “ bashful” female in Dickinson’s poem: the victim is first “hidden in her leaflets,” suggesting that she hides away, then she is “breathless” and “helpless” when “passed” by the speaker, suggesting that she fled, was chased, and then overtaken. At the end of the second stanza, she is picked up and carried away, leaving “Her simple haunts beyond!”

The third stanza introduces a third party “For whom” the violating act was performed. Again, Ovid’s Metamorphoses provide insight into how we are supposed to read this reference to a recipient of the “Dingle” and the “Dell,” both valleys that serve as metaphors for the female sexual organ and indicate the rape and defloration that has taken place: since Daphne’s metamorphosis into a laurel tree, Ovid explains, the laurel has been associated with Phoebus and has served as an emblem of victory, crowning emperors and honoring success. Even though Daphne was turned into a tree before Phoebus could rob her of her virginity and chastity, he still emerges as victor, possessing the laurel tree, which until today it is not associated with virginity or resistance to male sexual aggression, but is a sign of success, honor, and victory (Cirlot 181). The riddle of the last stanza of “So bashful when I spied her!” (F70), which introduces a cheeky tone, conceals the identity of the recipient of the laurel. However, I insist, the mystery and riddle is a mere distraction away from the speaker/Phoebus who in Dickinson’s poem “robbed the Dingle” and “betrayed the Dell” for himself, keeping the laurel branch as a trophy.

Dickinson comments on the outrageousness Phoebus’ acquisition of this attribute entails in “Lay this Laurel on the One” (F1428), according to Crumbley a “general reflection on the misattribution of fame” (“Back Talk” 14). Crumbly points out that this poem is a response to Higginson’s poem “Decoration” honoring an anonymous woman as contributor during the Civil War instead of the fallen soldiers (“Back Talk” 14). However, I believe that “Lay this Laurel on the One” (F1428) is not to be read solely in reference to Higginson’s poem and the Civil War context, but in connection to Ovid’s narrative of Daphne and Phoebus.

L1428

Lay this Laurel on the one
Triumphed and remained unknown –
Laurel – fell your futile Tree –
Such a Victor could not be –
Lay this Laurel on the one
Too intrinsic for Renown –

Laurel – vail your deathless Tree –
Him you chasten – that is he –

The emphasis of the poem, I insist, is on Daphne, who not only triumphed but "remained unknown –," but, transformed into the laurel tree and thus "intrinsic" to it, nevertheless " chasten[ed]" Phoebus. But even though she succeeded in sparing herself from Phoebus, the transformation was in vain, as he "fell [her] futile Tree," decorating himself with her success, for female success cannot exceed male pride and vigor: "Such a Victor could not be –."

While "Sweet is the swamp with it's [sic] secrets," (F1780) critiques religious maxims about the relationship between humans and nature, and explicitly the position of women in regard to nature and mankind, "So bashful when I spied her!" (F70) and "Lay this Laurel on the One" (F1428) discuss cultural narratives that depict nature as an insecure space where women might be violated and exploited. In Daphne's case, the attempted violation is not just unsanctioned, but on the contrary turned into male honor. Daphne, sacrificing her human female body for chastity, is further violated as a tree, virtually being robbed of body parts in order to decorate male heads. That Dickinson understands the human exploitation of nature as a transgression and violation becomes clear in "Who robbed the Woods –" (F57). In this poem, the violation is a self-complacent act, "His fantasy to please –," and the "robbed" victim, speechless, cannot give consent or protest:

F57
Who robbed the Woods –
The trusting Woods?
The unsuspecting Trees
Brought out their Burs and Mosses –
His fantasy to please –
He scanned their trinkets – curious –
He grasped – he bore away –
What will the solemn Hemlock –
What will the Fir tree – say?

The poem asks questions about who committed the robbery and what the victims, " unsuspecting" and seemingly consenting at first, think. Similarly to "So bashful when I spied her!" (F70), this poem transmits a sense of unease. The poem is set in the aftermath of the robbery, and therefore the anthropomorphised trees' revealing "their Burs and Mosses -/ His fantasy to please –" seems calamitous. At first, "He" is just "curious" and inspects the forest's secrets. The "Trees" who present their secrets voluntarily, want to "please" him in a very human manner, and want to satisfy his curiosity and "fantasy."[32] In the seventh line, the male protagonist commits the robbery, depriving the trees of their seeds, which are called "trinkets" in line six and therefore represent value.

As in “So bashful when I spied her!” (70), the robber enters a space in nature from the outside, commits the violation, acquires a trophy, and leaves. The male offender is characterized by mobility and vanishes unidentified, while the space entered, the scene of the crime, remains stationary, open and vulnerable, and the overtly or covertly female victims associated with that space are rendered impotent and immobile. The association of femininity with nature therefore enables a vision of women as immobile, exposed, vulnerable and in danger of penetration as soon as they enter a landscape characterized as away from civilization and as part of nature.

2.2.6 Limits and Transgressions

When women leave the domesticated grounds of civilization and enter a space that is associated with nature, they according to nineteenth-century cultural assumptions jeopardize their physical integrity. Dickinson shows in several poems how these assumptions are maintained and legitimized by cultural narratives that link nature and sexuality, and how they are used to mark nature as a territory that is inaccessible for women because of the danger it conveys. Nevertheless, Dickinson’s female characters frequently cross the line into the wild, forbidden and mysterious landscape that lies beyond civilization. In some poems, Dickinson only lets her speakers hover on the boundary between the known and unknown, or has them transgress into that which lies beyond only mentally. When she does so, Dickinson conceptualizes nature as a “space of possibility” and destabilizes the notion of nature’s otherness by using familiar metaphors (Stein 52).

Once more, the metaphor of the house is fruitful in deconstructing the idea of nature as opposite to culture: in “What mystery pervades a well” (F1433), Dickinson describes nature as a house, a domestic place that is “haunted”, in order to make its mystifying character more accessible (Stein 50-51).[33] Nature, which Dickinson characterizes as limitless and encompassed in the metaphor of the house at the same time, according to Stein “destabilizes the boundaries of Victorian separate spheres” for men and women (52). She concludes that Dickinson asks for the possibility for women to “slip out of the patriarchal structures” that hinder them to develop the full array of their potential and to invent more egalitarian models of gender relations (51).

Many of Dickinson’s poems only hover at the rim to nature and play with the thought of crossing over into this space of possibility. In one of Dickinson’s most light-hearted poems of hypothetical transgression, the “fence” initially hindering the speaker from crossing over into forbidden territory proofs to be only a minor obstacle compared to the moral judgement and consequential reprimand from God following such a transgression:

F271

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!

The poem, written in a playful and satirical voice suggesting the speaker to be a child, describes a reflection on whether or not to climb a fence in order to attain the 'forbidden fruit' on the other side. The speaker's attire including an "Apron" that could get "stained" by the fruit reveal the child speaker to be a little girl. Employing the little girl persona allows Dickinson, Mossberg argues, to address the restrictions nineteenth-century American society forced on women (Mossberg 47). The line "Over the fence –" is repeated twice in the first stanza, making it a much more prominent part of the poem than the "Strawberries" on the other side. Its crossing over rather than the consumption of the berries is focused on. The fence, mentioned twice, would have to be conquered twice if the speaker wishes to return, something that could be achieved easily: "I could climb – if I tried, I know –," the speaker declares. Only the fact that the speaker is a girl and wears an apron that can get stained and would reveal her transgression keeps her from climbing.

If the "Strawberries" are the 'forbidden fruit' and the girl speaker is Eve, then the punishment would be severe. Not coincidentally, the little girl is not afraid of her parents scolding her, but of God. The transgression of picking the strawberries is thus not just a misbehavior against gender norms, but of moral nature. The claim that God himself would climb, "if He were a Boy –," reveals the existence of different codes of behavior for girls and boys, which seems utterly arbitrary: "God has a double standard for boys and girls," Mossberg summarizes (Mossberg "Nursery Rhymes" 53). The stain on the transgressive girl's apron and the allusion to the Fall indicated by the topic of the 'forbidden fruit' hint at sexual misconduct. Again, the eviction of humankind from paradise and the need to reproduce sexually thereafter are linked to a division of space and the segregation of access to certain spaces according to gender. Because a boy does not have an "Apron," which can be "stained" and thus provides proof for the transgression, a boy does not need to fear punishment. The consummation of the "Strawberries", as is having sex in Victorian society, is not a sin per se, but only if it happens outside of culture's regulations that prohibit the climb "Over the fence –" for some: Unmarried

girls and women, as opposed to boys and med, jeopardize their moral and physical integrity if they step into the wild territory of unwedded sex beyond the fence of civilization. Accordingly, the girl speaker in this poem stays put, and no 'off-fence' takes place.

Mossberg understands Dickinson's employment of the little girl persona as a subversive strategy, a "safe vantage point from which to criticize" "a patriarchal Yankee culture" that renders her as an adult woman impotent (48). With the voice of the little girl, a transgression can be thought of hypothetically while cheekily violating a different, much more serious taboo: the child persona enables Dickinson to venture against God, the ultimate patriarchal figure. [34] The innocent voice of Dickinson's speaker is often cheeky and funny, making her criticism seem unoffending and thus making her subversive strategy more effective, masking her endeavor initially and thus being able to place her argument more forcefully when revealed. As a little girl, the speaker does not lack the ability to climb the fence, even if she does not do it. God, even "if He were a Boy –," cannot do that, however, as to the ultimate authority and omnipresent sovereign, no limits or transgressions exist: Logically, there are no fences for God to climb. Dickinson's pun thus consists of turning a restriction that is declared to be intensified for her gender into a freedom: as opposed to God, who cannot do wrong, she, and all woman, has the possibility to choose. Although the venture away from civilization is dangerous and will potentially be reprimanded, it still exists as an option.

The world beyond the "fence," in this poem the untamed nature that lies beyond the cultivated garden, becomes a place of possibility that is potentially accessible and allows for the fulfillment of pleasures prohibited by a restrictive society. The "Strawberries" are only ' forbidden fruit' when located in a territory in the off. Certainly, the girl persona has tasted strawberries before, how could she otherwise exclaim "Berries are nice!" The fulfillment of the craving for "Strawberries" is not as important to the speaker as the fact that there is a desire which makes the fence, and thus the potential freedom to climb that fence, visible. In her analysis of poems featuring hungry speakers, Mossberg shows how to Dickinson, hunger is productive and a way of achieving omnipotence:[35] "She needs hunger, not food, to create," Mossberg concludes ("Nursery Rhymes" 62).

Mossberg's statement on hunger in Dickinson, I propose, can be generalized to other desires like curiosity or the craving for a 'forbidden fruit' constituting themselves as a want to break out of confinement as in "Over the fence –" (F271). The craving and the inaccessibility of the object of desire, located in a space declared to be outside of civilization and prohibited by restrictions specific for women, enable Dickinson to thematize issues of spatial restrictions and accessibility based on gender and to criticize them. Desire, then, is neither a curse nor a sin, but a necessary precondition for liberation, as it delivers the creative spur to break out of confinement and, above all, empowers her speakers to question authorities.

The venture into nature thus constitutes not just the departure from known into wild and untamed territory, but also a liberation from or abandonment of restrictions based on gender. In the first stanza of “So I pull my Stockings off” (F1271) a speaker illustrates this by stating that “Wading in the Water” barefoot is a transgression which happens barely “For the Disobedience’ Sake.”

F1271

So I pull my Stockings off
Wading in the Water
For the Disobedience’ Sake
Boy that lived for “Ought to”

As stockings are usually worn by women, we can identify the speaker as a woman. However, the transgression of removing the stockings in order to violate the rule of coverage of a woman ’s feet and calves seems to be minor compared to the “transgression of gender” Parks believes occurs in the last line of the first stanza, when the speaker “transforms” into a boy (Parks 18). Parks argues that Dickinson aims “to push towards genderlessness” when she has her speaker remove her stockings, “those feminine trappings,” in order to experience the water sensually (Parks 2/18). She draws a parallel between the act of removing the items of clothing to the landscape, locating “So I pull my Stockings off” (F1271) in a swampland, a natural setting that is characterized by “volatility and illegibility” that refuses to be categorized,” enabling fluid gender identities (Parks 16).

While I agree with Parks’ view of swamps as liminal spaces that lack specific boundaries and therefore disable common binary distinctions such as land and water, solid and week, and visible and invisible, I do not think that “So I pull my Stockings off” (F1271) is a poem about gender fluidity. Rather, this is a poem about transgression “For the Disobedience ’ Sake.” Therefore, I focus on the violation of rules and the underlying imperatives in the poem rather than on an exploration of genderlessness. The removal of the stockings, a misbehavior especially if we take into account that the speaker is female, is viewed as conduct that is decidedly unfeminine, and thus rather reminds of an act of a rebellious “Boy that lived for ‘ Ought to’.” The behavior of the disobedient female in “So I pull my Stockings off” (F1271) is thus likened to a notoriously uncooperative boy’s who always opts for the alternative to compliance. As “Over the fence –“ (F271), “So I pull my Stockings off” (F1271) thus highlights the double standards that exist regarding gendered behavior in nature and the coverage of the body. Women and girls are not to merge with nature by undressing and entering the shallow water, while, even though also representing a nonconforming act, doing the same is still within the range of to be expected behavior for boys or men. Dickinson’s speaker enters nature in order to go against the rules in this poem, transforming the water and the landscape around her into a space for possibility and alterity. In this space, gender is nothing but a layer of cloth

and a set of behavior which to abandon becomes the means of access to an alternative, rebellious stance against normative culture.

In nature, the constructedness of gender becomes obvious, revealing it to be a cultural category that is not valid in nature and does not belong there. The first two stanzas of "A Burdock twitched my gown" (F289) demonstrates this humorously:[36]

F289

A Burdock twitched my gown
Not Burdock's blame – but mine
Who went too near the Burdock's Den –

A Bog affronts my shoe.
What else have Bogs to do –
The only Trade they know
The splashing men?

…

The lady's "gown" gets caught and possibly torn, and her shoe gets stuck in the mud. Nature undresses her, being "affront[ed]" by the cultural attributes of clothes just as natural states such as nudity affront members of society: Clothes are unfit in nature just as all reminders of our naturally naked state are unfit in civilized settings. According to Parks, "[t]he poem evokes an aggressive, confrontational natural world" (17). I strongly disagree: the speaker sympathizes with nature in "A Burdock twitched my gown" (F289), pinpointing that it is she who crossed the boundary between the two worlds, entering a territory where she, or the attributes enabling her to be an intelligible gendered subject in society, are out of place. Rather than turning the speaker genderless, as Parks has it, I argue that nature reclaims the (naked) body of the speaker, making her one with nature. However, this happens in a very different way than nineteenth-century American culture, which associates women with nature and excludes them from civilization and rationality as purely biological subjects, prescribes it. The woman entering nature is clearly marked as a cultural being by her clothes, and decidedly does not belong into the boggy landscape, but is out of place. The clothes the woman wears are signs of a gender role that does not correspond to nature, and are disqualified by the "Burdock" and the "Bog" as mere hindrances for the speaker to move. This happens in a decidedly unaggressive manner, the speaker acknowledging that she, the intruder, is to blame for her trespassing, and not the "Burdock," which is a naturally sticky plant, nor the "Bog," as its marshy ground characteristically engulfs objects. The physical contact between nature and the speaker is not intentional, and the undressing therefore lacks a sexual component. The speaker is thus neither objectified as an erotic subject to be gazed at by a third party nor 'consumed' by nature, nor does the speaker objectify nature as a sexual partner. Rather, the "Bog" and "Burdock['s]"

clinging on to the speaker's clothes and shoes have to be understood as a "Trade," as the second stanza implies. In order to be able to access and roam in the natural landscape, the speaker has to adjust to her surroundings, portrayed here in economic terms, as if the shoe she leaves behind served as a kind of admission fee.

When entering the space of wild nature, clothes that ladies usually wear are highly unpractical and out of place. The lady's attire becomes a hindrance, even more so than a man's, and only by getting rid of it and redressing to her naturally naked state can she move freely. Entering the space of nature thus requires a willingness to 'undress', both metaphorically and in reality. Gender attributions, Dickinson's poem declares, are cultural constructs which only apply within the space marked as civilization. The speaker of "A Burdock twitched my gown" (F289) associates with nature by acknowledging her own trespassing into a space where gender norms do not apply, and thus shows the limitations of such norms, deconstructing the illusion of their universal validity.

In the second stanza, the bog "affronts," the lady's shoe, an anthropomorphic emotion unfit for a body of water, alleging that it acts with intention. The "Trade" the bog pursues, likened to the business of "splashing men" heightens the anthropomorphising effect. This is significant because it complicates a clear distinction between nature and culture, understood as oppositional terms in nineteenth-century American culture (Merchant 27). Even though in the first stanza the female speaker is portrayed as an intruder into the space of nature, I claim that Dickinson makes a statement here about the interconnectedness and indistinguishability of nature and culture. This becomes apparent if we consider Franklin's comment on the purpose of to this poem, revealing it to be a metaphor for the social transmission of ideas. Franklin notes that Dickinson sent "A Burdock twitched my gown" (F289) to her brother Austin in 1861. The poem, first sent to her brother as a letter (L240), is a comment on Austin apparently being "'touched'" by the politics of Frank Conkey, a political rival of their father Edward Dickinson (Dickinson 309). Austin is thus to take the blame himself for getting to close to Conkey, or other "splashing men", as he knew he could be susceptible to their political positions. However, the humorous tone of the poem suggests that the implied imperative to stay away from any advocates of different (political) ideas than their father's is not to be taken serious by Austin.

Applied to gender or social and cultural norms in general, the poem implies that the concepts and ideas each member of society incorporates automatically affects the others. In this sense, not only nature is 'sticky', but humans are too. By crossing over from social space into a space of wilderness, Dickinson's rebellious speakers experience nature as a space of possibility, where they can momentously escape the constraints of their gender and culture. A potential of change is thus prevalent in "A Burdock twitched my gown" (F289), as the poem shows via the natural metaphor of a twitching burdock how contact and exchange with others

makes ideas and concepts stick on other people, implying that someone who, just as the speaker in this poem, ventured into nature and experienced the limitations of the applicability of gender norms, might be able to transmit this insight to others.

In her poem, Dickinson draws a parallel between entering the space of nature and entering social and political spaces. Just as gender is destabilized and declared arbitrary when someone leaves cultural space, so can political ideas, in this particular case her brother Austin 's convictions, be destabilized when he leaves the authoritarian space of his father's world and enters the public where he is exposed to alternative political positions. The space you move within, this analogy suggests, demands a certain kind of adaption of the visitor, and he or she will inevitably return 'home' altered. Just as Bondi argues, our conceptual world changes when boundaries are crossed and the spatial parameters changed, unsettling codes of social behavior (241). The poem exemplifies Foucault's statement that power relations have to be negotiated within a "sphere," which may be a physical space or a social setting, creating a power pattern that structures the interactions between the people entering and moving within this space (*History* 92-93). When moving through a natural landscape, the woman in "A Burdock twitched my gown" (F289) has to acknowledge that her attire is ill-fitted for the purpose and that it is not her, but the laws of nature which are superior, reminding her of her being out of place. Accordingly, Austin's political convictions might be out of place when he meets with members of different political parties, and as he partakes in different political discourses, this influences his own views. Both spaces prevalent in this poem, culture and nature, are portrayed as governed by imperatives, and the subjects moving within those spaces not only have to acknowledge but act according to the power patterns structuring these spaces.

2.2.7 Power and Gender: Dynamic Relationships and Gravity

Dickinson removes relationships between men and women from social and cultural space in order to reveal the constructed character of the gender roles and power patterns that rule human interaction. When she relocates them in nature, Dickinson frequently uses natural forces such as gravity as metaphors for the hierarchies and dependencies between male and female speakers in romantic relationships. Gravity is a governing principle of our universe, determining the downward movement of all objects in free fall on earth and keeping the cosmos ' planetary bodies in orbit. The universal character of gravity and its omnipresent and irreversible validity serve Dickinson as a metaphor for presumably fixed power patterns in hierarchical relationships between two people.[37] While Dickinson sets these relationships in nature and portrays the participants as subjects to gravitational forces, she assigns gender in an unconventional way, disregarding the cultural associations of passivity with femininity and active contribution with the male gender, or she switches attributions of gender in the course

of the poem. When she does that, Dickinson upsets traditional notions that view gender as naturally given and fixed, revealing it to be a cultural construct and role play. But not only gender, also power becomes mobile in the poems starting out with relationships between participants like the moon and the sea, both subject to gravity's forces. Even though gravity suggests fixity, universality and irreversibility, the power patterns between the participants change, suggesting that they, like gender, are in fact not given by nature but cultural products, and are therefore created in interaction. "The Moon is distant from the Sea –" (F387) exemplifies this fluidity, assigning gender and power to the moon and the sea only to deconstruct these attributions in the course of the poem:

F387

The Moon is distant from the Sea –
And yet, with Amber Hands –
She leads Him – docile as a Boy –
Along appointed Sands –

He never misses a Degree –
Obedient to Her eye –
He comes just so far – toward the Town –
Just so far – goes away –

Oh, Signor, Thine, the Amber Hand –
And mine – the distant Sea –
Obedient to the least command
Thine eye impose on me –

Power structures are asymmetrical in this poem, a controller taking full charge of a controlled. Contradictory to conventional attributions of gender and power, the female moon "leads Him," a "docile" male sea, destabilizing and denaturalizing the assumptively fixed correlation between being in charge and being male. The hierarchies are at first distributed clearly between the moon and the sea, but are then reversed in the last stanza where the dependence of the sea to the moon is compared to the relationship between lovers, or possibly God and a believer.

The female gender is initially readily assigned to the moon, as the moon with its monthly cycle is associated with the female biological rhythm. Similarly, the moon's determination of the sea's tides does not provoke wonderment in the reader, as the occurrence of tides as a result of the moon's gravity field is a natural phenomenon that is common knowledge. Consequently, the associations our culture provides enable Dickinson to portray an unconventional power structure without breaking with the norms, introducing alternative hierarchies intelligently via contradictory connotations the word 'moon' conventionally

provides. By invoking a mother-son relationship between the mature moon and the boyish sea Dickinson further masks the latent contradictions between the female gender and leadership in the first stanza.[38]

In the third stanza, Dickinson delineates the spatial contours where the relationship between moon and sea and its power dynamics are played out. Similarly as in "I started early – took my dog" (F656), the sea never reaches the town, implying a boundary between nature and civilization that cannot be crossed. Thus, the moon's power to lead the male "Sea" is limited to the realm of nature, marking this unconventional relationship as relative, dependent to a spatial setting, and a specific context. Only in the last stanza is this context resolved, where the moon and sea are not mother and son but worshipper and worshipped, implying a romantic or religious relational framework. Here, the distance between the two participants being joined together only by the power structure defining their relationship disappears, and the moon's "Amber Hand" is relocated to belong to the "Signor," collapsing gravity's rigid power structures.[39] The speaker, now identified as "distant Sea," directly addresses an exotic "Signor," owner of the previously distinctively female moon's "Amber Hand," and thus reorders the constellation of gender and power in the poem. The assignment of supremacy is obscure because the stanza's third line "Obedient to the last command" could grammatically refer to either the speaker or the androgynous, "Amber Hand[ed]" "Signor." This circumstance is complicated by the presumably weaker speaker's request for the "Signor" to "impose" his "eye " on the "distant Sea." If we read this line as an imperative, it becomes a speech act first granting the male protagonist power, and thus questions the a priori existence and the truthfulness of the hierarchy between speaker and addressee initially characterized with the metaphor of gravity.

Despite the association with fixity and ubiquity, gravitational forces are not consistent throughout the universe, but wax and wane according to the weight and proximity of the objects under their influence. In fact, gravity can only exercise influence if there are at least two objects, as its strength is dependent on each of their masses and their distance to each other. The continuity of the force field and the delicate balance between gravity's pull and centrifugal forces keep the moon and other celestial bodies in orbit, but any change in one of the bodies' physical qualities would jeopardize this stability. In the last stanza of "The Moon is distant from the Sea –" (F387), rigid power patterns are deactivated because the conditions that hold them in place are modified: Dickinson changes the parameters of the described relationship, complicating the ascription of the participants' gender, questioning the hierarchies between the two, and deconstructing the assumption of persisting power patterns. When the female speaker grants the admired "Signor" power, she does so complying with nineteenth-century conventions ascribing men power over women, but because she demands him to take charge,

she silently remains in control of the relationship, casting herself in the role of the subordinate under the condition that he plays the part she assigns him. In fact, power patterns are progressively flexible in this poem, suggesting that the participants engage in role play, an assumption confirmed by the free switch of gender and the uncertain distribution of power in the last stanza.[40]

Gender roles and hierarchies between people, Dickinson suggests, thus depend on each participant's acknowledging the other's role: "Without a controller, there is no controlled, and vice versa" (Caci "Interchangeability" 75). Such a perspective of power and gender is highly provocative and progressive, resembling today's understanding of gender as an effect of power and theories defining power as relational, unstable and not preexisting, but created in interaction (Foucault *History* 94). Furthermore, the fact that the speaker and addressee can adjust the degree of control they exercise suggests that the roles they take on respective to each other do not necessarily have to be maximally oppositional, but can represent any point in between absolute domination and subordination. Because power and gender are played out against each other in "The Moon is distant from the Sea –" (F387), this finding can be applied to gender as well: the distribution of roles portrayed as flexible allows for gendered positions somewhere in between, and not only at the extreme end of the spectrum of maleness and femaleness. Thus, the "Signor" can possess an "Amber Hand," incorporating female and male characteristics. The understanding of gender put forward in "The Moon is distant from the Sea –" (F387) focuses on the assignment of roles and therefore discredits essentialist notions that portray gender as physically given and dualistic in favor of a model of gender as fluid, nonessential, in need of recognition and negotiation, and as moving along a spectrum that allows for pluralistic forms of manhood and womanhood. Such a model of gender based on performance and fluidity is very progressive for Dickinson's time and strongly resembles namely Butler's theory on gender, only developed a century later (Butler *Gender* 8).

Even though Dickinson offers an alternative model of gender and power in "The Moon is distant from the Sea –" (F387), the images and gender attributes she employs to reach this end do not contradict nineteenth-century norms. The poem thus challenges the limits of acceptability and, even though overtly moving within the parameters of her culture's paradigms, creates models for an alternative interactional basis between men and women. The metaphor of the moon controlling the tides perfectly integrates aspects of female identity and domination that in a different context could have been perceived as impertinent, constructing her poem's progressively gendered characters from within the restraints of normative discourse. Dickinson skillfully relocates the relationship between her human speakers in a natural landscape that is characterized as outside of civilization but not completely separate, as the sea "comes just so far – toward the Town – / Just so far – goes

away –." These lines mimic De Lauretis' definition of how discourse is redrawn and resistance made possible as a "movement" between "hegemonic discourses and the space-off, the elsewhere, of those discourses" existing "in the margins" of the generally available discourses ("The Technology of Gender" 26).

The sea's inability to broach the border to the town points to the limits of the discourse of moon and sea as an enabling metaphor as well as to Dickinson's awareness of this limit, being, just as De Lauretis prescribes for every critic performing resistance, "at the same time inside *and* outside the ideology of gender, and conscious of being so, conscious of that twofold pull, of that division, that doubled vision" (De Lauretis *The Technology of Gender* 10, original italics). Furthermore, the limits highlighted here correspond to what Foucault calls the specific "sphere" outside of which a given power dynamics is invalid, and which, as a social and cultural context's logic, determines the appropriate behavior and interactions within its field (*History* 92).

"I make His Crescent fill or lack –" (F837) is acted out within similar parameters as "The Moon is distant from the Sea –" (F387), featuring the moon, now male, and the "Tides," both controlled by a speaker who in the last stanza declares that power is held mutually: "Which is the Despot, neither knows –/ Nor Whose – the Tyranny –."

F837

I make His Crescent fill or lack –
His Nature is at Full
Or Quarter – as I signify –
His Tides – do I control –

He holds superior in the Sky
Or gropes, at my Command
Behind inferior Clouds – or round
A Mist's slow Colonnade –

But since We hold a Mutual Disc –
And front a Mutual Day –
Which is the Despot, neither knows –
Nor Whose – the Tyranny –

Power relations are represented as invertible and thus depend on mutual agreement and on the occupation of a certain role. In contrast to "The Moon is distant from the Sea –" (F387), which introduces a possible romantic relationship between the speaker and the "Signor," this poem is more overtly erotically charged, as the vocabulary provokes phallic imagery: there is a "Crescent", a word with the Latin root 'crescere', meaning growing or gaining size, the "Colonnade", invoking the association of phallic shaped columns, the verb "gropes" with its

ambiguous meaning implying improper physical contact, and the constant contrasting and change of size from big to small and vice versa. [41] The male moon is controlled by a superior power, but the hierarchy between the instance in charge and the subordinate moon is called into question in the final stanza, where the controller and the controlled are revealed to share one "Mutual" position.

The moon's "Disc" is held mutually by both controller and the controlled, and it is this "Disc" that is enlarged and reduced in the course of the poem, marking power as a figure of growth. "Power is a familiar growth –," (F1287) Dickinson writes in another poem, declaring it to be an integral part "In every company," varying only in intensity, and "Escape" being only possible after death (F1287). It is impossible to determine who is in charge in "I make His Crescent fill or lack –" (F837), but the waxing and waning of the "Mutual Disc" and the back and forth movement of the "Tides" remain as evidence of the power travelling from one participant to the other.

Foucault identifies the mobility of power existing between individuals and not residing with one of them to be exercised on the other as crucial to his understanding of relations between individuals:

> Power must be analysed as something which circulates …. It is never localized here or there … . And not only do individuals circulate between its threats; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application.
>
> (Foucault Power/Knowledge, 98)

The speaker and the male in the poem hold a "Mutual Disc," which makes them identifiable as the sun or the planet earth and the moon, and they are both subject to gravity but do not control it. Gravity is a force existing between bodies. The metaphor of gravity thus captures adequately Foucault's definition of power between two people: Power, just as gravity, cannot be escaped and exists "in every relation," but the participants can negotiate the amount of power each of them exercises on the other, as "there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relations" (Foucault *History*, 93-94). The speaker's assertive claim of power is declared naught in the last stanza, revealing his or her dominant status to be mere role play. An understanding of dominance as role play is supported in stanza two, where the male is "Superior in the Sky," but at the same time is under the speaker's "Command," and thus only appears to be superior when, in fact, he is not. The union suggested in the third stanza is limited temporarily in the poem, as both protagonists also "front a Mutual Day." In fact, the moon's "Crescent" is only visible during the night. The appearance of the moon on earth is defined by the amount of sunlight being cast on its surface, part of which can be blocked by the earth, which stands between sun and moon. The influence

of the sun and earth on the moon's perceived shape thus disappears during the day, marking the relationship between them as temporary and thus fragile.

The poem is fascinating if we ask who, in theory, could control gravity. Dickinson's contemporary would have answered that only God could do that. Only divine power could take control over gravity. Alternatively, if we consider that the relationship of control described in the poem is a product of poetry, the speaker could be collapsed with the poet. The erotic relationship between the speaker and the male "He" is set in nature and in poetry. Nature is freed from God's power in this poem, as the speaker takes over control, making nature into a realm that exists independently outside of God's reach. According to Stein, Dickinson reorders the power relations between God, nature, and the poet, portraying an autonomous nature that allows for a more mutual and fluid distribution of power among them (24).

The poet, in this case Dickinson, claims creation for herself in this poem, and thus imagines herself on equal grounds with the divine creator, overturning hierarchies and reordering traditional power structures.[42] The question remains who "He," holding the " Crescent" and the "Tides" and being "superior in the Sky" could be. If it is not God, the male figure under control, I propose, could well be the divine creator himself. God created the moon and the sea, and thus they are "His Crescent" and "His Tides." The poet speaker then takes over a (body) part that belongs to God, and, thus breaking up his omnipotence, gains control over God himself in her poetry. The relationship between speaker and God is characterized as erotic in this poem, and is characterized as a power play involving growth and reduction, movement towards union and mutuality and increasing distance, elements that can be interpreted as metaphors for the generation of desire, role play and a teasing eroticism.

Dickinson uses the underlying principle of gravity as a metaphor for the attraction between lovers and the inevitability of the fascination for the other, more powerful or larger entity in several of her poems describing relationships. Often, she sets these poems in nature, and characteristically at least one of the characters involved in the relationship is an anthropomorphized body of water, inevitably flowing into a sea. "My River runs to Thee –" (F219) provides a humorous example of a "River" proposing union to the "Blue Sea." The tone, rhythm and rhyme of the poem are light and flirty, the landscape imagery of a phallic brook being absorbed in a sea suggest intercourse, and the "spotted nooks" carved into the land rouses associations of female genitalia, implying that the poem cheekily follows an erotic hidden agenda.[43]

F219

My River runs to Thee –
Blue Sea – Wilt welcome me?

My River waits replay.
Oh Sea – look graciously!

I'll fetch thee Brooks
From spotted nooks –

Say Sea – take me?

The sea is a recurring motive in Dickinson's poetry, and referring to her early poetry, Leiter reads it as "a symbol of fulfillment in love, with the beloved the larger, encompassing element with whom the diminutive, subservient female speaker wishes to merge" (185). This interpretation certainly accords with "My River runs to Thee –" (F219). The sea as an all-encompassing body of water that absorbs smaller units like drops, rivers, and brooks remains a powerful topos throughout her poetic oevre however. The pressing issue Dickinson resumes time after time using the metaphor of the sea swallowing smaller bodies of liquid is whether a union between lovers is possible without having to abandon individuality and independence in a romantic relationship. "The Drop, that wrestles in the Sea –," (F255) Leiter says, is written in an angry tone that implies hidden frustration (185).[44]

F255

The Drop, that wrestles in the Sea –
Forgets her own locality
As I, in Thee –

She knows herself an incense small –
Yet small, she sighs, if all, is all,
How larger – be?

The Ocean, smiles at her conceit –
But she, forgetting Amphitrite –
Pleads "Me"?

As the "Sea" is already all-encompassing, it does not need the "Drop" to be complete, and therefore there is no need for concern about the female smaller unit of water's fate. The female speaker however risks annihilation. "How larger – be?" she asks, threatened to be absorbed by the larger "Ocean," and unwilling to lose her own identity insists on possessing a "Me," something that the majestic "Sea" dismisses as "conceit" unfitting for a woman. The female's pride, Dickinson reminds us, is not to be ridiculed however. Just as the female "Drop," the reader and the "Ocean" forget about "Amphitrite," the goddess of the sea, who rules the oceans alongside the sea-god Poseidon. Instead of pleading for retaining her identity, she should boldly claim it, as being part of the sea and as "Drop" contributing to the whole entitles her to a status similar to the "Ocean[s]," or Poseidon's.

According to Leiter, this poem can be read in context of the "dangerous intensity of marriage" that Dickinson in her letters and poems at the same time fears and craves (186). "The Drop, that wrestles in the Sea" (F255) can certainly be read in this context, as its metaphorics strongly remind of a literary predecessor that deals with the marriage between socially unequal partners. I suggest that Dickinson took Brontë's *Jane Eyre* as a template when she wrote her poetry featuring the brook and the sea: "I thought of the life that lay before me," Jane Eyre tells her beloved Mr Rochester the night before their scheduled wedding, "– *your* life, sir – an existence more expansive and stirring than my own: as much more so as the depths of the sea to which the brook runs are than the shallows of its own strait channel" (Brontë 263). After having lost the prospect of marriage with the rich Mr Rochester, Brontë lets her heroine *Jane Eyre* ponder on whether to accept the proposal of marriage by St John, a missionary whom she does not love: "I was tempted to cease struggling with him – to rush down the torrent of his will into the gulf of his existence, and there lose my own" (Brontë 390). As both extracts from Brontë show, the threat of loss of self is strongly connected to the prospect of marital union.

Marriage is frequently portrayed as problematic in Dickinson's poetry. In fact, it is not always clear in Dickinson's poetry whether a union, even though initially desired, is favorable after all. "The Sea said 'Come' to the Brook –" exemplifies the tension between craving the "Other" for its otherness and the boredom arising as soon as the familiarity following possession takes over.

F1275

The Sea said "Come" to the Brook –
The Brook said "Let me grow" -
The Sea said "Then you will be a Sea -
I want a Brook - Come now"!

The Sea said "Go" to the Sea -
The Sea said "I am he
You cherished" - "Learned Waters -
Wisdom is stale - to Me" –

Again, Dickinson intertwines questions of power and desire in this poem. The "Sea" desiring the "Brook" denies it growth because it would then gain size and become indistinguishable, just another sea. The crux in this poem is that the force of gravity is inevitable and causes all rivers and brooks to run downwards until they meet, and the water of the brook turns into the water of the sea. The poem's imagery portrays the "Brook" as phallic, an impression that is reinforced by it's plead to "Let [it] grow" and the craving sea's demand to "'Come now'!" In this poem, even though gender is not unambiguously assigned, the phallic "Brook" is fully engulfed

by the deep sea, representing rather female sexuality than male. In this poem, the prevalent danger of annihilation implies that active, desiring female sexuality is dangerous. Even though the larger "Sea" initially desires the "Brook," it is not con"tent at making it disappear. Once incorporated, the "Sea" cannot recognize the former "Brook," and the craving for it disappears. Only as long as the "Brook" can be defined as 'other' does it rouse desire in the "Sea." When that otherness disappears and the teasing difference in power characterized as gravity ceases, the "Wisdom" acquired during the amalgamation becomes "stale" and worthless. Thus, the desire arising through difference and distance is more valuable in this poem than the actualization of a union, which inevitably makes the reason for attraction and thus all erotic interest disappear (Caci "Interchangeability" 79).

While power difference and distance seem to be a precondition for desire, union seems to diminish this difference and the annexation and consequential undifferentiability between the lovers threaten individual identity. However, a certain degree of adjustment to the other partner in a relationship, whether marriage or romantic affair, seems to be necessary. Again, Dickinson refers to gravity when describing the connection between the participants in a relationship as the tidal "Answer" the "Sea" gives the "Moon." The burning question she explores repeatedly is to what degree adjustment to the other and a subjugation of individual interests is needed when one enters a marital or romantic relationship with someone. Could the advantage of a union with someone outweigh the sacrifices needed, Dickinson asks in "I could suffice for Him, I knew –," (F712) and can there be certainty beforehand?

F712

I could suffice for Him, I knew –
He – could suffice for Me –
Yet Hesitating Fractions – Both
Surveyed Infinity –

"Would I be Whole" He sudden broached –
My Syllable rebelled _
'Twas face to face with Nature – forced –
'Twas face to face with God –

Withdrew the Sun – to other Wests –
Withdrew the furthest Star
Before Decision – stooped to speech –
And then – be audibler

The Answer of the Sea unto
The Motion of the Moon –

Herself adjust Her Tides- unto –
Could I – do else – with Mine?

A female speaker and a male unidentified person, in the last stanza compared to the “Sea” and the “Moon,” are attracted to each other and drawn towards each other, a force that is associated with gravity in the last stanza. Even though they long for each other’s company, they are also highly aware of their own individuality and separate identities. Hesitation on the speaker’s part and the male counterpart’s doubt on whether they could be “‘Whole ’” convey a sense of uneasiness in this poem. The association of “Fractions” with ‘lack’ and the positive connotations of ‘sufficing one another’ and ‘wholeness’ suggest inevitability, on the one hand heightening the existential fear from loss of identity and on the other hand turning the speaker ’s reluctance to conform and enter a union with her male lover into a confrontation with both “ Nature” and “God.” As a reaction and possible attempt at escape, the bodies of the sky flee from each other in the third stanza, the “Sun” and the stars withdrawing to the limits of the universe. However, the attractive forces between the bodies of the sky do not diminish with distance, and on the contrary the demand to make a “Decision” becomes “audibler.” In contrast to the other poems using gravity as a metaphor for the power relations between lovers, the dependency and the force that binds the “Sea” and the “Moon” to each other cannot be adjusted, but seems to preexist. However, even though power cannot be negotiated here, the space within which the attraction exists seems to be dynamic, stretching to the outskirts of the universe if needed. The female speaker thus lacks the freedom to decide whether she wants to be with the male “Moon,” and the demand to “adjust Her Tides” to him persists, but the two may be flexible to decide on the degree of the necessary adjustment.

In “I could suffice for Him, I knew –” (F712) Dickinson reflects on the social nature of all human beings that primes us to live in groups and build unions with others on the one hand and the desire for individuality and independency on the other hand. Both strives are irreconcilable and doom the individual to either remain “Fraction[al]” or to enter into a relationship and ostensibly form a “Whole” which, of course, cannot exist because the union requires adjustment on either part and, thereby, produces a loss. In her poetry, Dickinson exploits apparent contradictions her culture, society and the norms and expectations they produce provide. In “I could suffice for Him, I knew –” (F712), the speaker’s “Syllable rebelled ” at the prospect of merging with someone else’s. However, syllables cannot stand alone if they are to be meaningful, but only acquire sense in combination with other syllables or words. Thus, a selfhood that is based on separateness does not make sense. Dickinson is aware of that and despite the idiosyncrasies of her language and approaches to different topics moves within the constraints of the poetic genre and the expectations of her time to produce the novel insights her poetry provides. As I say elsewhere, Dickinson “is willing to ‘adjust her Tides,’ her

words, to other words to create multiple flexible meanings, even if this at times compromises intelligibility" ("Interchangeability" 85): "'I could suffice for Him, I knew –' captures this poetical … dilemma …" (Caci "Interchangeability" 85).

By using gravity as a metaphor in her poetry on relationships between participants of different gender and hierarchies, Dickinson portrays the apparent rigid models her culture prescribes for the interactions and connections between men and women. From within this constraint, she proposes alternative models however, offering new understandings of how hierarchies and gendered ascriptions are created in interaction, portraying protagonists whose gender identities are ambiguous, dynamic and on the move towards new subjectivities beyond the dichotomous male and female but somewhere along the spectrum in between. The seaside landscapes Dickinson choses to portray these relationships are characterized by being part of nature as opposed to culture. The space of nature creates the illusion of a lack of societal prescriptions at the same time as it provides the pretext of naturalness. Nature thus provides models of dependencies between bodies and phenomena that appear to be given and, as nature is nevertheless not void of cultural associations, offers the possibility to anthropomorphize elements of nature. By doing so, Dickinson not only deconstructs notions of natural fixity of relations in nature but also in culture between men and women, and thereby challenges the intertwined models of gender and power of her time.

My analysis of Dickinson's poems set in nature shows that the poet understands the function of nature as a necessary opposite to the concept of culture, which by definition excludes everything that is wild and untamed, and therefore projects everything that does not belong to the realm of culture onto the abject space of nature. The way we see and perceive nature is, therefore, highly governed by the culture we live in. Dickinson's poetry shows not only that the poet is highly conscious of this fact, but also that her poetry constitutes a critique of gendered personifications of nature as benevolent Mother Nature or Virgin Land. On the one hand, Dickinson appropriates such personifications to offer possibilities of powerful female role models, extending the realm of feminine authority to a similar scale as God's, and on the other hand she dismisses them as cultural constructs. When Dickinson stages erotic desire in nature or uses floral metaphors, she does so in an unconventional way, deconstructing the dichotomous concept of gender and proposing a more fluid model that allows for multiple positions along a spectrum instead. Dickinson's space of nature thus provides room for the expression and experience of an alternate eroticism and sexuality. It offers the characters who trespass into nature the possibility to rebel against gender norms, to realize the constructed nature of these norms, and to understand that structures of power generating gender roles are not rigid but dynamic. By using seemingly rigid forces of nature like gravity as a metaphor for the attraction between lovers, Dickinson allows her characters to negotiate the intensity of their

relationship to each other, the distance between each other, and the degree to which they want to submit themselves to the other.

3. House and Home

3.1 The Dichotomy of Public and Private Space and Dickinson's Subversive Appropriation of the Domestic

No other poet is as closely associated with her home as Emily Dickinson, who spent most of her life in the house and garden of her father's property. The fact that Dickinson became increasingly "housebound"[1] in her thirties, as Wheler puts it, tempts many readers into assigning special significance to the surroundings in which Dickinson created her poetry (Wheeler 23). Such a reading is reinforced by nineteenth-century notions that made the house "coextensive with the person of the dweller, a kind of second skin", as Fuss puts it (*Interior* 9). On one hand, this chapter historically locates such notions of domestic space as cultural signifier endowing its inhabitants with identity and examines their significance for an understanding of Dickinson's use of the domestic in her poetry. On the other hand, my examination of the interiors and representations of engagement in the household focuses on the employment of this heavily gendered space as a locus for creativity and the reformation of the cultural parameters determining female identity and women's proper sphere.

"God, keep me from what they call households"! Dickinson exclaims in a letter to her friend Abiah Root in 1850 (L36).[2] The call presents the involvement in domestic duties as a burden and expresses the want to be free from such obligations, but at the same time confirms the poet's contribution to and participation in keeping up a household. In *Maid as Muse*, Aife Murray portrays the influence of servants on the Dickinson family's everyday life, arguing that the presence or lack of household aid affected the poet's productivity (80).[3] Even though Dickinson frequently complained about the burden of domestic chores and might have dismissed "housework as a plebeian interference with her writing", the extent to which she was occupied with care work and housekeeping cannot be denied (Erkkila *Politics* 143). During times when their mother was sick, Dickinson and her sister Lavinia took over the management of the household, and it seems to be established that Vinnie was responsible for the cleaning, while Emily cooked (Murray 77). Contemporaries also report of Dickinson's everyday occupations in the kitchen, like Higginson who knew about her baking skills and her father's marked preference for her bread.[4] Dickinson's cousin Helen Knight Wyman wrote in the *Boston Cooking-School Magazine* in 1905 how the poet, despite her mind's affiliation for abstract thought, was often busy with household tasks: "Even though her mind might be occupied with 'all mysteries and all knowledge', including meteors and comets, her hands were often busy in most humble household ways."[5] Wyman's statement shows impressively the perceived clash between Dickinson's mental absorbance and her occupation within the home and informs us about how a woman's life was incompatible with a poet's occupation at the time. By

emphasizing Dickinson's involvement into household chores the speaker seeks to reconcile the two spheres and to convert them into proper feminine behavior. The fact that Dickinson was often occupied in the kitchen, kept a piece of paper and pen with her while she cooked and often wrote poems on the back of recipes strengthens the connection between domestic work and poetry (38).[6] The surviving scrap papers Dickinson used to sketch her poems seem to testify coexistence, or reciprocity, between the absorption in household affairs and a mind deeply engaged with the poetical, attentively drawing inspiration from the surroundings of daily reality.

The correlation between Dickinson's occupation within the household and her care responsibilities and the frequency of domestic themes and settings in her poetry has occupied critics from the beginnings of Dickinson scholarship. Especially feminist readings, and rightly so, encourage scholars to view Dickinson's art, in Suzanne Juhasz words, "as an extension and manifestation of her specific biographical, psychological, cultural situation" (*Critics* 6). That is, feminist criticism encourages readings that situate the poet and her poetry historically, and to take her gender and her life's specific circumstances as well as the conventions of her time seriously as influence, inspiration and as site of projection. Historical as well as every day context thus forms an integral part of Dickinson's poetry. However, the simultaneity of Dickinson's engagement in domestic duties and her identity as a poet still seem to offer difficulties, as critics show a need to elevate her involvement with the household from everyday ordinariness by recurrently drawing parallels between typical female occupations within the home and the writing of poetry in order to appease the poet's involvement with household tasks with symbolic value. Shira Wolosky, for example, aligns needlework, Dickinson's fair copies found in the attic after her death, and the characteristic dash running through her poetry like a connecting threat, merging the female needle with the male pen:[7] "Her sewing of poems into fascicle booklets connects her domestic to her poetic arts. Indeed, the dashes that at once mediate and disrupt her flow of syntax suggest the sewing thread on which she strings her words, yet in doing so dramatizes the fragile connections they weave." (Wolosky *Poetry* 23).

The tendency to translate the particulars of Dickinson's domestic life into the abstract is probably most pronounced when Gilbert claims that the poet treated "all the materials of daily reality, and most especially the details of domesticity, as if they were not facts but metaphors ..." (23). From the beginning, Gilbert argues in "The Wayward Nun beneath the Hill," the myth evolving around the figure of Emily Dickinson was intensely associated with domesticity (23). This myth of the woman who only wears white and never leaves her house was fueled consciously by the poet herself, calling on stereotypically female "mysteries", " deliberately exploring and exploiting the characteristics, even the constraints, of nineteenth-century womanhood so as to transform and transcend them" (Gilbert 23). In order to parody and thus stretch the constraints situating women within the privacy of the home, Dickinson

again and again portrays everyday domestic reality in her poetry. Dickinson, Gilbert is convinced, engaged in “an elaborate mythology of the household” (31).

The frequent settings of Dickinson’s poems in the realm of everyday domestic life and her ability to expand these settings to the wider public leads critics to conclude that to Dickinson, household life was just as enlightening and relevant as public affairs, thus locating her in the same tradition as other female writers who “scorned patriarchal male definitions of what is important in history and of what is not important” (Gilbert 38). The emphasis of the importance of the everyday is not only emphasized, but acclaimed when Gilbert calls for a complementary vision of the mystic as characteristically female and identifies Dickinson as “priestess of the daily,”[8] emphasizing the transforming and restorative effects of household and health-care tasks paralleled in female fertility capable of endowing new life (40-1). The appropriation of the domestic as mystical is then empowerment on characteristically female terms: Dickinson “defines and enacts distinctive mysteries of womanhood”[9] by setting her poems in the domestic sphere, which according to Gilbert contributes to the special “’female’” character of Dickinson’s transformations (30).

If domesticity and all aspects associated with it that bind one gender to the confines of the house and declare it women’s proper sphere indeed offered a space for transformation to Dickinson, and if it is true that Dickinson, as Betsy Erkkila declares, aimed at creating “an alternative female community” through writing and at “challenging patriarchal power” in society specifically “*from within the confines of her ‘Father’s house,’*” it is important to ask how this setting becomes a tool for initiating change in Dickinson’s poetry and how she represents, reshapes and amplifies this space and its characteristics (*Sisters* 49, italics mine). The house with its connotations of privacy, domesticity, and gendered stratification offers a rich surface for interpretation when, as Juhasz suggests, viewed as a site the poet deliberately chose as refuge in order to "move into *a space* where she could select, apportion, focus, examine, explore, satiate herself exactly as she wished and needed to do, such that poetry could result ” (8, italics mine). Fuss suggests that we read Dickinson’s surroundings as an integral part of her attitude towards the home, as “the architectural dwelling is not merely something we inhabit, but something that inhabits us” (*Interior* 5).

Dickinson uses notions of the domestic and of the space of the house in her poetry in order to negotiate its gendered connotations, to criticize them and to undermine them in order to carve out a space allowing for alternative identities. In a first step, it is essential to recapitulate Dickinson’s historical reality as well as nineteenth-century discourses evolving around domesticity, the distinction between the private and public realm, and notions of womanhood that directly influenced the layout of houses, which were reinforced and mirrored by the physical space through which nineteenth-century individuals moved. In a second step, the chapter looks closely at the domestic spaces Dickinson’s speakers inhabit, allowing us to trace the way the poet stretches, adapts and creates new spaces within and beyond her

culture's prerogatives that challenge, destabilize, and transform conventional notions of gender.

3.1.1 Houses in Dickinson's Time: the Architecture of a Divided Society

"The reification of space is the story of social hierarchy," Sally Bayley says in *Home on the Horizon* (31). In space, identity and social categories like gender are produced, and they in turn create spaces (Mitchell 201): "gender symmetry and asymmetry manifest themselves in the organization and use of space," Klein says in her work on the private/public distinction (102). Her statement emphasizes the difference between how men and women move in space, when mapped, reveals the gendering of space. And this gendering, in turn, is linked to notions of the public and private (Klein 102). We thus have to understand space and its inaugurating quality always at the same time as physical *and* social.

This complex and interdependent relationship becomes even clearer when we think of spaces designed for a specific purpose. Looking at domestic space, the ideologies attached to this particular space and the rules governing its use, determining who had access to which spaces, which activities were performed openly and which were doomed to invisibility, provides an understanding of how space inscribes itself onto social practices, and how space itself is structured and in turn inscribed by them. The contrast between the ideologies inscribed onto space to shape it according to a certain purpose and its appropriation by individuals who actually live in those spaces results in tensions. Architecture, Pohl says, represents the "ruling social discourses" of a certain time, while lived space is supposed to manifest these discourses in social practice (11). According to Pohl, this opens up a paradox between the representative nature of space and space that is actually 'lived,' as we have to comprehend space both literally and allegorically at the same time (11).

Domestic space was highly stratified along gender lines during the Victorian age. In *The Victorian Parlor*, Logan explores "how ideology is inscribed in and onto the material world" (1). What he says about the English parlor is highly instructive for my purpose as well as for the formation of a more scrutinizing eye on the architecture of the nineteenth-century New England, a region highly shaped by its British roots (Logan xv). The nineteenth-century British parlor, Logan says, is a "synecdoche for that culture itself, a microcosm of the middle-class Victorian world, miniaturized, as if under glass" (xiv). If this is true, we can draw conclusions about Victorian society and culture by looking at how space was designed, and how people moved in and reacted to those spaces. Other critics, among them Pohl, also make a link between living space, its organization, and its relationship to individual people and society as a whole. The layout, decoration, accessibility, and use of rooms in homes can be seen as model spaces reflecting the organization of both individual families and social systems (Pohl 9). The distinction between the private and the public realm and their association with feminine grace and charm on one side and the ruthless, aggressive character of the business

world on the other side has according to Blunt and Rose served the bourgeoisie to distance themselves from the lower classes in England and all over Europe ("Family" 3). Kross also emphasizes the link between domestic space and social hierarchies when she treats middle-class houses, first appearing in the United States on a wider basis in the eighteenth century, as "both mirrors of and metaphors for colonial society" (385). Architectural history, she maintains, gives insight into how the division between public and private space, which in turn allowed for the creation of "multiple gendered publics," was made possible (385). For a better understanding of Dickinson's time, the opposition of public and private and the poet's appropriation of the domestic, it is useful to reconstruct the development from the simple hall-parlor house where all household work was done in a single room to homes consisting of multiple rooms with dedicated use.

Even though the association of women with the private, and men with the public already existed in the eighteenth century to some degree,[10] men and women living in houses consisting only of one or two rooms as it was the custom of the time must have had access to each other 's conversations, and women must have had more insight into men's businesses and financial matters simply because fewer rooms existed to retreat to and shut the door. The addition of several rooms to the house made the division between public and private space possible (Kross 385). Dickinson experienced this change very directly when her family moved back to the Homestead, the house built by her grandfather but sold due to financial problems and left in the 1840ies, and repurchased by her father in 1855 (Fuss *Interior* 26-8). When Dickinson was born, the house was occupied by both her father's and her grandfather's family, with the hall and staircase functioning as an invisible divider, but only one kitchen and one hearth, creating a very homogenous and communal dwelling (Fuss *Interior* 27-8). Dickinson's father substantially remodeled the Homestead according to new principles of reserving every room for a special purpose and distinguishing between spaces open to visitors and those for family members only.[11] Edward Dickinson added a two-storied wing on the east of the original structure containing the kitchen in the back, a servant staircase and servant quarters above, the pantry, the dining room, and an additional bedroom on the second floor (Fuss *Interior* 32). On the ground floor, there was now room for a library to which a conservatory was added (Fuss *Interior* 32). According to ideological principles, each family member now had their separate bedroom. These changes allowed for the division between public and private spaces, removed servants and activities like cooking from the center of the house, and the availability of separate bedrooms which all had their own heating provided more private space for the individual family members (Fuss *Interior* 54).

The public and private spaces created in such a way, Kross says, became more gendered over time (385). Space in great houses, she illustrates, was hierarchically[12] marked, "with men having access to the more formal, expensive, and psychologically satisfying parts of the house for all-male activities" (Kross 385). These rooms, namely the parlor, sitting room,

and dining room, were the political and intellectual centers within the house and open to both all-male and mixed gender activities, while the library was reserved for spare time and intellectual cultivation.[13] The only space where women could meet without men was the bedroom, a space remote from the center of the house and lacking prestige (Kross 386). In the bedroom, women also wrote and read, but many of course shared their bedrooms with their husbands (Kross 386). We know that Dickinson wrote her poetry and letters in her bedroom, often at night after her duties in the household had been completed and everyone else had gone to bed. Marked rather as a place to write than a place to sleep – Dickinson wrote most of her poems and letters here – this room was more a poet's "private study" than a bedroom (Fuss *Interior* 59). [14] Certainly, her own bedroom and the privacy it granted her are an important factor to consider in regard to Dickinson's avoidance of marriage. In contrast to women, men had possibilities outside the home to gather, such as taverns, coffee houses and clubs (which excluded the lower classes) (Kross 286). These spaces were reserved to men only, while women had no such equivalent space that was exclusively for women but spent time outside of the home in ballrooms, theaters, stores, restaurants and churches which were open to both genders (Kross 386).

The distinction between genders was also important in decorative detail and furniture of a house, mirroring a concern for clear gender distinctions in all aspects of Victorian social formations (Logan 32). For example, Logan explains, there were 'male' and 'female' versions of chairs, the male chair featuring arms and being heavier built, the female chair being lighter and allowing space for elaborate skirts (32). Even though men and women shared most of the spaces in a Victorian home, there were strict regulations regarding the time when men and women used those spaces.[15] Very little is extant about the furniture and its assemblage in the Dickinson home during her lifetime (Fuss *Interior* 36). We do know, however, that the family members did not always segregate space according to gender, and Dickinson connected the kitchen at the Homestead with her brother, not female family members, as the siblings used to spend considerable time in the kitchen together (Fuss *Interior* 35). Despite such individual adaptations in specific homes, ideology remained strong, and women's as well as men's lives, Logan concludes, where substantially affected by the gendering of the physical and ideological confines of the home (32).

The picture Kross and Logan paint of the Victorian house is one of restriction, circumscribing and imprisoning women, and to a certain extent of course also men, within their own home. Of course, we always have to bear in mind that the descriptions and portraits of Victorian living spaces we have today are always arranged. That is, we do not have access to these homes as they really were, but have to rely on representations which are, of course, always mediated, have to be understood in their historical context, and need to be recognized as intentional and strategic (Logan 2). Part of this dilemma is that most of the information we have on the interiors of Victorian houses and their use comes from courtesy manuals or guides

for housewives. The very genre of these sources implies their proximity to ideology, not practice. Even though Dickinson's father, according to Fuss, remodeled the Homestead according to the ideological principles of the time, there is evidence that the family did not inhabit the spaces of their home according to these principles (*Interior* 35): the kitchen and dining room formed the familial center of the house, and both rooms were used for eating, sitting together, writing and reading (Fuss *Interior* 35). The dining room was especially adaptable, being transformed into a sitting room during the winter, and containing a writing table for Emily, storage for her father's law papers, and a lounge chair where her mother often slept (Fuss, *Interior* 35). During the years of Dickinson's brother Austin's affair with Mabel Loomis Todd, Fuss writes, the dining room was where they met and, "with Emily and Lavinia's tacit approval," even had sex (*Interior* 36).

Given such versatility, Logan emphasizes that even tough women were "in some sense inmates" charged with the decoration of interior space that made it into a 'home,' "they were also its producer, its curators, and its ornaments" (26).[16] This circumstance represents a potential source of empowerment: women also shaped, to some degree, the space they were assigned. However, the restrictions, divisions and attributions of space in houses were by no way stable, but in constant need of negotiation and affirmation, and thus offered the possibility of adjustments, allowing men and women to reinterpret and reshape spaces within their homes against ideology to suit their own needs. This instability, Bayley illustrates, is mirrored by the focus on the "maintenance of boundaries" described in many nineteenth-century instructive literatures on home décor (Bayley *Home* 42). Thresholds like doors and windows, but also connective architectural elements like hallways, vestibules and staircases, Bayley explains, are essentially "markers of territories", and housewives are advised to carefully maintain the separateness of allocation of activities assigned to a specific room (*Home* 42):[17] "The purpose of any room is to provide a solid and discrete set of spatial identities, reflecting a clear set of social roles. A room determines the identity and purpose of its occupants and there should be no blurring of these distinctions" (Bayley *Home* 45). However, and despite its ideologically clear demarcation from its outside, the home is always also connected to the "'public' space of political, economic and cultural relations and institutions" that it wishes to exclude as its opposite (Rose "Family" 5). Objects in a house, Rose maintains, are simultaneously crucial to the creation of domestic space, but also point outwards, encompassing spaces out of the reach of the particular domestic setting[18] ("Family" 5-7). The home thus represents a complex set of ideologies and their potential transgression inscribed into spatial boundaries mirroring the segregation between the genders. The direct link between spatial separation and gender make the home a very rich metaphor for Dickinson to present, transgress and discuss notions of identity, gender, ideologies of womanhood and the social divisions of her culture.

3.1.2 The Domestic Ideal and the "Empire of the Mother"

"Well-kept women meant a well-kept nation," Bayley summarizes the scope of nineteenth-century domestic ideology (*Home* 27). Women and their management were thus intimately linked to the nation and its fate, although they were, ironically, excluded from actively taking part in it. It is not a long stretch, then, to declare the home, women's realm of action, a metaphor of the nation. According to nineteenth-century domestic ideology, the home was seen as the " source of personal and civic virtue," as opposed to public institutions like the church[19] that were formerly thought to foster such traits. The home and the ideas attached to it thus took an important place in fostering the ideals so central to the nineteenth-century American nation (Logan 25). As discussed earlier, it seems apparent that this development coincided with and was significantly fostered by a change in architecture adding more rooms to houses, assigning them specific purposes, gendering them and creating a demarcation between public and private. Bennett locates the climax of the domestic ideology termed the "Empire of the Mother" between 1836 and 1860 (2). Other critics like Klein situate the height of the association of the woman with the home more vaguely within the boundaries of the nineteenth century, and most historians concur that the construction of a private and a public sphere with strong gendered and ideological roots sprouted in America in the eighteenth century and reached overall validity in the nineteenth century (Klein 101).

Women stood at the center of nineteenth-century America's cult of domesticity, and the home was viewed as a protective cultural space where ideal forms of femininity would be well kept and preserved" (Bayley *Home* 27). The home, then, becomes a sanctum threatened by the harshness of the outside world (Logan 26). It was every woman's mission to make the world better from within the home by bringing men nearer to good and thus guard society from further moral decay (Welter 163). Women within their proper domestic sphere were seen as "the highest adornment of civilization" (Welter 164). Domesticity was therefore the most important value promoted in women's magazines as marker of True Womanhood (Welter 162). A women's identity was thought to be intimately tied to the house and home, and women were urged to find inspiration for the formation and acting out of their distinct identities within the home (Logan 33). To this end, they were constantly reminded to keep themselves busy performing "morally uplifting tasks" within the home (Welter 164).[20] To support an adequate development of the female inhabitants' character, the domestic interior was supposed to reinforce symbolically contested dichotomies like male and female or public and private (Logan xiii). The home, and as Logan points out especially the parlor, were metaphors for family happiness and therefore "the designated scene of culturally mandated domestic bliss" (Logan 31).

During Dickinson's time, modesty was perceived as the "quintessence of womanhood" (Wolosky *Poetry* 2). In her exploration of True Womanhood, a term widely used in the nineteenth century[21] to describe the ideal woman, Welter identifies four fundamental

virtues a woman had to possess in order to be considered a "true" woman: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity (152). Ideal feminine identity and the expression of such an identity, rooted within the home, were structured by the notions of "utility and self-denial" while "interiority was legitimate only when the feminine self was fully defined by and directed towards others" (Logan 33). Etiquette books of the late eighteenth and nineteenth century prescribe modesty as the all-encompassing principle steering all of a woman's actions, her participation in conversation, her bearing and attitudes and, to go without saying, her sexual behavior (Wolosky *Poetry* 3). Silence, then, and not speech or straight-forwardness was promoted in women (Nekola 31). But despite these limiting and prescribing qualities, modesty offered, in Wolosky's words, a "core mode of female self-representation" (*Poetry* 2). When appropriated with an emphasis on its positive attributions like the devotion to community values, modesty certainly accommodated qualities affirming female selfhood and was thus suitable for many women for the expression of specifically female experience in writing (Wolosky *Poetry* 2). Klein also points to the potential of modesty as a signifier for "True Womanhood" offered even for subversive or alternative identification: "Although individuals are always constrained by the sets of distinctions of which they may avail themselves, the fact that such sets are multiple is at least at times a source of power" (Klein 99-100). Klein stresses the possibilities modesty, a complex construct invoking a whole range of often contradictory attributions, offers for a representation of the self. Wheeler heads into a similar direction when she identifies modesty, or reserve, as she calls it, as a rhetorical strategy that allows for withholding information or attitudes by moving within conventions, thereby creating an air of secrecy (7-8).[22] Feminine virtues such as modesty or reticence, Wheeler emphasizes, may be used both as a "reassuring mask of femininity" or to redirect attention from their (physical) gender towards "androgyny," thus appearing within a proper feminine frame while criticizing the conventional lyric at the same time (11). Only when understood with an ideological background does Dickinson's appropriation of modesty and the domestic, the myth revolving around her life and the historical reality at the Homestead allow for a differentiated view of the degree of her conformity in regard to such ideologies, but also of her subversive reinterpretations and rebellions.[23]

The Empire of the Mother and True Womanhood are ideological concepts that do not accurately reflect real women's lives in nineteenth-century America. Klein terms the ideology preoccupied with the distinction between the domestic associated with the female and everything beyond the hearth associated with the male located at this specific point in time the "domestic thesis" (97). The domestic thesis, Klein argues, is a construct over hastily taken for reality by many historians and critics likewise when talking about nineteenth-century American women's lives. The assumption of the ideology's direct translatability into historical reality and its all-encompassing validity unduly fixes the way we think space was organized, and how it was used and perceived in each instance. Klein bases her critique on the fact that much of what is taken for granted as parts of the "domestic thesis" relies on information on courtesy

manuals and etiquette books. She therefore reminds critics that we have to assume a “gap between theory and practice” that makes general statements about to which degree individual families complied with this paradigm highly problematic (Klein 101). A reductive perspective of the private and the public as corresponding to home and not-home, she declares, does not do historical reality justice (Klein 104-105). The spaces women moved in and the gendering that went hand in hand with the uses of those spaces might thus be multi-dimensional and less concrete than anticipated.

This is not to say that the ideologies surrounding women and the home are irrelevant when thinking about women’s lives in nineteenth-century America, even if they did not obey those norms at all time. Even if ideological divisions of the public and private manifested themselves as more permeable than commonly assumed in everyday life, the formative power of these ideologies in sustaining discriminating and exclusive social and legal institutions has to be recognized. The role of modesty is a complex one, not only restricting women to their assigned sphere, but also enabling them to communicate beyond and thereby functioning as a mediator between the public and the private (Wolosky *Poetry* 3). On the other hand, ideals such as modesty cannot be underestimated in their power to entrench themselves in and solidify social, political and legal structures that represented real obstacles in women’s everyday lives. Wolosky reveals modesty as a central element of the “Cult of True Womanhood” to be a key factor reinforcing the perceived and internalized division between the public and the private, preventing women from acclaiming the public sphere and, most crucially, claiming equal legal rights (*Poetry* 3). In nineteenth-century America, women were denied property and the inheritance of property if they were married; they were prevented from voting, and needed a legal guardian[24] to sign a contract, they were disqualified from witnessing in a court or in front of a judge; and could not be appointed to a public office (Wolosky *Poetry* 3). As Stanton highlights in her “Address to the New York Legislature” in 1854, marriage was the ultimate deprivation of rights for a woman, as it renders the wife wholly dependent on her husband and illegitimate to propriety. As she reports, husbands were entitled to corporal punishment of their wives, had full authority of all financial means, and had the right to determine their wife's social interactions (Stanton 208). According to Runzo, “helplessness was cultivated in all areas of a woman's life” during Dickinson's time, and her social and legal status was sealed as “natural” by medical, psychological, and especially Darwinian evolutionary discourse (62). “Extra-legal social norms” like modesty forbade a woman to speak publicly when in mixed groups, and thus was an additional, and significant, obstacle in a striving towards equality (Wolosky *Poetry* 3). Yet, Eberwein warns against overstressing the restrictions women doubtless felt in their everyday lives, arguing that women still had “ important areas of freedom” in matters of religion, clothing, furniture, or medical treatment, but emphasizing that “the Yankee woman of Dickinson’s time were more likely to use freedom by making negative choices,” acting out modesty by demonstrating “what they could do without”

(*Strategies* 44). Certainly, Dickinson's reluctance to meet other people, to appear in public, her restriction to white dress, and her refraining from publishing, among many renunciations, can be viewed in that light, highlighting the difficulty to define the peculiarities of her life along dichotomies of private choice versus cultural constraint.

It is exactly ascriptions like modesty intertwined with domesticity, woman's sphere, and the home as restricting and liberating space that I am interested in in this chapter. Dickinson's appropriation of gendered attributions connected to the public and the private, to virtues and decency, and to legal and social structures that are mirrored, inscribed in and reinforced by physical spatial structures highlighted in the home are the focus of my interpretations. While looking at these aspects, I want to bear in mind Wolosky's observation that finding an autonomous poetic voice allowing for female self-expression in a culture that fosters the absence of outspoken identity in women is an act of daring (*Public* 682). Dickinson 's transformations of domestic space are thus not only subversive in respect to her culture, but also a contribution to and affirmation of her identity as a poet, despite the existence of many female poets[25] still a term predominately associated with men and defined in male terms.[26]

3.1.3 Dimensions and Dynamics of the Terms Public and Private

The nineteenth century was a time full of tensions due to fundamental changes on almost every level of society: The American Nation declared itself independent, the railroad, newspapers and periodicals made communication possible across vast distances and bought people closer together, the predominantly agricultural economy gradually developed more industrial forms, issues revolving around civil rights and equality became burning concerns that cumulated in the Civil War, politics became a public matter, domestic and commercial work was increasingly conducted at separate localities and the liberal ideal of privacy as a precondition for sovereignty and autonomous decision making was established (Wolosky *Poetry* 4). These changed notions of privacy and the public structured the lives of men and women along gender lines, assigning them so called "separate spheres" (Wolosky *Public* 665).

Logan links the development of domestic ideology closely to an emerging consumerism, understanding the idea of "Home" as a social phenomenon closely connected to changes in industrial production and the consequent growth of capitalist economies (23). For men, this meant that the ability to provide for a family and establish a home became more and more an issue of identity (Logan 33). For middle-class women who were primarily responsible for managing and, both figuratively and literally, ornamenting a home, the purchasing of furniture and decorative objects in a marketplace with a seemingly boundless number of consumer goods became a more complex and important task (Logan 35). This is especially the case if monetary means are limited as during Dickinson's lifetime, several financial crises occurred, and the danger of insolvency represented a real threat. The long

engagement common during the nineteenth century was a direct effect of the pressure resulting from the necessity to establish and maintain a representative home, and the decision when to marry and how much money was necessary to being able to provide such a home became crucial (Logan 34).

The divide between the public and private, according to many critics, served to confine women to the house. However, this divide is and never was as stable as theory portrays. Many critics, among them Pohl, Bennett, and Wolosky, emphasize the fact that the public and the private coexist, overlap and are constantly renegotiated. Consequently, the dynamics which create social divisions are far more complex than anticipated. Shira Wolosky brings our attention to the fact that intense confusion arises from the described developments concerning the terms of the private and the public (*Public* 665-666). In fact, she explains, the terms acquire almost juxtaposed meanings when applied to men or women. The private in a context involving the female gender is often associated with the domestic sphere and understood as dichotomous to the public world outside the home and thus transmits a sense of enclosure, limitation, and confinement (Wolosky *Public* 665). When uttered in the context of liberal discourse and in connection to men, privacy meant quite the opposite, figuring as a space of thought and reflection allowing the individual to form independent opinions (Wolosky *Public* 666). Within the liberal tradition, a man's individuality, fostered in the privacy of his home,[27] is a precondition for the sovereign individual to enter the public realm and develop a democratic consciousness (Crumbly 35). The private realm then is prior to the public, which only exists through the authority of private men establishing it as such, and signifies a space of freedom in which the state is not to interfere (Wolosky *Public* 667). In a republican perspective, the terms private and public, as Wolosky explains, are used in a different and conflicting way to a liberal understanding. Nineteenth-century Republicans, Wolosky enlightens her readers, gave the public priority to the private realm as they view it as designated to the common good and thus ensuring individual freedom (*Public* 667-8).

As there were differing notions of the public and the private prevalent in the time, and as these terms encompass meanings beyond strictly spatial significations, it is misleading to locate women exclusively in the space of domesticity and the home (Wolosky *Public* 668). It is true, Wolosky emphasizes, that women and their occupations were associated with the private and domestic, but at closer scrutiny, she illustrates not only that women ventured well into the public space, but also that the activities they were involved in were not private in nature, but contributions to the (republican) common good and thus evidently public (*Public* 669). Although women took part in activities that have to be understood in their public dimensions, it is important to call to mind that, despite this fact, women did not have civil rights, and therefore were excluded from direct decision making (Bennett 10). To add to this already very complex picture, Wolosky shows how the activities men were involved in, and which were thought of as public as men commonly worked outside the home to earn a living, in fact have to be termed

private as they are not contributions to the common good but serve the personal ends of supporting a family and increasing one's wealth (*Public* 673).

Women's activities, which included teaching, missionary work and care work involving precarious populations like the poor, orphans, or tending to the sick in hospitals, were thought of as mere extensions of the domestic into the public sphere, and therefore as private (Wolosky *Public* 669-70). Similarly, the political and civic engagement of women including abolitionist activism, campaigns against prostitution and alcoholism were perceived as essentially centered on the family's wellbeing and moral convictions, despite their public and national resonance (Wolosky *Public* 671-673).[28] The terms private and public, Wolosky explains, therefore can be understood neither as geographical nor as in relation to the common good, but have to be conceptualized along gender lines: "It is not simply that women do private things", Wolosky summarizes nineteenth-century perceptions of the terms, "it is that what women do is by definition private" (*Public* 673).

To gender, Wolosky adds power as a crucial aspect to understanding the nineteenth-century usage of the terms private and public. The description of women's lives and their occupations and concerns as private, she maintains, signify devaluation (Wolosky *Public* 673). The nineteenth century increasingly valued traditionally male domains such as economy, competition, and the concentration on increasing one's own advantages, while "moral" issues and the commitment to society as a whole, associated with women and "Civic virtue", lost significance (Wolosky *Public* 676). The exclusion of women from the public and the labeling of everything women were concerned with as private, then, denied them and their work appreciation and rendered them less powerful (Wolosky *Public* 676). The home, then, increasingly became a moral haven, and moral issues were feminized, deemed sentimental and located within the private, denying them general importance and public power (Wolosky *Public* 677). As a result of its feminization, civic virtues, so important and called upon during the revolutionary period, were gradually reduced to a matter of manner, female sexual austereness, and the capability of compassion (Wolosky *Public* 677). The Cult of True Womanhood, Welter points out, was not without paradoxes: On the one hand, it uplifted women as the of true bearer of virtue and a morality high above men, celebrated them as "very little less than the angels," but despite this superiority in character denied them a more active participation in public matters, devaluing the very traits encouraged and cherished in women (174). Consequently, the task of women's magazines and conduct guides preaching the ideal of True Womanhood to persuade women of their value and the necessity to preserve the status quo should not be underestimated. Welter describes this task as follows:

> By careful manipulation and interpretation they sought to convince woman that she had the best of both worlds – power and virtue – and that a stable order of society depended on her maintaining her traditional place in it. To that end she was identified with everything that was beautiful and holy. (Weterer 174)

In light of the difficulty to distinguish between the public and the private, and the fragility of a social order insisting on this very distinction in all matters of including the most trivial everyday details, it is important, to ask how Dickinson's reordering and re-conceptualization of the classical dichotomies of interior/exterior and publicity/privacy restage interiors, as proposed by Fuss, as public places, and the public spaces as offering private refuge, and how she relates the values and the gendering attributed to those spaces (*Interior* 25).

3.1.4 Women's Poetry and the Private – Public Distinction

"Emily Dickinson seems, and in many ways is, the most private of poets," Wolosky says in *Poetry and Public Discourse in Nineteenth-Century America* (*Poetry* 15). This is a statement calling for explanation. After all, Dickinson lived in a house where politics were a constant presence. Not only was her father deeply involved in Whig politics, setting the common good above all personal interests, but some of the most influential political personalities of the time visited the Dickinsons and even stayed overnight (Erkkila *Politics* 139). The Dickinson family home was an open house, indeed a very public place, where the segregation of spheres was maintained only very loosely (Fuss *Interior* 52). Dickinson thus was in direct contact not only with the decision makers of her time, but also with the discourses concerning public matters. In her poetry, Dickinson discusses many topics, among them the Civil War and the values connected to it, and she frequently criticizes the confinement she experienced as a woman. These can hardly be considered topics classifiable as merely personal or private. What does Wolosky mean, tying Dickinson so fiercely to the private? And which meaning of the word "private" is she referring to, given that the terms private and public evade geographical as well as attributive classifications?

The answer is not as straightforward as one might wish. In "Public Women, Private Men," Wolosky clarifies the entanglement of the public and the private, defining them as proscriptive rather than descriptive, and linking them inextricably with gender and power (Wolosky *Public* 673). In her analysis, she illustrates that women's activities and women's interests and participations in political affairs, civil services and educational programs were termed private because it was women, and not men, undertaking them, even though these activities took place outside the home and in the public sphere, and were by nature evidently involvements on a social level. Complicating Wolosky's discussion of the terms, Klein points out that women who did not take part in the public that took place outside the home and involved the company of and interaction with others face to face were still able to take part in a so called "associative public sphere," which is characterized as "a sphere of social, discursive and cultural production" that could involve the writing of letters or poetry addressed to a single individual, be passed around or read to a company of people (104). Surely, this circumstance

relativizes Wolosky's earlier statement declaring Dickinson a poet of the private. A substantial number of the poems Dickinson wrote were included into letters and sent to friends, who in turn passed them around, widening her circle of readers without publishing (Dandurand 260). In fact, Dandurand suggests that this kind of circulation might have generated a much wider awareness of the existence of Dickinson's poetry among contemporaries than scholarship has acknowledged so far (269).[29] The reason for the misrepresentation of her potential audience is rooted in an anachronical understanding of the genre of the letter as private and thus limited to the readership of the recipient.

Bennett takes up the discussion of the public or private nature of poetry by nineteenth-century American women, and she likewise makes the dichotomy between the private and the public a burning issue. This is especially interesting as Dickinson, who refused to leave her father's house after the age of thirty, was at her time and still is often reduced to the private and domestic, even though she evidently not only interacted with visitors at the Homestead, but also took part in numerous discourses via her letters and poems to friends who actively called for emancipation or abolitionism,[30] thus taking full advantage of what Klein calls the "associative public sphere" (104). The political significance of American nineteenth-century poets, Bennett proclaims, has been understated not only by contemporaries, but also by today's critics (3). In *Poets in the Public Sphere*, she counters the perception of poetry as principally talking to itself for purely aesthetic purposes by bringing forth the in American newspapers popular complaint genre and characterizing it as "*public* speech" (4, italics not mine). The goal of complaint poetry frequently published in newspapers, magazines and periodicals, Bennett maintains, was persuasion, and its placement within media belonging to the tradition of social debate makes its audience concrete (5). Instead of associating it with the abstract and purely aesthetical realm, Bennett, following the development of poetry authored by women within the complaint genre, regards nineteenth-century American women's "poetry as a specific form of communicative utterance directed toward real-world (…) effects," assigning it political and cultural significance (6). This becomes especially convincing if we take into account that during the time, people were acutely sensitive to private-public distinctions, although these notions were complex and involved contradictory stances. Because the ideal of womanhood warned women of the public world as false and presented the home as "true", Nekola remarks that many female poets might have refrained from publishing because of a fear that speaking to an audience and being heard and understood by an audience would compromise their integrity and therefore render them "gender*less*" (41, original emphasis). Petrino also confirms that women who published their work were often blamed for doing so "almost as if they had broken sexual mores" (37). Thus women who did contribute to a public medium such as periodicals did so being acutely aware of both the possibilities and dangers this act offered (Klein 102). The United States' women's rights movement, for an example, was decisively guided towards success, Bennett is sure, with the

help of complaint poetry despite its perception as “harmless filler” by publishers and possibly many contemporary male readers (6).

Klein emphasizes the danger of taking ideologies of gendered spheres and domesticity for actual lived reality, reducing the maintenance of the distinctions between the spheres and the discourse of domesticity to a characteristically “male worriment” (101). The fact that a lot of poetry authored by women was published in journals and periodicals reaching audiences all over the country might testify to a more permeable restrictiveness in regard to gender and publishing than generally assumed. Besides, the possibility to publish anonymously provided women with a way to avoid public scrutiny of their poetic talents and moral integrity. Petrino confirms that anonymous publication was a common practice and that the nineteenth-century America’s genteel classes rejoiced in guessing games about who the authors were, thereby “subverting the decorum” “that authorship should not be acknowledged to the general public” (37). The frequent publication of women’s poetry, Bennett suggests, has to be understood in connection to the idea of the public being in principle accessible for everyone[31] and, on the condition that one took part in its (albeit self-referential) rhetoric, allowed for critique and change (9). Although women’s verse had to compel standard modes to be acceptable, “under the guise of sentimentality,” they brought forward concerns on a national scale, and therefore “wielded emotional power that had national ramifications” (Petrino 10). Women, Bennett’s argument goes, entered the public sphere via publishing their writing, and in particular their poetry, in order to “demand, model, imagine, produce, and defend reforms” that eventually granted them more freedom (10). Wolosky similarily assigns women’s poetry significance within women’s struggle to gain civil rights. The fact that women did publish and write poetry at all, she argues, is a merit of female seminaries becoming available at the end of the eighteenth century, education being an important first step towards participation in the cultural and political public, even if, initially, women’s involvement was limited to “republican participation” as teachers and mothers raising competent male citizens (Wolosky *Poetry* 31).

In order to appear in the print public media of their time, eighteenth-century American women poets often resorted to writing complaint poetry fitting the grid of the “age’s idealizing genteel standard”, employed a sentimental rhetoric, or composed novels with a pious or domestic focus (Bennett 19, Nekola 31). Here, the potential modesty played as a guarantor for social acceptability and as a mode for positive representation of the female. Wolosky uses modesty as an exemple for appropriations of cultural prerogatives by women writers who by publishing ventured into the public sphere, using modesty as a trope for presenting themselves and for positioning themselves in social and literary discourses (*Poetry* 3). Modesty, Wolosky writes, is a “*topos,*” or literary trope in female writing that, while invoking limitations and confines for women, also served as a “mode of entry into the wider world” by transgressing or reshaping those boundaries (*Poetry* 1, original italics). Bennett counters the general assumption that the genteel lyric and the sentimental tradition were a specifically female genre

of poetry, pointing to the many male writers employing this format (21).[32] To female poets, a crucial motivator to write was the question of how feminine subjectivity should relate to ideologies of the domestic and prescriptive attributions of modesty, and whether and to which extent these could serve as an anchor for identity (Bennett 23). Dickinson confronts this question in many of her poems, using domestic space and all its ideological implications on feminine identity as a ground for redefinition by highlighting the contradictions inherit in the ideology, questioning dichotomies of the public and the private by deliberately crossing lines and accommodating female voices at the threshold between. Dickinson's work, Fuss' argument goes, reorders and re-conceptualizes the classical dichotomies of interior/exterior and publicity/privacy, restaging interiors as public places, and treating public spaces as offering private refuge (*Interior* 25). Following the movements in domestic space in Dickinson' s poetry allows us to track the creation of a female voice empowered by the ability to endow this space with significance beyond its implied constraints, stretching across female and male, private and public, and inside versus outside distinctions.

3.2 Exploring the House and the Domestic in Dickinson's Poetry

A closer look at Dickinson's use of the domestic realm as a setting of her poems and of the space inside the house grants us a better understanding of how the poet envisions space as flexible, dynamic and offering room not just in its expansiveness, but also in reverse, shaping possibility for the accommodation of an unorthodox female individuality in the margins of lived space such as the doorways or windowpanes, in the negative space of cupboards, or on the scope of the infinitesimal. Often, the speakers of Dickinson's domestic poems cannot immediately be gendered, but certain attributes like items of clothing, their occupation within the house, or their small, diminutive, decorative or quiet bearing make identification as female very plausible. While Dickinson's speakers remain firmly settled within the domestic sphere, they emphasize or dramatize the segregation of spaces and create new room within the house that allows for difference and thereby reaches beyond the limits of their setting.

3.2.1 Exclusion and Access, and the Blurring of Inside and Outside

In her poetry, Dickinson dramatizes questions of exclusion and access, marking domestic space as distinctly divided along the dichotomies of inside versus outside, and portraying its accessibility as controlled by a powerful figure or entity. Such inaccessibility is expressed in "I have a King who does not speak" (157), where a "childish" or "meek" speaker is excluded from the prestigious parlor:

F157 I have a King, who does not speak –
So – wondering – thro' the hours meek

I trudge the day away –
Half glad when it is night – and sleep –
If, haply, thro' a dream to peep
In parlors, shut by day.

And if I do – when morning comes –
It is as if a hundred drums
Did round my pillow roll,
And shouts fill all my childish sky,
And Bells keep saying 'Victory'
From steeples in my soul!

And if I don't – the little Bird
Within the Orchard, is not heard,
And I omit to pray
'Father, thy will be done' today
For my will goes the other way,
And it were perjury!

The identification with a bird or child, looking up at a "King" and "Father" and the simultaneous renunciation of these figures' power are a characteristic strategy Dickinson employs to empower her speakers and to claim room.[104] The poem contrasts night and day, leaving the speaker, who seems subjugated under the authority of the "King" and lacks occupation, "trudg[ing] the day away," "wondering" during daytime. During the night, however, escape from the silent "King" is possible in a "dream," opening new realms for vision, and the speaker gains not physical, but visual access to "parlors, shut by day." These momentary visions in dreams constitute themselves as "'Victory'" the next morning, bestowing the speaker with positive energy and power. The silence of the "King" is contrasted by deafening sound in the second stanza: "a hundred drums", "Bells," and "shouts" of "'Victory'" fill the speaker's "sky," a wide open place. The third stanza is characterized by the lack of sound again: "the little Bird," "is not heard," and the speaker "omit[s]" a prayer which is nevertheless provided as direct speech in quotation marks, provoking doubt about the speaker's de facto speechlessness. The submissiveness of the little prayer, of course, is equally called into question: The "Father" is asserted in his power, but in the next line, this power is contradicted, as the speaker's "will goes the other way." The nonsensical "For" between the two lines heightens this incongruity, suggesting a rereading of the prayer not as affirmation of power, but as renouncement, stating that the authoritarian figure's orders will not be "done" as in 'executed,' but are "done" as in 'finished,' and therefore do not apply any more. In such a subversive reading, the "perjury" or transgression hinted at is affirmed.

The poem pairs silence and the ability to speak with locality and time. During the day, the powerful "King" initially remains unchallenged, but during the night, the distribution of power is called into question. The speaker, "thro' a dream," manages to broaden the available scope of experience, enabling speech that finally renegotiates the power balance. The speaker is associated with sound and identified as a "little Bird," who "peep[s]" into the parlors, while the "King," inaccessible in his silence, remains speechless. In her reading of the poem, Gilbert sees the male's passiveness as a precondition for the speaker to claim a powerful voice (27). This powerful voice, however, is still internal: the place where sound is most prominent is the speaker's "soul." The speaker never speaks officially in the "parlors" then, the most representative and culturally inscribed of all rooms, and never sets foot into one, as they remain "shut". The place where the "little Bird" gets to raise its voice, gets to sing, is the "Orchard," a space markedly outside the domestic sphere and beyond the culture represented by the parlor. The speaker, although empowered by night's possibility of liberating dreams and able to transfer the freedom experienced during nightly visions into day and consequently being able to privately contradict divine or patriarchal "will," remains marginalized and at least outwardly "meek," lacking access to the most prestigious spaces within culture, and unable to alter the spatial restrictions imposed by an inapproachable power.

The speaker of "I – Years had been from / Home" (F440) is an outsider as well, not daring to open the door to her former home fearing that she would be asked what her "Business" was there. The speaker lingers in front of the door, even puts a hand to the latch, but "Consternation" becomes so intense that the speaker finally flees from the house "like a Thief." This comparison suggests shame, the speaker flees as if a transgression had taken place, suggesting unconsciously that the exclusion is justified. "Tis true – They shut me in the Cold –" (F658), also a poem about exclusion which is portrayed as justified punishment for an unnamed "Blame," asks forgiveness for those who banned the speaker: "Forget it – Lord – of Them," the speaker pleads, and connects his or her own absolution with theirs, "Forgive Them – Even as Myself – / Or else – forgive not me –." The absence of resentment towards those who judged and banned the speaker into exile seems strange, but the plea to God to forgive them for this harsh punishment realigns them with the speaker, suggesting that even though an offense has taken place, the measurement of shutting the speaker "in the Cold" was inadequate, distributing "Blame" on both sides. In "I – Years had been from / Home" (F440) a similar mechanism takes place, I believe. The speaker, although not termed a thief, behaves "like a Thief" because of his or her lack of courage to enter the house and to confront its habitants. For an actual "Thief," the exclusion would be justified. Behaving like a "Thief" thus outwardly renders the exclusion coherent with the speaker's actions. The speaker, who runs away and does not intrude the house, but also the "Home" that represents the exclusion, remain strangely blameless in this poem, realigning the two. It is interesting, then, that in the course of the poem, the speaker becomes a sort of house: his or her laughter is "Wooden,"[105]

and the fingers are removed from the door “as cautiously as Glass,” revealing the subject of this poem to be self-examination characterized by “outsidedness [sic] itself, fear, inaccessibility” (Wheeler 35). Inside and outside become indistinguishable if the speaker’s self resembles a house. The use of the house as a metaphor for mental states is common in Dickinson’s poems, as some much discussed poems show: “Remembrance has a Rear and Front. / ‘Tis something like a House –[106]” (F1234) defines memory as house-like and unfathomable as the “deepest Cellar”, and “One need not be a Chamber – to be Haunted –” (F407) states that “The Brain has Corridors – surpassing / Material Place –.” The blurring of inside and outside is also a recurring topic in Dickinson’s poetry, and possibly best illustrated in “They called me to the Window, for” (F589) where a landscape viewed through the window suddenly “dissolved,” and the speaker discovers that “in their Room – a Sea – displayed –,” transforming the inside into a space large enough “to seat the Skies –.”[107] When Dickinson blurs inside and outside, this is not just a distortion of spatial orders, but has a direct influence for the people moving in these spaces, disassociating the social roles from the location they reside in. The first stanza of “He was my host — he was my guest,” presents an indeterminacy of roles that are based on the distinction between inside and outside:

Fr1754

He was my host — he was my guest,
I never to this day
If I invited him could tell,
Or he invited me.

As Bayley outlines, in the nineteenth-century home every room had a specific function which determined the identity and social roles of its occupants (*Home* 45). The roles of host and guest are distributed according to who is the owner or tenant of a certain space, and who is not. The person residing in this space is then the host, and the person admitted to enter this space from the outside is the guest. In “He was my host — he was my guest,” these roles are intermingled, diffusing the spaces associated with them. The second stanza, declaring the “Analysis” of these roles naught, does so in specifically spatial terms:

...
So infinite our intercourse
So intimate, indeed,
Analysis as capsule seemed
To keeper of the seed. (Fr1754)

The described relationship is so “infinite” or “intimate” that it becomes impossible to tell who is associated with the “capsule”, who with the “seed”, and which contains which.[108] When inside and outside become indistinguishable, it is thresholds like the locked door in “I – Years had been from / Home” (F440) which remain the only constant in the metaphor, whether

leading into a domestic space or the speaker's unconscious: The portrayed threshold cannot be crossed, rendering the speaker powerless, denying access to a space strangely familiar and potentially warm and nurturing as the "Home" referred to in "I – Years had been from / Home" (F440), but also associated with fear leaving the speaker "trembling."

While Dickinson portrays exclusion, thresholds become impassable and a profound sense of isolation prevails. Exclusion seems absolute, and the speaker, longing for human contact and a "Home," is left in the cold. Instead of breaking through the barrier locking the speaker outside, Dickinson employs an altogether different strategy, reversing spatial dichotomies of inside and outside, and here and there: The space the speaker cannot enter is suddenly not exterior, but interior space, transforming isolation from social interaction into a psychological condition. Consequently, intimacy is portrayed not just as an emotional state but is translated into a spatial perspective that deconstructs the dichotomy of here and there, eliminating social roles like host and guest that are based on the residence within a space and the control over who crosses its threshold. Spatial settings not only produce social and mental realities in Dickinson 's poetry, but mental states dissolve spatial entities, denying their existence in social reality and turning them into mere products of the mind. Employing this strategy, Dickinson manages to invalidate the power of the people who exiled her speaker, denying them the privilege to draw borders and define exclusion.

3.2.2 Prison, Renunciation, and Escape

The majority of Dickinson's poems discussing the segregation of space portray a speaker not suffering from exclusion and being denied access, but being confined to a space, shutting the speaker not out and away, but imprisoning the speaker within a physical structure. Dickinson' s speakers do not commonly rebel against confinement openly however, but try to break free by embracing it or declaring renunciation as an inverse means to acquire freedom within constraint or to postpone it to the afterlife. "They shut me up in Prose –" (F445) portrays a subversive appropriation of confinement or imprisonment, and is often used by feminist scholars to demonstrate Dickinson's reinterpretation of captivity as liberating self-empowerment when the physical boundaries of space are overcome mentally (Wheeler 39).

F445

They shut me up in Prose –
As when a little Girl
They put me in the Closet –
Because they like me "still" –

Still! Could themself have peeped -
And seen my Brain - go round -

They might as wise have lodged a Bird
For Treason - in the Pound -

Himself has but to will
And easy as a Star
Look down opon Captivity -
And laugh - No more have I –

The speaker of this poem already rudimentarily discussed in the introduction of this study " Look[s] down opon [sic] Captivity" because physical confinement cannot hinder the mind's activity. The speaker then only laughs at her keepers, transforming captivity and freedom into mental states. Critics have widely commented on this poem. Wheeler reads it as poetry opposing domestic captivity, where prose equals "punishing confinement in girlhood" (37). Eberwein understands the closeted little girl dreaming herself away as "a paradigm for adult poetic freedom in an apparently confining world of prose" (*Strategies* 57). Finnerty suggests that if a little girl or woman is supposed to be silent and inconspicuous, then Dickinson makes her disappear[109] ("Cross-Dressing" 80). According to Wheeler, the laughter of the little girl is "a defiant way of singing," escaping the "jail cell of form" (Wheeler 37). According to Mossberg, "prose becomes Dickinson's term for society's value and repressive enforcement of conformity" (*Daughter* 108). All those critics link the form Dickinson chooses to express herself closely with cultural and societal principles and the wish to counteract them. Gender plays an important role here, as the confinement the poem communicates stands in direct connection with a demand doubly imposed on women: The requirement of being "still" refers both to physical and acoustic inaction. Wheeler highlights the relation between gender and the imperative of being "still" by observing the missing rhyme of "Girl" and "still:" This incongruity, she declares, is a statement for the "incompatibility of these terms," and directly opposes cultural imperatives (Wheeler 37). Finnerty claims that the "Bird" of the second stanza is male, connecting it to the clearly gendered "Himself" in the third stanza, suggesting that the change of gender from "Girl" to "Bird" is significant ("Cross-Dressing" 81).[110] Wheeler also pays attention to Dickinson's misuse of "Himself," and calls "themself" "her hybrid pronoun" without explaining this statement further (39). Indeed, the choice of pronoun is interesting. The hybridity Wheeler announces exists on several levels: it mixes "them" with "self," and thus plural with singular, fusing the girl-speaker with the faceless "They" who confined her to the " Closet," and it creates an androgynous self in the last stanza, uniting the female speaker with a possibly male "Bird" in "Himself". The fusion of "them" with "self" is further supported by the fact that "themself" could both "peep" as the "Bird," associated with the closeted female speaker, and further demand her to be "Still."[111] In spite of the initial contradiction between the girl's agitation coupled with visibility and audibility and her gender, interpreted as misbehavior and accordingly punished, being "still" and being spatially and physically restrained might be

a precondition for the “Brain” to “go round.” Dickinson’s famous last stanza of “No Rack can torture me –” (F649), seemingly rather cryptic, makes sense in this context:

F649

Except Thyself may be
Thine Enemy –
Captivity is Consciousness –
So’s Liberty –

Eberwein pronounces Dickinson’s “tendency to exploit limitations” (Eberwein Strategies 57). “ They shut me up in Prose –” suggests that the speaker, even though she violates norms at the same time complies with them. A marginal space like a closet represents this stance which is peripheral, but still within the house, however not part of the room. The closet might thus be a space that is relatively free from social and cultural inscription. It is decidedly marked as negative space because it is neither spacious nor does it convey meaning as it usually not lived in and therefore does not provide room for social interaction or represent any cultural value. When it is appropriated and subversively exploited, such a negative space might expand to an affirmative place allowing for non-normative behavior without overtly upsetting the norms.

It is telling that the poem, although deemed crucial to a definition of Dickinson’s poetry by numerous critics, never actually mentions the word “poetry,” presumably as ill-fitting the “Girl” as being “still,” but only the “Prose” she is apparently to move within. Gilbert understands Dickinson’s dislocation of the “Girl” into the “Closet” as a means to transgress and convert ordinary language serving patriarchy (39). The critic gives “They shut me up in Prose” (F445) as an example of how “expansions of meaning” can be achieved by dislocation from the conventional context (Gilbert 40). The “Closet,” a negative space within the domestic sphere, accommodates both the transgressor and the accomplice of social norms, the poet represented both by the “Girl”, the adult female speaker and the male “Bird.” This is to say that within the poem, we are simultaneously confronted with the “still” and the visible and audible child and adult, different concepts of liberation and captivity, ideas of what constitutes the domestic sphere and that which lies beyond, and the opposing terms poetry and “Prose.” The closet, within which the poem is set, is thus a space that fuses contradictory terms, multiplies meaning, and allows for several diverting definitions of “self,” enabling creativity and simultaneously granting the security of seclusion and tangible limits as well as a refuge from domestic life.

In “I dwell in Possibility –” (F466) prose again is a confined space; “smallish” (Wheeler 40). In contrast to “They shut me up in Prose –” (F445), the speaker who “dwell[s] in Possibility –” (F466) openly and deliberately chooses a confinement, but one that remains markedly open:

F466

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 –

The "House" of "Possibility" is deconstructed in the course of the poem, freeing it from all its containing features, but still relying on vocabulary associated with the house. As Mudge summarizes, "the theme of limitlessness is ironically built on the details of the house which held" both the poet and the speaker in this particular poem (188). "A fairer House than Prose" features "numerous Windows" and "Doors" making it an increasingly permeable structure. The "Gambrels of the Sky" remove the roof, and the "Chambers of Cedars" blur the distinction between inside and outside, invoking the image of cedar trees inside. In contrast to the solitary "Closet" in "They shut me up in Prose –," "Visitors" frequent this house, contributing to its character as "Paradise." However, the spatial restrictions are pronounced when the speaker spreads "wide" "narrow Hands". As Wheeler puts it accurately, "Narrow hands can only spread so wide, after all. Even the idea of possibility becomes enclosure" (40). The "narrow Hands" are attributed to a female speaker by many critics, and the house of "Possibility," opposed to " Prose," is readily associated with poetry. Juhasz reads this poem in connection to domesticity, locating the female speaker in a domestic setting, stating that she "makes not cakes but poetry … because of the power of the imagination, the 'housewife' can be a poet" (*Continent* 20).

Elsewhere, Dickinson also treats confinement in positive terms. "A Prison gets to be a friend –" (F456) values imprisonment because its space is familiar, predictable, and secure:

F456

A Prison gets to be a friend –
Between it's Ponderous face
And Our's – a Kinsmanship express –
And in it's narrow Eyes –

We come to look with gratitude
For the appointed Beam

It deal us – stated as Our food –
And hungered for – the same –

We learn to know the Planks –
That answer to Our feet –
So miserable a sound – at first –
Nor ever now – so sweet –

As plashing in the Pools –
When Memory was a Boy –
But a Demurer Circuit –
A Geometric Joy –

The Posture of the Key
That interrupt the Day
To Our Endeavor – Not so real
The Check of Liberty –

As this Phantasm steel –
Whose features – Day and Night –
Are present to us – as Our Own –
And as escapeless – quite –

The narrow Round – the stint –
The slow exchange of Hope –
For something passiver – Content
Too steep for looking up –

The Liberty we knew
Avoided – like a Dream –
Too wide for any Night but Heaven –
If That – indeed – redeem –

The “Geometric Joy” described here becomes more and more narrow in the course of the poem, the “Demurer Circuit” and “narrow Round” circumscribe the prisoner. The “escapeless” space moves in on the prisoner, the “Planks” “answer to Our feet” and its “features” resemble more and more the prisoner’s while “Liberty” is far removed in childhood. Commenting on the fourth stanza’s “When Memory was a Boy -” Wolosky rhetorically asks: “Is boyhood an image meant to oppose girlhood? Is Dickinson’s prison her female body?” (*Reclusion* 235). Answering to that question, I believe that the emphasis on the body in this poem is crucial: the prison seems decidedly human; it has a “face,” “narrow Eyes,” and “features,” and the “Key”

takes on a “Posture.” Furthermore, the experience of imprisonment is expressed in sensual terms: there is the “sound” of the “Planks” and the “feet” feeling them, the body hungers and receives captivity’s “food,” and the memory of “plashing in the Pools –” tastes “sweet.” Because the “Phantasm steel” displays “features… as Our Own,” Wolosky reads the prison as a mirror image of the self (*Reclusion* 234). Rather than a mirror, I suggest that the prison is incorporated and becomes a second skin. The “Kinmanship” of the prison’s “Ponderous face” in the first stanza becomes “Our Own” when imprisonment becomes “food,” and the “sound” of the “ Planks” underneath the “feet” is “sweet” as “plashing in the Pools –,” the water on the skin enclosing the body completely,[112] becoming pure sensation. Like the “Closet” in “They shut me up in Prose –” (F445), the prison as the speaker’s body offers both the comfort of a “friend,” a familiarity met with “gratitude,” “content,” and “Joy,” but also render the prisoner “miserable,” “passive,” and “escapeless.” The positive effects are inseparable from the negative consequences of the monotonous “stint.” In “How soft this Prison is” (F1352) the same ambivalence is pronounced, juxtaposing negative associations with positive one in the last line which calls “Incarceration – Home.”

In “A Prison gets to be a friend –” (F456), the speaker is both captive inside the body, but its skin also delivers the only access to the outside. The skin as surface is at the same time enclosing but also a permeable boundary for sensation and contact. The reality of this contact, but also of the imprisonment as “Phantasm steel” is questioned in the course of the poem. The “Key” to the “Prison,” as “Check of Liberty” is deemed “Not so real,” and “Liberty” is “Avoided – like a Dream –.” The “Ponds” enjoyed as a child are far now, and although freedom was experienced then, it is not accessible now. The speaker described here, reduced to a body that incorporates confinement, removed from the world and awaiting “Heaven” as only “Hope,” reminded of “Liberty” only by childhood memories, indeed could be gendered female regarding the passivity the poem emphasizes on. In “Doom is the House without the Door –” [113] (F710), confinement in domestic space is similarly escape-proof, as the only opening is towards the sky, and possibly heaven. Similarly to “A Prison gets to be a friend –” (F456) that which lies beyond the “House” can only be speculated on in a “Dream.” The dream world beyond consists of “Squirrels [that] play – and Berries [that] dye –.”[114] The emphasis on playfulness and bright colors in “Doom is the House without the Door –” (F710) strongly reminds of “A Prison gets to be a friend –” (F456) where freedom is located in childhood.

The speaker in her “Prison” is confined by her body and her physical surroundings, questioning the reality of her experience, as all contact to the outside world has been lost or is so far removed in memory that the past becomes inconsolable with the speaker’s identity, indicated by the boyhood she never actually experienced. The passive speaker becomes a saint, who “look[s] with gratitude/For the appointed Beam” to bear it like a martyr’s cross, her only “Hope” “Heaven,” a place “Too steep for looking up –” her modesty forbids her to dream of. This interpretation is consistent with the nineteenth-century Cult of Home Religion that

understood homes as allegories for churches, made the home the family's spiritual center and turned domestic duties into "divine mysteries" (Logan 25, Bayley *Home* 27). According to these concepts, the housewife is a "divine domestic priest" (Bayley *Home* 27). Gilbert observes that Dickinson repeatedly parodies and stretches stereotypically female "mystics" (23). "A Prison gets to be a friend –" (F456) provides an example of such a parody, transforming the domestic priestess from worshipper into a Jesus figure and converting suffering not only into a virtue but salvation, embracing the confinement within the domestic sphere imposed by gender as a means for escape into "Heaven" as well as condemning it as inhuman. The transformation of the prisoner into a saint and martyr frees the speaker from her body, elevating her into the realm of the spiritual "Dream" or abstract thought, an "Endeavor – not so real." The identification as martyr accepts ambivalent attitudes towards confinement, turning passivity and endurance into an "Endeavor" with religious prestige, letting it become a second skin and part of the speaker's identity, but also calling for a place where confinement, suffering and endurance do not exist.

The last line expresses doubt, asking if "Heaven" really would "redeem." The doubt raised here reevaluates purely spiritual or intellectual existence, "not so real" as imprisonment. The female speaker conforms to the demands of modesty and purity her culture prescribes, renouncing all personal wishes, projecting them into the afterlife and only permitting corporal sensations which are interpreted as virtuous suffering. By calling "Heaven" and the afterlife into question, the passive suffering in confinement loses its positive value. The poem is then readable as a critique on such confinement, criticizing a society that locks in its women and only permits them the liberty of dreaming as long as these dreams concern religious salvation.

"I meant to have but modest needs –" (F711) represents a further critique of modesty that dislocates all personal interests and wants into the afterlife, making "Heaven" the only thing to aspire for. The speaker is painted as naïve because of believing that through prayer and honest conduct, God would grant her the "modest needs" of "Content – and Heaven –," a space of her own. This lengthy poem's third stanza reads:

F711:

...
And so – opon this wise – I prayed –
Great Spirit – Give to me
A Heaven not so large as Your's,
But large enough – for me –
…

After being laughed at, the speaker "Threw [her] prayer away –," and henceforth regards the promises of virtue and salvation in the afterlife as prize for faithfulness and modesty "With a suspicious Air –." The speaker, in the last stanza "grown shrewder," is now not likely to be contented with "modest needs –" any more:

F711

…
But I, grown shrewder – scan the Skies
With a suspicious Air –
As Children – swindled for the first
All Swindlers – be – infer –

The speaker's wish for a space of her own in heaven is denied, and despite of the loss of naivety and gained shrewdness empowering the speaker in her earthly existence, no reward in this life is granted. "I meant to have but modest needs –" (F711) reveals deep skepticism expressed in the doubt in the renunciation requested of women, and in the loss of faith in an afterlife, a rightful place in "Heaven," and a fair God.

"A Prison gets to be a friend –" (F456) gains new interest in connection with this skepticism. The poem hints at doubt in the last line, asking "If" the afterlife "indeed – redeem[s] –" the constraints suffered. If God is not reliable as in "I meant to have but modest needs –" (F711), suffering in this life is not worth endurance, and the elevation of pain into a spiritual "Endeavor" as in "A Prison gets to be a friend –" (F456) does not make sense, despite its momentary empowering and liberating effects. On the contrary, the effort to conform to societal demands and to refrain from anything not "modest" (F711) and to find fulfillment within the assigned sphere might provoke nothing than a dismissive "Smile" or "twinkle …" from the "Grave Saints" who wonder in the fifth stanza how anyone could be "so honest – be extant – / It take the Tale for true - / That 'Whatsoever Ye shall ask – / Itself be given You' –" (F711). There is no reward for endurance, and even though breaking out of the confinement of life might offer momentary comfort as in "Escape is such a thankful Word" (F1364), it does not exist as an alternative. In a further poem about confinement, the speaker defines "Escape" as disintegration that allows for the separation between "Heart" and "Life:"

F1364

…
Escape – it is the Basket
In which the Heart is caught
When down some awful Battement
The rest of Life is dropt –
…

The dislocation of the "Heart" is escape, while "Life," or the body, is entombed or irrevocably imprisoned and shut away. Again, confinement is corporeal here, locating freedom in an afterlife without a body. The speaker owning a body is stuck in passivity and reminded in the last stanza that "'Tis not to sight the savior – It is to be the saved –" (F1364), emphasizing that it is not revelation, but conformity to religious and moral imperatives that the subject is to aim for: "to sight the savior" is the reward for adhering to the rules, which is the requirement to be electable at all to for salvation.

Dickinson's poems of confinement and escape express the dilemmas nineteenth-century women faced who tried to conform to the rules of conduct: the values of domesticity required them to embrace the spatial limitations imposed on them, and the incorporation of virtues like modesty and self-denial fostered further restraint of the self, negating all personal wishes. According to Dickinson's poems dealing with these topics, there is no corresponding counter value offered for these sacrifices, but redemption is dislocated in the afterlife. To her speakers who go to extremes following the values of renunciation to the point of disappearing, transforming themselves into martyrs and praising their imprisonment, the delayed recognition of their sacrifices in the afterlife is highly dissatisfactory. Dickinson expresses skepticism about a fair reimbursement after death for her speaker's earthly suffering or overtly denies God's justice. Consequently, suffering and renunciation in life are unjustified.

In a different poem, Dickinson defines "Renunciation" as "a piercing Virtue - / The letting go / … for an Expectation - / Not now –" (F782) but in the afterlife, requiring the sacrifice of " Choosing / Against itself –," a task that contradicts the human drive of self-preservation. Nevertheless, Dickinson's female speakers often do not overtly speak up but bear their suffering in silence. Despite their yearning to escape imprisonment, they express ambivalence towards their confinement and instead of rebelling against the inhuman conditions they live in create alternative appropriations of culturally contested spaces in their dreams or thoughts. When Dickinson's female speaker in "I tie my Hat – I crease my Shawl " does not escape but remains within cultural space, she tries to behave according to the norms, but finds that this forces her "To simulate", a "stinging work" that requires "To cover what we are" and hence contradicts her subjectivity:

F522

I tie my Hat – I crease my Shawl –
Life's little duties do – precisely –
As the very least
Were infinite – to me –

I put new Blossoms in the Glass –
And throw the Old – away –
I push a petal from my Gown
That anchored there – I weigh
The time 'twill be till six o'clock –
So much I have to do –
And yet – existence – some way back –
Stopped – struck – my ticking – through –

We cannot put Ourselves away
As a completed Man
Or Woman – When the errand's done

We came to Flesh – opon –
There may be – Miles on Miles of Nought –
Of Action – sicker far –
To simulate – is stinging work –
To cover what we are
From Science – and from Surgery –
Too Telescopic eyes
To bear on us unshaded –
For their – sake – Not for Our's –

Therefore – we do life's labor –
Though life's Reward – be done –
With scrupulous exactness –
To hold our Senses – on –

The first stanza introduces the theme of simulation or performance, as the speaker, never actually intending to leave the house, theatrically ties her "Hat" and creases her "Shawl," both articles immediately revealing her gender. She conducts "Life's little duties" as if they "were infinite" to her, pretending that they were of importance to her.[115] The theatricality and lack of necessity of tying the hat and creasing the shawl are highlighted in the next stanza where the "little duties" are specified as concerned with decoration, replacing weltered flowers: The fresh petal that "anchored" in the speakers "Gown" hints at the possibility that the speaker just came in from the garden. But inside the house, "Hat" and "Shawl" would ordinarily be removed, not adjusted. The speaker just entered the domestic sphere from a space potentially less culturally invested, and upon crossing the threshold to the domestic carefully arranged space feels the necessity to check her appearance, possibly in a mirror. Her look, as the maintenance of order within the house, has to be preserved with "scrupulous exactness." Inside the house, the speaker becomes part of the decoration, waiting paralyzed for time to pass: Like a clock on a shelf that stands still, her "existence – some way back –/ Stopped – struck – [her] ticking – through –." Her "errand" consists of "Miles on Miles of Nought –," a description that reveals her "Action" to disappear in inexistence, to be essentially not action but inaction and paralysis. Even "when the errand's done" she does not feel "As a completed Man/Or Woman", does not find fulfillment and identify with the role and sphere society has attributed to women.[116] This incompleteness and the inability of identification make the speaker unable to describe herself either as male or female, she remains an unspecified "Man/ or Woman." In contradiction with cultural expectations, she does not "come to Flesh" through her duties, does not root her character within the domestic sphere and find a unified inner self. She cannot become the manifestation of an ideal, a Victorian angel-woman.[117]

The reluctance to conform to a gender role and to embrace a clearly gendered identity is mirrored in the approach Dickinson's speaker takes towards her "errand" which is marked

by “scrupulous exactness:” she “weigh[s]/ The time,” measures its “ticking” in a scientific way, an approach that is directly opposed to a understanding of her “little duties” as “infinite,” as she pretends to treat them. Such a scientific approach is stereotypically male, and not female.[118] Because the speaker does not conform to gender stereotypes, she has to take on the “stinging work” of hiding this fact “From Science – and from Surgery -/ Too Telescopic eyes.” “Surgery” threatens with further disintegration, adjusting the (body) parts that do not correspond to the norm,[119] while “Science” tries to bring everything down to logic and natural fact. However, the point the poem makes is that there are no stable, unified and unambiguous identities. A “Telescopic” view, as opposed to a binocular one, portrays the object through just one lens, instead of two, as human eyes do. Dickinson, certainly conscious about the ambiguity of the sound patterns of “Too” and “eyes” in “Too Telescopic eyes,” makes a statement here about the speaker’s identity not just being neither “Man/Or Woman,” but at least twofold, not possessing a unified I, but multiple Is or “eyes.” The shift from “I” in the two first stanzas to a more general “We” in the third and fourth stanzas can be read in a corresponding way, representing the speaker who experiences herself as multiple rather than unified. The “we” remains open during the whole the course of the poem however, allowing for the inclusion of all women as a group. Opposing the “we” is an equally unspecified they: it is “For their - sake – Not for Our’s –” the speaker pretends to fulfill her role as housewife and simulates a unified gender identity. This statement is contradicted in the last stanza, where “life’s labor” is done in order “To hold our Senses – on –,” not theirs. The speaker’s pretense or performance of conventional womanhood now happens not in order to please someone else, but seems to serve the preservation of her own sanity, her “Reward”[120] for conforming to standards. Her “Senses,” revealed to be multiple and unconventionally in between or free from gendered determination, become threatening to the speaker who clinging to normative behavior manages not only to convince her surroundings of her integrity, but also to uphold a sense of self that has a voice. Losing her “Senses” would mean to lose her status as an intelligible person who, even though her scope of action as housewife would have been limited, was recognized as a valuable member of society. The fact that the last stanza, like the preceding one, uses an inclusive “we,” hints at the possibility of all women playing this game of pretense, and as a consequence the whole of society being threatened if the inadequacy of unambiguous gendered ascriptions and the reduction of the female to the home, a pillar of patriarchal Victorian society, was revealed: “…the basis of their understanding of the world would crumble[s], were they to realize the extent to which she [Dickinson, or her speaker] does not fit into their concepts of nature, the human unconscious, and divinity,” Larsen summarizes the latent threat to social order in “I tie my Hat – I crease my Shawl –” (F522) (p.70).[121]

In the line “For their – sake – Not for Our’s –” (F522), the speaker refrains from rebelling openly, confronting the reader with a highly ambiguous speaker who is at the same time powerful and immobilized, rebellious and highly assimilated within her culture. My analysis

shows Dickinson's understanding of society and the individual as interdependent: The speaker's behavior holds a world order together, and in turn she is bestowed with an identity as a recognizable member of that world. "I tie my Hat – I crease my Shawl –" (F522) illustrates impressively the "threat of a complete loss of control over herself as a self-identifying being" that arises from the realization of the interdependency between compliance to social norms and the recognition as a member of society, which Pollak observes as a recurring theme in Dickinson's work (*Anxiety* 22). That this interpretation of the impact of one's conduct is not overrated is supported by Welter's analysis of nineteenth-century women's magazines in which she asserts that if a woman disobeyed the principle of female submissiveness, "she tampered with the order of the Universe" (159). A woman who left the home and therefore her proper sphere induced chaos, Welter illustrates vividly by quoting sources that remind women to remain within their domain by endowing them with the extraordinary power to determine the world destiny from within the home. By valuing other's wellbeing above her own, Dickinson's speaker corresponds to Victorian culture's expectations of women to be selfless and devoted to others, but the poem also makes her power visible, putting the responsibility for the future existence of an intact society or anarchy in her hands.

By shifting from a personal "I" to an inclusive "we" in the third stanza, Dickinson removes stress from the speaker's potentially revolutionary and transgressive character and issues of identity, describing all women as struggling with the same inner conflict. The inclusive and unspecified "we" redistributes the responsibility of emancipation on all women, or even to society as a whole, including men. While voicing a critique but refraining from making active claims, Dickinson only hints at, but does not transgress cultural imperatives like modesty, leaving the reader torn like her speaker who remains hovering above the boundary between transgression and conformity.

3.2.3 Exaggeration of the Female Ideal

In numerous poems staging female voices, Dickinson exploits ideals of True Womanhood and the 'angel in the house', grotesquely exaggerating behavioral prescriptions of modesty, selflessness, purity, religiosity, moral virtue and angelic beauty resulting in seemingly masochistic suffering and self-sacrifice. Dickinson's speakers over-perform or hyper-conform to gender roles to the point of disappearing into closets, moving into the margins or incarcerating themselves within the home, or becoming paralyzed objects akin to the furniture and decoration so intrinsically tied to the domestic interior. The disappearance into liminal space and the paralysis into an object are strategies to sarcastically highlight the restrictions women were subjected to on a daily basis as a result of their sole association with the domestic and private sphere. Even though Dickinson frequently portrays speakers heroically and patiently suffering extreme constraints, her attitude towards women who correspond to

Victorian society's behavioral codes for women is highly ambivalent. "What Soft – Cherubic Creatures –" (F675) heavily criticizes "Gentlewomen" who embody the ideal so completely that they lose their own character and become the garments and materials surrounding them:

F675

What Soft – Cherubic Creatures –
These Gentlewomen are –
One would as soon assault a Plush –
Or violate a Star –

Such Dimity Convictions –
A Horror so refined
Of freckled Human Nature –
Of Deity – Ashamed –

It's such a common – Glory –
A Fisherman's – Degree –
Redemption – Brittle Lady –
Be so – ashamed of Thee –

The condemning tone of the poem directed towards the angelic "Gentlewomen" instead of the source of "assault" raises the question of Dickinson's attitude towards the over-conformity to ideals, especially since many of her female speakers so often strategically over-perform norms of modesty and selflessness, making them strikingly alike the "Gentlewomen" in "What Soft – Cherubic Creatures –." However, the "Gentlewomen" in this poem are not distinguished by their virtuous character or outstanding morality, but their 'gentleness' is primarily expressed through the delicate and tender fabric of their attires, the "Plush" and "Dimity." "Gentlewomen" are "Soft," angelic beings, fragile, vulnerable, and elusive. Their tenderness is paralleled with haughtiness and unearthly perfection, and the "Ladies" are so far removed from "common" things that they become unreachable and untouchable like a "Star." These "Cherubic Creatures" lack corporeality so completely that they escape physical violence: If attacked, in effect only the "Plush" surrounding them is assaulted. Of course, this statement is highly sarcastic, emphasizing the logical consequences of the Victorian ideal of the 'angel in the house' as providing a terrain for violence to take place unsanctioned if women through their virtues lose their corporeality.

The violence in this poem is staggering; contrasts are highlighted by the juxtaposition of softness, frailty and "Cherubic" bodilessness on one hand and words like "assault," "violate," and "Horror" on the other hand, indicating aggression, injury, and trauma. Twice, the "Gentlewomen" are confronted with disgrace: once they feel "Ashamed" of "Freckled Human Nature" in the face of "Deity," and once they are denied "Redemption" and reminded to feel "ashamed" of their own haughtiness. Without further comment, Sewall identifies this poem to

be about rape (239). Pollak similarly alludes to the topic when she says that Dickinson criticizes "Gentlewomen" in her poetry for lacking substance and being too elusive even to be raped (*Anxiety* 49). The assembly of softness implying weakness, a violence resulting in "Horror," and the emphasis on shame towards the end of the poem make rape a very plausible interpretation. It is striking, then, that the potentially violated "Gentlewomen" are the object of Dickinson's criticizing scrutiny, and not the rapist. The "Ladies" are directly addressed, while the aggressor remains an unspecified and genderless "One" suggesting a generality of the violence while at the same time marking it as hypothetical via the conditional "would."

The "Cherubic Creatures" and their "refined" character unquestionably stay at the center of interest. Dickinson blames the "Gentlewomen" for providing conditions for rape by adhering to ideals and thereby fostering helplessness, and then turning their back to mutilated women instead of confronting the rapist and preventing such crimes: Dickinson demands of the "Brittle Ladies", both themselves frail, but snobbish nevertheless, to "Be so – ashamed of Thee," meaning themselves. She does not grant these "Ladies" "Redemption," since even though they might seem angelic, they reinforce power patterns by following cultural expectations to the point where they facilitate violence against themselves and further isolate and condemn those afflicted by it instead of showing Christian virtues like compassion and community.

An additional reading of the second stanza's "Of Deity – Ashamed –" implies a critical position towards the "Diety" the "Gentlewomen" are supposed to resemble, because besides the "Cherubic" features they also contain fragility and weakness, and therefore, and because God allows for the existence of "freckled Human Nature" that violates social imperatives, they are automatically prone to being assaulted. In a converse argument, the fragility associated with the angelic women and thus associated with "Deity" implies God's own weakness, certainly a further reason to feel "Ashamed" if that is how one feels towards supposed omnipresence. Consequently, ideals of True Womanhood viewed as naturally given or as part of a divine order are evidently flawed and therefore cannot be desirable. "Redemption" is available for neither the "Gentlewomen" nor those diverging from the ideal. As seen so many times in Dickinson's poetry, salvation in heaven or "Glory," here reduced to "A Fisherman's – Degree –," are not available.

The condemning tone of the poem raises the question how Dickinson, so often strategically over-performing norms of modesty and selflessness, relates to this ideal and what she suggests as suitable appropriation of this ideal. Does "What Soft – Cherubic Creatures-" condemn "Gentlewomen" for aspiring to become a domestic angel and thereby paving the way for violence, or does she criticize the "Ladies" for not realizing the implications of such ideals and how they can be instrumentalized? Or is she exposing them as hypocrites because they misuse their alleged flawlessness as a justification for haughtiness and superiority, attitudes that stand in stark contrasts to the selflessness they propagate? Of course, blaming the women

instead of deconstructing and criticizing the ideal they try to live up to is not very effective. On the other hand, the poem achieves that on the meta-level, as it points out the ideal's consequences and faulty appropriations.

The question how and why Dickinson so often makes her speakers over-perform the norms has been addressed by numerous critics. Most understand over-performance and hyper-conformity as strategies to counter repressive structures by succumbing to them voluntarily and thus disabling their logic. Welter links virtues central to the ideals of True Womanhood like shyness, doubtfulness of one's own mental capacities, and dependence on others' opinions to a state of everlasting childhood (160). To address stereotypes, Dickinson often uses a innocently cheeky or funny posture making her criticism seem unoffending and thus making her subversive strategy more effective, masking her endeavor. Mossberg ascribes the poet an "apparent eagerness to please" which is only an outward conformity to cultural norms, and thus mere masquerade, as many critics are convinced ("Nursery Rhymes " 50). Consequently, as "a metaphor for her experience as a woman poet in her culture, reflecting and resolving her 'small size' – the lack of society's esteem for and encouragement of her mental abilities," Dickinson's "obsessive use of the little girl persona" makes sense (Mossberg "Nursery Rhymes" 47). But not only the little girl persona can be read within this context, but also Dickinson's use of small, powerless figures like insects, birds, and other small animals fit this context. In her analysis of the mouse, an often overlooked figure sharing characteristics with the child because of its smallness, powerlessness, and the lack of a valid audible voice, S. Anderson asserts that in Dickinson's poetry, the mouse elevates itself from a diminutive status and represents subversive power, but holds its power hidden (S. Anderson 88). Juhasz relates Dickinson's frequently small speakers adopting a childish or weak voice to her culture and interprets her engagement with it as "resolutely political", and like S. Anderson elevates her from a status of insignificance to power (*Introduction* 19).

Dickinson's rather sharp response to her brother Austin who criticized her writing exemplifies the poet's strategy: In her letter, Dickinson presents role play and the demand for women to please in a highly sarcastic tone, and although it might be perceived as funny, as Mossberg suggests, the anger Dickinson felt at being reminded of her place as a woman in her culture is not disguised:

> I feel quite like retiring, in presence of one so grand [Austin], and casting my small lot among small birds and fishes – you say you don't comprehend me, you want a simpler style. Gratitude indeed for my fine philosophy! … As simple as you please, the simplest sort of simple – I'll be a little ninny – a little pussy catty, a little Red Riding Hood, I'll wear a Bee in my Bonnet, and a Rose bud in my hair, and what remains to do you shall be told hereafter.
>
> *(L45)*

In her letter to Austin, Dickinson does not hide her hurt pride, does not pretend to subordinate herself to her older brother's standards, but by linking size and intellectual capacity ridicules

her “grand” brother’s inability to appreciate her “style” and unmistakably lets him know that she outwits him because even if adopting a small and simple stature, she is still the one in command: “what remains to do you shall be told hereafter.” When Dickinson in her poetry outwits her peers from a position mimicking insignificance and simplicity demanded of women, she not only mocks conventions, but also doubles her achievement because in addition to her intellectual victory she overturns contradictions of gender which imply that importance is rooted in size. “You said that I ‘was Great’ – one Day –” (F736) is a perfect example of how Dickinson at the same time mocks the demand on women to please others and to suit especially their husbands’ needs and wishes, and on the other hand satirically over-performs the role of the woman who tries to adapt to impossible requirements, in order to please:

F736

You said that I “was Great” – one Day –
Then “Great” it be – if that please Thee –
Or Small, or any size at all –
Nay – I’m the size suit Thee –

Tall – like the Stag – would that?
Or lower – like the Wren –
Or other hights of other ones
I’ve seen?

Tell which – it’s dull to guess –
And I must be Rhinoceros
Or Mouse
At once – for Thee –

So say – if Queen it be –
Or Page – please Thee –
I’m that – or nought –
Or other thing – if other thing there be –
With just this stipulus –
I suit Thee –

The woman in the poem increasingly loses her shape, becoming elastic and changing the size of her body according the expressed and guessed wishes of the person whom she wishes to please. As Leiter explains referring to another of Dickinson’s poems on marriage, “She rose to His Requirement – dropt” (F857), “[i]t is the husband who sets the terms of the married woman ’s life, and she who must ‘rise’ to his demands and standards” (173). The satirical voice and the impossibility of the adaptions Dickinson’s speaker proposes in “You said that I ‘was Great ’ – one Day –” (F736) ridicule both the demand on women, the expectations of society on wifehood and the women who struggle to please entirely without questioning the cultural imperatives that prompt them to do so. Dickinson’s appropriation, roleplay, and the disruption

and reversal of dichotomies in language and power relations, according to Juhasz, are by no means to be regarded as evasion, but constitute "an active and radical engagement with those forces" in her poetry (*Introduction* 17). For example renunciation, a typical female virtue that might look like the adoption of conventions, becomes an "act of autonomy" when viewed as categorical refusal (Juhasz *Introduction* 19). Recalling Eberwein's statement that Dickinson's female contemporaries often chose to display their virtues by demonstrating "what they could do without," consciously ignoring their freedoms of dress, religion, or the decoration of the domestic interiors, raises the question to which extent Dickinson's refusals really contradict conventions (*Strategies* 44). The view of Dickinson as a rebel dominant with many feminist scholars is counterbalanced by the existence of various poems that use stereotypically female voices without challenging this fact. Walker reads numerous poems about topics like renunciation and secret sorrow, the child elegy, the flower poem, and the poem of exotic location as largely conforming to the norms (179-80).[122] The discrepancy between critics' views of Dickinson the poet as a rebel fighting against patriarchy on one hand and as angel-woman conforming to the norms and embracing concepts of modesty, renunciation and selfless piety on the other hand calls for an explanation. Pollak argues Dickinson tried to counter tradition by not committing to any kind of recognizable practice: "the only tradition to which she adhered consistently was a tradition of inconsistency, since it was her intention and her fate to undermine orthodoxies, whatever their point of origin" (Pollak *Anxiety* 21). Of course, while trying to account for irregularities, this argument agrees with other critics who insist on the view of Dickinson as unorthodox fighter against her time's values.

However, an approach that integrates both the rebel and the more conformist poet has to account for the discrepancy between the two and provide a description of how they relate to each other and how the exploit of that relationship benefits the poet. Pollak recognizes this need and acknowledges that paradoxes in Dickinson's work persist, arguing that while Dickinson fought against the subordination of women in many poems, she also "reacted against her culture's failure to subordinate its women sufficiently", thereby disrupting views of her as a rebel (*Anxiety* 21). Poems like "A Prison gets to be a friend –" (F456) or "What Soft – Cherubic Creatures –" (F675) which contains a threat despite the speaker's paralysis could probably be explained as such a complaint of insufficient subordination. Focusing on the paradoxes in Dickinson's work, it becomes clear that her reaction to her time and culture and her strategies to engage with this culture always have to be recognized as highly ambiguous. Reared and rooted in a society that fostered subordination and unworldliness in women, S. Anderson insists, "would make a female ambivalent, at best, towards power" (85). Although critical towards this subordination, Dickinson therefore cannot draw simply powerful or powerless female figures, but negotiates their power in "ambivalent, yet overdetermined ways" (S. Anderson 85). Juhasz argues that Dickinson creates "A space wherein *transformation* might occur. But a space within the patriarchy" when she exaggerates norms

or openly confronts norms (Introduction 19, original italics). I want to identify, explore and explain this strategy, focusing on the spaces Dickinson's characters inhabit, relating them to the positions her speakers, grand or small, rebellious or conformist, take.

What kind of space do Dickinson's speakers occupy when they claim that they "took the smallest Room –?" Which boundaries are created or pushed back when a voice is declared insignificant to the point of disappearance? Which new territories does renunciation open up? These questions are crucial to understanding why Dickinson chose the postures she did, and how these positions worked to her advantage, whether in an exaggerated, openly critical or favorable manner. Rather than just describing a condition, her different voices create something; they inscribe themselves into the room into which they are projected to a positive end. In "I was the slightest in the House –," the speaker is benefitted with "the Mint/ That never ceased to fall –," collecting it in a small "Basket."[123]

F473

I was the slightest in the House –
I took the smallest Room –
At night, my little Lamp, and Book –
And one Geranium –

So stationed I could catch the Mint
That never ceased to fall –
And just my Basket –
Let me think – I'm sure –
That this was all –

I never spoke – unless addressed –
And then, 'twas brief and low –
I could not bear to live – aloud –
The Racket shamed me so –

And if it had not been so far –
And any one I knew
Were going – I had often thought
How noteless – I could die –

Finnerty sees the "ideology of female reticence" as the main subject of "I was the slightest in the House –" ("Cross-Dressing" 80). The speaker emphasizes smallness and the reluctance to speak. Domestic space is unevenly divided in this household, as the speaker takes "the smallest Room" of all. But not only space, also time seems to be limited: The speaker stays up at night with a "little Lamp, and Book," and, oddly, "one Geranium," while everyone else sleeps. The poem does not make clear whether the speaker chose this life or was forced into it. The second stanza asserts that being "so stationed" is not without disadvantages, as it

allows the speaker to “catch the Mint/That never ceased to fall –.” The “Mint” represents something precious or valuable, and the speaker seems to have assumed the only position that allows for the collecting of this continuous gift. This poem hints at the advantages of retraction from visibility and audibility without setting this act in a light of rebellion against norms or restriction itself. Existence on the margin is described here, during the night, at the brink of disappearing or dying. The speaker has no voice, no room, no significant possessions, and does not seem to belong to a community. Yet, this does not seem to a purely negative condition. “I was the slightest in the House –” (F473) could shed some light on the question how Dickinson understands the positions she puts her speakers in work to their advantage. Mossberg argues that to be small is Dickinson’s way to be special, interpreting what others perceive as reticence as “disguised arrogance” (“Nursery Rhymes” 56). She terms this arrogance “’Cindarella complex’”, explaining how smallness and apparent insignificance can be read as being extraordinary and indeed superior to everybody else who does not experience neglect and injustice (Mossberg “Nursery Rhymes” 57). Mossberg employs the logic of the fairy tale to support her argument, where the weak and disadvantaged are the chosen ones and conquer all adverse conditions.

Smallness, then, “is not only a feint of modesty required of little girls and poetesses, but a sign of her [Dickinson’s] superiority” (Mossberg “Nursery Rhymes” 60). Deprivation, thus, does not render the poet a victim, but on the contrary grants her an empowered status which allows for possibility and action. Mossberg’s interpretation of smallness explains why Dickinson’s speakers would have chosen this state voluntarily, and it shows how this status could empower her speakers. Mossberg sees this strategy as “archaic and rebellious, allowing laws of logic to be transcended, order upset” and offering a platform for “subversive innocence” (“Nursery Rhymes” 63).

However, if we recall Wheeler’s statement that nineteenth-century American women exaggerated modesty in order to show their superiority by demonstrating “what they could do without,” this strategy, even though potentially empowering, loses its rebellious character (*Limitation* 44). Rather, I suggest, Dickinson choses a small, childlike or insignificant speakers in order to create the illusion of their isolation, creating a reclusive space for her speakers apart from everyone else exactly because they are in fact not alone, or small, or insignificant . “I was the slightest in the House –” F473 transmits this effect, painting the speaker as up at night alone in her room, only speaking when prompted to. The speaker’s marginality is called into question when we consider that she, being “the slightest in the House” has to belong to a community or family sharing a home. Otherwise, the comparative form of the adjective “slightest” does not make sense. Within the house, the speaker does have a designated space, her “Room,” marking her as a recognized member of the family. After all, the assignation of the “smallest Room” seems appropriate considering her slightness, and must not necessarily be considered unfair. Despite this slightness, the speaker seems to be addressed and thus

recognized by others sometimes, as the statement “I never spoke” is not absolute but explicitly varied by “unless addressed.” The shame felt in stanza three also hints at the speaker’s integration into a community, as shame is a feeling produced socially. Even stanza three, where the speaker meditates about her own death and whether anyone would notice, she acknowledges that death is “far” from the situation she is in at the moment, and that she would not quit life alone, but only if “any one I knew/Were going.” At first sight, Dickinson draws an existence in complete solitude at the brink of disappearing that occupies the smallest possible marginal space and with one leg already crossing the line to inexistence.[124] The positioning of the speaker on the margins of society is complicated by the hints suggesting that despite the illusion of isolation, the speaker is surrounded by other people. After all, already the comparative first line of the poem, stating that the speaker is “the slightest in the House” implies that she lives together with people less slight. Again, Dickinson’s speaker cannot be located here or there, is not residing somewhere beyond social space nor is she at its center: she seems to seek solitude and refuses to partake in everyday sociability, but at the same time is thoroughly embedded in a circle of relations. The question whether the speaker could die “ noteless” is denied in such a reading. The pun on “noteless” brings the poet back into the poem, assuring the reader that should the speaker die, it would certainly not be without leaving a written legacy, and should it be only notes.

I believe that Dickinson frequently choses small speakers in order to contrast them to others and to create an illusion of their isolation from the rest of society, declaring their independence. Paradoxically, her speakers remain rooted in society however, and seem to reside at the center and the margin at the same time. “I was the slightest in the House –” (F473) emphasizes the advantage of such a position, stating that “So stationed I could catch the “Mint/That never ceased to fall –,” marking her standing, although cryptically, as a privileged one. While she declares her speakers to be free from society’s influence, she is able to reintegrate their eccentricity into society, empowering them and granting them special rights. The speaker of “I was the slightest in the House –” (F473) enjoys the solitude of the night and the privacy of discretion, reserves herself the right not to speak and “live – aloud.” These peculiarities are justified by her shame, her modesty and slightness. At the same time, the speaker remains present, carves out privileges for herself as to be up at night with her “little Lamp, and Book –/ And one Geranium –”, and moves freely through the house. Quite obviously, her intention is not to die literally “noteless.” [125]

The dependence on others is emphasized in “It would have starved a Gnat –” (F444) where an extremely small speaker identified as a “living child” asserts dependency on others because of hunger and “Food’s necessity” paired with the inability to “seek a Dinner” autonomously.

F444

It would have starved a Gnat –
To live so small as I –
And yet, I was a living child –
With Food's necessity

Opon me – like a Claw –
I could no more remove
Than I could coax a Leech away –
Or make a Dragon – move –

Not like the Gnat – had I –
The privilege to fly
And seek a Dinner for myself –
How mightier He – than I!

Nor like Himself – the Art
Opon the Window Pane
To gad my little Being out –
And not begin – again –

As opposed to a complaint about the dependence on others, Wheeler reads this poem together with "They shut me up in Prose –" (F445) as a depiction of imprisonment.[126] "The metaphorically starving child is trapped by unidentified forces in a house and remains too sturdy eve to escape by exhausting herself to death as the gnat does" (Wheeler 37). The rather unskilled rhyme of "remove" with "move", Wheeler believes, points towards "the child's blocked imagination and inability to devise her [sic] own flight" (37). In contrast to "They shut me up in Prose -," the constraint is not primarily manifest as physical structure. It is "Food's necessity" that "like a Claw" binds the speaker to others. The comparison to the "Gnat" reveals the deficiency of the "living child" to be the inability to fly away in order to "seek a Dinner." But the reasons for the speaker's paralysis and stasis are not just missing wings, but the inability to escape hunger by voluntary starving. Like in "I was the slightest in the House –" (F473), where the speaker imagines how death would reveal her importance to others, the speaker of "It would have starved a Gnat –" sees escape in death, as it would free the child from "Food's necessity," the "Claw" that holds him or her captive. The smallness of this speaker is strategic in order to reach this goal, paradoxically trying to escape hunger by living "small," testing to which extent "Food" could be refused. As the poem states, the speaker fails, as the child cannot "remove" hunger by living "so small," but possibly only intensifies the hunger, starkly highlighting the dependency on "Food" and, therefore, others. The further the speaker moves to the margins, the smaller the child's body and the more lowly the lifestyle, the more aware the speaker is of the impossibility to disappear completely, to wholly detach himself or herself

from society and live beyond social restraint and order. Death functions as the frontier the speaker cannot reach, despite becoming infinitesimally smaller.

The embeddedness of even the smallest member of society into a community, and the dissociation of size and relevance are expressed in “Except to Heaven, she is nought.”

F173

Except to Heaven, she is nought.
Except for Angels – lone.
Except to some wide - wandering Bee
A flower superfluous blown.

Except for winds – provincial.
Except by Butterflies
Unnoticed as a single dew
That on the Acre lies.

The smallest Housewife in the grass,
Yet take her from the Lawn
And somebody has lost the face
That made Existence – Home!

This “smallest Housewife,” “nought,” “lone,” and insignificant to a wider world because she is “provincial,” is nevertheless essential to “somebody,” as she makes “Existence – Home.” The frequency of the word “Except” underlines the importance of the flower – “Housewife,” disqualifying all the terms declaring her insignificant and isolated. Like in “I was the slightest in the House –” (F473) and “It would have starved a Gnat –” (F444), the smallness, powerlessness and isolation of the speaker is only illusionary, disguising insufficiently the ties to a community that, despite the speaker’s wish to disappear, sees her as a member of that community.

3.2.4 Danger Inside: Sexual Violation and the Limits of Consciousness

When Dickinson’s speakers exaggerate female ideals of modesty, reserve, quiet acceptance of a subordinate status to the men in the household, a reluctance to speak and avoidance of public matters, the poet often lets them retreat into smallness, portrays them as paralyzed or lets them disappear in marginal spaces. However, the total disappearance into nonexistence, something seemingly equivalent to escape and freedom in many Dickinson poems, is impossible. Dickinson’s speakers remain members of the family and thus of society.

The community, family and the private setting of the home Dickinson’s speakers are so thoroughly embedded within fails not only in granting its female members individual space,

but it is also unsuccessful in providing safety if women are to be found alone in a room: the "haven in a heartless World" does not grant its inhabitants sufficiently against sexual violence, whether coming from the outside or residing within the walls that divide the private from the public (Rose "Family" 5). Intrusion is a topic Dickinson portrays in several poems, playing with notions of space that use the domestic realm as a setting, but often continue to use the house and its rooms as a metaphor for the brain or the female body. Within the house, the female body is not automatically protected, but can become the target of sexual violence. New England's Victorian society did not provide linguistic means to talk about the body, let alone rape or domestic violence. It was a taboo for a nineteenth-century white middle-class woman to talk about her body or portray it in any way (Miller "Humor" 118). Female sexuality was considered a private matter, which was maintained by an understanding of the body and its surface as governed by an inside-outside distinction that is essentially spatial: a Women's modesty demands her to manage the outlines and boundaries of her body by covering it up sufficiently with clothing, marking the interior and exterior of her body (Berkley Blaustein 33). This designation of sexuality as private (and the importance to control one's openings) is constructed, Berkley Blaustein argues, via the association of female sexuality with models of domestic interiority (33): "Over the surfaces of the body, the bathroom, and the house, female sexuality is consistently figured as a private space, a space designed not so much according to its contents as such, but according to the precise control over its openings" (Berkley Blaustein 33).

At the same time, medical discourses portrayed the female body as frail, strengthening female subordination and replacing religious notion of female inferiority. Medical discourse was used to substantiate moral and political movements that restricted women's agency, especially in matters of their own bodies and their own reproduction and fertility (Smith-Rosenberg 23-24). This had the consequence that "[b]etween the 1870s and 1890s, abortion became illegal, birth-control information was banned form the U.S. mails, brothels were closed or prostitutes made to register and submit to gynecological examinations" (Smith-Rosenberg 24). Wardrop explains that during the nineteenth century, women who appeared in front of a court as victims of rape often were subject to criminalization themselves, being accused of seduction and their claim being regarded as insubstantial (79).

Exclusion on several levels and the resulting prohibition from law and the right to protection are the topics of "Alone and in a Circumstance" (F1174). This poem has been interpreted from various angles: David Porter first reads this poem as an account of visiting the outhouse and being bitten by a spider, thereby identifying it as the story of an assault (17). Wardrop takes this argument a step further, calling the spider a "violator", identifying the assault as rape, and reading the third stanza as the speaker's effort to reclaim the right over her own body (79). Others read the figure of the spider and its skillful and precise weaving of beautiful nets as a figure for the poet and her work, concentrating on questions of authorship,

copyright and editorial altering invoked by the poem (Gilbert/Gubar 638-9).[127] Perceiving a humorous tone in the poem, Eberwein uses its heavy use of juridical terminology as an example of Dickinson's application of legal discourse to a comical effect (*Perspectives* 32). Similarly trivializing the spider's assault, James Guthrie reads the poem as a provincial woman 's complaint about being chased from the outhouse by spiders and other insects (33). The poem, Guthrie says, expresses Dickinson's ambivalence toward her own provincialism, playing on the stereotype of a country court, mockingly presenting a case that reveals to be insubstantial as technically, no offense has taken place, and because of the speaker's reluctance to name the delinquent, no offender can be identified (33). The presented juridical case, Guthrie explains, is more sophisticated than initially meets the eye, revealing Dickinson's mastery of the legal discourse (34). The privy, Guthrie explains, represents the " backwood culture" of rural Amherst. The poem reveals, in his opinion, Dickinson's alienation from her provincial identity as well as her inability to give it up entirely, making her "both victim and intruder, property owner and uninvited 'visitor'" (34). This alienation, he sums up, is mirrored by the legal complaint that falls outside of jurisdiction and renders (the) Lord's[128] help impossible (34).

This poem's overarching topic is exclusion in a spatial as well as in a juridical and poetic sense, and this exclusion results in an inability to claim and receive protection. Concepts of the private and the public as well as the domestic define this exclusion. For a detailed analysis of the poem, it is useful to reproduce it in full length:

F1174

Alone and in a Circumstance
Reluctant to be told
A spider on my reticence
Assiduously crawled

And so much more at Home than I
Immediately grew
I felt myself a visitor
And hurriedly withdrew –

Revisiting my late abode
With articles of claim
I found it quietly assumed
As a Gymnasium
Where Tax asleep and Title off
The inmates of the Air
Perpetual presumption took
As each were special Heir –
If any strike me on the street
I can return the Blow –

If any take my property
According to the Law
The Statute is my Learned friend
But what redress can be
For an offence nor here nor there
So not in Equity –
That Larceny of time and mind
The marrow of the Day
By spider, or forbid it Lord
That I should specify –

Stripping the poem of all its flesh, we come down to a story about the annexation of an unspecified propriety, "nor here nor there," by a spider or some other offender, which the speaker refines from naming. Although the speaker appeals to the law for help, it seems that the case cannot be presented in front of a court because the vague "Larceny of time and mind" falls outside of its jurisdiction.[129] What disguises itself as a recount of an event and is brought forward in the form of a complaint turns out to lack crucial elements of a narrative. The poem remains vague about its setting, the protagonists and the subject of the alleged offense. Even if an "omitted center"[130] is characteristic for Dickinson, I find this exclusion of context and the inability or refusal to pin down meaning telling (Leyda xxi). Even the spider mentioned in the first stanza is converted into a volatile "inmate... of the Air" in the second stanza and altogether declared unreliable in the last two lines. Without even the certainty of the spider's nature, all we are left with is the impossibility to represent the alluded event.

In the first stanza, we have two instances referring to the impossibility of representation: "Reluctant to be told" and "reticence", which insist on silence on the subject matter. What we know for certain from the first two stanzas is the isolation of the speaker, the intentionality of the violator, the growth of alarm and the consequential alienation and withdrawal of the speaker. This structure makes Wardrop's suggestion to read "Alone and in a Circumstance" as a rape poem or story of sexual assault plausible. Sexual assault and rape were silenced subjects in Dickinson's culture and were represented only in mediated terms, often a "feint and faint manner" that leaves the reader uncertain of whether the violence occurred or not, and to what degree, without describing the act itself (Wardrop 75). Apart from societal pressure, fear and shame both seem probable motivations for the declared silence. The third stanza tells us of the loss which resulted from the incident, the speaker's effort to redeem that loss, the violator 's reluctance to give in and the laws inefficiency regarding the speaker's cause. Bearing in mind that women who tried to submit a case of rape to the court often failed, the interpretation of the described assault as sexual violence makes sense.

Likewise, I do not want to abandon Porter's proposal of the privy as the site of action. As stated towards the end of the third stanza, the offence takes place "nor here nor there," a

description that certainly does justice to the privy as being neither part of the house and the privacy of "domestic bliss," nor a public place. Essentially, the outhouse is a non-place.[131] The speaker's reluctance to name the place demonstrates the nineteenth century's lack of adequate language to express bodily matters (Runzo 65). The privy with its association of bodily functions therefore has to be located outside of language. According to Runzo, the body, if mentioned at all in Dickinson's poetry, is often restrained and bound in "spaces of limitation" like "pits, prisons, tombs, closets"and is marked by society's effort to control the speaker (61). The choice of the outhouse as setting for this poem, I claim, represents a space outside the dichotomy of public and private and beyond language. It becomes not only a space of containment for the speaker's body but also a constitutionalized void for the execution of the assault, resulting in the ineffectiveness of the speaker's effort to claim justice. The poem does not remain in paralysis though, but precisely because the claim for justice fails, the injustice of the situation is exposed. While her speaker fails, Dickinson's poem achieves, I suggest, the opposite: the fact that an offence goes unpunished, in fact is not even received in a court, is brought to the reader's attention, and a law that protects only some while others remain defenceless, is criticized.

Runzo's interpretation of another poem, "Mine – by the Right of the White Election!" (F411) helps to illustrate my claims about "Alone and in a Circumstance" (F1174). Runzo sees "Mine – by the Right of the White Election!" (F411) as a measurement against the restriction of women to their bodies and to femaleness. The strategy employed, she summarizes, consists in a detachment from conventional womanhood by assuming power over and taking possession of her own body through juridical proclamation:

> [T]hrough her own invocation of law and convention, Dickinson disconnects herself from cultural conceptions of 'woman' in Victorian America, pronouncing her own laws, conceiving her body otherly, announcing herself a *proprietor*, dramatic assertions in the face of woman's legal divestiture. In this poem, the space of order and control becomes *a space of apparent anarchy*.
>
> (Runzo 65, my emphasis)

Runzo's statement about "Mine – by the Right of the White Election!" (F411) is directly applicable to "Alone and in a Circumstance" (F1174). The latter poem likewise declares the speaker a proprietor, and it does this using the same discourse of law. The use of legal discourse, according to Runzo's account, signifies the emancipation from Victorian womanhood if we assume the speaker to be female. I insist on the differentiation between poet and speaker of a poem and therefore resist from gendering the latter. In this perspective, "Mine – by the Right of the White Election!" (F411) is not Dickinson's "own 'declaration' of rights," but simply *a* declaration of rights. The emphasis of my analysis is on the employment of a certain discourse rather than on a speech act - which, as Runzo hints at, would be invalid within a discourse reserved for men. What Dickinson does here, I claim, is entering a discourse in a playful way. She is then not speaking herself - an impossibility in the light of her legal

status - but lets a poetic voice speak instead. This is a voice that mixes legal and political discourse with attributions of royalty, social regulation, ownership and colours. By doing this, she inflates the dominant discourses of jurisdiction and politics and creates her own version of it, thus challenging its stability. Even without an overhasty assumption of a female speaker, this constitutes a questioning of the adequacy of these dominant discourses. Still more interesting, legal discourse being identified with “order and control” by Runzo becomes a space characterized by anarchy, a striking similarity to the “Gymnasium” the speaker finds her “abode” transformed to.

I find it especially remarkable that in both poems, the attempted repossession of the speaker's right happens in terms of the law (“articles of claim”), politics (“Tax”) and ownership (“propriety”). Those are the three elements that traditionally constitute the center pillars of freedom and agency in American society. The speaker’s exclusion from these basic rights marks women as second class citizens. The reference to the offender, pluralized in stanza three as “inmates of the Air” is a good hint that these possess freedom because they reside within a certain system, while the speaker, outsider instead of “inmate,” does not. The play with apparent oppositions such as the word “inmate”, referring to a prisoner, and the “Air” signifying freedom, suggest a reading of the speaker as not completely paralyzed, even though lacking the offender’s freedom. When the legal claim fails, the speaker is multiply challenged: The fact that the offender multiplies in stanza three emphasizes the speaker’s isolation and points towards a lack of sympathy that the violator, in contrast, seems to have in abundance, as the speaker is now confronted with numerous adversaries. The description of the offender as a spider makes the situation seem ridiculous in stanza three where the speaker loses ground and “Title” to the insect. If we pay respect to the complaint this poem voices and take into account Bennett’s argument that the popular complaint genre was used in newspapers since the first half of the eighteenth century to debate gender issues, it becomes clear that the highly unfair treatment the powerless speaker is subjected to is heavily criticized (Bennett 6). Women’s situation outside of the law and citizenship is clearly more than just bugging. The depiction of the offender as insect is sarcastic and debasing at the same time, a defence strategy that highlights how inappropriate the animalistic characters’ privileges are. The representation of the offenders as “inmates” in line fourteen, transmitting a sense of confinement even for the bugs, might be a hint toward their privilege’s dependency on certain legitimizing discourses like jurisdiction that are not necessarily fair or moral.

If we read the spider not only as aggressor but also the emblem of an artist and poet, which other poems like “The Spider holds a Silver Ball” (F513) and “The Spider as an Artist” (F1373) suggest, we can read the conflict in this poem as a struggle for poetic space. Gilbert and (link the spinning spider-artist with the characteristically female craft of sewing, saying that with these two metaphors, Dickinson’s poetry weaves a “Tapestry of Paradise” (F306), a “magic place” which is a space where “the woman artist would not be a subversive spider who

disguises herself and her meaning in webs of obscurity (…)" (642). Even though the spider is an intruder and not the figure of identification here, I want to take its presence and especially its connotations in other poems as a hint for reading this poem in connection to the spatial conditions of poetry writing and the spaces it in turn creates. The "abode" the speaker struggles to reclaim might therefore be read both literally as the private space needed for poetry writing and figuratively as "Tapestry of Paradise", the space where a female poet has a righteous existence, can be outspoken, and is recognized as an artist. The speaker's prohibition to righteously claim that space is an allusion to the precarious condition of a female poet's existence both in physical-social space where she, like Dickinson, had to perform household tasks and was seldom granted private time alone, and in the realm of the mind and poetry.

The annexation of the speaker's private space and the following struggle to regain property rights might then as well be a complaint about lacking copyright laws during the nineteenth-century. There is no protection for intellectual propriety, and once a poem is released to the world, it is subject to alteration and appropriation by others. Her portrait of the spider crawling on the speaker's body and her poetry, both implied by the term "reticence" as that which is concealed and wishes to remain unseen, inseparably links bodily matters and art as something of the speaker's own, a propriety both in the sense of ownership as well as an attribute of one's self, and thus declares them components of a single identity.

This poem impressively shows a speaker confined by various discourses rooted in gendered Victorian society. The perspectives I explored above and the various confinements identified make a gendering of the speaker as female highly plausible. On the surface a narrative about trivial annoyance when visiting the *out*house, the poem becomes a complaint about the lack of privacy. The housewife's tools in form of "broom and dustpan", Guthrie's interpretation of the "articles of claim", prove ineffective in restoring privacy (33). The housewife, as opposed to her husband or even base creatures like spiders, has no entitlement to privacy and risks being ridiculed when she makes claim for it.

Had the offense taken place in the street, the presence of other people would have guaranteed a certain protection. But outside the shelter of the home, where Victorian women enjoyed a certain status, and completely "Alone" the female speaker is exposed to the threat of physical violence. Modesty, a virtue closely linked to sexual austereness and virginity, forbids a Victorian woman to talk about the body, and if she attempts to do so, polite discourse has censored the appropriate words.[132] Modesty and the obligation to use decent language therefore represent restrictions resulting in invisible barriers in physical space. Spaces off limit thus make women easy prey for rape or sexual assault. But how can any woman refrain from visiting the outhouse? The speaker's effort to literally "re*dress*" herself in order to reinstall her propriety (a near homophone of line nineteen's "property") fails because women were not allowed to be witnesses in court and could not file a legal claim without a male guardian doing

it in their name (line 22, my emphasis). The public spaces of the courtroom and the nation which determine citizenship both deny the speaker access, as they did to women generally.

The poem, disguised as a conventional nineteenth-century poem of female complaint, possibly deemed harmless during Dickinson's time because of its setting and simple characters, can be read as an outraged cry against a woman's status "So not in Equity." As demonstrated earlier, the poem fuses the bodily self and poetic creation into conjoint matters of identity. The female body and poetry form inconsolable opposites in nineteenth-century culture.[133] Their fusion is thus provocative. The poem, when read as a woman poet's claim for right, not only challenges conventions, but functions as empowerment when taken seriously. The last two lines "or forbid it Lord/ That I should specify" might refer less to a woman's modest refusal to name the violence she was subjected to and more to a threat to actually do so. The woman poet, a spider by trade herself, certainly possesses the ability to do so, as she has the means to weave her language's net around the constraints placed on her by a domestic cult that orders her to get rid of that spider. The privy, then, might not just be a space for comical effect, but represents a setting "nor here nor there" that serves a certain purpose. The outhouse may symbolize the marginal space being neither inside nor wholly outside of dominant culture De Lauretis has in mind. The speaker de-marginalizes it by speaking about it, bringing its back into consciousness. According to De Lauretis, this liminal space permits the possibility of resistance and agency through a creative and unconventional use of language that allows for difference (139). The female subject occupying and appropriating this kind of space, in our example symbolized by the privy, does not restrict herself to her assigned sphere of female gender roles.

More explicit than "Alone and in a Circumstance" (F1174), "In Winter in my Room" (1742) tells of a sexual assault within the home using a "Worm / Pink lank and warm" turning into a snake as a phallic metaphor for the rapist. According to Finnerty, the poem's bold metaphorics are not just revealing for modern, post-Freudian readers, but would have been understood even by Dickinson's contemporaries despite the Victorian imperative that forbid all representations of sex ("Reverie" 96):

F1742

In Winter in my Room
I came upon a Worm
Pink lank and warm
But as he was a worm
And worms presume
Not quite with him at home
Secured him by a string
To something neighboring
And went along –

A Trifle afterward
A thing occurred
I'd not believe it if I heard
But state with creeping blood
A snake with mottles rare
Surveyed my chamber floor
In feature as the worm before
But ringed with power
The very string with which
I tied him – too
When he was mean and new
That string was there –

I shrank – "How fair you are"!
Propitiation's Claw –
"Afraid he hissed
Of me"?
"No cordiality" –
He fathomed me –
Then to a Rhythm *Slim*
Secreted in his Form
As Patterns swim
Projected him.

That time I flew
Both eyes his way
Lest he pursue
Nor ever ceased to run
Till in a distant Town
Towns on from mine
I set me down
This was a dream –

The fact that Dickinson declares the described assault as a "dream" does not weaken the provocative explicitness of the poem. Despite the poem's statement that it should be read as a dream, "[i]ts unself-conscious clarity is astounding," as Paglia puts it (644). It is exactly this clarity that makes the reader doubt that this really is the account of a dream, as dreams characteristically are not that intelligible, but oblique (Finnerty "Reverie" 95). Here, however, nothing is suppressed. Nevertheless, Finnerty maintains, we should take the statement that the narrative in the poem is an account of a dream seriously, and he reads it in connection to

the discourse about dreams prevalent during Dickinson's lifetime ("Reverie" 96). Even though the interpretation of the worm transforming into a "Secret[ing] " snake as a phallus is just one among different options, I want to explore it further in the context of intrusion and the danger of sexual assault within the home.

Unlike the majority of Dickinson's poems, "In Winter in my Room" (F1742) provides a narrative, starting conventionally with specifications about the time and place of the described event. The speaker is confronted with an intruder from the outside and feels "not quite with him at home" in his or her room, possibly a bedroom and therefore a very personal and the most private space within the home. The worm does not belong there and therefore startles the speaker who, uncomfortable with the male worms presence there and the impending danger lurking "Secure[s] him by a string / To something neighboring," and then resumes whatever activity had been interrupted by the intruder. The encounter with the "Worm / Pink lank and warm" is described as strange, and the speaker feels a need to act, to restrain the intruder, but either does not have the authority or is not alerted enough to evict him from the private "Room."

The attachment to "something neighboring" does not have the hoped for effect however, and instead of rendering the "Worm" immobile and impotent achieves the opposite. "A Trifle afterward," the speaker finds the male "Worm" transformed into a "snake," his empowerment being symbolized by the "mottles" "ringed with power." The speaker now is terrified. The similar sound patterns in "ring…" and the twice repeated "string" in the second stanza put emphasis on the connection between the two. Apparently, the snake has not only broken free, but the very string that was meant to protect the speaker from the worm is now his emblem of power. A ring with transformative powers can be read as an engagement ring or a wedding ring, the symbol for marriage. In this poem, the string which becomes a ring is paralleled by the transformation of the strange, yet innocuous "Worm" into a dangerous "snake." If the ring of power is a wedding ring, it turned the stranger intruding the speaker's private bedroom into a family member who can move within the house freely. The speaker thus has to flee to "a distant Town," as the home fails to protect against violation if it is coming from within the family as opposed to the outside world.

The attachment of the "Worm" "by a string / To something neighboring" turns the intruder into a member of the household and family. The fact that the speaker ties the "Worm" to "something" rather than someone, which we would expect if we read the "mottles" "ringed with power" as a metaphor for marriage, emphasizes the new status of the intruder as belonging to the house as naturally as a piece of furniture, as "something neighboring," does. When the snake becomes part of the home, the speaker simultaneously becomes detached from it, having to flee its premises as coexistence would have required "propitiation…" and a level of "cordiality" that causes the speaker to remember the episode "with creeping blood," an expression for paralyzing fear. After all, the "snake" "fathomed" the speaker and "to a Rhythm

Slim / Secreted in his Form;" a description that hints at sexual intercourse cumulating in male climax. In "Secreted," both "secretion" and "secret" resonate and once more highlight the inexpressibility of the sexual violation, an imperative the poem evidently disobeys.

A poem commonly read as a Gothic "psychodrama" of the mental "internal world turned external" is "One need not be a Chamber – to be Haunted –" (F407) (Bayley "Ghost" 57). Bayley, who reads Dickinson's death poetry in context with *Hamlet,* identifies the mystery of what is imagined and what is real as the central question of the "One need not be a Chamber – to be Haunted –" (F407) ("Ghost" 55). Weisbuch focuses on the depiction of identity as multiple, displaying the "internal self as plural" when the speaker discovers "Ourself behind ourself" (Weisbuch "Prisming" 217). The poem is set in the "Brain," which is described in terms of a "House" that is terrorized by a "Ghost," called a "cooler Host," and has "Corridors – surpassing / Material Place." Focusing on the analogies between house and body, on the intrusion by the "Ghost" called a "Horror," and the emphasis on physical matter rather than abstract thought hinted at by the "Corridors" of the "Brain," I link the intrusion into the house or home to the violation of the female body.

F407

One need not be a Chamber – to be Haunted –
One need not be a House –
The Brain has Corridors – surpassing
Material Place –

Far safer, of a midnight meeting
External Ghost
Than it's interior confronting –
That cooler Host –

Far safer, through an Abbey gallop,
The Stones a'chase –
Than unarmed, one's a'self encounter –
In lonesome Place –

Ourself behind ourself, concealed –
Should startle most –
Assassin hid in our Apartment
Be Horror's least –

The Body – borrows a Revolver –
He bolts the Door –
O'erlooking a superior spectre –
Or More –

Drawing on the literary model of the Gothic novel, Dickinson tells a ghost story in this poem. “The prevailing story,” Bayley summarizes, “is one of intrusion and suspected violation” (“Ghost” 59). In my chapter on Dickinson’s use of death and the grave as spaces in her poetry, I provide a more detailed overview of the Gothic genre’s preoccupation with death and sex, and remain here referring to Wardrop’s observation that Dickinson frequently links death and sex intricately in her poem’s that can be considered Gothic (*Gothic* 70). The Gothic genre provides Dickinson with a model to describe such an intrusion, providing a link between the figure of Death, in our example a “Ghost,” and rape. An impressive example of this connection provides “The Frost of Death was on the Pane –” (F1130), which reconnects to my analysis of “In Winter in my Room” (1742), largely calling on the same imagery to narrate an event of rape, portraying “Frost” as a phallic “Snake”.[134] In “One need not be a Chamber – to be Haunted –” (F407), not only the Gothic genre implied by the “Ghost” at the “midnight meeting” suggests a reading that involves physical violation, but also the presence of the term “Brain” as a setting for the events as opposed to ‘mind,’ which emphasizes physiology instead of abstraction.

The metaphor of the house for the “Brain” serves not only to locate the event of intrusion and to describe the invasion of a foreign, unwanted, and frightening thought into the mind in narrative terms, but according to Schöberlein might serve to describe a neurological process or mental state according to the medical knowledge about psychological processes available at the time: According to Schöberlein who studied the textbooks the poet’s education was based on, “Emily Dickinson understood from a fairly young age what the brain was, what it did, and what it looked like” (54). In such a reading, the “Corridors” in “One need not be a Chamber – to be Haunted –” (F407) correspond to the brain’s gyri, which due to their multiple folds accommodate an extraordinary amount of surface space “surpassing -/ Material Place – ” (Schöberlein 54). The brain in Dickinson’s poetry, Schöberlein shows convincingly, “is a physical object, a material *thing* that has texture, ‘weight’ and mass (F598), suggesting that the poet had visualized the organ … hidden in her own skull” (54, original italics). The “House,” like the skull, is a container that sets the scene for the drama unfolding in the poem, and “the brain is a dramatized interior space” (Bayley 57). The danger coming from within, an encounter with “one’s a’self,” or “Ourself behind ourself,” is much worse than coming across an “External Ghost.”

Looking at the spatial levels or layers of the poem moving from an “External” ghost into a house that is simultaneously a brain I suggest a reading that reveals a more physical description at the core of the poem than the interpretations by critics such as Bayley or Weisbuch that see a mental drama of multiple personalities suggest. I take Schöberlein’s implications that we have a physiological description of human inner anatomy here serious, and therefore put forward a reading that understands the brain as a metonym for the inside of the body, referring by synecdoche to that which lies beyond the skin of the speaker. If we do

that, the “a’self,” or ‘a self’ we find within the body, something perceived of as alien, as intruder, but yet intrinsically linked to the speaker’s body may be an unborn child. This invisible being “ concealed” within the speaker’s body, or “hid in our Apartment,” as the poem states using again the metaphor of the house, is called “Horror’s least” because of its small size, but that does not reduce the terror the speaker experiences. To an unmarried nineteenth-century woman, the discovery that she is pregnant can indeed be perceived of as far worse than the experience and aftermath of rape, as the crime can remain undiscovered and thus no blame and public shaming affect the victim: Being overpowered by the “External Ghost,” the intruder from the outside, is thus “Far safer” “Than it’s interior confronting – / That cooler Host-.”[135] Similarly as to “Alone and in a Circumstance” (1174) that locates the event of the assault in a non-space, “One need not be a Chamber – to be Haunted –” (F407) situates the assumed rape at “a midnight meeting,” midnight being the exact time between this day and the next, in between and nowhere, at no time, at dead of night, where all clocks are set back to zero. The time the sexual offence takes place once again points towards its inexpressibility, the inability to name, locate and time the event. Its consequence however, the pregnancy and subsequent birth of an illegitimate child cannot be hidden. Because nineteenth-century Victorian society upheld virginity as of utmost importance for a woman’s worth, the mutilation of her body by extramarital sex or rape could be viewed as an equivalent to social death, a topic Wardrop explains was often represented in terms of physical death (*Gothic* 77). The identification of an unwanted unborn child as “Assassin” and the speaker’s conclusion that she, or rather “The Body – borrows a Revolver –“ and “bolts the Door –,“ and commits suicide effectively hinders a birth and the revelation of the rape. After having passed over, the speaker, “O’erlooking a superior spectre – / Or More –” triumphs over the “External Ghost” as well as over the “Assassin ” within, having become impregnable when she regained the ultimate control over her body by committing suicide.

The act of suicide and the accompanying redemption of control according to Bayley signify a change of gender: in order to seize the phallic “Revolver,” the speaker has to become male (Bayley “Ghost” 58). The female cannot protect the “sanctuary of the apartment” from the intruder (Bayley 59). Only in a gesture imitating the male rapist does she regain control, and thereby eliminates herself, and the self within, the offspring of the violator. The female “House ” or body thus proves to be fragile, and the woman within it, however “Prudent,” a variant Franklin provides for the “Body” in “One need not be a Chamber – to be Haunted –” (F407), has to be on constant guard in order to maintain her physical integrity, a state that is indeed akin to being “Haunted” as the poem’s opening line proclaims: “One need not be a Chamber – to be Haunted –,” we are reassured, as being female and possessing a body that is permeable and vulnerable to assault is enough reason to become paranoid. While being on constant guard, the danger the paranoid speaker expects in every “Corridor” is most often a

product of the “Brain:” “Ourself” imagining the intruder “behind Ourself” at every moment signifies a far greater stress than finally meeting with the concrete “External Ghost.”

Graphically and phonetically, “One need not be a Chamber – to be Haunted –” (F407) provides “a drama of exits and entrances,” Bayley maintains (“Ghost” 60). The metaphor of the house, the brain and the body become permeable structures potholed with the A’s and O’ s of “a’chase,” “a’self,” and the repeated “One” and “Ourself.” On such precarious ground, we too have to expect the worst behind every Dickinson construction. “In order to read Dickinson well,“ Bayley instructs her readers, “we must come complete with paranoia. We should hear things in corners … . We must learn to see and hear ghosts. We may not see a single body, but we will catch at threats of lost materials, abandoned places, rejected histories” (“Ghost” 59). Becoming a paranoid reader, we must become accustomed to the ghostly intruder just as Dickinson does:

F773

Conscious am I in my Chamber –
Of a shapeless friend –
He doth not attest by Posture –
Nor confirm – by Word –

Neither Place – need I present Him –
Fitter Courtesy
Hospitable intuition
Of His Company –

Presence – is His furthest license –
Neither He to Me
Nor Myself to Him – by Accent –
Forfeit Probity –

Weariness of Him, were quainter
Than Monotony
Knew a Particle – of Space’s
Vast Society –

Neither if He visit Other –
Do He dwell – or Nay – know I –
But Instinct esteem Him
Immortality –

In this poem, the ghostly intruder or “shapeless friend” residing in the speaker’s private “Chamber” is neither frightening nor perceived of as alien, but seems to belong there like a piece of furniture. In fact, the poem suggests that instead of occupying a space in the “Chamber,” the ghost might just be a product of the speaker’s imagination, her consciousness,

as “He” does not seem to be visible or audible in any sense and therefore does not provide any sensual stimuli needed for a person to perceive his presence. Assumingly, the speaker prefers the “Company” of a “shapeless friend,” as in the second stanza the necessity of “Courtesy” is deemed naught, and this lack of conventions of hospitality are deemed “Fitter” by the speaker than the usual formal rituals involved with receiving a guest properly. The third stanza confirms the harmlessness of the “shapeless friend,” as neither protagonist’s “Probity,” their moral or integrity, is in danger despite the described inattention to conventions of “Courtesy.” Indeed, the fourth stanza reassures the reader, “Weariness of Him, were quainter / Than Monotony,” stating that the “Presence” of the ghost has become so ordinary that it does not provoke any reaction in the speaker. Rather, the “shapeless friend” has become a “Particle – of Space’s/ Vast Society –,” suggesting that “He” is part of the space surrounding the speaker. In fact, he seems to be such a constant presence that in the last stanza, the speaker speculates if instead of being a product of his or her imagination, the “shapeless friend” is nevertheless a timeless phenomenon and therefore “immortal.” However, the speaker attributes the idea that the ghostly visitor might exist independently from his or her imagination to “instinct,” something that opposes reason and detaches the perception of the ghost from consciousness. The philosophical question arises then whether consciousness can exist independently, and thus be immortal like the ghost, and possibly become the ghost itself. In “I never hear that one is dead” (F1325), “Consciousness” is called “That awful stranger” in the last stanza and is feared just as the ghost in “One need not be a Chamber – to be Haunted –” (F407):

F1325

…
I do not know the man so bold
He dare in lonely Place
That awful stranger – Consciousness
Deliberately face –

According to Finan, Dickinson “explores the psychological pressures of being a self-conscious entity” in her poems on consciousness (41). Applied to “Conscious am I in my Chamber –” (F773), this entails that becoming conscious of a “shapeless friend” in one’s private “Chamber” means that by recognizing the other, the speaker simultaneously becomes self-aware. By acknowledging the shapeless intruder and recognizing the invalidity of social norms regarding hospitality, the speaker becomes aware of their existence before declaring them unnecessary, and by doing so reflects over his or her own behavior. The nuisance of consciousness, or “Weariness of Him” in regard to social norms is that even in our private “Chamber,” we cannot abandon social rules of behavior. The fourth stanza confirms this, attributing a “Vast society –” to “Space.” The speaker who is “conscious” can, therefore, never really escape social imperatives and remains observant of his or her own conduct, even when

alone. A social being is therefore never truly alone and can never retreat to a truly social space as long as he or she is bound to a space within the structure of the home that is socially and culturally marked.

The privacy Dickinson portrays in her poems can be disturbed any time, be it by a living intruder raping his female victim or by threatening her physical integrity, be it by the individual's own awareness that these things are possible and the resulting paranoia suspecting a trespasser at any time and thereby creating the danger in the mind, projecting it onto the space surrounding the speaker, or by accepting that as a being conscious of these mechanisms, one cannot ever be sure of the reality of a lurking threat and can never really deactivate the cultural mechanisms that call forth these mechanisms of the mind. Dickinson's female speakers thus live in a precarious state within their houses and the home of the family, being aware of their physical entrapment within the house as well as in their vulnerable bodies and their mind, doubling the captivity.

3.2.5 Housewife, Wife, Bride, and Lover

A possibility for women to escape the precarious situation as single woman is to marry and become a wife and housewife. While wifehood may offer protection against at least the social sanctions of the birth of an illegitimate child, it also means financial and legal dependence on a husband joint with the household duties and representative role of a wife (Stanton 208). Dickinson was critical of this arrangement, and many Dickinson scholars confirm her negative attitude towards marriage: According to Wheeler, Dickinson "criticizes her culture's intimate association of married women with the houses they labored to maintain" (25). Indeed, Dickinson portrays marriage predominantly in negative ways, linking it to death in many instances, a topic that I explore in detail in my chapter on death and the grave as spaces for a reunion with a lover. Furthermore, Dickinson describes marriage in several poems as religious calling, serving a husband in similar ways as serving God. "She's happy – with a new Content– / That feels to her – like Sacrament –" (F587), a poem declares, portraying a wife happily tearful about the fact "That Heaven permit so meek as her – / To such a Fate – to minister –." Wheeler claims that despite a few positive portraits, ambivalence dominates Dickinson's poetry about wifehood and bridehood, an attitude that becomes impressively clear in poems such as "Title divine, is mine." (F194) where the lifecycle of a woman is reduced to being "Born – Bridalled – Shrouded – / In a Day –" (25).

F194

Title divine, is mine.
The Wife without the Sign –
Acute degree conferred on me –
Empress of Calvary –

Royal, all but the Crown –
Betrothed, without the Swoon
God gives us Women –
When you hold Garnet to Garnet –
Gold – to Gold –
Born – Bridalled – Shrouded –
In a Day –
Tri Victory –
“My Husband” – Women say
Stroking the Melody –
Is this the way –

The first six lines of the poem tell of a woman who gained wifely, “divine” and “Royal” status, despite the fact that she lacks the attributes associated with such states as the “Sign” or the “ Crown.” Nevertheless, the woman received the “Title” of “Wife” and “Empress of Calvary.” The association of the two labels, or maybe identities, make the ambivalence with which Dickinson views marriage visible: while “Empress” confers royalty and power, “Calvary” referring to the mount where the crucifixion took place connotes pain, suffering and self-sacrifice. Being “Wife, ” whether officially as married woman or figuratively devoted to some superior cause, comprises not only a certain status, but demands uncompromising devotion amounting to selflessness, which opposes the notion of having an individual identity and one’s own interests. However, “Title divine, is mine.” starts out with an empowered voice, claiming a “Title” and declaring that “acute degree” was assigned to the female speaker. The resoluteness of the speaker is underlined by the full stop at the end of the line, denying any doubt about the claim. The rite of passage accompanying the change of status is compared to an engagement, but in contrast to common expectations happened with the speaker conscious and alert, as she was “Betrothed, without the Swoon.” The speaker seems to be divided about her new status however, just as the poem is divided in two: after line six, the speaker reflects on the course of life “God gives us women –” which is reduced to being “Born – Bridalled – Shrouded – / In a Day –.” This does not leave much room for individual development, and certainly offers no alternative options. While this prospect for a woman’s life does not seem to be very attractive, the line “Tri Victory” referring back to the three stages in the life of a woman again use vocabulary that connotes success and power, highlighting again the poem’s ambivalent voice that acquires a bitter tone as the verse unfolds. The female speaker distances herself from others by stating that some women refer tenderly to their husbands, “Stroking the Melody –” of the term signifying their marital partner. “Is this the [only] way –” the poem finally asks, leaving the question unanswered and thereby criticizing the lack of alternatives as well as leaving room for possible responses encouraged by the open and extending final dash “-.”

In a similar fashion, “I’m ‘wife’ – I’ve finished that –” (F225) announces a female speaker’s metamorphosis which marks the passage from girlhood into womanhood. Again, the speaker uses royal imagery to describe this “other state” which transformed her finally into a “’Woman.’” The gender role is oddly set in quotation marks, which reduces it to a term or title that stands in peculiar contrast to the male title of “Czar” associated with power, sovereignty and control:

F225

I’m “wife” – I’ve finished that –
That other state –
I’m Czar – I’m “Woman” now –
It’s safer so –

How odd the Girl’s life looks
Behind this soft Eclipse –
I think that Earth feels so
To folks in Heaven – now –

This being comfort – then
That other kind – was pain –
But why compare?
I’m “Wife”! Stop there!

The last line of the first stanza relativizes the empowering statements of the first three lines, explaining the reason for the commitment to become “’wife,’” a term again put into quotation marks to emphasize its superimposition as a description of the speaker’s identity. “It’s safer so –,” the speaker declares, and the informed reader assumes financial, social and legal privileges to be the reasons for the speaker’s marriage and simultaneous termination of girlhood. It is striking that there seems to be no stage between girlhood and wifehood in this poem, as the speaker only becomes “’Woman’” through marriage. The poem contrasts married life to girlhood and elevates it above the latter, comparing the difference between the two states to the disparagement between “Earth” and “Heaven,” which alludes to the difference between life and death. Again, the comparison is ambivalent, as heaven is connoted positively and salvation signifies the ultimate goal of a Christian believer, but death as the opposite of life brings about stasis, paralysis and the lack of sensation. Marrying is associated with “ascension into heaven, as if marrying is dying,” Wheeler confirms the implication of the poem’s comparison between married and unmarried life (Wheeler 25).[136] However, despite its association with “Earth” and therefore life, girlhood is not associated positively in the poem, but signifies “pain,” while the safety of marriage is perceived of as “comfort.” The negative associations of girlhood can be explained by the inability of the female child to turn into a ‘”woman’” without simultaneously becoming a ‘”wife.’” From such a perspective, girlhood does

not represent life, playfulness and agility, but signifies stasis just like wifehood compared to existence in the afterlife does. Consequently, the speaker's question and assumed revelation that the two states cannot be compared because comparison deconstructs the presumed difference between the two states of female existence is naught: "But why compare?" the speaker asks and censors her own criticism of the limited social roles available for women, calling out "I'm 'wife'! Stop there!"

The passage from girlhood into womanhood is connected to a change in realm, sphere, or floor, as the female characters acquiring wifehood literally climb not only the social ladder, gaining social status, but leave their girlhood, which presumingly takes place on the ground floor, and ascend into heaven. "Softly – my Future climbs the Stair –," the bride in "A Wife – at Daybreak – I shall be –" (F185) describes her transformation from "Child" into married adult. Dickinson visualizes this change spatially in several terms, letting her characters cross over from the space of the living into the space of the dead, from the space of worldly life into a divine sphere, and from the ground floor to the upper floor by claimbing the stairs. This climb from downstairs to upstairs cam be read as the move from the relatively public living room to the marital bedroom when transferred to the domestic space of the house that both the girl and the wife or bride occupy. The spatial and metaphorical anchorage marriage signifies is demonstrated in a poem portraying the metamorphosis into wifehood in a highly abstracted, defamiliarized way:

F511

He found my Being – set it up –
Adjusted it to place –
Then carved his name – upon it –
And bade it to the East

Be faithful – In his absence –
And he would come again –
With Equipage of Amber –
That time – to take it Home –

A male protagonist rearranges someone's "Being" in space, renames it with his own name, and bids it goodbye, facing it "East." The carving of his name onto, or into, the "Being" reminds of the change of last name a woman who marries undergoes, identifying the speaker with a wife or bride. The bride lacks an identity in this poem and is reduced to an "it," an object the male takes charge of, sets into place according to his judgement, and then leaves to wait there for his return. In "his absence," the "Being" is ordered to be "faithful." The second part of the second stanza remains oblique, but stresses the provisional character of the wife's abode, a place not yet "Home," but ready to be taken away, frozen into waiting for his return, and being available for him to adorn "it" with "Amber" to his liking. The wife or bride solely exists as decorative object here, as formable mass that a man can imprint his name on and that does not require special care but awaits to be endowed with his desire. Marriage does not seem

desirable in these poems that characterize the life of a wife as predetermined. Wives, becoming a part of the house just as an ornamental object, are expected to play a role, and they lack an independent identity. This last poem strongly reminds of one of Dickinson's most famous poems, "My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun –" (F764) where an unidentified speaker seems to wait patiently "In Corners" until "The "Owner passed – identified - / and carried [the speaker] away –." Again, the speaker is described in terms of an object occupying a hidden and unlived space, ready to fulfill a purpose that can only be realized by the man who bestows it with an identity and therefore a life.

How, then, does Dickinson imagine a positive meeting and maybe even a romantic relationship between the genders within the domestic sphere? After the strong rejection of married life, living with a man does not seem to be possible in Dickinson's work. Indeed, the encounters between man and woman within the domestic sphere become highly problematic or last only for a short moment. This space is so heavily abound with cultural meaning and rules of social conduct that guide the interactions between men and woman that a meeting on equal grounds is always only momentary. Dickinson's lovers, therefore, are equally elusive: they remain translucent, cannot be graspable, or exist only in marginal spaces. "I cannot live with You – / It would be Life – / And Life is over there – / Behind the Shelf" (F706), one of Dickinson's speaker's proclaims. "Behind the Shelf" is an uninhabitable space, however, and it offers neither the speaker nor the lover room for a life together. A joint life therefore remains impossible in this poem, so unimaginable in fact that the speaker rules out an existence with the lover after death as well for fear that one of them might die first, leaving the other alone, or one of them might be allowed entrance into heaven while the other, incapable of accepting "Jesus" as superior to the idealized beloved, is shut out. For fear of separation, for a lack of a space that would allow this unconventional couple to be together, and for the dread of public sanction following their illegitimate union ("They'd judge Us"!), the speaker proposes the impossible in the last stanza:

F706

…
So we must meet apart –
You there – I – here –
With just the Door ajar
That Oceans are – and Prayer –
And that White Sustenance –
Despair –

The lovers, in adjoining rooms but unable to face each other directly, are aware of each other 's presence and might even be able to communicate via the half open door, but they are not allowed to enter each other's quarters. The "Door ajar" breaks the division of space, but loses its function as passageway by not allowing trespassing, reinforcing the unpassable boundary between the rooms instead of opening up the two spaces and joining them. The wall in

between however becomes the connection between the rooms and thus the lovers, being the one thing they share and that they both are able to touch. The division, the structure that keeps them apart thus becomes the point of union that makes it possible for them to "meet apart." Like Pyramus and Thisbe, lovers separated by a wall in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the wall between Dickinson's speaker and her lover in "I cannot live with You –" (F706) becomes the defining feature of their relationship.[137] Keeping this in mind, even the cryptic opening stanza of the poem becomes clear: "Life is over there – / Behind the Shelf" refers directly to the wall which the shelf is attached to. It is this built structure, the dividing line between the speaker and her lover, a part of the house with all the associated cultural meaning and social rules of conduct that simultaneously keeps the lovers apart and joins them. The built structure representing the cultural fabric that keeps society together is what defines all relationships, whether conventional or deviant in the eyes of society, and both the speaker and her lover are deeply embedded within this culture.

Despite Dickinson's speakers' inability to live a satisfactory life in a relationship with a lover outside of culturally sanctioned marriage, union with the male lover is possible, albeit only of short duration. Such moments of union are experienced positively by the speaker, but their temporary character is highlighted by the elusive features of the lover, evading identification. This strategy allows Dickinson to portray erotic encounters between a man and a women, expressing the passionate content of her poems via metaphor. In both "To my Small Hearth His fire came –" (F703) and "The Wind – tapped like a tired Man –" (F621), the speakers possess characteristics of houses, a metaphor Dickinson frequently uses for the female body, and welcome the male visitors to enter their haunts:

F703

To My Small Hearth His fire came –
And all My House a'glow
Did fan and rock, with sudden light –
'Twas Sunrise – 'twas the Sky –

Impanelled from no Summer brief –
With limit of Decay –
'Twas Noon – without the News of Night –
Nay, Nature, it was Day –

The visitor in this poem sets fire to the speaker's "Hearth," the center of the house and source of heat where the family members commonly assemble during winter, lighting the whole house. However, the poem is neither set in winter nor is it dark, as the second stanza confirms, declaring it to be "no Summer brief –," but a long summer, and "Noon – without the News of Night –." Consequently, there is no need for the fire that bathes the whole house "with sudden light –," and a literal reading does not seem very interesting. The poem is overtly erotically charged, leaving not much room for doubt that an erotic experience is being portrayed here.

The speaker invites the male protagonist to enter her “House,” a metaphor for the female body, and he arouses her excitement, bringing her body to “fan and rock,” culminating in a sexual climax, making her reach the “Sky.” The experience is reported to be very intense, as the poem lists several terms emphasizing the glow, vividness and brightness of the encounter with the male’s “fire,” using the words “Sunrise,” “Summer,” “Noon,” and “Day” belonging to the same semantic field. Moreover, the experience is declared to bring about enlightenment, allowing the speaker to go beyond the confinements of time and her physical existence: “Impanelled from no Summer brief – / With limit of Decay –“ can be read as freeing the speaker, or the couple in their erotic union, as, even though they are “Impanelled,” and thus shielded and protected, the ecstasy of “Summer” is prolonged and frees them from “Decay,” disconnecting them from time and the inescapable destiny of death. In their union, the couple thus exists beyond time and enters a realm that is erotic in nature and lies beyond this world’s reality.

“The Wind – tapped like a tired Man –v (F621) functions largely the same as “To my Small Hearth His fire came –” (F703). Again, the poem emits an erotic charge, suggesting a female speaker who invites the male “Wind” into her “Residence within:”

F621

The Wind – tapped like a tired Man –
And like a Host – “Come in”
I boldly answered – entered then
My Residence within

A Rapid – footless Guest –
To offer whom a Chair
Were as impossible as hand
A Sofa to the Air –

No Bone had He to bind Him –
His Speech was like the Push
Of numerous Humming Birds at once
From a superior Bush –

His Countenance – a Billow –
His Fingers, as He passed
Let go a music – as of tunes
Blown tremulous in Glass –

He visited – still flitting –
Then like a timid Man
Again, He tapped – ‘twas flurriedly –
And I became alone –

The brief visit of the “Wind,” described as reminding of once a “tired Man,” and then a “timid Man,” is “rapid,” “flurried …” and fleeting, commencing and ending with a tap. The visitor is characterized as elusive, transparent, immaterial, and “footless” even though he possesses “Fingers.” Like the previous poem, “The Wind – tapped like a tired Man –“ (F621) emits an erotic charge, which is invoked by the speaker inviting the male visitor into her “Residence within” and the male “Wind” “push[ing]” “like a “Billow” and the “Fingers” evoking a “music” when brushing past.

The poem has a comical undertone when the speaker remarks that offering some seating is superfluous if the visitor consists of “Air” instead of flesh and “Bone.” This humorous side note can be read as a statement about the obsoleteness of standards of hospitality as in “Conscious am I in my Chamber –,” (F773) where the “shapeless Friend” is not met with “ Courtesy” either. This seems to hint at the unnecessity of moral standards during the encounter of the speaker and the shapeless “Wind.” The following stanza reading “No Bone had He to bind Him –“ resonates with the undated “In Winter in my Room” (1742) where the speaker “ secures” the intruding “Worm” “with a string,” something which is not possible here. Despite the visitor’s bonelessness, the male “Wind” performs phallic acts however. The wind’s force with which he pushes and rushes through the house is translated into the sound of “numerous Hummingbirds at once,” and his stroking “Fingers” elicit a “music” that arises as a consequence of the wind’s touch of the speaker’s body, her “Residence.”

The entrance and the exit of the “Wind” to the “Residence within” are mirrored in the poem, both being initiated by a “tap…” and the comparison of the visitor to a “Man.” The beginning and end seem to be inverted, as counter to expectations, the speaker’s lover is “tired” prior to the erotic encounter and “timid” afterwards. This inversion seems to support the contradictions of the poem which are striking: the man with “No Bone” does not lack a phallus ’ energy, and the “footless Guest” nevertheless has “Fingers.” Furthermore, the character of the male visitor seems to contradict common associations of a male phallic figure as he is neither aggressive nor covetous, but in contrast tender, careful and “tremulous,” his “Fingers” stroking the female speaker’s body as if it were of “Glass.” Even though the poem portrays an unconventional male character here, it retains a traditional structure of presenting the female protagonist as rather passive and her male counterpart as active pursuer of erotic pleasure. In both “The Wind – tapped like a tired Man –” (F621) and “To my Small Hearth His fire came –” (F703), the female speaker is associated with the house and remains immobile, patiently awaiting the male lover’s visit. The metaphor of the house that Dickinson employs frequently to wake associations of femininity and the female body cannot serve as part in an unconventional relationship between a man and a woman, as it symbolizes the domestic norms and cultural standards of nineteenth-century society. The woman likened to a house therefore remains immobile and confined, being destined to wait for a man to come and “set [her] up” as in “He found my Being – set it up –” (F511) and to make “all [her] House a’glow”

as in “To my Small Hearth His fire came –” (F703). If both participants in a relationship are to be equal partners, this has to happen in a different spatial setup that allows for the dynamics and free movement of both characters.

In “He was weak, and I was strong – then –” (F221) a couple crosses a threshold and enters a realm where unity, or equality, is temporally possible. Neither of the lovers is represented as a house here, but both of them move through a space that constitutes a built structure and is called “Home” together. When day begins, the couple has to part, and even though they both “strove,” the state of the night that allowed for the equality between them cannot be preserved:

F221

He was weak, and I was strong – then –
So He let me lead him in –
I was weak, and He was strong then –
So I let him lead me – Home.

‘Twas’nt far – the door was near –
‘Twas’nt dark – for He went – too –
‘Twas’nt loud, for He said nought –
That was all I cared to know.

Day knocked – and we must part –
Neither – was strongest – now –
He strove – and I strove – too –
We did’nt do it – tho’!

Entering through a door, the speaker and a male protagonist enter a space that is marked by privacy and intimacy. The two protagonists enter this realm while changing the power structure between them, being each once “strong” and once “weak” and both leading each other. What happens within the space beyond the “door” is hidden from the reader and only described in negative terms, stating what it is not. Beyond the threshold of the door, the poem suggests, lies a realm unimaginable by the reader, a space that offers alternative paradigms for the relationship between lovers. Their bond can only exist temporarily however, as when “Day Knocked,” the flexibility of the hierarchies between them collapses and they are torn apart. None of them is fit to lead now, and despite their striving, they cannot overcome the demands of the “Day”. Wardrop states that Dickinson uses the word “strove” in a context implying sexual contact (*Gothic* 90). This supports my interpretation that in this poem, Dickinson pictures an alternative model for a relationship between lovers that is not based on rigid distribution of roles and power, but is based on an equality between them that allows them to negotiate the hierarchies and rules that are valid only while they are together. However, this structure cannot be maintained, and as soon as a third party, here represented by the “Day,” enters their

sanctuary, the social norms of their time are reestablished and as a consequence, the lovers cannot exist as a couple.[138]

To summarize Dickinson's use of the image of the house and the concept of the domestic sphere, it becomes clear that Dickinson undoubtedly offers a critique of the Victorian cultural paradigms that tie women to the domestic sphere and that grant them only a diminutive status. However, she does not present her female speakers as rebels overtly protesting against this reality. Her characters voice the unfairness of the situations they suffer from while simultaneously adapting to them in several ways, which reveals a highly ambiguous attitude towards nineteenth-century domestic culture. Dickinson declares physical imprisonment as a mere mental condition that can be overcome in the freedom of the mind. The poet's speakers seek to expand their realms by taking advantage of positions and marginal spaces like closets, walls, and liminal spaces behind shelves that are less invested with cultural meaning. Dickinson uses the metaphor of the body as a house hand in hand with ascriptions of passivity and immobility. In "One need not be a Chamber – to be Haunted –" (F407), the speaker is terrorized by the threat of violence or even rape of an intruder or ghost. The external danger from a rapist intruder becomes danger from within the brain and human body when the speaker is "Haunted" by the ghost/fear of such an intrusion. The resulting paranoia makes it impossible for Dickinson's speakers to ever seek true privacy and solitude within the home. Consequently, the female speaker is doubly entrapped: she is caught inside the vulnerable female body and bound to the domestic sphere.

3. Death and the Grave

4.1 The Afterlife as a Space for Alternative Existence

Emily Dickinson, many scholars agree, was obsessed with death. According to Cody, Dickinson's "preoccupation with the theme of death" is the most obvious symptom of the many other mental and emotional disturbances the poet dealt with even before her "breakdown" in her late twenties (*Obsession* 34-5). Without drawing conclusions regarding Dickinson's mental health, Griffith claims that Dickinson's treatment of death and the frequency of the theme are unique in American literary history: "Except perhaps for Melville, no writer of the American nineteenth century looked more habitually than she upon the skull beneath the skin, and was more visibly shaken by the spectacle" (49). All other topics Dickinson touches upon in her poetry and letters are overshadowed by death, Griffith believes, as the poet "lived in mortal dread of dying"[1] (49). Even scholars who shy away from strong statements as these observe that Dickinson broaches the issue of death "to an unusual degree" in her writing (Johnson *Death* 59). Yet, the most careful ones cautiously assert that "death was important to Emily Dickinson" (Nesteruk 25). How important the topic of death exactly is and how much it structures Dickinson's work remains an issue of debate. Johnson counts "five to six hundred poems" that include death or refer to issues concerning death (*Death* 60). Weisbuch perceives this as an understatement and boldly claims that "nearly every poem Dickinson wrote has to do with death, with endings" (69). But instead of calling death in Dickinson's poetry a " grotesque obsession," he proposes that Dickinson saw it as a riddle blurring the lines between the physical absence due to geographical separation and actual death when someone has ' gone away,' turning leave-taking into death and missing into mourning (Weisbuch 71-74). That Dickinson's fascination with the topic does not necessarily have to be morbid becomes obvious when we consider her many ways to approach the topic, which also includes humor. A poem initially pleading for a corpse to be revived ends on a comical note, concluding that the reason why we wish for the deceased to regain life is not purely for their sake, but because of our estrangement towards the corporeality of the lifeless body, here called "Than with this horizontal one/ That will not lift its Hat – (F1550).

F1550 Oh give it Motion — deck it sweet
With Artery and Vein —

Upon its fastened Lips lay words —
Affiance it again
To that Pink stranger we call Dust —
Acquainted more with that
Than with this horizontal one
That will not lift its Hat —

In this chapter, I want to explore Dickinson's use of the death theme and the grave as a space beyond any claims about an obsessiveness or preoccupation. After all, even Cody admits that New England Puritanism's and nineteenth-century romanticism's concern with death, its omnipresence and the very real threat it constituted in the everyday lives of Dickinson 's contemporaries form the background against which Dickinson's "obsession" should be seen (*Obsession* 40). Unlike today, death and mortality were part of everyday life in Dickinson's time, and therefore was not only less deniable than today but also more visible. The death of infants and children was a real threat to any family, and giving birth was still risky, death in childbirth being disastrous for both mother and infant (Petrino, *Contemporaries* 6). The fact that Dickinson returns to death more frequently than others may have a variety of reasons. Death, dying and the question of whether existence after death is possible offer the poet ways to express contents she cannot accommodate elsewhere, and possibly grants access to new and unapproachable matters. Death, in other words, offers Dickinson a realm that is open to projection and acclamation because it represents a mystery, is unknowable and non-representable. Rather than approaching the death theme with dread and using it as a representation of horror, Dickinson foregrounds the possibilities an existence beyond the knowable offers. Occasionally, she even gives the topic a comical edge as in "Oh give it Motion – deck it sweet" (F1550) when a speaker humorously pleads for a corpse to be reanimated, calling the dead body a "Pink stranger" and "this horizontal one/ That will not lift its Hat –". We encounter a lightness in many poems defeating death's grim associations that is typical for Dickinson. When she explores the topic from a child speaker's perspective as in "We do not play on Graves –" (F599), she declares with satirical naïveté that the burying ground is unfit as a playground "Because there isn't Room –/Besides – it isn't even – it slants," reducing the speaker's reasoning to topographical aspects of the site (F599). In "Of Death I try to think like this –" (F1588), another poem calling on childhood, Dickinson defines death as that which always lies beyond, the "Flower Hesperian" on the other side of a roaring brook that perpetually entices and is pursued only by the boldest, in the face of the danger of "Doom" (F1588).

Despite the enigmatic nature of death itself, death as a literary trope was far from untouched ground during Dickinson's lifetime. In contrast, the depiction of death and its many associations were prevalent in the literary works Dickinson read, just as they were ubiquitous

in her everyday life. Death, along with everything concerning death like the deceased, corpses, funerals and tombs, were "one of the nineteenth century's major public preoccupations," (Tracy 35). The elegy, a poetic genre aiming to console the mourning, according to Mahoney provides a "constructed space of intimacy" that provides a substitute for the loved one as text (55).[2] The elegy was a very popular genre for women poets at the time, making a woman poet's interest in death neither unfit nor peculiar when mourning the death of a child or portraying a woman's death in childbirth, (Petrino, *Contemporaries* 6-7).[3] The Victorians practiced a veritable "cult of death," keeping artifacts constantly reminding them of the dead displayed in their homes: it was common to keep figurines of departed family members, to order posthumous portraits to be made and to keep locks of their hair (Petrino, *Contemporaries* 59).[4] Especially in the case of a deceased child, Victorian families prolonged mourning and tried to physically preserve the memory of their dead child (Petrino, *Contemporaries* 59).

Given the prevalence of death in Victorian culture, it seems overhasty to draw conclusions about Dickinson's treatment of death in her poetry simply because of the frequency of the topic, or to make general claims on the basis of only a few individual poems. In order to make a differentiated argument about Dickinson's approach to the trope, it is important to have an even closer look at the period's attitudes towards death and the literary traditions that not only shaped the way people thought of death, but also initiated a change in how people were buried and commemorated during Dickinson's lifetime.

4.1.1 The Cult of Death and the Development of Landscaped Cemeteries

Most scholars mention the Dickinson family's proximity to Amherst's burial ground that was situated just behind their house on Pleasant Street, the house the teenager and young adult Emily Dickinson lived in before the family moved back to the Homestead, when commenting on Dickinson's preference for death themes. The frequent processions as well as the view of the gravestones from various windows, Habegger is convinced, must have left deep impressions on the young poet (26). Furthermore, the Civil War, "the defining historical event of Dickinson's lifetime," must have made death an even closer presence for the adult Dickinson although it took not place in Amherst immediately (Miller, *Time* 147). Death in numbers, reports, and visual representations was ever present during the four years of the war. As Miller lists, over 620'000 soldiers died during the war in total, and during some battles, there were over 2'000 deaths a day, not including those who died as prisoners, those who were wounded and later died at hospitals, and those who perished after catching diseases, which afflicted the troops as well as those living in the areas most devastated by the war (*Time* 148). It was during these years that Dickinson, then aged thirty to almost thirty-five, wrote poetry at a rate that she

was never able to iterate later in her life: over half of the whole body of her poetry was written during this period (Miller, *Time* 147).[5] Dickinson's poetry touching upon subjects of the war do so not by taking clear sides, but by representing different voices and casting attitudes in different forms, including some using the idiom of popular poetry (Miller, *Time* 147-149). Even though Amherst was not at the epicenter of the war, modern inventions such as the telegraph and photography made it possible for news to travel from the battlefronts to the rest of the country within hours, delivering visual impressions as well as written reports, including lists of the dead. This new way of reporting and distributing news certainly heightened the sense of immediacy of the events of the war, and the Dickinson household subscribed to or had access to several newspapers and journals that broadcasted war reports both in visual and narrative detail.[6] Apparently, Dickinson had a preference for obituary notices even before the Civil War; as Cody writes that the death notices in the family newspapers were especially reserved for her (Obsession 38). Already as a teenager, she mentioned death frequently in her letters, expressing an "inner pressure to talk about the subject" (Cody, *Obsession* 36). At age fifteen the premature death of her cousin Sophia Holland shook her so deeply that her parents worried about her wellbeing and sent her to Boston to recover from the deep impressions her cousin' s passing had left (Cody, *Obsession* 35). There, Dickinson visited Mount Auburn cemetery, one of the first garden cemeteries in the United States (Cody *Obsession* 35).

Dickinson lived at a time of changing attitudes towards death, when new ways of commemorating and burying the dead were introduced. Mourning manuals guided left-behind families and friends through times of loss and emphasized religious and sentimental aspects of mourning that regarded the renunciation of everything a person loved as a virtue and demanded gratefulness for one's own death and the deaths of loved ones as precondition for an afterlife (Barnstone 86-7). A person's last words before passing were seen as important indicators of the dead's worthiness for heavenly election (Barnstone 87).[7] That Dickinson shared this concern for the wellbeing of late family and friends' souls becomes evident in letters she sent to clergymen to inquire about their willingness to die.[8] In "To know just how He suffered" (F688), she explores this conventional topic showing a keen interest not only in serious concerns like the last words at the moment of passing that might illuminate the dying person's state of mind as well as offer a glimpse of the afterlife, but also in trivial details like the weather:

F688

To know just how He suffered – would be dear –
To know if any Human eyes were near
To whom He could entrust His wavering gaze –
Until it settled broad – on Paradise –

To know if he was patient – part content –

Was Dying as He thought – or different –
Was it a pleasant Day to die –
And did the Sunshine face His way –

What was His furthest mind – of Home – or God –
Or What the Distant say –
At News that He ceased Human Nature
Such a Day –

And Wishes – Had He any –
Just His Sigh – accented –
Had been legible – to Me –
And was He Confident until
Ill fluttered out – in Everlasting Well –

And if He spoke – What name was Best –
What last
What one broke off with
At the Drowsiest –

Was he afraid – or tranquil –
Might He know
How Conscious Consciousness – could grow –
Till Love that was – and Love too best to be –
Meet – and the Junction be Eternity

To the speaker of this poem, the last moments before death and the words spoken are significant. The poem flippantly mixes concerns about the deceased's wellbeing, whether he was patient and confident or afraid, with a barely masked curiosity that reaches from trivial questions about the weather to vain interrogations about the dying person's sympathies and the name of his favorite person to more profound existential questions of "How Conscious Consciousness – could grow –" (F688). The light, almost conversational tone and the smooth rhymes bestowing the poem with a marked playfulness suggest that the questions raised here have a quality of the everyday. The fourth and fifth stanzas' beginning with "And" suggest a breathless, fast reading, and the presence of different voices curiously firing questions at a witness of the deceased's last moments seems possible. While Dickinson presents the deathbed theme and her culture's concerns about dying in this poem, its chattiness betrays the seriousness of religious issues and displays death as a subject not only of everyday casual conversations but possibly even gossip and voyeuristic curiousness. Death, then, becomes a

public event that serves as entertainment, the very opposite of the religious renunciation of worldliness the Church demanded from the dying themselves and the loved ones they leave behind. That dying and bidding farewell to a deceased are public affairs that are not restricted to the closest family is mirrored in "I am alive – I guess -" (F605), where "Visitors may come –" to inspect the corpse and "And lean – and view it sidewise –" asking questions about the death. The question "'Was it conscious – when it stepped / In Immortality'?" is uttered, wondering at what point consciousness leaves the body during the process of dying.

With Dickinson's treatment of the deathbed theme as a public event in mind, it does not seem paradoxical that, despite religion's rejection of every attachment in this world, the commemoration of the dead gradually claimed more public space and changed the face of American urban landscapes. According to Eggener, the word "cemetery," which was understood as a picturesque burial place in a rural setting, was not commonly used in the U.S. before the nineteenth century, although Americans from the beginning buried their dead, but did so either "at home, in churchyards, potter's fields, town commons, or municipal burying grounds" (9). Churchyards surrounding a church typically only stretched a few yards and, in New England as in Europe, were crowded and lacked pathways or decorative vegetation (Eggener 38-9). In contrast cemeteries, which first sprouted in the United States during Dickinson's time, were parklike structures. Garden cemeteries or so called rural cemeteries were highly maintained spaces conforming to Victorian tastes of tamed nature. Eggener locates the "rise of the American rural cemetery movement" in the 1830s (24). By the 1860s, Mount Auburn cemetery in Boston embodied principles of Victorian aesthetics, the trees being trimmed, hill levelled, swamps dried out and the ponds being cast symmetrically (Petrino, *Contemporaries* 102). Because no parks existed in American cities at that time, cemeteries often took on that role, offering the visitors relaxation and the promise of emotional stimulation (Petrino, *Contemporaries* 103).

More important than their contribution to the enhancement of the quality of life in American urban centers, landscaped cemeteries were understood as "signs of urban prosperity and progress" (Eggener 24). The relocation of the burial of the dead from the core of the cities to their outskirts had their initial origin in the struggle to improve the health of the urban population (Petrino, *Contemporaries* 102).[9] The cemetery in the U.S. has to be seen as a "fundamentally modern and American institution" that developed in the 1830s at the same time as industrialization and commercialization shaped urban culture (Eggener 27). According to Eggener, we have to perceive of the emergence of cemeteries in America in tune with the introduction of shipping canals, railroads, trade unions, and sewing machines among others (27). Compared to European rural cemeteries, their counterparts in the U.S. were generally larger and allowed for more space between individual graves (Eggener 28). The invention of

mechanical lawn mowers made the maintenance of such cemeteries increasingly efficient and well organized (Eggener 29). Railways between cemeteries and cities ensured the accessibility for everyone and in addition facilitated the transportation of headstones, which became increasingly standardized and were often mass produced rather than local products (Eggener 29). As any other plot of land, cemeteries were soon commercialized and burial grounds traded as real estate for a profit (Eggener 29). By the 1850s, investment into cemeteries had become commonly recognized as a lucrative business, generating billions, and fuelling a "funeral-service industry" (Eggener 29-30). Dickinson refers to the grave in terms of real estate and uses language related to the economic world when she employs vocabulary such as "price," " 'Discount,'" "*Brokers*" and "'*Dividend*" when talking about how "Costly" death, "the price of *Breath* –," is (F249, italics in original).

The burial of the dead in individual graves that were sometimes even fenced and often decorated attest to the sentimental attachment of family members to the last resting place of their dead and its status as a near-domestic space (Petrino 102-3). Individuality was also preserved not only at the grave, but in the home: it was common practice during the time to make casts or molds of the head and hands of family members during their lifetime (Raymond 114). These artefacts where then displayed in the parlor, keeping the memory of the deceased's bodily features alive (Raymond 113).[10] The increased popularity of posthumous portraits, funerary sculpture and other artefacts attests a change in mourning culture that accompanied the rural cemetery movement (Petrino, *Contemporaries* 6). Certainly, the Civil War with its outrageous number of deaths and the impossibility to identify each soldier by name and to bury him individually must have stood in stark contrast to this new way of handling death and commemorating the dead. Individual graves were understood as achievements of democracy and equality, while mass graves provoked a feeling of unease and were therefore reserved for slaves, prisoners, or, if the circumstances required, the numerous victims of war or epidemics (Eggener 27-8).

The most dominant metaphor Dickinson uses in her poems on death, dying and corpses is the grave as house, domestic space, or bed: "The grave my little cottage is," (F1784) where a speaker promises to "make [her] parlor orderly / And lay the marble tea." and the "Sweet – safe – Houses –" (F684) with "Lids of steel – on Lids of Marble –" "sealed so stately tight" equate the tomb with a house explicitly, while in other poems like "I died for Beauty – but was scarce" (F448) the occupants of graves "talk... between the Rooms" as from bedroom to bedroom. As Eggener points out, the domestic metaphor used for the grave is not peculiar in any sense as it is used all over the world: Across cultures, the equation between the grave, understood as the body's last resting place or house, is often equated with domestic space (Eggener 14). The metaphor of the grave as house is extended to the cemetery, which is often

thought of as a village or city of the dead (Eggener 15). In “Have any like Myself” (F723) Dickinson describes a churchyard in terms of a village with some “New Houses” whose “Occupants” have “God” as “nearest Neighbor”. As Eggener points out, the graveyard or cemetery metaphorically recast as village or city serve as example of a utopian place that is “well organized, self-sufficient, egalitarian, and void of social conflict” (15).[11] Then, despite their utopian character, the graveyard and the grave itself as the smallest unit within the complex become inherently social. As the antidote to a culture’s restrictions, it mirrors them and engages with them: “Because cemeteries are such patently liminal sites – poised between past and future, life and death, material and spiritual, earth and heaven – they more than any other designed landscapes communicate grand social and metaphysical ideas” (Eggener 10-11). This quality makes the grave as a setting for poetry a space of possibilities. Paradoxically, locating her poetry’s protagonists in the grave allows Dickinson to reimagine them in a space where social rules have become naught but societal paradigms are still present.

In Christian culture, where the belief in afterlife is strong, the grave is only a place of passage housing the body during the transition and only a shell for the soul (Eggener 12-14). In this sense, the grave is a container for a container, which might be empty or still occupied for a while. Nineteenth-century America experienced numerous religious movements which made room for skepticism within Christian doctrine (Bolton 98). The availability of different religious attitudes and interpretations required an active examination of the competing religious movements. In “Those – dying then,” (F1581) Dickinson seems to object to the added complexity and bemoan the loss of certainty:

F1581

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 illume at all -

Under the pressure to choose between the different religious movements, Dickinson argues that worse than making the wrong choice is disbelief, and thus reduces the importance of the choice.[12]

Religious uncertainty also persisted in the question of at what point exactly the soul and consciousness left the body, whether this happened only at the event of the Last

Judgement, and whether the body was to be considered fully dead until then or not (Fuss *Corpse* 7). "'Twas Crisis All the length had passed –" (F1093) describes the moment of dying, "The Instant" which marks the transition from life to death. In the third stanza of the poem, Dickinson describes the physical symptoms that occur when life leaves a body:

…
The Muscles grappled as with leads
That would not let the Will –
The Spirit shook the Adamant –
But could not make it feel –
… (F1093)

The body and its struggle is foregrounded here, presenting the body as unable to escape death even though the "Spirit" and "Will" of the dying person are still very much alive. The physicality of death is contrasted with what makes the essence of a person, their consciousness. At the same time as physicality is foregrounded and the materiality of the body, a subject tabooed in nineteenth-century society, is portrayed in strain, it becomes clear that this body is only a container, a passive impediment of matter that holds the soul. The "Spirit," Dickinson writes in her poem, hovers for a "Second" while the "[the] Soul / Escape[s] the House unseen –." The "House" figures doubly here, once as the built structure, and once as the body, the soul leaving it and turning it into a corpse. The drama of dying is also staged minutely in one of Dickinson' s most famous poems, "I heard a Fly buzz – when I died" (F591). The poem is written from the perspective of the dying person who, at the moment of death is interrupted by the buzzing fly which intervenes "Between the light – and me –" and thus denies a revelation of "the King" in the afterlife.[13] The speaker does not seem to be alone in the room, as there are "Eyes around, " people witnessing her death, and the dying person utters some last words in the form of a will regarding his or her earthly belongings. The body is not described in detail here, just "Breaths" are mentioned, and ears perceiving the interposing fly are implied. The eyes, identifying a light, only figure as "Windows" in this poem, suggesting that the body has already become an empty container, not housing the speaker any more. The voice of the poem thus hovers somewhere in-between the body and eternity, being simply a consciousness in the room, or a spirit haunting the poem:

F591 I hear a Fly buzz – when I died –
The Stillness in the Room
Was like the Stillness in the Air –
Between the Heaves of Storm –

The Eyes around – had wrung them dry –
And Breaths were gathering firm
For that last Onset – when the King

Be witnesses – in the Room –

I willed my Keepsakes – Signed away
What portion of me be
Assignable – and then it was
There interposed a Fly –

With Blue – uncertain – stumbling Buzz –
Between the light – and me –
And then the Windows failed – and then
I could not see to see –

Tellingly, Bayley describes Dickinson's speaker to be "stuck on the windowpane," nor here nor there, but kept somewhere in transition (Ghost 64). In this poem, Dickinson not only dramatizes the moment of transition, but also delivers a model of how the body, the soul or consciousness, and the afterlife are structured spatially. The container of the body thus possesses "Windows" that grant a vision of the afterlife and transcendence. The "Dying Eye" and the ability to see to be able to perceive transcendence are central to Dickinson when she imagines the moment of death (F648). It is just the "Eye," the homophone of 'I,' that dies in "I've seen a Dying Eye," becoming "Cloudier" and finally "obscure" in the process, not revealing to the speaker what its final impression was. The vision of the afterlife remains always limited in "I heard a Fly buzz – when I died" (F591) being framed by the windowpane. This 'framedness' can be interpreted as our rootedness in the body and our dependence on our perceptive senses, and our physical form always determining and limiting our perceptive powers. It is crucial, I believe, that Dickinson uses the image of windows here, and not doors. It remains uncertain then whether the speaker and, substitutionally, the whole of humanity are ever meant to leave the body-container, setting the concept of an afterlife into question: Windows do not serve as gateways such as doors do, but only open up to that which lies outside partially: Light can penetrate the glass of a closed window, and fresh air can enter a room when opened, while warm air can escape. Humans do not usually enter or leave a room through a window. Flies, however, frequently do. Again, the fly appears as the most potent figure in the poem, being able to move freely between the realms of death and life, the human and the divine world, and material and immaterial space.

The trope of a voice from beyond the grave, Raymond stresses, paradoxically effaces and emphasizes the body: the text presents the speakers as bodiless, but the allusions to the moment of death and our knowledge that the grave houses not just a voice, but also a dead body, are "always threatening to undo the text" (Raymond 115). As an example, Raymond

mentions "'Twas just this time, last year, I died." (F344), which portrays the sounds heard within the coffin as a dead child is carried to the burial site. The speaker's disturbing statement "I wanted to get out, /But something held my will." (F344) makes the reader fear that this child is buried alive. The body's stillness and inability to act despite its retention of sensory perception suggest that this speaker is caught in a state that is neither death nor life. A sense of paralysis, confinement and loneliness that would normally evoke horror in the reader is smoothened by the childish perspective and the speaker's almost spooky calmness rejoicing in the unavoidable fact of human mortality that would eventually reunite the family members in the grave with the child. Because the details of the sounds are so sensual, Raymond argues, the body and its perceptive system are foregrounded in this poem, confronting us with a dead but nevertheless at least partially conscious corpse (Raymond 116). The dead voices thus enable Dickinson to keep the body hovering between presence and absence, covered from plain sight but still shockingly close: "The body is held away and given over in the same gesture" (Raymond 116). In "I heard a Fly buzz – when I died" (F591), the voice stating in the first stanza to already have died lingers, as the "uncertain- stumbling" fly, interpreted by Nesteruk as religious doubt or even a demon, hinders the speaker from meeting the sublime "King," and is thus held back in a state between life and death (35).

A large number of Dickinson's poems move within this uncertainty, exploiting the grave as a transitory space and letting corpses feel, hear, and even speak. During the nineteenth century, so-called "corpse poems," as Fuss terms them, were not uncommon, and reflected the time's conflicting attitudes towards death and the dead body: the dead body, increasingly regarded as a medical object and not one of religion, as dead matter figured as a mouthpiece for the poet as it gradually ceased to signify religiously: "at the moment death merely appears to fall silent, corpses start to chatter away in poetry" (Fuss, *Corpse* 4).[14] "Perhaps no poet," Bolton suggests, "has more exhaustively explored the image of the conscious corpse than Emily Dickinson" (107)[15]. "I heard a Fly buzz," Barnstone convincingly argues, "verges on blasphemy by replacing Christ's call with a fly's buzz" (88); The poem, she observes, focuses on the body's death rather than on the soul's transition into a heavenly afterlife and thereby " undermines the sentimental notion of an angelic and beautiful death" (Barnstone 88). "I heard a Fly buzz," according to Barnstone, constitutes an alternative to sentimental nineteenth-century deathbed customs (89). Similarily, she sees "I felt a Funeral in my Brain" (F340) as a rewriting of funeral services and rituals: There is no revelation, and the speaker goes numb instead of coming closer to God as predicted by contemporary Calvinist notions that expect mourners and witnesses at deathbeds to reach a higher level of religious consciousness, which frequently culminated in confessions of faith or conversions (Barnstone 89). Schöberlein delivers an intriguing interpretation of "I felt a Funeral in my Brain" (F340) based on the medical

discourses of Dickinson's time, unearthing the physiological imagery in many of Dickinson's poems, showing that Dickinson was aware of the fact that the brain "can only create what lies within its physical boundaries," that thought is therefore material, and that the soul and religion are only effects of biological processes (56).[16] "If we begin to equate soul and brain, what happens to the Christian promise of resurrection and heavenly afterlife?" Schöberlein summarizes Dickinson's religious skepticism (58). I agree that Dickinson declares religious customs meaningless when she replaces the transition of the soul into heaven and God's call by a fly's meaningless buzz. However in "I felt a Funeral …," Barnstone points out, even more clearly than in "I heard a Fly buzz …," it is the custom of the funeral service, rather than the event of death itself, that cause the torturous and deafening sensations in the speaker: It is the "Calvinist doctrine regarding death and the soul, that *numbs* the speaker's mind" (Barnstone 90, emphasis in original); The funeral drum's "beating – beating," like the fly's buzz, transforms meaning into mere noise that eradicates religious sagacity (Barnstone 90). Both poems, Barnstone continues her persuasive argument, create and emphasize the speaker's isolation from others, paralleling this state with the state of the dead, who are paradoxically expected to reach a higher level of perceptiveness and losing it at the same time, just as they are thought to pass over into a heavenly afterlife unscathed at the same time as their senses are failing and the body is left to decomposition (90-1). Thereby, Dickinson opens up a new specter of being, including a death that is not death, a numbness that is full of sensation, and a blindness and deafness that nevertheless perceives.[17] This is where Barnstone locates self-conversion, the peak of what she calls the second phase of development in Dickinson's work, opening up a new space for the self to be free (91).

4.1.2 Death and Dead Female Bodies in Literary Tradition

Death was a topic explored in many different literary genres during Dickinson's time: from epitaphs on gravestones speaking to the living from beyond through the stone, to the lyrics of the graveyard poets, romantic and sentimental novels and poetry to Gothic literature, Dickinson and her contemporaries encountered matters connected to death ranging from mourning and consolation to utopian heavenly landscapes functioning as reminders of death and as connection to the dead, voices from beyond, deathbeds, living corpses and corpses turned into art. To explore Dickinson's position within these literary traditions, the fact that Dickinson was a woman and that she wrote exhaustively about death have to be reflected. As already mentioned, the child elegy was women poets' most frequent genre, and their success in it crucial for their poetic endeavors. Besides being a poetic subject recurrently written and read about, death was a central aspect of women's everyday lives during Dickinson's time. In

addition to taking care of children, tending to the ill and to the dying was one of the core tasks middle-class women performed (Bennett, *Dickinson* 72). But the gendered division of care work is not the only way that nineteenth-century American culture linked women to death more immediately than men. From a Christian point of view, death only exists because of the transgressive desire of Eve who initiated the Fall and mankind's consequential banishment from a deathless Paradise (Dollimore xxiii). In this narrative, a single woman's desire for knowledge overthrew order and introduced chaos and anarchy, rendering humanity fragile and nature subject to constant change, which can readily be understood as erosion and thus death (Dollimore xxiv).[18] Through their association with the body and the material rather than the mind, women were furthermore a step closer to the grave than men who were thought to live more on the spiritual and intellectual level, and thus per se in a more timeless sphere than women did. In Victorian literature, death is something that occurs without warning to women protagonists, and deathbed scenes are described in great detail (Berreca 4). In Victorian fiction, beautiful women, considered too delicate and too passive to resist the sinful influences of this rough word, suffer and die innocently in order to remain pure (Welter 162).

To Edgar Allan Poe, the death of a "beautiful woman" is "undoubtly the most poetical topic in the world" (982). This statement, quoted over and over since its utterance, declares the death of women, under the condition that they were beautiful, to be more than just the physical transformation of a body into a corpse, more than a change of state from earthly life to the afterlife within a religious belief system, and more than the expiration of an individual personality and the loss of a loved one. The death of a woman, in this view, is foremost an aesthetic event, making the death and thereby the body of the woman, which is the object that remains as proof of the event, into an object of poetic quality. Women, traditionally the objects of art and not its creator, nevertheless contribute to its conception by delivering the definition of what is beautiful and poetical, and provide the male artist's imagination with material for his work.

Of course, Poe was not the first to make the link between women, women's bodies, female beauty, and art. The dead beloved, as muse, according to Bronfen, has taken multiple functions over time: by being directly addressed by the poet and being glorified by him, the muse is indirect producer of the text, object of the text, and addressee of the text (244). The death of the muse inspires the poet so that he might reanimate her in his text (Bronfen 244). To be animated while being at the same time absent Bronfen calls "presence-in-absence (life-in-death)" (244, addition in original).

"She lay as if at play" (F412) calls upon the figure of the dead female body as subject for a poem, which seems to partially reanimate the dead woman, portraying her as either dead but (almost) alive, or alive but strangely frozen in time:

F412

She lay as if at play
Her life had leaped away –
Intending to return –
But not so soon –

Her merry Arms, half dropt –
As if for lull of sport –
An instant had forgot
The Trick to start –

Her dancing Eyes – ajar –
As if their Owner were
Still sparkling through
For fun – at you –

Her Morning at the door –
Devising, I am sure –
To force her sleep –
So light – so deep –

From the beginning, the startled reader is confronted with a poem contrasting a dead body with vivacity. This seems reconcilable, challenging the reader who must imagine the corpse "as if at play," lying down, but the arms only "half dropt" and the eyes open and still "sparkling." Dickinson, I believe, alludes to the Victorian literary custom that lets women die without warning, death happening suddenly and unexplained. The woman in the poem was torn from life in midst of a moment full of life, and her body still carries the marks of the joy and childish bliss. With the repetition of "as if" in the first, second and third stanza, the poem questions the truthfulness of its own description. The third stanza takes this to extremes, letting the woman's eyes dance and sparkle, meeting the reader's eye straight on, and declaring that everything was just a "Trick" in order to make "fun – at you." However, the woman's exuberant eyes are just a deception, and their "Owner," their spirit, has left the body. In the fourth stanza, we learn that her "sleep" is not voluntary, and although it seems "so light," it actually is "so deep," and she will never wake. Dickinson's poem about a female dead body defies making her object into art. The dead female body as the embodiment of beauty and the perfect subject for poetry cannot show any signs of death or even decomposition to fulfill its purpose. Dickinson's poem satirizes this, making her dead woman so alive that even her speaker seems to doubt the fact that she is dead. As if captured in time, she is stopped in mid-movement, and

her arms, “half dropt –,” seem comical, as if posing. The body posing in death challenges the idea of the dead female body as ‘objet d’art,’ as it is not death turning the corpse into a poetical subject, but the woman herself, posing just before death occurs, as she knows that she will be gazed at. The eyes wide “ajar” in stanza three certainly break all the rules of the genre, rendering the voyeuristic gaze of the reader impossible, staring right back, refusing to become an object, but retaining control, even in death, ridiculing the readers and their expectations. While the poet does not succeed in reanimating the dead woman in the text or as text, as the poetic tradition referred to by Poe aims at, Dickinson does fulfill her own requirements for poetry: Are you too deeply occupied to say if my verse is alive” and „Should you think it breathed …” (L260), she asked her mentor Higginson in her first letter to him. Certainly, “She lay as if at play” is alive, as it startles the readers from the start and then truly haunts them, as the dead woman, with unexpectedly open eyes stares at them, making fun of them, denying them the called-for aesthetic experience of the dead-woman-as-art but instead delivering a different (equally aesthetic) experience of poetry that reaches out to the readers both intellectually (as satire), emotionally, and physically, giving them the shudders.[19]

Of course, the female body as a subject for poetic descriptions is not a phenomenon of the nineteenth-century only. Bronfen traces the history of the muse, identifying the fact that (bodily) absence is required for something to acquire symbolic meaning, and the preference for women to be “figures of desire” and to signify apart from her physical presence as the “ central motor of Western literary production” (255). The original muses in Greek mythology delivered knowledge to the poet that was new to him or that lay beyond his experience (Bronfen 245). In Augustan Rome however, the poet was not medium of a higher power any longer or needed the muse’s superior knowledge, but possessed all poetic power himself (Bronfen 245). The muse was reduced to merely decorative function, but besides existing in representative form, could also take human shape in the form of a real woman’s body (Bronfen 245). The loss of the muse’s divine association coincides with her reduction to a mere decorative function and the acquisition of a body. The beauty of the muse, consequently, rather represents the poet’s genius, as she does not add to his poetic powers, but rather facilitates the emergence of his capacities that are already there (Bronfen 245).

During the late middle ages, Dante reverses this development partly, granting the muse, who is a real women but physically absent through her early death, the power of invocation (Bronfen 245). In Petrarchan love poetry, the idealization of the inaccessible woman reaches a climax, making the distance a precondition of the poetry to emerge and lifting the admired women to the status of a “divine signifier” (Bronfen 245). The muse, then, does not only serve as addressee, but delivers an “allegorical pretext for a signifier other than herself” (Bronfen 245).

During the Romantic period, the muse is again corporal, but this corporeality is fading as she is dying or already deceased (Bronfen 246). In the Romantic tradition, the muse's waning body, and finally her corpse, are emphasized: "What she gives is not her song but rather her body and her life" (Bronfen 246). The poet's reanimation of the beloved is then an " attempt to artificially preserve her against death" and at the same time an act that gives the poet and his art eternal life (Bronfen 246). Without her death, the beloved would not be able to serve as muse, and it is consequently her death, and not her beauty or the love she symbolizes when alive, that inspires the poet. The individual woman is thus erased multiple times: by death, replaced by the text, and by merely functioning as an allegory for death and lost love (Bronfen 247).[20]

Edgar Allen Poe, who most adequately formulated the time's attitude towards the interconnection between death, female beauty, and art, lost his wife due to tuberculosis when she was still at a young age (Bronfen 249). Bronfen suggests that she was inspiration for his texts, and her illness, which forbade sexual intercourse, and subsequent death made his fascination for her equivalent to the unattainability and presence during the act of remembering and artistically reanimating her (249). Death then transpires into life, and the poet wins over death by artistically inscribing her and himself into immortality (Bronfen 250).[21] The poet, in Bronfen's example specifically Poe, experiences a "death-in-life," or "death by proxy" because he directs his attention and interests from life to death without leaving life himself (250). Bronfen illustrates the erasure of the woman by text with an additional example: Henry James also lost his beloved, and Bronfen claims that the poet who acquires his poetic capacities by experiencing the loss of a beloved woman comes to prefer his own poetic recreation of her to the real living woman (251). The dead woman is thus purely object and as such forms the center of the poet's self-definition (Bronfen 252). As he transforms her into an object, he is free to shape and reanimate her endlessly (Bronfen 253). But as merely object, she remains empty, only represents a "closed-circuit sign" that is purely signifier without reference, simply there to demonstrate the "omnipotence of the speaker" (Bronfen 256). Bronfen asks whether the " Romantic fascination with the death of a young bride is not connected with a desire to prevent the muse from turning domestic and thus ceasing to function as inspirational source" (255). " When a Muse turns into a domestic woman," she states, she ceases to inspire the poet (Bronfen 255).

The connection between domesticity and the need for women to lose their corporeality, and consequently their liveliness, in order to adhere to an ideal is not just an idiosyncrasy of nineteenth-century art, but a central demand of the prevalent Cult of Domesticity. The way Dickinson presents corpses and women in her text thus has to be understood in context with both the domestic and the poetic ideals of her time. Gilbert and Gubar describe a state of

"death-in-life" which they ascribe to the ideal of the Victorian "angel-women" who, incorporating selflessness and total devotion to others, loses all her vitality (24-5). The "beautiful angel-woman's key act," they explain, is to become a "*objet d'art* or a saint" by renouncing all personal wishes or desires, a sacrifice that brings her both nearer to death and to heaven (Gilbert and Gubar 25, original italics). By erasing all personal ambitions and needs and focusing solely on the wellbeing of others and her own appearance, the ideal Victorian woman is more an accessory to the Home than an individual presence and thus, as Gilbert and Gubar describe, more object than living (25). Their quality as object is heavily embossed by cultural ideals that stem from the arts and literature, giving the Victorian woman a static existence that is immune to aging and, as Gilbert and Gubar emphasize, statue like or corpse like (25).[22] Wheeler concludes that the Victorian "angel-women", "living female *objet… d'art*", was the object of Poe 's fantasy of the dead woman, as they were "dangerously prone to moving, speaking, aging, and otherwise disrupting the male artist's adoration; the dead lady is the perfect blank page for imaginative projection" (27, original italics). Dickinson's culture associated women closely with death, and in turn, death was associated with women. After all, it was mainly women who tended to all life events that are understood as transitions between life and death: they gave birth, they took care of women in childbed, they nursed the sick back to health, they sat at deathbeds, they watched over the dead, and they arranged bodies for burial. When Dickinson writes about death, lets her voices speak from beyond, or describes the grave as domestic space, she not only does so with a cultural and literary tradition as background that links women intrinsically with death, but also reflects on her female voices and bodies as women, their culture, and the realms they move within. It is useful to reconsider how different popular and literary genres broach the subject, how literary genres shaped American culture on death, and how these genres induced changes in burial practices in order to understand Dickinson's own approach to the subject including the standing of women within the trope.

4.1.3 Romanticism and the Pastoral

The development of the garden cemetery or landscaped cemetery, as introduced in America during Dickinson's lifetime, had its origins in a change of the literary conception of death in Europe. Seldom is there a better example to describe the reaction between the literature of a certain time with its respective culture, and the relevance of literary treatments of topics for a better understanding of people's attitude towards them in everyday life, than Romanticism's, pre-Gothic genres,' and the Pastoral's induction of what curl terms the *Victorian Celebration of Death*. Even though garden cemeteries emerged in the U.S. only during the 1830ies, their origins started in Europe in the previous century. Curl attributes their development to a literary

tradition characterized as a “new area of feeling for nature and landscape” written in a Gothic mood that originated in Great Britain with the works of James Johnson (Curl 2-3). These works were written in a time when a population shift from rural into urban areas due to increased industrialization occurred, and the number of inhabitants in Great Britain’s major cities grew drastically, leading to extreme overcrowding and consequently sanitary problems (Curl viii). Infant mortality rates were still high (Curl ix). But sanitary reasons and matters of health only partly explain the development of cemeteries in Britain, including “remarkable landscaped cemeteries, splendid mausolea, and noble monuments” (Curl xx). Curl finds references to graves he deems as “Gothic pre-echoes” or elements similar to Romanticism he attributes to the “cult of Melancholy” in works by Edmund Spencer and John Milton (1).

During the second half of the eighteenth century, a group called the Graveyard Poets, Curl mentions as its most important contributors Robert Blair, Edward Young and Thomas Gray, played the most important role in altering the conception of death in British Victorian society (3). Namely Edward Young, the author of the influential *Night Thoughts* originally published in 1742, contributed the celebration of death (Curl 5). Fifteen-year-old Dickinson quotes Young in a letter to her school friend Abiah Root describing her visit to Mount Auburn cemetery in Auburn, demonstrating the popularity of this text and young Emily’s awareness of the connection between this particular text and garden cemeteries (L13). Young’s *Night Thoughts*, in its respective adaptions into other languages, influenced especially the German and French poets (Curl 7). The poem is said to contributed to the development of the *Sturm und Drang* movement, and was admired by poets such as Gottlieb Klopstock, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Johnann Gottfried Herder and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, whose *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* were inspired by Young’s poem (Curl 7). Young’s admirers in Germany were accordingly called “’Younglings’”, and “’Youngizing’” was introduced into France when *Night Thoughts* were translated (Curl 7-8). By 1789, *Night Thoughts* was famous Europe-wide, “despite its essentially Protestant tone and critical stance regarding Roman Catholicism,” as Curl emphasizes (Curl 8). The text had lost its character of a “work of eighteenth-century Protestantism” that focused on the hope for an eternal life and shifted towards an understanding of death as a generator for sad feelings but disconnected from any thoughts of an afterlife either in heaven or hell during *its many* translation into different languages and the process of gaining the status of a key work of melancholy and the contemplation on death, (Curl 7). *Night Thoughts* thus was reduced to a “solitary poet’s personal grief as he wandered alone among tombs” (Curl 7). Crucial for the development of garden cemeteries was *Night Thoughts’* most famous scene depicting the secret burial of Narcissa, the literary complement of Young’s eighteen-year-old step daughter who had to be buried in secret after her sudden death in France, as the French did not allow the burial of

Protestants (Curl 8-9). According to Curl, the scene evoked a “vogue for burial in gardens” throughout Europe, which eventually swept over to the United States (8).

A second literary ideal decisively contributed to the development of garden cemeteries and landscaped cemeteries during the Victorian age: the Pastoral celebrating classical Arcadia. The beautiful landscape inhabited by gentle shepherds living in harmony with nature is overshadowed by death luring (Curl 11). In Arcadia, the shepherd has the possibility to meditate over the grave, in contrast to the overcrowded cemeteries of the days that were marked with decay, bones and the physical implications of decomposition: “Here was the peaceful, beautiful ideal, a place for memories where death was civilized” (Curl 11). Curl finds traces of allusions to tombs in gardens even in the seventeenth century but observes that with the Picturesque, the tomb definitely became part of gardens (11). Curl accredits the “strange transformation of the garden” into a “Garden of Remembrance” to the English poet William Shenstone (1714-63), who established “memorials set in evocative landscapes” in his poetry grieving for youth, lost friendship, life, or love, turning the “urn, the marker, and the memorial … into essential ornaments of the garden” (12). The spirits of the deceased were thought to remain in the garden, and by dying it was possible to enter a space that resembled the famous Greek Arcadia (Curl 12). But the monuments in these gardens were not only meant to evoke a lost Arcadia and to create a connection to the dead, but were also commemorating national figures, making the ambler not only aware of lost individuals, but also remembering him of national virtues and ideals (Curl 13). Curl also mentions the Swiss poet Salomom Gessner, who introduced sentimentality in his *Idyllen*, tombs in idyllic settings catalysing “tender feelings” and “moderate tears” (13). In the course of these developments, tombs became essential elements in the conception of the Arcadian landscape (Curl 13).

4.1.4 Sex and Death in the Gothic Tradition

Wardrop suggests viewing Dickinson’s “obsession with death” in the context of the Gothic tradition and ascribes her the use of “neograveyard poetic devices” (*Gothic* 11). Wardrop shows that the frequency of the death theme and seemingly grotesque figures as the speaking corpses were associated with the Gothic in Dickinson’s time and did not provoke strangeness, but were part of a very popular and frequent genre.[23] Wardrop sees Dickinson’s use of the “ standard nineteenth-century ‘voice from beyond the grave’” as a voice that lingers at the brink of the linguistically possible (*Gothic* 89). “Dickinson’s fascination with Death stems at least partly from the challenge of representing that which is unknowable” (Wardrop *Gothic* 88). The representation of death is impossible, nevertheless Dickinson tries to poetically achieve “that of which language is incapable but strives to accomplish nevertheless” (Wardrop Gothic 88).[24]

Wardrop defines uncertainty, hesitation and the delay of resolution as characteristic features of Gothicism (*Gothic* 12-15). At the center of all suspense stands an "unholy void," which constitutes itself as a "void of belief" as a result of the secular world's "possibility of an absent or nonexistent God" (Wardrop, *Gothic* 12-3): "Gothicism tracks the slow death of God in Western culture" (Wardrop, *Gothic* 13). Strikingly, Dickinson's speaking corpses articulate themselves from beyond the grave, as dead bodies, or from a position Wardrop calls "not-life," emphasizing the fleeting boundaries between life and death, calling attention to the unpredictability and suddenness in which death might occur (*Gothic* 14). As a poet who "allows other techniques besides the fantastic," Wardrop classifies Dickinson as a "hybrid gothic poet" (*Gothic* 18). Poetry, in contrast to fiction, necessarily contains gaps and plays with form, defamiliarizing context. Gothic poetry, Wardrop maintains, achieves this doubly, "horrific images" creating a "redoubled defamiliarization" (*Gothic* 18).

Wardrop's discussion of the Gothic genre reconnects gender to literature by emphasizing Victorian culture's attitudes towards female bodies that are expressed in the Gothic. Especially Women's Gothic creates situations in which woman's body are threatened, causing a fear "that registers subjugation by patriarchal power structure" (Wardrop, *Gothic* 70-1). The threat to the body is associated with or experienced as death. Matters of female biology, such as menstruation, sex, pregnancy and childbirth are potentially the object of anxiety in the Gothic tradition (Wardrop, *Gothic* 71). The female body is charged with guilt and shame, culminating in "patriarchal disgust and fear of the female body" (Wardrop, *Gothic* 71). In a society that measures a woman's worth with her virginity, the loss of bodily integrity by sex or rape is social death and may be represented in terms of physical death (Wardrop, *Gothic* 77). This explains why Dickinson's use of the Gothic and her figure of death are frequently associated with rape: "For Dickinson's gothic heroine, the thought of sex is often inextricably conjoined with the thought of pain or death" (Wardrop, *Gothic* 70). An impressive example of the association of (involuntary) sex and death is "The Frost of Death was on the Pane –" (F1130), where death is represented as a rapist:

F1130

The Frost of Death was on the Pane –
"Secure your Flower" said he.
Like Sailors fighting with a Leak
We fought Mortality –

Our passive Flower we held to Sea –
To mountain – to the Sun –
Yet even on his Scarlet shelf
To crawl the Frost begun –

We pried him back
Ourselves we wedged
Himself and her between -
Yet easy as the narrow Snake
He forked his way along

Till all her helpless beauty bent
And then our wrath begun –
We hunted him to his Ravine
We chased him to his Den –

We hated Death and hated Life
And nowhere was to go –
Than Sea and continent there is
A larger – it is Woe

Death personified as “Frost” and later in stanza three as a phallic “Snake” is portrayed as intruder here, only held back by a fragile “Pane,” threatening the speakers’ “’Flower,’” which is the symbol for female virginity, and often used by Dickinson to represent female sexuality (Stein 45). The speaker uses the plural pronoun, implying that the fight for the “passive Flower” is fought collaboratively by all women. Yet, death, identified as male in stanza two and again in the third stanza, breaks the protective “Pane” and crawls slowly past the speakers. The female flower is “bent” forcefully by death’s “Snake” which “fork[s]” its way through despite the speakers’ effort to hold it back and to block the way. The speakers’ desperate wedging is contrasted by the rapist death’s slow but steady advance, against which its victim is helpless. The speakers are exposed to the rapist’s violence because they possess the “Flower,” experienced as a “Leak” in stanza one, because it makes them vulnerable. Finally, the female speakers are violated and their “beauty bent.” It is interesting that Dickinson chooses the third stanza, which stands in the middle of the poem, to consist of five instead of the customary four lines, marking it as formally transgressive, and highlighting it visually. The center of the poem is the act of violence, the deflowering. The result, the “beauty bent,” is part of the next stanza however, and culminates in an imagination of revenge, the speakers hunting the offender down in his hideout, most interestingly a place echoing the female sexual organ: the snake is hiding in a “Ravine” and a “Den,” both cave-like structures, paralleling the act of sexual intercourse and the transgression of violence. However, revenge proofs naught, as the speakers are left disoriented and dislocated, hateful towards existence both among the living and dead, overpowered by the overwhelming feeling of “Woe.”

Dickinson's rape poem cleverly uses topics and imagery associated with death by Victorian society in order to present sexual violence, a topic unspeakable if publicly addressed or sought to express in common language: The snake, the personification of Satan who induces the Fall and humanity's eviction from paradise into mortality, is the offender in her poem as in the bible, connecting death and sexuality. In the bible, (female) sexuality is a consequence of the need to reproduce, brought about by the event of death. Female vulnerability can be seen as a punishment for giving in to the snake's seduction by religious standards, just as mortality is punishment for Eve's transgression. Following this logic, Eve, the representative of all women, would then be to blame for her own defenselessness towards rapists. However, I do not believe that this is a conclusion Dickinson adhered to. Rather, she identified the hierarchy between God and humanity as the source of women's vulnerability, depicting God or Satan as rapist in "He fumbles at your Soul" (F477), a poem that characterizes death as "… One – imperial Thunderbolt -/ That scalps your naked soul –" dealt by an abusive deity. Similarly, in "The Frost of Death was on the Pane –" Dickinson does not seem to advocate a reading that blames the victim, as the "Frost of Death" approaches from the outside and not from within, threatening from the other side of the "Pane." When death finally penetrates the "Pane" and transgresses the threshold of the "Scarlet shelf," a strikingly domestic (and structural) metaphor for the female body or sexual organs, the speakers are made homeless, once more evicted from their sanctuary, displaced as there is "nowhere... to go," and neither "Sea" nor "continent" can accommodate the hate of the mutilated speakers.

Dickinson's poem, I believe, criticizes the treatment of rape victims in her society. Similarly to "Alone and in a Circumstance" (F1174), where the speaker's "articles of claim" are ineffective because the offense happened "nor here nor there," presumably the outhouse and therefore a space that cannot be talked about, the speaker of "The Frost of Death was on the Pane –" cannot get revenge because that would require to follow the "Snake" into the "Ravine. " Even though stanza four fantasizes about such a revenge, the poem does not end with the punishment of the offender, the victim's reestablishment, nor the speaker's satisfaction. Seeking legal sanction of the rapist is impossible for a nineteenth-century rape victim. Seeking revenge or punishment for the rapist would demand that the raped woman would publicly name the offense and would have to indeed follow the "Snake" into the "Ravine" again when delivering a narrative account of the violation, thereby marking herself as a social outcast. Masking rape as death then is a way to portray this entrapment.

The link between sex and death, just as the association of the female body and death, were not unusual during Dickinson's time. The Victorians equated even the experience of an orgasm with the afterlife by describing it as an "'eternity in a moment'": "the loss of self during orgasm apparently mirrored the loss of self in death (Berreca 1). Consequently, Victorian

literature allows a pleasurable aspect to death as well. While sex, sexuality and the description of sexual acts, whether experienced in positive terms or negatively as rape, are associated with death and dying, scenes in the grave become increasingly eroticized when associated positively: The quality of the deaths as well as their number in literature changes during the Victorian age (Berreca 2). Most interestingly, Victorian literature avoids the description of regulated and legitimate sex in marriage, but focuses on adulterous and adventurous sexual behavior, which is frequently punished by death. Victorian literature's treatment of sex, according to Berecca, is characterized by an inability to refrain from moral judgments (3). She summarizes sarcastically: "Marriage is to heaven as sex is to death" (Berecca 3). Marriage is a form of alienation from paradise, Dollimore explains (44). Likewise sexuality, marriage is a consequence of death, as procreation as a necessity against death demands the regulation of sexuality (Dollimore 44). Most interestingly Dollimore also attributes the division and hierarchy between the sexes as a consequence of the Fall, linking it to the taming of sexuality in marriage (44).

But not only literature, also medical theories of the time strengthen the connection between sex and death. A man's orgasm and the ejaculation were thought to weaken him physically and to lower his moral attitudes, "bringing him closer to death with every orgasm" and thus decreasing his life expectancy (Berreca 4). In contrast, women who were sexually active with other men were thought to gain energy, as if sucking it out of their male partners (Berreca 4). Vampire imagery, Berreca suggests, may have been motivated by such views. As sex and the description of sexual actions were a taboo in Victorian times, erotic desire, according to Berecca, appeared in various "guises," among them the desire for the death of the lover or admired person (4). Victorian characters, she explains, therefore sometimes express the urge to kill the beloved rather than losing her (Berecca 5). The link between desire, sex, and death was not just a peculiarity of Dickinson's time, but one of its major characteristics (Tracy 35). Freud's psychoanalytic theories, which only gained importance in the early twentieth century, includes death and sexuality as driving human forces into his model of the human psyche. Freud's theory explains why protagonists in Victorian literature occasionally long for the death of the beloved. Being in love, Freud explains, does not completely free us from suffering, as it includes the fear of losing the object of that love (Dollimore 183-4). Death, he maintains, is the nearest conceivable experience of unity (Dollimore 186). During all our socialized later life, according to Freud, we try to find a substitute for the undifferentiated state of early infancy which perceives itself as whole (Dollimore 184). Desire is the consequence of loss and absence, and it culminates in love, or 'Eros' (Dollomore 183-4). However, it cannot deliver the satisfaction of early childhood. Death as "the complete absence of excitation, a state of zero tension characteristic of the inorganic or the inanimate" is desired as the maximal

loss-free state (Dollimore 186). According to Freud's psychoanalytic theory, 'Eros' and the death drive, 'Thanatos,' form the ultimate opposites: Eros links individuals and groups of people in general into unities, death separates them (Dollimore 188).

Dickinson positive depictions of death that define it as gain in an array of poems rise the question whether she perceived of death in a similar way as Freud's psychoanalytic theory of the death drive suggests. Indeed, in some of Dickinson's deathbed poems her speakers express envy with the dying person:

F1278

So proud she was to die
It made us all ashamed
That all we cherished, so unknown
To her desire seemed –
So satisfied to go
Where none of us should be
Immediately – that Anguish stooped
Almost to Jealousy –

The dying person dies proudly, as if death was something to achieve. In fact, Dickinson's choice of words does tempt a contemporary reader to associate the poem with Freud's death drive, as the dying woman seems to lack all desire the living strive to gratify, but instead seems "So satisfied to go" (F1278). This lack of desire and the passing woman's satisfaction provoke jealousy in the mourners. The onlookers only experience loss and "Anguish," even shame, and therefore feel jealous of the gratification the dying woman seems to be granted. Mayer, who is convinced that "Dickinson's death poetry reveals a fierce love for human life as it is lived on earth" and therefore clearly prefers life to death reads "Jealousy" in this poem not as caused by the dying person's satisfaction, but by the fact that she does not perceive the separation from their loved ones as loss (45). Her interpretation suggests that the mourners react with jealousy to the parting woman's preference of death over them (Mayer 51). In "The last Night that She lived" (F1100), a body of mourners feel jealousy of the eternal life the "So nearly infinite" dying woman is about to embark.

Only in connection with death-beds and deadly illnesses does Victorian literature allow a glimpse into the bedroom, which is a taboo during Victorian times and hidden away from all but the most inner family circle (Berecca 5). The moment of death, regarded as a mystery, and the emotional charge of the onlookers witnessing death, Berecca explains further, has in common with the act of sex that it falls out of the frame of the domestic and lacks the language to be expressed in such terms (5). Therefore, even death-bed scenes could be understood as erotic (Berecca 5). Victorian society "cannot speak about either sex or death. … rational discourse is literally unthinkable," which is why symbols or metaphors served as "camouflaged

terms" in order to avoid broaching the taboo (Berecca 5, my emission). The bodily and anatomic aspects of both sex and death help to bridge the apparent contradiction between procreation implied by sex and the loss of life in death (Berecca 5). Death was not understood as a definite end, but rather as a passage to another place or state (Berecca 6). Whereas death was the transition from one order to the other, sex was more scary and disorderly, suggesting chaos and the erosion of social and ideological paradigms (Berecca 6). Both sex and death, as "'out of body' experiences," as Berecca terms them, breach boundaries and are separated from everyday experiences (6). Meaning concerning death and sex becomes interchangeable, the two terms sharing and at the same time defying a common language (Berecca 6): A dying protagonist can be described in all bodily details and in dying reach a heightened sensual awareness that lets him or her experience death in ecstatic, seemingly orgasmic terms (Berecca 7).

Sex and death were not only fascinating in combination during Dickinson's time, but also separately: Besides death, sex and sexuality were the nineteenth century's "major private and secret preoccupations" (Tracy 35). The two preoccupations are combined in the figure of the vampire, and sexuality, which could not be talked about, finds an expression via death (Tracy 35). The link becomes evident when women, penetrated by the vampire's teeth and thus becoming undead, simultaneously become foul, unchaste beings, "like prostitutes" (Tracy 34). In novels not associated with the vampire genre, elements characteristic for the genre can nevertheless be seen. Dickinson read *Jane Eyre*, where the theme of marriage with the undead occurs, as Tracy characterizes the marriage between Mr. Rochester and his mad, locked up wife (38). Although the vampire novel reached the height of its popularity[25] only after Dickinson's death, and Dickinson does not write about vampires in her poetry or letters, I nevertheless find the possibilities interesting that vampire fiction presents for writers at the time. The fact that the genre allows authors to write about sexuality unsanctioned allows for the development of alternative sexual models, which are fascinating regarding Dickinson's adaptation of the theme: Not only are Dickinson's graves and dead bodies frequently erotically charged and do her corpses speak and perceive sensuously even after death, but the grave seems to offer a space that allows for a sexuality outside of institutionalized marriage and a heterosexual frame.

In contrast to the eighteenth-century Gothic novel, which emphasizes psychological processes of fear, the vampire novel, according to Tracy, is about physical, and specifically sexual, fear (33). While a ghost is only spirit, the vampire can and does do bodily harm and is perceived as "sexual menace" (Tracy 33). Motives like marriage with the dead and the white robe, which hints at once at a marriage gown, nightdress, and burial garment, also link sexual activity and death and are prominent in vampire stories (Tracy 37-8). Vampire fiction seems to

offer a singular opportunity to describe the female body in detail (Tracy 39): the demographic most likely to attract vampires are young women in especially light nightgowns lying in bed (Tracy 38). Tracy rhetorically asks whether there are any detailed descriptions of sexually active and bodily attractive women in nineteenth-century British or American writing that do not feature vampires or the undead and quickly answers his own question by saying that vampire fiction had this privilege because "the supernatural or ghostly aspect seemed to sanitize" sexual content because the setting and the characters seemed so unreal (39). As an example, he mentions Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), which features sexual acts and "virtually every form of unacceptable sex" without facing censure at a time when in Britain, Oscar Wild was trialed and imprisoned and Emile Zola's British publisher was imprisoned for sexual indecency (Tracy 41). Tracy also attributes to this fact that *Dracula* himself is not sexually active and rarely occurs in the story, but all the other vampires in Dracula are women (41-2). Again, Tracy points to the infectious and corrupt character of the female vampires, which he links to the day's view of prostitutes, and sees the destruction of these women as Stoker's "phantasies of total sexual power and sexual revenge" (45). He sees the sexually active vampire woman figure as a reaction to nineteenth-century men's fears of women's movements and demands for more social and sexual privileges (Tracy 46). Vampire women are thus both mirrors of fear as well as a safe way to "explore the fascination with sexually aggressive women" in fiction (Tracy 46). Vampire fiction features women who show gender ambiguities, are aggressive sexually against men, show lesbian tendencies (Tracy 54). Instead of nurturing and caring for children, they treat them brutally and drain their blood, violating all (gender) conventions and incorporating central nineteenth-century fears.

4.2 Exploration of Death and the Grave in Dickinson's Poetry

Because so many of Dickinson's poems deal with death, dying, loss, or mourning, or imagine a state or place beyond life, their sheer number prohibits the detailed analysis of all aspects the poet connects with the theme. Rather than providing a catalogue of Dickinson's different approaches to death, this study concentrates on poems that help to clarify how Dickinson thinks of death and the grave as a place, how this place is structured according to hierarchies and gender, and which possibilities the acquisition of this space offers in order to re-conceptualize gender. Specifically, I analyze poems that aim at carving out space for identity in death, that imagine erotic love after death, invent an alternative spirituality beyond God-centered Christianity, and transform the grave into a homely place that houses life.

When Dickinson writes from the perspective of a dead body within a grave, describing the deceased's thoughts and sensations, this has the peculiar effect of negating death: Her

corpses communicate, “just making signs” (F433), they hear, they feel, they breathe, and they experience erotic encounters: “In my own Grave I breathe” a speaker states in “So give me back to Death –” (F1653). In “’Twas just this time, last year, I died.” (F344) a long-dead child “ heard the Corn” when carried to the graveyard. A female dead speaker, still self-conscious her appearance and aware of societal expectations towards her gender, worries about her “Toilette” and “Braid[s] the Hair” (F471). The process of dying is expressed in erotic terms in several poems, letting one speaker orgasmically exclaim “Dying! Dying in the night!” (F222), and featuring another who imagines “strok[ing] [the lover’s] frost,” which “Outvisions Paradise!” (F431). In a further poem, a dead woman “… tunnel[s] – till my [her] Grove/ Pushed sudden thro’ to his –” (F554), using mining as a metaphor for a sexual encounter. In Dickinson’s poetry, complete union between lovers and otherwise taboo erotic encounters become possible only after death. The grave provides a space where the simultaneous presence and absence of the physical body makes possible an existence beyond conventions that, albeit still not void of cultural and social paradigms, allows for alternative constructions of identity.

4.2.1 Death Is Spacious

That Dickinson thought of death in spatial terms and that she defines it as characteristically lacking specific boundaries becomes evident in many poems. Death and the loss of loved ones is experienced as dislocation, as in “There is a finished feeling” (F1092), where the speaker faces “A Wilderness of Size.” When she mockingly asks “Is Heaven a Place – a Sky –a Tree? ” in “We pray – to Heaven –” (F476) Dickinson abandons the need to structure our conceptual and physical world spatially after death. The question about the spatial arrangements of heaven is naught to the dead, which is emphasized by Dickinson’s rather naïve addition of the “Tree” to the query list, as only the living need to locate heaven: “Location’s narrow way is for Ourselves – / Unto the Dead / There’s no Geography –.” However, Dickinson questions her own statement in the finishing line of the poem, revealing the origin of her dilemma of how to locate the dead and the afterlife in the premise that there exists a soul or spirit that leaves the body after death and resides in ‘Heaven:’ “Where [does] – Omnipotence – fly?,” Dickinson asks, and does not provide her readers with an answer but stops dead at what appears to be an unfinished stanza. “Omnipresence” includes in its very definition the sense of space, and therefore the question of how to conceptualize and place it is crucial to understanding the concept. I believe that in this poem Dickinson provocatively asks how we can quietly accept ideas like omnipotence, the soul, or an afterlife, even though we cannot conceptualize them. The poem is thus critical of the religious doctrines preaching the existence of a bodiless soul,

an afterlife somewhere beyond, and an unimaginable, dimensionless, omnipotent God. Religious promises, according to “We pray – to Heaven –,” thus create more questions than they provide answers.

To Dickinson, the transition from this life into an existence beyond is foremost a matter of form and spatial dimensions, I claim. In “Time feels so vast that were it not” (F858) she expresses temporality and eternity in terms of space:

F858

Time feels so vast that were it not
For an Eternity –
I fear me this Circumference
Engross my Finity –

To His exclusion, who prepare
By Processes of Size
For the Stupendous Vision
Of His Diameters –

The speaker’s ”Finity,” presumably mortality and the limitations being imposed by the body’s “ Circumference,” which conceivably are the social, historical, familial, physical, and corporal context we live in, feels very limited compared to time’s vastness. The capitalized male pronoun in the second stanza can be read to signify God, who in contrast to the speaker is infinite, omnipotent and omnipresent. Even after death, when the speaker “by Processes of Size” is freed from the limitation of the physical body and the perceptive constraints it entails, an existence in an afterlife does not include a likeness to God. We are always remote from “ His Diameters,” always confronted with “His exclusion.” The only thing we can hope for, Dickinson’s poem implies, is “the Stupendous Vision” of the dimensions of the divine. Understanding divinity thus is a gnosis in terms of space. An insight into the space of spaciousness follows after death, paradoxically after we have abandoned our own existence in defined space, and have given up the need of “Geography,” as “We pray – to Heaven –” (F476) teaches the reader.

In “So give me back to Death –” (F1653) Dickinson’s speaker ‘measures’ the gained space and the scope in the “Grave” somewhat more ambivalently: The still conscious corpse, “deprived of thee,” suffers from solitude and therefore concludes that “[the grave’s] size is all that Hell can guess - / And all that Heaven was –.” The poet’s definition of death as supplying the dead with indefinite space gives us the basis according to which, I believe, we have to understand Dickinson’s opposing statements in “For Death – or rather” (F644), which says, on the one hand, that “The Things that Death will buy / Are Room -,” and on the other hand maintains “I am alive – because / I am not in a Room –“ in “I am alive - I guess -” (F605). Her

first statement corresponds to the reading of death providing indefinite, undefined space as illustrated in my poem discussions above. The second statement refers to “a Room” as opposed to just “Room,” a synonym for ‘space,’ and therefore it signifies a defined, limited space. When reading “I am alive - I guess -,” it becomes apparent, however, that in fact, the speaker is not alive in a literal sense, but has died and now enters the cycle of life as a part of nature:

F605

I am alive - I guess -
The Branches on my Hand
Are full of Morning Glory -
And at my finger’s end -

The Carmine - tingles warm -
And if I hold a Glass
Across my Mouth - it blurs it -
Physician’s - proof of Breath -

I am alive - because
I am not in a Room -
The Parlor – Commonly - it is -
So Visitors may come -

And lean - and view it sidewise -
And add “How cold - it grew” -
And “Was it conscious - when it stepped
In Immortality”?

Being alive usually goes hand in hand with restriction. These restrictions are not solely spatial though, but are an effect of cultural and social norms that impose patterns of behavior and hierarchies on the subjects moving within this social space. The speaker states that not being in a room is equivalent to being alive. It is indicative that the room one should not be in is specifically the “Parlor,” representing the family, its values, and mirroring the ideologies of nineteenth-century society more than any other room in the house (Logan xiv). In the parlor, one cannot move or speak freely, but is marked by gender, social class and a set of behavioral codes. Guests are welcomed in the parlor, where “Visitors may come,” and the host is foremost a representative of the family and therefore has to display exemplary manners and character. This space and the people who occupy it, according to Dickinson’s poem, are not “alive” as the speaker, who seems to be fully embedded in nature. Contrarily, the parlor represents an organized and idealized space within which every human movement is orchestrated according to cultural codes of behavior. As illustrated in my chapter on the home and house, Dickinson

perceives such an arranged domestic space, here contrasted to nature to its highest effect, as restraining and lifeless. Wheeler agrees that “I am alive – I guess –” (F605) favors death over a “lifeless life” that restricts women to their home and further limits their space and actions within the home (Wheeler 28). In contrast, death provides the opposite, an abundance of room.

4.2.2 Death Creates Room for Identity (beyond social categories)

The space death offers for Dickinson is characterized by the lack of normative inscription. Death is a democratic force that extinguishes all the restrictions of cultural, religious and social paradigms that define our identity and status in society:

F836

Color – Caste – Denomination –
These – are Time’s Affair –
Death’s diviner Classifying
Does not know they are –

As in sleep – all Hue forgotten –
Tenets – put behind –
Death’s large – Democratic fingers
Rub away the Band –
…

After death, the first two stanzas of this poem promise, an existence void of social inscription and religious doctrine is possible. This offers room for the acquisition of a new, independent identity. “I’m ceded – I’ve stopped being Their’s” (F353) also mediates this new freedom. Although the poem does not necessarily need to be read in the context of an afterlife – interpretations involving marriage or joining a convent and consequently discarding one’s name with all earthly possessions – it becomes a rich source for analysis if we do assume that the speaker transitions from one form of life into another kind of existence, possibly in the next world. Leiter observes that the first words, “I’m ceded –” suggest that the speaker is “a territory that has been surrendered from one authority to another” (110). This capitulation - in my interpretation the body that is taken over by death – seems to contradict the power voice of the poem, its air of empowerment and liberation. Similarly as in other poems, where Dickinson paradoxically combines humble subordination and bold grandeur, this poem claims that death offers its subjects the liberty to make their own choices:

F353

I’m ceded – I’ve stopped being Their’s
The name They dropped opon my face
With water, in the country church

Is finished using, now,
And they can put it with my Dolls,
My childhood, and the string of spools,
I've finished threading – too –

Baptized, before, without the choice,
But this time, consciously, Of Grace –
Unto supremest name –
Called to my Full – The Crescent dropped –
Existence's whole Arc, filled up,
With one – small Diadem –

My second Rank – too small the first –
Crowned – Crowing – on my Father's breast –
A half unconscious Queen –
But this time – Adequate – Erect,
With Will to choose,
Or to reject,
And I choose, just a Crown –

Unlike many Dickinson poems, this well-known poem can be read with accelerated speed, almost in one breath. The syntax is transparent and supports a swift reading. The speaker of the poem seems agitated, empowered, and optimistic about what lies ahead. The female speaker enters a new state which allows for self-determination: now, "With Will to choose, / Or to reject," she "… stopped being Their's" and thus left a state of ownership. At the same time, she leaves her childhood, her "Dolls," and her Christian name behind. When baptized the first time, she was a passive, "half unconscious" infant, "without the choice," but now, she consciously and actively chooses her "second Rank," which is declared to be "Adequate;" "just a Crown" fits her.

It seems paradoxical that the new state, which means the deletion of the old identity, the old Christian name, is portrayed so positively. The speaker stands "Erect," and her existence seems completed. Something has been lacking before, has been incomplete, fractured, unsatisfactory, as the event that brings about her new state rounds off the missing section of her identity: "Called to my Full – The Crescent dropped – / Existence's whole Arc, filled up." The old partial self has to perish, "Is finished using," and can be discarded in order to make room for a new, empowered self. A similar transformation providing the speaker with a strong sense of self, a "Name" is imagined in "For Death – or rather" (F644):

F644

For Death - or rather
For the Things 'twould buy -
This - put away
Life's Opportunity –

The Things that Death will buy
Are Room -
Escape from Circumstances -
And a Name -

With Gifts of Life
How Death's Gifts may compare -
We know not -
For the Rates - lie Here -

Wheeler interprets F644 as granting "a hardheaded look at a woman writer's situation, based around an economic metaphor" where death is the only chance for freedom, seclusion and a right to her own name (28). The speaker estimates the expense of attaining a self-determined existence and concludes that it costs life, as only death can bring "Escape from Circumstances - / And a Name –." The reason why the speaker feels that he or she does not possess a name can only be explained if we assume, as Wheeler does, that the speaker is female. A nineteenth-century woman did not have a last name that could be considered her own, but she was named after her father when baptized and traded that name in for her husband's at marriage. Dickinson uses economical metaphors in this poem, emphasizing the context of trade and the question about the "Rates:" Is trading life for a name and an existence beyond social constraints worth it? The same question applies when we consider, as in the earlier poem, marriage as a possible allusion here.[26] The decision whether and whom to marry did, and often still does today entail economic considerations. Does the trade of a name for another, the subsequent social status and its benefits pay off in regard to the relative freedom and self-determination of an unmarried woman? It seems paradoxical that in order to become 'someone,' women in nineteenth-century New England had to enter a state of ownership as somebody's wives, and therefore became 'someone's.' In contrast, when a woman passed away, her name would be carved into stone, would be inalterable and enduring time on the tombstone. An immovable identity for a woman is thus only attained at the point when her human form, her body, dissolves, leaving the name to signify without a material signifier. Only as a dead woman does she get public acknowledgment as a person, the poem suggests.

Never is a dead person and her life more exhibited and the focus of general attention than during a funeral. Paradoxically, her own funeral would be the only event in an unmarried

woman's life that would attract a public interest and draw a crowd for her sake. In nineteenth-century New England, dying was a public event, and funerals were attended in great numbers. Dickinson comments on her contemporaries' fascination with death and the spectacles funerals represented satirically: "Pompless no Life can pass away" (F1594). Death and dying therefore become a "Miracle for all!" Dickinson's speaker exclaims in the same poem.

F653

No Crowd that has occurred
Exhibit – I suppose
That General Attendance
That Resurrection – does –

Circumference be full –
The long restricted Grave
Assert her Vital Privilege –
The Dust – connect – and live –

On Atoms – features place –
All Multitudes that were
Efface in the Comparison –
As Suns – dissolve a star –

Solemnity – prevail –
It's Individual Doom
Possess each – separate Consciousness –
August – Absorbed – Numb –

What Duplicate – exist –
What Parallel can be –
Of the Significance of This –
To Universe – and Me?

The poem, most feasibly, describes the event of a funeral. A "Crowd" has come to witness the "Resurrection." I suggest that we have to understand the term "Resurrection" on several levels in this poem: First, the funeral that calls back the memory of the deceased and attracts a disproportionate amount of attention can be viewed as a resurrection in the sense of a revival of the departed woman's life. Second, Dickinson emphasizes the fact that during life, a woman does not possess her own last name, but always carries the name of either her father or her husband. In this sense, she has a right to her own name only after death, as it is then carved into stone and thus becomes unchangeable, as she cannot marry, be divorced or remarry any

more. Third, numerous of Dickinson's poems suggest that after death, the deceased do not lose consciousness but, fully perceptive, enter a new kind of existence beyond social and cultural restraints. This new kind of existence can be interpreted as a rebirth, or "Resurrection." That the inauguration of an existence beyond is alluded to here becomes clear when we look at the second stanza, which assures us that the woman's being has now reached a state of completion: "Circumference be full –," (F653) the speaker claims, and echoes "Called to my Full – /The Crescent dropped – / Existance's whole Arc, filled up," in "I'm ceded – I've stopped being Their's" (F353). Being completed and attaining the dimensions of death, the speaker deems to be a "Vital Priviledge," giving us a further clue as to how to understand the "Resurrection" from the first stanza. The completion allows the woman, now bodiless "Dust," to"connect [with God?]– and live" in the afterlife. Now "Dust," the "Atoms" of her human form, dissolve and offer "place." The space the dead inhabit lacks contours and therefore is not measurable. Comparisons are naught here, Dickinson writes in her third stanza, as all units and amounts we know can be endlessly compared: they "Efface in the Comparison." At the same time as the woman's "Atoms" decompose, as she is effaced, her life and death are celebrated by the crowd. The festivities and the grand procession can only be experienced by the participants, however, as the dead person possesses a "separate Consciousness." To the dead body, the attention received is thus insignificant, and he or she is doomed to never know about the glory obtained at the funeral. The poem therefore questions the significance of public attention to the dead. To those who gained completion in heaven and acquired an endless amount of space and freedom, attention on earth cannot signify, as the "Crowd" cannot compare to infinity. Compared to the size and omnipresent prominence of the "Universe," of course individual fate cannot be of importance. Still, the certainty of public acknowledgement might soothe the fear of annihilation after death and even make up for a lack of recognition during life, and therefore may be of immeasurable importance to the living.

The spectacle of death and the interest it raises in the public in "No Notice gave She, but a Change –" (F860) further illustrate how Dickinson envisions death as an empowering moment for a woman. The poem describes the process of dying in terms of meteorological change: "… Rime by Rime, the steady Frost / Opon Her Bosom piled –," again using "Frost" as a synonym for death.[27] The woman is portrayed as brave during her dying, not being afraid of the fact that her life forces dwindle, but similarly as in "I'm ceded – I've stopped being Their 's" (F353) meets the change bravely and with a superior air. The third and central stanza reads:

F860

…
Of shrinking ways – she did not fright
Though all the Village looked –
But held Her gravity aloft –
And met the gaze – direct –

…

The dying woman is watched by the whole village while dying but stares back directly, "aloft." Dying is not a private experience then, but becomes collective entertainment. Viewed positively, this provides a singular chance for women to stand out and to concentrate public attention on herself. Public attention, however, also entails public judgement. The poem stresses the courageous way the woman died, staring right back at the "Village" attending the deathbed as well as at death. Hers is a powerful gaze, a daring gaze, a fearless, and provoking gaze. Modesty, reserve and virtuosity are values that do not apply at the moment of death, which turns the body, her "Bosom" usually hidden away, into an artefact and an item of public interest. In the final two stanzas of "No Notice gave She, but a Change –" (F860), the corpse, "like a seed" is buried in the grave, and as the mourners withdraw and the buried woman is forgotten, "As Some we never knew -," the physical remains enter an "Everlasting Spring" as part of nature's cycle. As in previous poems, Dickinson hints at a rebirth in "No Notice gave She, but a Change –" (F860), and the woman remains master of her own fate, as the resurrection as part of nature only happens "if so she chose[s]," emphasizing her freedom of decision.

The liberty to make one's own decisions, the "… Will to choose, / Or to reject," (F353) only seems to be granted after death, at the point when the speakers of Dickinson's poems become pure consciousness, still sentient and perceptive, but not caught in a physical form any more. Curiously enough, death is also the moment when their names start to signify, not referring to a physical presence, but to the essence of the personality, the character of the deceased, and the life he or she lived. According to Raymond, Dickinson's anonymous voice from beyond claims a bodiless, nameless authority (119). By renouncing a place in the physical world and a righteous existence in social and cultural space, she, according to Raymond "demands an uncompromised hearing as it were outside of time," being taken seriously "not as a father's child but as a maker, a poet, of ample awe" (119).[28]

Death thus offers the possibility of an identity outside of conventional gender structures. In her study on Dickinson's exploration of the concept of death, Ernst hints at the possibility of creating an identity through the establishment of a space outside of conventional power relations and sees this new space as gender neutral. According to Ernst, Dickinson's possibilities to create an identity in life were restricted, and therefore she had to imagine an alternative self in the afterlife:[29] "We must remember the poet's social position as a single nineteenth-century woman, mainly cast in the role of a daughter. Death … offers the only focus, against which the speaker can experience a sense of self, an identity, which her surroundings restrict to the role of wife and mother" (Ernst 163). Death has the power to transgress these

norms, to be transformative, and according to Ernst offers a gender free or gender neutral space:

> Death for Dickinson turns into the graspable opposite, a focus which permits her to detach herself from any authority within her environment, and which usually generates an individual sense of identity. Death does not differentiate between male and female, and thus allows the awareness and creation of an identity in a sphere outside that to which her being subjects her (…). (Ernst 163)

I do not agree with Ernst that Dickinson's death offers a gender neutral space, as her subjects are still gendered in the grave and afterlife, and frequently carry attributes that identify them as either male or female, nor do I believe that Dickinson identified herself solely as daughter. Instead, she established herself to be a poet, even if even if not always overtly and in all contexts. My analysis of the poems ascribing death the possibility of a name and identity highlight a paradox of nineteenth-century society that demands a woman's physical disappearance, her death, before it grants her public attention, maybe even fame, and the authority over her own name. Dickinson presents death as a democratic moment freeing individuals from cultural ascriptions such as class, but she highlights these aspects of death to criticize their existence in life, I believe, as she criticizes women being expected to die before attracting any fame. The detachment of body and self is important in the poems craving an identity and a name, but the corpse that remains is not merely empty of inscription.

4.2.3 Femininity in the Grave: Gender and Gendered Space

Matters of spatial limitation in life and after death are intertwined with restraint based on gender in Dickinson's poetry. Even though Dickinson presents death as a democratic force that renders categories as social and economic status obsolete, it does not free the dead from gender identity and the associated restrictions. In several of Dickinson's poems featuring the dead, speakers do not only retain their sensory and perceptive powers after death, but they continue to worry about their bodies' specific gender associations. In "To make One's Toilette – after Death" (F471) a female speaker is concerned with her appearance even after death and still wants to please:

F471

To make One's Toilette – after Death
Has made the Toilette cool
Of only Taste we cared to please
Is difficult, and still –

That's easier – than Braid the Hair –
And make the Bodice gay –

When Eyes that fondled it are wrenched
By Decalogues – away –

In this poem, death means separation from the beloved who "fondled" the speaker when alive. Nevertheless, and even though the task of making one's toilette is rendered difficult by the absence of the body, the speaker still feels the other's gaze. The "Decalogues," here marking the distance between the living and the dead, as a set of rules also mirror social conventions like gendered behavior that everybody has to abide by. The relationship to the "Decalogues" changes after death, but not their influence: The living have to follow its rules, and the dead will be judged according to their obedience to these rules. Like the Ten Commandments that still continue to be significant after death, the need to please and prepare the body for a viewing or judgment by a third party remains. However, the poem differentiates between familiar tasks as "Braid[ing] the Hair" and the need of a new kind of "Toilette" that is not based on physical appearance anymore. The "Toilette" is then merely a metaphor for fashioning the self in response to the need to please that remains after death. The speaker is always subjected to someone's gaze, be it her lover's during life and after death, or God's. Whether her physical appearance or her moral integrity is judged, she has to fashion herself, play a role and pose. Playing that role, expressed in gendered terms in this poem, is part of the speaker's identity and is not abandoned after death.

"I felt my life with both my hands" (F357) also presents a female speaker who, presumably after death, examines her "life," "soul," and body, wondering if they still belong to her:

F357

I felt my life with both my hands
To see if it was there –
I held my spirit to the Glass,
To prove it possibler –

I turned my Being round and round
And paused at every pound
To ask the Owner's name –
For doubt, that I should know the sound –

I judged my features – jarred my hair –
I pushed my dimples by, and waited –
If they – twinkled back –
Conviction might, of me –

I told myself, “Take Courage, Friend –
That – was a former time –
But we might learn to like the Heaven,
As well as our Old Home”!

The final stanza states that the speaker now resides in “Heaven,” her new home. The speaker is curiously detached from her body, examining it as an object, provoking a feeling that the speaker is not part of this body, but somehow from the outside rearranges her hair and smoothens the wrinkles in her face. This feeling is reinforced by the opening line which states that the speaker “felt [her] life with both [her] hands,” holding it up, turning it around, and weighing it pound by pound. While she searches for a trace of her name, her ownership of herself to be found on the objectified body, “soul,” and “life,” the question arises whether identity can be detached from the physical body, and whether “soul” and “life” can be examined as fractures and independent from the self and the body. The final stanza advocates that an existence without a body, “our Old Home,” can be appreciated after a gradual acceptance by the speaker over time. Thinking existence as bodiless, if it is not deemed impossible altogether, requires a degree of abstraction that is extremely hard to acquire, and “I felt my life with both my hands” (F357) does not provide a glimpse of it. Even though the speaker seems strangely detached from her corporeality, a physical form must nevertheless still be there, as the voice of the poem comes from within the body (of the text) or a (reader’s) consciousness.

Raymond observes that Dickinson marks the grave as a feminine space by describing it in terms of domestic space, which is certainly associated with femininity (115). Dickinson’s use of the house as a metaphor for the grave also occurs in many poems that portray speakers experiencing “death-in- life, an existence apparently without the power to seize happiness,” as Wheeler puts it (29). Therefore, “Dickinson’s houses are often interchangeable with graves” (Wheeler 35). Reversely, the voices speaking from within the grave retain their ability to communicate, perceive sound, experience love, and even have sex. “The grave my little cottage is,” (F1784), a poetic voice claims, preparing tea and keeping her “parlor” orderly while waiting to be reunited with an absent beloved in “everlasting life.” The naïve voice and the quotation marks embracing the girl speaker’s “’keeping house’” suggest that housekeeping is merely a game, possibly to pass time, and that the grave provides the scene for a setup reminding of life. The dead speaker continues “’keeping house’” as in life, blurring the difference between life and death and highlighting the speaker’s inability to break up habitual behavioral patterns, either because she lacks the imagination to fashion her existence differently, expecting the reunion with the beloved to be dependent on the scaffolding that structures the relationship and lays out the roles between them, or because even after death, gender expectations and gender identity persist. Raymond does not believe that Dickinson

used the childlike voice as a means to criticize women's diminutive status in nineteenth-century culture, but instead argues that it serves her as a means to erase individuality and the self as the child speakers from beyond the grave lack both body and name (108). I do not abide by this, as "The grave my little cottage is," provides a girl speaker who is stuck in gender specific play even after death, not being able to think outside of the pattern of pre-structured behavior, being caught in paralysis. Child play is often an imitation of adult behavior, and can provide a defamiliarized perception and insight into gender expectations to the adult observer. Furthermore, the naivety of the speaker in "The grave my little cottage is," can be a critique on women's restriction to the home, constraining their possibilities for action and ability to use their mental capacities severely, resulting in a degradation of their perceived intelligence. I agree with Mossberg that the persona of the "little girl" can serve as "a metaphor of her experience as a woman poet in her culture, reflecting and resolving her 'small size' – the lack of society's esteem for and encouragement of her mental abilities" in Dickinson's poetry (47). Employing the little girl persona allows Dickinson, Mossberg argues, to address stereotypes her society forced women into (47).

In "Sweet – safe – Houses –" (684) graves attired by rich "Marble," Plush," and "Satin," housing "stately Treasures" build a neighborhood or village of the upper classes, "Locking Barefeet out –," providing no entrance for the underprivileged. In contrast to the poems providing identity addressed earlier, social status still exists after death in this poem. However, I believe that Dickinson refers not to the occupants of the graves as locking out the poor here, but portrays a cemetery in this poem. The modern graveyards as Mount Auburn cemetery in Boston allowed for the setup of statues, tomb slabs and burial vaults made it resemble a city of the dead. "Sweet – safe – Houses –" critiques the visibility of the social status of the dead and emphasizes the association of the tomb with the house. The tombs are embedded in social life here, where "Coaches" drive by and there is "laughter" and "whisper." In "Have any like Myself" (F723), snow covers the "New Houses on the Hill," making them disappear until " March," and the "Occupants of these Abodes" can rest with only "God" and "Heaven" as their "nearest Neighbor." However, the dead inside Dickinson's graves are not entirely lonely. Indeed, after death a new kind of intimacy becomes possible, physical love can take place beyond moral restrictions, as the body is both present and absent at the same time. Wheeler claims that "Dickinson looks toward eternity as a life of mind unfettered by gender, or love unfettered by culture, or both" (36). As my analysis of "To make One's Toilette - after Death" (F471) and "I felt my life with both my hands" (F357) show, I do not agree with her claim that Dickinson abandons gender in those poems that feature speakers from beyond. The grave is a space that is marked as female, as it is described as a house for the dead, and therefore does not provide a blank space unfettered by culture. However, I do agree with Wheeler that

death provides room for love and even erotic encounters beyond the cultural imperatives of Dickinson's time. After death, the body acquires a different meaning to the living. A corpse is still a cultural object, but provides a canvas for the projection of desire for the remaining lover. Yet in the grave, sexuality may be lived because to the dead, the body does and does not exist at the same time, as my analysis of "To make One's Toilette - after Death" (F471) and "I felt my life with both my hands" (F357) demonstrate.

4.2.4 Possessing the Dead Body: Love and Desire after Death

The transformation of ab living body into a corpse in Dickinson's poetry is caused by death's 'frost' claiming the body, rendering it cold and stiff. Once in the grave, the bodily remains potentially reenter nature's circle of organic rebirth. Dickinson does not depict the decomposition of the physical body, but portrays the body either as (poetic) artefact or being slowly absorbed into nature. "'Twas warm – at first – like Us –" (F614) portrays the metamorphosis of a living body into an object, describing the corpse as a marble statue. Throughout the poem, the body is not named, but remains an undefined "it." A "Chill" slowly converts the warm body into cold, motionless rock:

F614

…
The Forehead copied stone –
The Fingers grew too cold
To ache – and like a Skater's Brook –
The busy eyes – congealed -
…

When lowered into the grave, the body is solid, "Adamant," and heavy rock. The stony forehead, fingers, and frozen eyes remind us more of a statue than of a corpse, concealing all signs of physical decay and corporeality, offering the reader instead an objet d'art in Poe's fashion. The cold stone offers a blank surface that can accommodate an array of possibilities. As a clean and cold artefact removed from physical decay, the corpse in Dickinson's poetry can acquire erotic connotations and become a vessel for sexual fulfilment. Although necrophilic in nature, this imagined sexuality allows Dickinson's poetic subjects to enact a sexual union transgressing the norm without fearing sanctions, as the corpse transformed into an artefact offers not physical but aesthetic pleasure, turning erotic metaphors into images for poetic delight.[30]

The dead body frequently becomes an object of desire in Dickinson's poetry and even acquires erotic meaning. A union that due to social constraints is inconceivable in life becomes possible after death. In her poetry, Dickinson unites dead lovers in the grave or allows for the possession of the body by a left behind lover after death. Probably the most famous poem expressing necrophilic desire is "If I may have it, when it's dead," (F431), where the body

remains a neutral “it,” objectifying it and detaching it from the person it was, but its possession still imagined as the ultimate fulfillment of a union denied in life:

F431

If I may have it, when it’s dead,
I'll be contented – so -
If just as soon as Breath is out
It shall belong to me -

Until they lock it in the Grave,
‘Tis Bliss I cannot weigh -
For tho’ they lock Thee in the Grave,
Myself - can own the key -

Think of it Lover! I and Thee
Permitted - face to face to be -
After a Life - a Death – we’ll say -
For Death was That -
And this - is Thee -

I’ll tell Thee All - how Bald it grew -
How Midnight felt, at first - to me -
How all the Clocks stopped in the World -
And Sunshine pinched me – ‘Twas so cold -

Then how the Grief got sleepy – some -
As if my soul were deaf and dumb -
Just making signs – across - to Thee -
That this way - thou could’st notice me -

I’ll tell you how I tried to keep
A smile, to show you, when this Deep
All Waded - We look back for Play,
At those Old Times - in Calvary.

Forgive me, if the Grave come slow -
For Coveting to look at Thee -
Forgive me, if to stroke thy frost
Outvisions Paradise!

Only after death can the speaker envision a union with the lover. There is no clear reference to the gender of neither the speaker nor addressee, who is only an “it”. Even though a sexual

union might be aimed at here, the speaker does not dare to pronounce it. It is not clear what the “it” in the first stanza refers to: the life of the lover, the body, love? Ernst is sure that “it” is the body of the lover and criticizes Dickinson for reducing the addressee of this poem to an object (160). Henneberg can imagine both a heterosexual or homosexual relationship (11). What is more important, I believe, is that the place for eroticism and final (sexual) union is the grave and the time for this to take place after death. The poem is necrophilic, as there are several references to sexuality, such as the lock and the key in the second stanza, which can be read as references to sexual organs and heterosexual intercourse. Furthermore, the unspecified “it” could, besides signifying the corpse or physical body of the dead lover, refer to sexual pleasure. That physical contact is indeed what is longed for is confirmed in the last stanza, when the speaker utters “to stroke thy frost/ Outvisions Paradise!” Ernst sees the identity of the addressee as an individual person that is reestablished in stanza three, where he or she is directly addressed (160). Here, the speaker asks the still living lover to embrace a union after death as a prospect: “Think of it Lover! I and Thee / Permitted - face to face to be –“. Not only a physical, but also an emotional closeness is imagined, as the speaker envisions communicatively sharing the grief that follows the loss, and likewise suffering a halt of life, an experience described in terms of death as darkness, as a suspension of time, and a feeling of cold: the speaker would tell the lover “How Midnight felt,” “How all the Clocks stopped in the World,” and how “‘Twas so cold.” The speaker thus imagines being dead in life, as the speaker becomes “deaf and dumb” and verbal communication eventually fails, consisting only of signs and entailing the uncertainty whether the dead lover perceives them at all.

The fifth and following stanzas reestablish the separation between the lovers, as the speaker moves back into present time. As a union “Outvisions Paradise” and therefore is not viable, Ernst concludes that it is not the ultimate goal, and she argues that the hiatus between the lovers is necessary for the speaker to “become aware of her own self” by constructing an identity in separation form another (161). While I agree that many of Dickinson’s poems negotiate identity and function as a means to create a distinctive self, I do not see this for the poems on love after death. The desire described here is perverse in its necrophilia, but a union in life is impossible. Nonetheless, the speaker voices the inappropriate sexual desire and does not chose to exclude it from the self. The speaker is highly aware of the deviance of the voiced desire and for the impatience to possess the corpse this voicing implies, asking the lover for forgiveness and breaking simultaneously another taboo by claiming that “to stroke thy “frost” is superior to or a substitute for paradise in heaven. It is intriguing that Dickinson chooses to voice necrophilic desire and discredits Christian visions of salvation by replacing it with an erotic phantasy, but shies away from letting her speaker express erotic desire for a living person. This might be explained by classifying the poem as Gothic, as Peel does, setting it in

a frame which permits stroking a dead body, but also removes it far enough from reality in order not to be considered improper (50). After all, the Gothic setting, I argue, is only a detour to voicing erotic desire to a still living addressee in this poem. The incongruity of such desire and naming the sexual body is heightened by the fact that although the poem clearly is erotically charged, the body remains an ineffable "it."

Henneberg considers the variants Dickinson gives in her manuscript of "If I may have it, when it's dead," (F431). The variants, she declares, have the "power to undercut the meaning of the poem" (12). A parallel reading is needed to see the possible implications, she suggests. In one variant, the "so" in line two is replaced by a "now," suggesting that the prospect of possessing the object of desire is enough to satisfy the speaker. As Henneberg says, "the intensity and nature of intimacy vary" depending on which version of the poem we read (13). In line six, "Bliss" is replaced by "Wealth", shifting the emphasis from the experience of sexual ecstasy to economic value. Henneberg sees a connection between the shifting meanings between variants of poems and Dickinson's reluctance to identify her characters in hetero- or homosexual terms: "The variants constantly shift meaning and turn Dickinson's (poetic) body into a site of ever-changing eroticisms" (Henneberg 13). The last stanza is also crucial as the physical contact changes in intensity and nature between variants: "stroke," which is ambiguous as it can be both gentle and violent, is replaced by "touch," which establishes physical contact, and "greet," which suggests contact only on a social basis. Again, Henneberg pleads for a reading that allows the coexistence of various degrees of eroticism, making their "instability and versatility" visible (13). As Henneberg summarizes, "the moment any element or meaning arrives at the centre, it will be displaced and substituted" (13).[31] I agree that Dickinson's corpse poems allow for mobility in regard to the degree of closeness and the erotic intensity they offer. The sterility and inaccessibility of the corpse removed from its bodily reality, referred to only with a neutral pronoun and described as a cold artefact is repeatedly broken by references to sexual intercourse: the speaker speaks of "Bliss" and the "key" to the grave in the second stanza, and the vision of touching the body, represented at once as relic and corporeal, foreground physical experience. Barker identifies absence as the most important characteristic of the dead body. The corpse's "inventory of absences," he writes, "renders it infinitely susceptible to imaginative inscription" (244). The eroticism of the dead body does not arise in mutuality or reciprocity, but if it does rouse desire, it is essentially its non-responsiveness that generates it (Barker 242). The corpse's quality is thus sculptural, and as an object of art and, as Barker maintains, collective memory and cultural pride, never absent from cultural inscription (242). The corpse's passivity and its lack of inhibitions or shame when exposed naked or revealed, he argues, are a central characteristic of nineteenth-century paintings that rejoice in the display of the (usually female) naked dead body, (Barker 243).[32]

The female dead body, untouchable when alive, is subjected to the male gaze without the burden of cultural retention. The lifelessness and quietness of the dead body, Baker elaborates, is perceived as erotic by the voyeuristic viewer because it does not object to its viewing, signifying "the cease of argument, a stop to words" (244). To Baker, the likeness of the dead body's stillness to "post-coital repose" simultaneously unsettles and entices, paradoxically provoking an erotic, prototypically life affirming response in contrast to the corpse's lack of vitality (245).

Erotic desire relocated in the afterlife is initially more pronounced in "Promise This – When You be Dying –" (F762) than in the previous poem, but is attenuated within a religious frame in the last two stanzas:

F762

Promise This – When You be Dying –
Some shall summon Me –
Mine belong Your slightest Sighing –
Mine – to Belt Your Eyes –

Not with Coins – though they be Minted
From An Emperor's Hand –
Be my lips – the only Buckle
Your low Eyes – demand –

Mine to stay – when all be wandered –
To devise once more
If the Life be too surrendered –
Life of Mine – restore –

Poured like this – My Whole Libation –
Just that You should see
Bliss of Death – Life's Bliss extol thro'
Imitating You –

Mine – to guard Your Narrow Precinct –
To seduce the Sun
Longest on Your South, to linger,
Largest Dews of Morn

To demand, in Your low favor –
Lest the Jealous Grass
Greener lean – Or fonder cluster
Round some other face –

Mine to supplicate Madonna –
If Madonna be
Could behold so far a Creature –
Christ – omitted – Me –

Just to follow your dear feature –
Ne'er so far behind –
For My Heaven –
Had I not been
Most enough – denied?

Similarly to "If I may have it, when it's dead," (F431), the speaker of this poem pleads for the possession of the corpse of her lover after death. The right to be present at the deathbed and to close the dead lover's eyes is claimed much more decidedly in "Promise This – When You be Dying –" (F762) however: The repetition of "Mine" in the first stanza pronounces the exclusive status of the speaker in respect to the lover. As in the previous poem, the pair seems to be spatially separated, as the speaker needs to be called for to attend the death of the beloved, and consequently does not live in the same household or in proximity to be automatically aware of the physical condition of the addressee. The desire for physical contact is explicit here, as the speaker wishes to close the lover's eyes with a kiss in the second stanza and demands to be alone with the deceased after death: "Mine to stay – when all be wandered –," the speaker declares, taking full possession of the body. This moment of intimacy is transformative, as the death of the lover is the cause for a reevaluation of the situation by the speaker and concludes with a renewal of life rather than capitulation to the loss in the third stanza. A dislocation of values takes place in the fourth stanza, where instead of loss and misery, death signifies "Bliss," and the lover replaces the divine "Emperor" who the speaker is culturally expected to imitate and whose sacramental "Libation" is supposed to be received.

As "If I may have it, when it's dead," (F431), "Promise This – When You be Dying –" (F762) is blasphemous, but again to a more considerable degree than the first poem. "Christ – omitted – Me –," the speaker claims, and rhetorically asks whether the impossibility to be with the lover in life had not been a deprivation of a rightful access to "Heaven." Consequently, the speaker justifies the worship of a "Creature" "so far" away as if she were "Madonna" as revenge. The blasphemy takes place doubly here, I argue, as the speaker not only replaces Christ with the lover, but takes on an omnipotent status him- or herself, claiming possession of the lover's corpse by exclaiming "Mine" six times throughout the poem, reclaiming it from nature and therefore physical decomposition in stanza six and redirecting the course of the

sun, a celestial body traditionally under the demand of God and symbolically representing the center of the universe and deity itself. The death of the lover thus is a dislocating event for the speaker, restructuring the hierarchies of power within the universe. The death of the lover reverses life and death, bestowing the surviving speaker with “Life’s Bliss” and reordering spatial segregations: because the lover is dead, the speaker has access to the body. Touch and physical as well as social intimacy are possible now that the speaker is allowed to remain alone with the corpse. The speaker who calls the dead body “Mine” so enthusiastically is empowered to the degree of becoming omnipotent, replacing God simultaneously with himself or herself and by the lover, who now is “Madonna.” The speaker pushes the “Sun” and “Christ” to the margin of the universe in order to give the lover a central position, thus creating an idiosyncratic new “Heaven” better suited to accommodate the speaker’s repressed sexual needs.

Erkkila is convinced that Dickinson constructed her religion centered on female love and the close friendships to her female friends in order to counter heterosexual order and patriarchal society (“Homoeroticism” 169). Dickinson substituted Christian religion with “her own personal religion of female love,” Erkkila argues (“Homoeroticism” 165). Susan Dickinson, the poet’s sister-in-law and intimate friend, acquires divine dimensions within this framework, and becomes the “’Shrine of Sue’” (L458).[33] Erkkila sees this substitution especially pronounced in “Dying! Dying in the night!” (F222) where a disoriented speaker at the brink between life and death calls out for Christ to assist the passing. Instead, “Dollie’s coming,” replacing “Jesus,” her presence granting instant comfort to the speaker.

F222

Dying! Dying in the night!
Wont somebody bring the light
So I can see which way to go
Into the everlasting snow?

And "Jesus"! Where is *Jesus* gone?
They said that Jesus - always came -
Perhaps he does’nt know the House -
This way, Jesus, Let him pass!

Somebody run to the great gate
And see if Dollie’s coming! Wait!
I hear her feet upon the stair!
Death wont hurt - now Dollie’s here!

“Dollie” is Dickinson’s nickname for Susan Dickinson, used in numerous letters to her. “Dying! Dying in the night!” ridicules religious doctrine not only by replacing “Jesus” with the most important person in her life: In Dickinson’s poem, God is absent, and his omnipotence is called into question by suggesting that he himself is lost, not knowing the house. The speaker calls out to “Jesus,” leading him the way, turning hierarchies upside down once again. The presence of “Dollie” finally does not only make the help of “Jesus” obsolete but also disarms death: “Death wont hurt – now Dollie’s here!”

The poem takes on a light, satirical tone that parades with a childlike naivety. As in the previous poems, death is not portrayed as a threat or bringing about isolation, but on the contrary produces closeness between loved ones. Even though it does not answer the question whether Dickinson’s poems with indeterminate erotic content should be read within a homo- or heterosexual framework, I claim that it is interesting to know that when Dickinson died in 1886, it was Susan, and not her sister and closest relative Lavinia, who prepared the body for the funeral (Hart 257). The two women had a very intimate relationship. Nevertheless, it remains speculative whether the question who would be tending for the dead body had been settled between the two women during lifetime, and whether the poem discussed refers to this, but a unprejudiced approach to the subject has to allow for the possibility that where gender is not definitely assigned in the poems, both homo- and heteroerotic readings are feasible.

A further interpretative possibility the poem “Dying! Dying in the night!” offers is to read it not only in the context of the previously discussed poems that view the death of one of the lovers as an opportunity for the surviving partner to become physically intimate, but to connect it to the poems that project a shared life with the lover into the afterlife. Thus, the “great gate” is not the passageway to the Dickinson homestead, but the entry threshold to the afterlife, and the “stair” “Dollie” has to climb is the stairway to heaven. From this perspective, indeed “Death wont hurt” as the speaker is reunited with a companion in eternal life. Biographical readings are always to be considered with caution, even though this poem suggests such a reading by providing “Dollie” as a referent in the poet’s real life. However, unlike the poems discussed above that imagine an erotic encounter with a dead body, “Dying! Dying in the night!” does not immediately encourage such a reading. Nevertheless, I believe that the exhilarated rhythm, the urgency of the second stanza with the word “Jesus” exclaimed four times and the relief and calm granted in the last stanza, at least on an auditory level, admit an orgasmic reading. McClure argues that Dickinson merges sexual and religious experiences: “… for this poet religious ecstasy is merely a sublimated sexuality, spiritualized and magnified by the imagination, and sexual ecstasy the gorgeous perversion of a more profound spiritual longing.” (McClure 10). Such a view certainly explains why in “Dying! Dying in the night!” salvation is orgasmic.

In the same year as “Dying! Dying in the night!” Dickinson also wrote “Wild nights – Wild nights!” (F269), a poem sent to Susan Dickinson with overt sexual content. Although the speaker and the lover in this poem are still alive, it helps to illustrate how Dickinson portrays erotic encounters in her poetry. The poem uses nautical imagery like the ship in a port, an anchor lowered into the water and rowing paddles piercing the sea’s surface, all metaphors using a phallic shaped object that penetrates or enters a passive entity, suggesting heterosexual intercourse. The tone is ecstatic, every stanza ending in an exclamation, culminating in the provocatively explicit “Might I but moor – tonight –/ In thee!”

F269

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

Futile – the winds –
To a Heart in port –
Done with the Compass –
Done with the Chart!

Rowing in Eden –
Ah – the sea!
Might I but moor – tonight –
In thee!

Pagnattaro argues that this poem is ungendered (33-34). As the metaphors used consist of classical heterosexual erotic imagery, I cannot agree. The argument that Dickinson might have portrayed homosexual desire via heterosexual imagery because in a society that was reluctant to address sexuality explicitly, the available imagery to express erotic desire was limited, could be voiced. However, it does not explain why Dickinson, wanting to communicate such a desire, would have done so in such a strikingly conventional fashion. Certainly, her poetic abilities would have allowed her to do so in alternative ways had she wanted to express homosexual desire. Yet, the poem makes it clear that the imagined relationship, albeit it seems to fit a heterosexual frame, is untamed and nonconformist. The second stanza proclaiming the speaker to be “Done with the Compass –/ Done with the Chart!” has a distinctly rebellious tone, suggesting that this passionate relationship has to be understood as different from the conventional patterns of heterosexual relationships, and is not in need of guidance or instruments of orientation that would lead it onto the ‘right’ path. Although “Wild nights – Wild nights!” (F269) images a heterosexual encounter only hypothetically by using the conditional

subjunctive form, it differs from other poems by displaying a wildness that stands in stark contrast to the regulatory and controlling attributes of compass and chart. The statement that the winds are “Futile” and not able to change the course of direction of a “Heart in port –” further stresses the devotion of the speaker to this potentially transgressive relationship, and exhibits an unwillingness to conform and surrender to acceptability.

Equally explicit in its metaphorical language is “I had not minded — Walls –” (F554), featuring a speaker who states that if in the grave, he or she would “tunnel” to be reunited with the lover, but is kept back by subtle but invincible obstacles likely to be of normative character.

F554

I had not minded – Walls –
Were Universe – one Rock –
And far I heard his silver Call
The other side the Block –

I'd tunnel – till my Groove
Pushed sudden thro’ to his –
Then my face take her Recompense –
The looking in his Eyes –

But ‘tis a single Hair –
A filament – a law –
A Cobweb – wove in Adamant –
A Battlement – of Straw –

A limit like the Vail
Unto the Lady’s face –
But every Mesh – a Citadel –
And Dragons – in the Crease –

Similar to “I died for Beauty – but was scarce” (F448), where graves are portrayed as “adjoining Room[s]” and the dead “talked between the Rooms,” a speaker imagines how, after her death, she would “tunnel” until she “pushed sudden thro’ to his” chamber. The speaker is clearly gendered female in this poem, and her lover is unambiguously male: He initiates the speaker’ s endeavor to get through to him by sending out “his silver Call,” and a female’s face will take “Recompense” at the sight of the lover when they finally meet. The poem is unconventional as it reverses gender norms, as the female speaker actively “tunnel[s],” and the distant male caller awaits his recovery passively. This circumstance and the erotic nature of the imagined encounter are emphasized by the vocabulary: her “Grove,” an allusion to female genitalia, forces its way through “Rock” and solid “Walls,” strong and “Adamant,” to finally find

“Recompense.” The trope of mining, with its tunnels and caverns, thus becomes a metaphor for defloration and sexual intercourse. A sexual encounter, according to this metaphor, is a movement in all three dimensions through space and matter. The grave provides such a three-dimensional space surrounded by matter.[34]

That we can read this poem as at least romantic, if not explicitly erotic, is suggested by the topos of lovers separated by a wall, just as Pyramus and Thisbe in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Ovid tells the story of lovers living in adjoining houses, communicating through a crack, but being unable to marry because of a conflict between their parents. The “Vail” (sic) in the last stanza also refers to Pyramus and Thisbe in *Metamorphoses*, as Pyramus stabs himself after finding Thisbe’s veil at their secret meeting place, believing that a lion had killed her. When Thisbe finds Pyramus dead, she also commits suicide. Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* also draws from Pyramus and Thisbe, letting the protagonists who are refused a life together kill themselves in order to be united only in death. Dickinson’s poem lists a whole array of hindrances that keep the lovers apart, wavering between extremes of their solidness, stating them to be either unbreakable and indestructible as a “Citadel,” or insignificant, as a “single Hair,” or fragile as a “Cobweb.” Cameron calls the contrast between the density and magnitude of these obstacles perfect examples of Dickinson’s “disequilibrium of excess,” which highlights the relationality of meaning, how the meaning of words begins to shift because of their juxtaposition to other words (“Fascicles” 156).[35] The poem declares both kinds, the “Adamant ” just as the “filament” preventions, inadequate reasons for keeping the lovers apart: even if her world, her “Universe,” consisted of “Rock,” the female speaker would find a way to be with her lover. The conditional subjunctive of the opening line leaves it unclear, however, if the speaker declares the first stanza to be counterfactual, saying that there is no reason in real life, not even a “law,” that can hinder a union of the lovers, or if the union is postponed to after death, as the literary allusions to Pyramus and Thisbe suggest, when indeed the corpse will be confined by solid matter. If we read the poem in context with its literary predecessors, there are undeniably social norms and rules, or even laws, represented by Pyramus’ and Thisbe’s and Romeo’s and Juliet’s parents, that can make the love and (sexual) union between lovers impossible.

In both romantic love stories however, Pyramus and Thisbe as well as Romeo and Juliet do not actively postpone their life together until after death, but they kill themselves because of a misunderstanding, an erroneous reading of the signs: they believe their lover to be dead, and therefore kill themselves. If miscommunication is considered, a single “Straw” can be misinterpreted or transformed into indestructible “Battlement.” In agreement with Ovid, interpretation then can be a kind of metamorphoses, turning a “Cobweb” into a “Citadel.” Likewise, a lady’s “Vail,” commonly associated with a wedding dress, can be misinterpreted as

a cloth covering a corpse's face. Or, if we return to our initial erotic reading, the "Vail" can signify a woman's virginity or chasteness, preventing or hindering sexual intercourse as a barrier, which is advocated to be "Pushed sudden thro'" by the poem, suggesting defloration.

The last stanza adds further intertextual complexity to the poem by introducing "Dragons – in the Crease." The intertextuality and references are threefold here in this poem: First of all, the dragons call forth the figure of the dragon slayer, found in religious legends and in medieval hero narratives.[36] Furthermore, I argue, the impending danger in connection with the morbid and claustrophobic air of the poem connect it to the Gothic tradition. The "Dragons" represent the ultimate obstacle for the speaker to overcome, and the "But" in the final two stanzas indicates that the brave endeavor of the female speaker to unearth her lover eventually fails. The reason for this, I believe, has to be explained by the intertextuality of "I had not minded — Walls –" (F554). The scripts available for love stories between lovers kept apart end with death, as the fates of Pyramus and Thisbe and Romeo and Julia prove. Their union has to be postponed until after death. In the grave, however, or the "Crease," echoing the "Groove" of stanza two and alluding to female sexuality, "Dragons" roam, proclaiming a sense of danger and preventing the final union. The brave female speaker, being of the wrong gender for such an endeavor, does not dare to slay dragons, however. If she does, we do not know about the outcome, as the poem terminates with the "Dragons – in the Crease –," not illuminating the consequences of this discovery. In either case, Dickinson lacked narrative models to create a female dragon slayer.

In history and different genres, dragon slayers follow different objectives. In medieval legends, the dragon slayer typically frees a noble lady or princess from the dragon's clutches and then marries her. Sexual union and marriage are the rewards for the brave hero. The reversed gender ascriptions in "I had not minded — Walls –" (F554) complicate this, however. Even though the female speaker takes on an active role and challenges gender expectations, she fails because of the lack of a story script for her situation. The topic of unfulfilled love may have its predecessors throughout history, from antiquity through Christian mythology and medieval literary tradition to relatively recent Shakespearian drama, but the speaker cannot commit herself to that tradition that would require her to wait patiently for her rescue by the male lover. This seems inadequate, as the portrayed relationship does not seem to embrace traditional gender roles. The speaker is always stuck in paralysis, whether a conventional or wayward course of action is taken: as the active heroine trying to break through to her lover she is preconditioned to fail due to cultural scripts that do not provide for this story line. If she confers to gender norms and waits for her lover to counter the obstacles preventing their union, she may never be granted a fulfilled love relationship. Whether in life or death, their relationship

is not possible, not even imaginable, but has to remain hovering between this world and the beyond, only offering hypothetical prospects.

In her love and death poems, Ernst declares, Dickinson portrays a self that is restricted by society, a "self chained to its surroundings" that longs after the grave as the place where a love relationship can finally be lived (155). The poems discussed above all express this yearning. "The central aspect of these poems," Ernst concludes, "is the fact that the speaker cannot verbalize a successful relationship with her lover, neither in the worldly realm nor in the one beyond; death and the liberation it implies cannot alter the basic features that dominate the speaker's understanding of a relationship" (162). As an example, she provides a detailed analysis of "I cannot live with You –" (F706), which argues that the reason for this impossibility is that being together "would be Life –/ And Life is over there –/ Behind the Shelf." A life together, as well as in the fourth stanza death and in the sixth ascension to heaven, are declared impossible in this poem. The suggestion to "meet apart" the speaker makes in the last stanza is paradoxical and only provides "Despair." Even though "I cannot live with You –" (F706) and numerous other love and death poems do not offer options that could be realized in life for lovers kept apart by society's norms, I disagree with Ernst that Dickinson "cannot verbalize a successful relationship with her lover" (162).

I believe that Dickinson does create a space for love in her poetry, and death is certainly such a place. Regarding the second part of Ernst's argument, I claim that it is not the speaker 's understanding of a relationship that makes union impossible, but the available concepts of what a love story is and her awareness of the social that is omnipresent in human experience. Even the spaces provided by her culture that presumably lie beyond social and cultural lived reality, such as abstract spaces as heaven, are culturally and thus socially determined. Death, however, offers Dickinson a space that she can temporarily claim for her lovers, as the numerous poems promising union after death and even picturing sexual encounters after death or between a living lover and a corpse demonstrate. Thereby, Dickinson reverses categories: Her poems of death transform the afterlife into life, comparing the moment of death to birth, and parting into its opposite, a union with the lover. In "'Twas a long Parting – but the time" (F691), after death "These Fleshless Lovers met –" in heaven, being "born infinite – now –," and the journey from life death described as "Bridal," turning the moment of death into a rite of passage. The fact that many of Dickinson's poems stage an encounter between lovers after death only hypothetically and clearly mark the union with the beloved as an event taking place in a future that is still unreachable does not imply that she cannot think of sexual encounters or voice them, as Ernst claims. On the contrary, many poems about death are very erotic and use various imagery that suggests sexual encounters. Even if these encounters are declared to be hypothetical, Dickinson nevertheless stages them vividly in her love-in-the-grave poems,

which offer her a space where to locate and verbalize transgressive and unconventional desire. Dickinson heavily relies on available patterns and conventions such as mourning culture and consolatory literature that was popular at the time. However, these literary traditions only provide a frame from within which Dickinson lets her speakers voice romantic, amorous, erotic and sexual desire. Her subjects are often bold, claiming possession of a lover, or taking on heroic stances, outlining a model for female behavior that is not commonly provided by her cultural context.

To summarize, Dickinson's poetry portrays the grave is a transformative space which allows an alternative existence that distinguishes between gender and the sexed body. In her poems that feature death, Dickinson explores the enabling potential for claiming an affirmative identity and imagine unconventional erotic and amorous relationships. The moment of dying and the state of death paradoxically are moments of power to Dickinson's speakers. After death, a woman can stand "Erect" (F353). Before, she had to shun public attention for ideals of modesty and reserve. The independence of gender from sex becomes evident since gender is not just abandoned after the material body is discarded. Dickinson's subjects do not become ungendered after death because gender is understood as a category that is primarily part of identity, not the body. Only after death can a woman obtain her own (last) name, as it is now set in stone and cannot be altered by marriage any more, but it is finally a stable identity that declares loudly and in public 'I am.' Similarly, the relocation of sexual desire into the grave is an enabling act in Dickinson's poetry. This allows her to approach the topic without fearing the stigma of vulgarity; the erotic is experienced, but the bodies do not touch. The grave becomes a space of paradoxes, of possibility, of freedom, of privacy/loneliness, and of union/love.

5. Conclusion

Looking at three different spaces that are simultaneously concrete and invested with cultural meanings and associations of gender, this dissertation investigates Dickinson's use of spatial conceptualizations and relates them to the gendered figures she creates. Throughout my analysis, the historical context of the specific settings Dickinson chooses for her poems has been taken into account, demonstrating how the sociocultural background underlying each poem signifies, which aspects of this context are highlighted by Dickinson, and how its paradigms are transgressed or reshaped in her poems. The visualization of abstract concepts and issues of gender in spatial terms constitutes a cognitive strategy that allows the poet to expand the range of associations conventionally available for a given subject matter and to reattribute it with new meaning. At the center of my interest is whether Dickinson achieves to redefine the spatial confines that accommodate her gendered subjects and whether the new territories mapped out challenge fixed boundaries in favor of more flexible and shifting models for locating gendered identities.

In a move from nature to the house and home and finally to death and the grave, my analysis first covers the ground from a space defined as wilderness and imagined as if outside of culture and society, then continues to the center of cultural ideals and the core of society defined as the home and the nuclear family, and finally ends its exploration in the afterlife that supposedly frees from all cultural and social concerns. Despite nature and death's conceptualization as outside and beyond culture, I show how their definition as abject spaces logically relies on cultural concepts and demonstrate their inscription with gendered as well as historical meaning. Furthermore, I portray the considerable conceptual changes all three spaces underwent during Dickinson's lifetime. This allows me to reveal the constructed character of all three fields of investigation and to pinpoint how the interests and concerns of a given society shape the concrete and abstract spaces within which it moves. But not only do people shape spaces according to their ideals, but spaces in turn influence the radius of an individual's autonomy, possibilities for action, and the social relationships structured by gender, social status, and hierarchies to which these individuals are subjected. I analyze how Dickinson uses each space in her poetry and how these spaces influence the way she portrays her gendered characters that reside within them. Furthermore, I pay special attention to the cultural demands these spaces transmit, whether Dickinson shows an awareness of these demands and how she highlights or criticizes them in her poetry. Finally, I demonstrate how the poet reinterprets the relationship between these spaces and gender and determine whether she successfully creates alternative, nonconforming, or even subversive gendered identities.

Counter to intuitive assumptions that space is simply out there and neutral, cognitive, and linguistic approaches show that we are preconditioned by our field of vision to divide space into artificial units and to group things into categories. The world we perceive is thus always already a product of systematic organization in the brain, and our mind is prone to draw correlations between similar phenomena. A way to highlight similarities is to use figures of speech that understand one concept in terms of another, like metaphor or simile. Using such conceptual constructions facilitates cognitive processes (Lakoff & Turner 133). Due to the restriction of our field of vision and the consequential mental abstraction of space into territories, spatial entities have to be understood as hybrid concepts residing in-between the abstract and the concrete domain, and as such they cannot be touched but only experienced or perceived. The concept of "landscape" captures this twofold pull, emphasizing the constructed nature of our perception of space and highlighting the social, cultural and historical aspects that prompt us to see landscapes in a certain way (Rose "Geography 344). The representation of landscapes in, for example, paintings or nature poetry and the attributes that are assigned to landscapes change over time, demonstrating that the way we think of space and how we communicate using spatial metaphors transmits cultural values and social categories such as hierarchical distributions of power, social class, ethnic belonging, or gender. For the analysis of Dickinson's poetry with a focus on spaces and gender representations, it is crucial to be aware that space is on one hand a product of social and cultural construction and is on the other hand shaped and appropriated by individuals, who in turn are bestowed an identity as members of a given society as they move within these spaces. Accordingly, social segregations are, among other things, maintained by different access to space. The division between the private and the public and the organization of houses allocating certain rooms, like the kitchen, to women and others, like the nineteenth-century parlor and the library, to men exemplifies such a division of space along gender lines. Segregations of space and the hierarchies between the genders are to be understood as inequalities in power which can be thwarted if their enabling foundations are deconstructed (Foucault *History* 96). Changing the spatial parameters where gender, social class, and other inequalities are made manifest may thus destabilize social segregations and cultural norms and make change possible. By appropriating new spaces and redefining the radius of existing space in her poetry, Dickinson can thus set free possibilities for gendered identities opposing or stretching the norm.

Just as with space which is always culturally mediated, we cannot talk about the physical body without investing it with notions of gender (Butler *Bodies* 8). Likewise, gender is not a manifest entity, but generated and negotiated in discourse and performatively produced by individuals who behave according to conventions of how female or male characters are

supposed to act in order to be recognizable as such. Because gender is created performatively and because conventions are fashioned by discourse, there exists an array of potentially divergent discourses on any given subject, and gender needs to be viewed as fluid, shifting, and theoretically open to change. This prompts the supposition that maleness and femaleness are not primarily to be regarded as dichotomies but that the possibility of different enactments of gender form a continuum of what constitutes a male or female character. The repetition of slightly different gender performances, which are characterized as a "reiterative and citational practice" by Butler, thus create the possibility of change (*Bodies* 2). The distinction between properties and performances deemed properly male or female and that which is not recognizable as such but declared as improper or inacceptable creates a space off, an abject space, where these deviant genders are located. However, the definition of what is excluded from the socially acceptable and intelligible depends on the dominant discourse and is therefore logically a part of it. Consequently, it is impossible to create an identity that is truly independent from the dominant discourse of gender, but the appropriation of a variation of maleness or femaleness moving along the margin of what is generally deemed acceptable by the majority of society, occupying a "position of resistance and agency" is thinkable (De Lauretis "Eccentric" 139). From this paradoxical position that is neither integrated nor completely excluded from discourse, the boundaries between abject and accepted gendered identities can be redrawn. The means to achieve this, according to De Lauretis, is by developing a creative and unconventional "practice of language" that challenges the status quo and transforms it subversively ("Eccentric" 139). Applied to Dickinson's use of spatial conceptualizations of mapping gender identities, this means that the poet has to create paradoxical spaces beyond the two-dimensional limits according to Rose's proposition that allow for the accommodation of female subjects that are located simultaneously in the center and the margin of discourse, allowing for difference (*Feminism* 151-3).

The spaces of nature, the house, and the grave that I analyze in Dickinson's poetry all locate female characters moving within their bounds differently, and it is difficult to pin down their exact position with respect to center and margin of a given discourse. Dickinson's poems are often very dynamic, changing perspective throughout the poem, forcing the reader to reevaluate assumptions made at the outset. The poems are built in layers of meaning, and the speakers of the poems are often multiply located in regard to dominant discourses, which means that they occupy several spaces simultaneously or continuously jump back and forth across boundaries.

The first of the three spaces I examine, nature, is the only site characterized by openness rather than enclosure. Nature, understood as the opposite of culture, provides Dickinson with a rich territory to reveal the constricting character of gender constructs and to

reshape them: using nature as a setting for her poems, the poet creates a sovereign female figure, expresses erotic desire, envisions an alternative to patriarchal religion centered around a male God, and deliberately goes against the grain, exploring new grounds, and venturing beyond the known. However, Dickinson's poems featuring nature reveal that she is aware of the fact that despite wilderness' function of contrast to civilization, nineteenth-century Victorian society's concepts of nature are projections highly influenced by culture. They constitute manifestations of the need to demonstrate the superiority of culture by contrasting it with an untamed chaotic otherness. The awareness of this fact has the consequence that nature cannot truly serve as a space beyond culture and that we cannot imagine such a space but always have to rely on cultural images even to make the opposite of culture thinkable.

"Nature is what We see –" (F721) expresses the insight that a nature outside of culture is unfeasible, and that language as an instrument and manifestation of cultural concepts cannot adequately describe a space beyond, but must rely on personifications and abstractions that cannot do justice to the complexity of processes of nature. We can perceive and experience phenomena of nature, but we cannot define nature using language if we want to avoid the trap of falling back to predominant discourses about nature: "'Nature' is what We know –/ But have no Art to say –" (F721). The use of dominant discourses in a subversive way, however, holds the power to deconstruct the underlying principles governing dualisms such as the nature – culture dichotomy. Dickinson strategically utilizes conventional personifications to challenge the hierarchy between the genders and to propose a model for positive female identification and powerful female identities that act and legitimize themselves independently from male consent. Dickinson's Mother Nature incorporates positive stereotypes of maternal nurture, love, and care, but instead of subordinating herself to God, she acts as a sovereign figure equal to God or beyond his reach and thereby challenges the omnipotence of the patriarchal God figure. Dickinson achieves this by personifying nature and creating a female pendant to a monotheistic male figure. However, the poet rejects such an abstracted and unified concept of nature, recasting it as primarily characterized by its parts, proposing a pluralized sovereignty: nature is made of landscapes such as "The Hill," times of the day and slants of light during an "Afternoon," of animals as the "Squirrel," the "Eclipse," a "Bumble bee," and of the sounds of the "Bobolink," "the Sea," "Thunder," and "the Criquet" ("Nature is what We see –" (F721)). Dickinson creates opposing models of nature, once bestowing it with its own voice and "News" (F519) the poet speaker of the poem claims to transmit, and at other times declaring it to lack order and communicative abilities, as in "Four Trees – opon a solitary Acre" (F778), where the visual experience of a 'landscape' in Rose's terms is emphasized ("Geography" 344). Hence, our perception of nature is determined by cultural paradigms, and therefore it lacks the capability to function as a medium for a transcendental God. Consequently,

'landscape' cannot communicate from the outside, but only functions as a reference to culture. However, Dickinson deems nature to provide a useful platform for the reinstatement of feminized spiritual worship: her speakers relocate faith from the church to nature and engage in reciprocal, two-directional prayer that reinvents the relationship between the believer and the divine, declaring traditional religious hierarchies obsolete in poems such as "Sweet Mountains – Ye tell me no lie" (F745). By reorganizing the relationship between divinity and believer as mutual, Dickinson dismantles the spatial organization of traditional patriarchal Christianity: Her feminized spiritual nature makes the vertical division between heaven and earth and God and worshiper obsolete and collapses the two opposing realms on a horizontal plane that allows for dynamic relationships that include the change of perspective and direction. Dickinson criticizes the patriarchal Christian God for being repressive and punishing instead of taking care of his creations as Mother Nature would. A caring God figure cannot reside in a remote space beyond the everyday struggles life provides, but has to descend to his or her protégés and face their struggles from their perspective. A feminized God figure characterized by her caring and closeness to her human counterparts instead of distance conditions the relationships possible between believer and worshiped and resides in a space lacking hierarchies or rigid power patterns.

Dickinson counters the sexualization of nature manifest in the figure of the Virgin Land by exposing the voyeuristic gaze and upsetting expectations transmitted by cultural images of nature as an eroticized savage eagerly awaiting fertilization by (male) civilization. The vocalization of erotic or sexual issues is taboo in Dickinson's time, but in connection with the perception of nature as female, especially flower metaphors offer a conventional way to linguistically express erotic desire. Dickinson employs and subverts erotic flower discourse by diverging from the traditional heterosexual model of sexuality, complicating ascriptions of genders, and suggesting an alternative sexuality allowing for flexibly gendered participants and including homoerotic desire. While creating highly provocative metaphors for sexual organs and intercourse such as the "Cactus …" that "Splits her Beard" (F367) or providing semantic contexts that can be read as invitations to cunnilingus, Dickinson simultaneously reverts to models of female morality and chastity when her speaker wishes for more reserve and inconspicuous behavior and flags her stark vocalizations of female desire as mere phantasy or redirects erotic desire to textual poetic pleasure as in "All the Letters I can write" (F380). However, the provocation contained in this poem does not wane by the multiple layers of possible interpretations and the final retreat to textual pleasure, as an intimate relationship with the reader is created. The complicated overlapping interpretations that locate desire in either an abstract, purely textual realm of botanical metaphors, are starkly physical and homoerotic, or reconnect the two, eroticizing the relationship between reader and text, or even reader and

poet make the definite ascription to either conventional or transgressive space difficult. Such poems evade a clear characterization within these criteria, and the speaker who is able to lend the poem a range of different tones bears an air of elusiveness as well as supremacy, while it hovers above the dividing line between the unacceptable and common practice. The ability to evade classification and to float between the extremes of sexual explicitness and cultural complicity empowers Dickinson's speakers, granting them a voice that can potentially express anything without being reprimanded.

Dickinson not only voice sexual and erotic content via flower metaphors, but also uses spatial settings in nature to accommodate erotic encounters. Sexuality and desire then become a space that is temporarily entered. These places provide a paradoxical space that is flexible in its boundaries, fluid but still akin to domestic space when Dickinson "visit[s] the Sea –" which has a "Basement" and an "Upper Floor" (F656). The entanglement of nature with the domestic suggests that the speaker never really leaves the space influenced by culture, and accordingly Dickinson integrates conventional narratives of activity and passivity, the danger of sexual violation and male dominance into the poem's narrative, but also inserts the possibility of a reverse reading portraying a woman in active pursuit of sexual pleasure. The woman moving within the natural landscape of the beach is thus a fragile object of male desire in the conventional reading, and an empowered identity that stands erect, takes charge of the space surrounding her, and decides over her own body in the more provocative reading.

The vulnerability and the danger of rape are highlighted in Dickinson's swampland poems, which are located similarly in a space characterized as fluid. Referring to the biblical narrative of the Fall of mankind, Dickinson demonstrates how the association of women with nature and issues of access and exclusion are intertwined. She criticizes discourses that use women's sexual vulnerability as a legitimation for their restriction to the domestic sphere, and in poems that liken women to immobile, passive plants that are subjected to aggressive male desire, she highlights how, since ancient Greek times, cultural narratives have supported women's confinement and male appropriations of female bodies.

As a space off, imagined as beyond culture and free from social restrictions, nature also offers a space of possibility in Dickinson's poetry. This is especially pronounced when her speakers fantasize about trespassing to nature and in poems that are set at the boundaries between civilization and culture or hover above that border. When Dickinson's characters cross over into nature, they leave rigid patriarchal structures behind, which allows them to temporarily switch gender or to abandon gender associations when becoming a "Boy" (F271, F456, and F1096). Forbidden borders, limits, and boundaries dividing wilderness or nature from civilization or culture fascinate the speakers in Dickinson's poems and grant them the freedom to choose either conformity or the transgression of climbing "Over the fence –" to

grasp the forbidden fruit, in Dickinson's case "Strawberries" (F271). Borders and prohibitions are thus enabling in Dickinson's poetry, and they make the reader aware of double standards dependent on gender and reveal gender to be something that is not essential, but functions like a layer of clothing that can be abandoned or changed. Clothes, then, as gender markers, are out of place in "A Burdock twitched my Gown" (F289), and to get access to that place the speaker has to let them go as cultural artifacts that do not belong to nature. Gender, Dickinson 's poem reveals, is a purely cultural category that is bound to a certain space and is neither natural nor universally applicable.

The fact that we transfer cultural meaning to phenomena in nature becomes a tool for Dickinson to rearrange power structures between men and women in her poems featuring the moon and the sea. She uses the metaphor of gravity to structure the relationship between gendered entities exercising power in hierarchal ways, but in the course of her poems redirects power, questioning the rigidness of hierarchical systems. Dickinson deconstructs the association of power and control with male actors, and subordination and passivity with female characters when she portrays a female moon who directs the tidal movements of the sea. When the attributions of gender and control are reassigned to partners in a human relationship counter to conventional expectations, Dickinson de-masks gender as performative role play and dependent on negotiating, anticipating later theories by Butler and Foucault. Instead of a dualistic system, Dickinson's poems which use gravity as a metaphor for power and the relationship between genders allow for more flexible identifications along a continuum.

Dickinson's poems using nature as a backdrop share characteristics of flexibility and fluidity. This mobility results from the awareness of the constructed character of nature as the opposite of culture and Dickinson's exploitation of the fact that we transfer cultural categories to nature. Moving within the conventions of her time, Dickinson starts out many of her poems using the images, personifications, and metaphors that are commonly available to portray nature or express areas of corporeal experience that are deemed unspeakable by her contemporaries, and then subverts them to reveal their true character as constructs. A reality beyond culture, she shows, is not expressible through language and thus remains inaccessible, and nature thus cannot truly offer an alternative space for female identity. However, Dickinson relocates the possibility of choice, freedom, and the temporary escape from gender and its restrictions at the border that divides culture from nature. The boundary, or margin, in De Lauretis terms, thus becomes a space of possibilities, and the trespassing across it empowers the speakers. Frequently, Dickinson's speakers cannot be definitely located, as the poems offer different interpretations varying in their degree of conventionality and provocation. For example, poems using the flower as a metaphor for female sexuality is not transgressive; the suggestions of transgendered or homoerotic desire Dickinson implies,

however, are highly provocative. However, the poems refuse a definite placement, as the overlapping layers of possible interpretations continuously cover up rebellious content with possible traditional readings.

Although the house as a space made by humans and characterized by enclosure is in many ways the opposite of the space of nature, my analysis shows interesting parallels with respect to Dickinson's treatment of spatial and cultural limits: Dickinson's poems that use the house and domestic space as a frame are also engaged with borders and their crossing. Dickinson exploits the segregation of space along gender lines to point out uneven distributions. Rather than representing a disabling limit, walls, closets, and the minimal space behind a shelf, which all divide the space between inside and outside, domestic space and a space off, or which keep lovers apart, in many poems become meeting points or offer room for individuality and serve as a connection or passageway to a potential alternative life. Even though Dickinson critiques the confinement of women in domestic space, her speakers do not protest openly against this restriction, but in her poems are using the house and home as a setting, they adapt to the circumstances in a subversive way. The question of how we have to locate Dickinson's poems in the domestic is therefore difficult to answer: While her speakers are thoroughly embedded within their culture, Dickinson nevertheless voices critique by highlighting unfair conditions, and thus at least implicitly calls for change. The ambiguity at the center of this stretch between conformity and rebellion is characteristic of the house and home poems.

Dickinson deconstructs the categories of inside and outside when she pictures the speaker as a house and recasts exclusion or entrapment within a space as existing only in the speaker's mind. Accordingly, Dickinson's speakers frequently escape from a state of physical confinement or imprisonment by adapting to norms of female modesty and renunciation to an unusually high degree. By overperforming cultural demands, her female characters carve out a scope of action for themselves that would otherwise be inexistent. This strategy becomes manifest in "They shut me up in Prose –" (F445) where a mature female poet/speaker declares the closet where she was locked as a girl, because she could not keep "still," as the precondition for freeing her imagination. Only within confinement, the poem claims, can the limitlessness of the brain be appreciated and exploited. Within each condition, its opposite is included: only imprisonment makes freedom tangible. Confined within the closet, the speaker thus leaves the house without leaving the house, rebels against confinement by embracing it, and goes against the conventions by reinterpreting them. Within the closet, the speaker is situated on the margin and at the center of domestic space and domestic ideology at the same time.

For some of Dickinson's speakers, confinement becomes a second skin, is valued for its familiarity, and yet paradoxically, as a divide between inside and outside, it also functions as a connection to the outside world as in "A Prison gets to be a friend" (F456). On the contrary, Dickinson condemns the eager adaption to demands of modesty and renunciation when they serve to fulfill religious requirements to gain access to heaven. The procrastination of personal fulfillment until after death and religious doctrines demanding a perspective of life as preparation for heaven are highly dissatisfactory. There is no adequate reimbursement for selfless devotion to others and self-sacrifice, and the poet remains skeptical of the existence of a fair redemption in the afterlife. Instead, Dickinson's characters who over-comply to cultural norms are portrayed as paralyzed, lifeless, and immobile. The female speaker in "I tie my Hat – I cease my Shawl –" (F522) never succeeds in leaving the house, but instead remains decorative just as a piece of furniture, despite her awareness of the role she plays as a woman, the necessity of pretense that arises from her inability to fully incorporate the norm, and the potential power she would have if she did not comply, thus upsetting the fragile structure society is built on. Dickinson's speaker stays put, but the stretch between conformity and self-denial this entails makes it increasingly difficult for her and the reader "To hold our Senses – on –" (F522). Even though Dickinson does not let her speaker rebel openly or has her reorganize the social order, poems like "I tie my Hat – I cease my Shawl –" (F522) could have had an effect on contemporary readers that may have prompted political actions or, at least, contributed to their attitude towards woman's rights movements. Her approach to political contents is not, Crumbly explains, to present problems and to offer a solution at the end of the poem, but to "stage dramas of sovereignty and consent" that force the readers to reach their independent conclusions, foregrounding the question of the "political significance of choices made in the domestic sphere" (*Winds* 34). To be able to provoke this cognitive process in her readers, Dickinson draws their attention on the assumptions they make about correct normative female behavior and the spaces where this behavior is expected, revealing how the power things said, done, or implied in those spaces have (*Winds* 34): if noncompliant behavior can upset the social order, disobedience and conformity to norms are political issues. Because Dickinson′s speakers frequently represent conventional and alternative female identities at the same time, readers become suspicious of their trustworthiness and distance themselves from them. This distance, Crumbly explains, is indispensable if the reader is to develop a critical and autonomous perspective (Crumbly *Winds* 34). The interdependency of domestic values and cultural imperatives is highlighted in Dickinson′s poems, revealing to the reader how individual conformity or rebellion can alter the social system of norms, and thus empowers individuals. For women who are thus empowered, the domestic sphere can potentially become a scene that allows for political participation.

Such distrust of the speaker becomes especially pronounced in poems representing extreme compliance and declaring this state advantageous. Because they incorporate demands of modesty and renunciation to an unusual degree, very small characters in Dickinson's poems bear a sense of superiority: The stature of smallness is declared beneficial in many poems, as the existence of their speakers on the margin and their ability to disappear out of sight allow them to create room for privacy otherwise impossible. Furthermore, the exaggeration of ideals of female abstinence from personal needs and the consequential danger of disappearance can be read as a sarcastic strategy to draw attention to the restrictions women suffered from daily. Alternatively, the exaggeration of ideals, as well as the embracement of confinement, can be understood as an attempt to outdo the demands of society in order to escape them. This constitutes a strategy similar to what Irigaray terms "mimesis" (1985: 76): By means of exaggeration, Dickinson's speaker manages "to make 'visible,' by effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible" and points out the logical consequences of a patriarchal discourse that renders women invisible and only grants them little space (Irigaray 76).[37] However, despite Dickinson's speakers' diminutively small size and their eschewal of apparently all personal needs, these speakers cannot disappear nor can they escape the domestic sphere. A careful reading of "I was the slightest in the House –" (F473) reveals that despite opposite claims, the speaker is a deeply embedded member of the family and, despite her smallness highly valued. Paradoxically, the attempt to escape society by reducing all needs to a minimum fails, because nobody can be small enough to become completely invisible, which rather emphasizes the embeddedness within a culture than offers a way out.

While Dickinson readily and in a large amount of her poems consciously portrays characters who exaggerate norms, she portrays women who uncritically strive towards the ideals of True Womanhood unfavourably. In "What Soft – Cherubic Creatures –" (F675) she initially blames the women who, as a consequence of these ideals, have lost their corporeality and have become not only angelic and elusive, but also fragile beings, which emphasizes their own vulnerability. Because they adhere to models of chastity and moral virtue, they help to maintain the taboo on sexuality, which facilitates rape and sexual assaults against women. Instead of showing solidarity with women who suffered sexual violence, the supposedly " Cherubic Creatures" condemn "freckled Human Nature," and Dickinson exposes their hypocrisy, as this attitude lacks sympathy and fairness, which are virtues they should strive for. Of course, the "Soft" ladies' elusiveness is only illusionary, and they, too, are at risk within a society that does not punish sexual assault against women. Dickinson impressively demonstrates the helplessness of victims of rape, but because her culture forbids overt representations of sexual content, these poems are characteristically vague and reenact the

speechlessness inherent in this task by satirically omitting it to be named or by relocating it in the realm of imagination. Because of its immateriality, the mind offers a space for locating the omnipresent danger of sexual assault for women even in the domestic space, but Dickinson subtly refocuses the discussion of the topic on the physical reality by representing the brain as a house. “One need not be a Chamber – to be Haunted –” (F407), she claims, using the house as a metaphor of the body and transforming the ghostly intruder from the outside into danger from within, an illegitimate pregnancy. The poem continuously shifts between perspectives, blurring the difference between inside and outside, house and body, and body and mind, turning the omnipresent danger of rape into paranoia, which is again a mental state. The speaker in her exposed state can only regain control over her own body and her own life in a paradoxical act of self – destruction, which demonstrates full self-empowerment over not only herself but also the intrusive fetus, but simultaneously terminates the existence of that self by committing suicide. Because paranoia makes it impossible to distinguish between mere products of the mind and real danger, and because the danger of rape and especially its unspeakability, which makes it impossible to reprimand, are a result of nineteenth-century cultural values. A woman cannot be alone, even within her own home, and thus the privacy deemed critical for a poet’s work becomes unachievable. Dickinson shows how this condition is caused by women’s double containment and entrapment of women in their presumed vulnerable female bodies and the house that is supposed to provide them with safety.

Marriage is ruled out as a guarantee of relative financial, juridical and physical safety in Dickinson’s poetry, as it requires selfless devotion and the abandonment of an independent identity: Through marriage, a woman is given a name, status, identity as wife, mother, and woman, and placed in the home as her sole realm of action. The lack of attractiveness and the absence of other options for women for alternative life choices are reflected in the fact that in Dickinson’s poems on marriage, her female speakers are transformed from being children directly to being women when they marry, allowing for no mature existence as an unmarried woman. Even though Dickinson does use the title of “Wife” (F194) positively in some poems, the ambivalence toward this position is highly visible and best exemplified by her frequent comparison of marriage as ascension into heaven and death simultaneously. Therefore, a positive relationship between a man and a woman living in a house together without the abandonment of individuality by the woman is thus impossible in Dickinson’s poetry, and lovers can only temporarily occupy non-spaces relatively devoid of culture “Behind the Shelf” or must paradoxically “meet apart –” “With just the Door ajar” (F706). Instead of the door, the dividing wall between two rooms and between the lovers becomes the connection in this poem, which again emphasizes the dividing line between spaces rather than actual spaces. The wall is a supporting structure of the house. As a house transports and mirrors cultural values, the wall

that holds it is part of this culture. The wall thus becomes a metaphor for a culture that only legitimately allows lovers to share a life as a married couple. The lovers, being socialized by that culture, thus are defined by it, and their relationship is determined by it. Consequently, the wall is that which they have in common, that which holds them apart and allows them to initiate a conversation at the same time.

Occasionally, Dickinson's lovers do meet and experience sexual encounters. When they do, women are often portrayed as houses allowing an elusive male character entrance. However, the use of the house as a metaphor of the female body denies the lovers a meeting on equal terms, as it bears connotations of immobility and passivity and pictures the women as readily available characters patiently waiting for a male visit. If equality is to be achieved, the partners in a relationship have to be able to move through space at each other's eye level, as "He was weak, and I was strong – then –" (F221) demonstrates. As a consequence, categories such as gender are abandoned, which according to Dickinson's poems is a precondition for true intimacy. Sadly, the union on equal terms cannot last but remains momentary, as the couple cannot maintain an equal power structure when the demands of society resurface. Although escape from the reach of societal discourses and rules seems to be possible within an intimate space, such a realm is not available permanently.

The relocation of love into the afterlife and the grave provides Dickinson with a means to voice sexual desire and to imagine existence together with a lover. Death has transformative powers in Dickinson's poetry, and the poet satirizes the consequences of the Christian religion that relocates redemption to the afterlife and thus reinterprets dying as being born, death as life, and parting as reunion. As a space of revival and an alternative existence with a lover, death offers Dickinson's speakers possibilities denied in life. Especially for her female speakers, death offers options denied in life. Because Dickinson's contemporaries had developed a veritable death cult and invested considerable energy into deathbed rituals, funeral practices, and commemorative acts, death and dying had developed to a social event that offered dead and dying women an incomparable amount of attention. During the transition from life to death, from one space into the other, Dickinson's female speakers are empowered. The abandonment of the physical body and the attached expectations about gender allow Dickinson's female speakers to resume control. Although Dickinson's dead speakers do not entirely abandon gender, their detachment from sex shows that the poet did not understand gender as an essential category, but, in contrast to her contemporaries, regarded it as an arbitrary construct that resembles modern theories of gender. Despite one woman's concern " To make [her] Toilette –after Death" (F471), which seems rather conventional, in the afterlife women can shape an independent identity and even obtain their own name, a prerequisite to gaining equal rights.

Because Dickinson's culture connects sex and death, Dickinson's reinterpretation of the grave as a space for erotic encounters and sexual experiences seems to agree with dominant discourses about female dead bodies. However, Dickinson uses very visual metaphors for sexual union and transgressively provides vivid descriptions of the body that go beyond existing literary traditions and have to be understood as provocative. However, not only the representation of erotic desire, but also the positions her female speakers take burst the frame of nineteenth-century aesthetic ideals of beautiful female but dead bodies. Dickinson 's speakers can play an active role, becoming heroines rather than mere objects of desire. The reason for Dickinson's relocation of sexual desire, a topic strictly tabooed in nineteenth-century Victorian America, lies in the simultaneous presence and absence of the physical body after death. Dickinson's graves are thus paradoxically empty and occupied by a corpse at the same time, as the speakers lose their corporeality but still remain sensual. Death makes the body sterile, I claim, voiding it of associations of reproduction, but emphasizing intimacy and closeness in union. Sexuality then becomes strangely physical and at the same time detached from physicality, and thus avoids the stigma of vulgarity. Paradoxically, erotic experiences in the grave unite lovers, but their bodies do not touch. Sexuality must be situated somewhere in between corporeality and mental experience. The body and skin of the dead become the limit of experience and at the same time are declared permeable, allowing the mind and physical sensation to escape while sensuality, consciousness, and the ability to see and speak paradoxically remain.

While Dickinson's poems featuring dead speakers dismantle body and mind, they at the same time draw attention to the arbitrary nature of gender, which, contrary to conventional conceptions, is connected to sex. However, the question of whether death offers an alternative space for female identification is complicated to answer, as Dickinson transforms the very idea of death when she relocates romantic relationships into the grave and empowers her female speakers at the moment of death. As with poems set in nature and in the domestic space of the house, borders and transitions from one realm to another are the most productive and interesting sites in Dickinson's poetry. Although the circumference of culture cannot be truly escaped in neither nature nor death, and the speaker in the home remains embedded in the community of the family, alternative courses of action, blurred gender identities, and union with a lover become possible momentarily when the speakers move close to the margins. Therefore, alternative models of behavior thus are made accessible, even if this happens only imaginatively and the realm of action is limited by conventional structures. Characteristically, Dickinson's poems offer multiple layers of interpretation, presenting a wider array of possibilities ranging from conformity to provocation, subversive appropriation, and rebellious transgression. Therefore, locating the speakers of these poems at the center or the margin of

dominant discourses is impossible; only a concept of discourse as dynamic and a model of space that accommodates divergent and paradox realities can capture this complexity. As readers, we need to endure ambivalence, withstand irritation when confronted with over-performing characters assumingly indulging in their suffering, stay alert in the presence of seemingly naive or playful approaches that mask earnest critique, and take silences, gaps, and apparent voids seriously because they hint at unspeakable matters the poems voice in their idiosyncratic way.[37]

Notes

Introduction (pp. 1-34)

[1] Barnstone interprets contemporaries' reports of Dickinson being old fashioned as an indication that they perceived of her life as in temporal stasis (2). At the sight of Dickinson's dead body, Higginson remarks that she looked considerably younger than she really was, noting "not a gray hair or wrinkle," death granting her "a wondrous restoration of youth" (Leyda 2:475).

[2] For an analysis of the gendered power structures in "The Moon is distant from the Sea –" (F387) and "I make His Crescent fill or lack – "(F837), see my chapter on nature.

[3] Refer to my exploration of poems on prisons and escape in the *House and Home* chapter of this study for a more detailed analysis of "They shut me up in Prose –" (F445).

[4] In *Women and Authorship in Revolutionary America*, Vietto calls to our attention that while women authors in all literary genres were scarce at the time, it is a misconception to believe that traditionally the women who did write favored the novel: in fact, before the nineteenth century, only a minor number of woman authors produced novels (Vietto 2). Poetry and nonfiction by woman was published more often than novels during the Revolutionary era (Vietto 120). Furthermore, Vietto states that writing per se did not constitute a transgression for women during this particular era, stretching from the beginning of the war in 1775 to the turn of the century (120). However, the frequency of the publication of work by women during the American Revolution, its availability and reputation during Dickinson's lifetime half a century later, and the cultural paradigms concerning female authorship and publication during the second half of the nineteenth century do not need to correlate.

[5] Westling uses archeological evidence to support her argument that the association of nature with the female is universal throughout human history (Westling 8).

[6] Interestingly, Eberwein points out that Dickinson located eternity at the center of the circle encompassed by circumference, but immortality outside of that circle (*Strategies* 268). Time, Eberwein concludes, thus loses its importance, encompassing both the center and that which lies beyond life (*Strategies* 268). Limitation, Dickinson's strategy to bring eternity and immortality into vicinity, then makes sense (Eberwein *Strategies* 268). God, identified as the diameter, stretches from the center of eternity to the realm beyond death through human existence, piercing the self at endless intersections (Eberwein *Strategies* 272).

[7] Fitter continues to define five forms of interest in space; a managerial, comparative, quotidian, possessive, and rational, approach to space, revealing each to be historically located and economically conditioned (10).

[8] Rose uses the example of landscape painting to illustrate how cultural concepts like gender and ideas of ownership and class are interconnected with the gaze at a landscape. She does this by analyzing the portrait of Mr and Mrs Andrews.

[9] It is important to note that Foucault distinguishes between institutionalized power and the power relations negotiated between people in every interaction. Foucault lists three aspects of power relations:

1. Space: Power relations are bound to a "sphere" within which they take place (Foucault *History* 92).
2. Dynamics: power relations are not stable but require constant reformation, affirmation, and confrontation (Foucault *History* 92).

3. Interdependency: different power relations support, contradict or isolate each other and thus form a "chain or a system" (Foucault *History* 92).
4. Materialization: Power relations take effect in institutionalized forms such as the law, the state and social systems (Foucault *History* 93).

[10] As Foucault puts it, "[t]here is not, on the one side, a discourse of power, and opposite it, another discourse that runs counter to it. Discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations; there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy; they can, on the contrary, circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another, opposing strategy" (*History* 102).

[11] According to Butler, "'the body' is itself a construction … . Bodies cannot be said to have a signifiable existence prior to the mark of their gender" (*Gender* 8). Kilian criticizes Butler for conflating sex with gender. The dichotomy between sex and gender is deconstructed in Butler's theory, as "sex … will be shown to have been gender all along " (Butler *Gender* 8). The new concept Butler proposes, Kilian argues, cannot be thought if we follow the logic of her argument and emphasize the interdependence of relational terms like inside and outside, sex and gender, or nature and culture, as the concept of gender only emerged in demarcation to sex (206). However, even though Kilian might have a point at criticizing Butler for having created a concept of gender that is blurred in its logic, I maintain that it mirrors exactly the essence of deconstruction that aims at reframing dichotomies: just as the inside only exists because there is an outside, and the outside is a product of the inside, sex and gender precondition and contain each other. The new concept of gender Butler proposes hovers on the margin between the demarcation from sex and its annexation, resulting in a theoretical concept that may not only be diffuse, but runs counter to the exclusive (and hegemonial?) logic of logic.

[12] Donna Haraway identifies the „master subject" which is understood as the norm everything else is contrasted with as male, white, middle-class, and heterosexual in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*.

[13] Earlier, Butler deemed resistance only possible from within dominant culture, and thus located its sight slightly differently: "If subversion is possible, it will be a subversion from within the terms of the law, through the possibilities that emerge when the law turns against itself and spawns unexpected permutations of itself" (Butler *Gender* 93). Exaggeration of distinctly female virtues as humility, a strategy Dickinson exploits repeatedly in her poetry, functions according to Butler's suggestion, inverting the law from within.

[14] Pollak approaches the poet combining feminist and biological approaches through a psychoanalytical lens in *Dickinson: The Anxiety of Gender* (1984), and Cody also argues psychoanalytically in *After Great Pain: The Inner Life of Emily Dickinson* (1971) diagnosing a psychological breakdown that motivated her poetry writing. Gelpi's *Tenth Muse: The Psyche of an American Poet* (1975) pushes towards a similar conclusion, identifying a conflict in the poet's gender identity. In 1979, such pathologizing interpretations were given a feminist turn by Gilbert and Gubar's *Madwoman in the Attic*, who explore the contradictions inherent in an identity as female poet, but also portray Dickinson as a victim of patriarchal power and agoraphobic. Adrienne Rich counters the view of Dickinson as psychologically impaired, arguing that she consciously fashioned her life in order to pursue her writing in "Vesuvius at Home" in 1976. Juhasz further explored this thesis in The Undiscovered Continent (1983), arguing that Dickinson preferred a life within the mind instead of getting married and being a mother. Bennett highlights Dickinson's relationship with Susan Dickinson and analysis her erotic poems in *Dickinson: Woman Poet* (1990). The performativity of gender roles and staging becomes the center of attention in Miller (1987), Wolff (1986), and Eberwein (1985), portraying the use of diverging voices and masks as empowerment and potentially subversive strategy. For a more extensive historical overview of feminist and psychoanalytical scholarship on Dickinson, consult Messmer's "Dickinson's Critical Reception," which my summary mostly relies on.

[15] *Poems* was edited jointly by Mabel Loomis Todd and Thomas Wentworth Higginson, who altered the poems substantially to satisfy contemporary publishing standard. The edition was very positively received and was followed by numerous editions and reprints (Wolff *Dickinson* 537).

[16] In an article in his *Atlantic Magazine* in 1891, Higginson reports Dickinson to have advised him: "When I state myself, as the representative of the verse, it does not mean me, but a supposed person" ("Emily Dickinson's Letters " in: *The Atlantic Magazine*, October volume, 1891).

[17] Bayley identifies the "ghost" haunting Dickinson's lyric dramas as literary interferences and references, and exemplifies this with the influence of Shakespeare's Hamlet on the poet ("Ghost" 47).

[18] Reading poetics manifestoes such as the ones by Emerson, Wordsworth, and Withman could not, Nekola insists, allow for identification of female readers (41). For women to consider themselves poets in the light of such manifestoes, a perspective of poetry as "out-of-gender experience" was necessary (Nekola 41): Emerson's " spermatic book[18]" and Whitman's perception of the poet as made of "fatherstuff" using a language that "offers the sweet firmfibered meat that grows men and women" directly link gender and poetry with the use of metaphors of male sexuality and reproductivity (Emerson *Journals* 547, Whitman 6,11, Nekola 42). It seems symptomatic that at a time when definition was such an important issue, there are no such manifestoes by female poets (Morse 61). As Nekola points out, female poets of the time did not express the confidence towards their audience nor a correspondence between language and gender as their male counterparts did (42).

[19] Oberhaus reads Dickinson's fascicles, the poems she sewed into booklets, as forming a constructed single work, a "conversion narrative" (87). Even though Wheeler does not see the fascicles as unities, she believes in a " persistent interest in closure" throughout the fascicles (33). About fascicle 21, Wheeler says: "Dickinson's fascicle is no more content to be 'about' a theme, except in the sense of 'around' or 'near', than her individual lyrics are" (*Choosing* 35).

[20] 40 booklets or "fascicles," as they are commonly called by Dickinson scholars, were found after Dickinson's death. The booklets consist of fair copies of poems carefully sewn together. The question whether the poems should be represented in print in the order provided by the fascicles or according to the date of their composure remains a well-debated topic in Dickinson studies. Higginson and Todd, the first editors of Dickinson's poems, ordered them according to the themes Life, Love, Nature, Time and Eternity, but did not cohere to the fascicles' original groupings (Sewall *Teaching* 31).

[21] Dickinson published in the *Springfield Daily Republican*, a newspaper that had reached a circulation of fifteen thousand copies during the early years of the Civil War, in the avant-garde *Round Table*, the *Brooklyn Drum Beat*, a paper printed in large quantities during a two-week period in order to raise funds for the U.S. Sanitary Commission, and in *A Masque of Poets*, which had prominent contributors like Emerson, who by many was thought to be the author of "Success is counted sweetest" (Dandurand 256).

[22] Dandurand describes how one of Dickinson' poems circulated after being published: When John White Chadwick reviewed the 1890 edition of Dickinson's poems, he states that he had loved that poem for twenty five years since its publication in the *Round Table*, but had never known who the author was (Dandurand 258-9).

[23] This community, according to Erkkila, consisted of her sister Lavinia, Susan Dickinson, her childhood friends Abbiah Root, Abby Wood, Emily Fowler Ford, and Jane Humphry, Elizabeth Holland and her cousins Louise and Frances Norcross ("Homoeroticism" 161).

[24] Again, Eberwein echoes Juhasz here, also linking negation to liberty: "If 'No' was 'the wildest word we consign to Language,'" as Dickinson states in 1878 in a letter (L562) to Judge Otis Phillips Lord, "it could somehow liberate other words – including those she would select to formulate the language of limitation and rejection that initiated her metaphysical quest for circumference" (Eberwein *Strategies* 45-46).

[25] The typical telegraph discourse lacked standardization, punctuation and capitalization following practical criteria rather than grammatical correctness and linguistic compression, provoking multiple readings (McCormack 574). In telegrams, keywords are capitalized, much in the same way as Dickinson uses capitalization (McCormack 575).

[26] Accessible at http://www.emilydickinson.org/.

[27] "And yet these ongoing Dickinson wars have produced a heavy mix of sex and text that has left its mark not only on past and recent editions of Dickinson's work but also on the making of American literary history," Erkkila agrees with Benfey ("wars"11).

Nature (pp. 35-101)

[1] From the *Philadelphia Evening Telegraph*, December 5, 1894.

[2] In *The Green Breast of the New World*, Westling identifies the association of nature with the feminine as archaic and traces its origins even further back, employing findings from archeology to support her findings, revealing the conception of nature as woman as part of our very humanity: "(…) most present-day studies of ancient cultures will agree that, whatever the dubious possibility of prehistoric matriarchies, the female body has been associated with the vegetative energies of the earth and the reproductive powers of other animals for as long as humans have been producing symbols" (8).

[3] Marx adds that landscape painting as a distinct genre only emerged during the Renaissance and became most popular during the eighteenth century, "when aesthetic interest in natural scenery reached something of a climax" (89).

[4] The long history of a search for a passage to Asia, still pursued by Thomas Jefferson although he devoted himself to a society based on agriculture, shows the prevalence of the vision of a naval power dominating trade. For further reading on Jefferson's efforts to find a river system flowing across the American continent connecting the Atlantic with the Pacific, see Allen, John L.: „An Analysis of the Exploratory Process: The Lewsi and Clark Expedition from 1804-1806" in: *Geographical Review*, Vo. 62, No. 1 (Jan., 1972):13-39. Print.

[5] Marx draws a picture of Jefferson as being a character torn between contradictions, as he promotes simple rural life, but he himself enjoys civilization, praises the renunciation of all worldly concerns but himself holds the highest office in America, wants to preserve a rural society but also invests into the advancement of science, technology and the arts… (Marx 2000, p.135).

[6] This conception of the origin of man in nature is linked to Rousseau by Marx (102).

[7] Westling points out that the landscapes the first settlers found in New England were by no means untamed but managed carefully for thousands of years by the native population: "Much of New England was parklike woodland, with open grassy spaces under the trees – all controlled by seasonal burning" (34).

[8] Genesis 1.28: „to increase, multiply, replenish the earth and subdue it" is the task of humanity.

[9] Of course, the association of women with the domestic and private sphere has more complex origins than their proximity to nature, such as the gradual abandonment of an economic system based on family businesses to more industrial modes of production that required men to seek employment outside the home. The distinction between the public and the private and its implications for women is discussed is further discussed in my chapter on the house and home.

[10] Referring to American literature and the specific American perception of nature, Heydt maintains that nature and the American landscape constitute a space which figures as a "home in which American culture continues to dwell,

one that American writing continues to renovate" (4). From this perspective, a concept that divides nature and culture in separate spheres is impossible.

[11] Variant: Melody (Anderson, Charles: Emily Dickinson's poetry: *Stairway of Surprise*. New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston 1960, p.93.)

[12] Dickinson distances herself from the Romantic tradition and especially Emerson's view of the poet as direct translator of nature here.

[13] Juhasz bases her argument on the version of the poem reprinted in Johnson with "Simplicity" instead of Franklin 's "Sincerity" as the last word. Johnson adopted the version sent to Susan in 1863, Franklin the one in fascicle 35 that includes variants. I prefer Franklin's version, as "Sincerity" gives "Nature" more weight and status than the possibly ironic "Simplicity".

[14] By equalizing "natural facts and spiritual facts," Emerson does not distinguish between matter and spirit, and does not maintain the hierarchy according to which for centuries things and beings were categorized by assumed degree of perfection, which is summoned by God. In Emerson's universe, nature is symbolic, and thus carries meaning (Emerson vol.I: 26).

[15] The dashes, according to Mayer, do not primarily disrupt reading here, but create silence and calmness, anticipating a God that is absent but nearby, not a savior but a consistent and assertive presence (275).

[16] Dickinson does not just provide a homogenous scene of nature however, as an acre is a cultivated piece of land, shaped by humankind for a specific purpose, which is the preservation of human life by delivering a maximized harvest. The trees on the acre may not serve this purpose. Had they been fruit trees or had they been planted by someone, the scene would have been more coherent. As trees growing spontaneously on the acre, and possibly stemming from a time when the land was not cultivated, they create a contrast between nature perceived as wilderness and nature being tamed, serving human needs.

[17] Benfey observes that Dickinson repeatedly describes the light's quality and movement and its shade on landscapes. He links this attention to light with the visual arts, seeing parallels between Dickinson's treatment of light in landscapes and American painter's art (Benfey 212). Her brother Austin, he adds, "was an avid collector of American landscape paintings" (Benfey 212).

[18]According to Mayer, Dickinson's negotiations of a God in nature perceive of nature as a blank space, a "ecosystem where humanity's place is problematic" (269). Mayer identifies three different ways in which Dickinson portrays God in her nature poetry (270):

1. A dictator God that acts out in a brutal ecosystem he uses as a playground for his sadistic games, a Calvinist God.
2. Female God with many faces, often a familiar figure representing a season and therefore addressed colloquially, or mother or housewife, her attributes exaggerated and caricatured. According to Mayer the only God figure in Dickinson's poetry that is met with awe.
3. God as neighbor. "kind of witness found only in relation to the place he watches over (…)" (Mayer 270).

[19] Stein sees a homosocial or homoerotic relationship between a female worshiper and feminized nature deity in this poem (Stein 42). While the homosocial constellation is important because it lets the speaker approach divinity on more equal terms, a homoerotic quality cannot be acknowledged in "Sweet Mountains – Ye tell Me no lie-" (F745). Dickinson does engage in an erotization of religious devotion when replacing God with female figures in numerous poems and letters, likening religious ecstasy with erotic pleasure, as in "Dying! Dying in the night!" (F222), where her beloved sister in Law Susan Dickinson replaces Christ, or when she constructs an alternative religion which centers around the"'Shrine of Sue'" (L458) (Erkkila "Homoeroticism" 165). However, I do not detect any erotic content in "Sweet Mountains – Ye tell Me no lie-" (F745).

[20] For a further discussion of Victorian womanhood, True Womanhood, the Empire of the Mother and the Victorian angel-woman, check my *House and Home* chapter.

[21] As Stein points out, Dickinson connects domesticity and nature in many other poems, among them F85, F86, 318, F1454 and F495, which ridicules the male gaze (Stein 40). In contrast, the reciprocal gaze between the mountains and the nun is egalitarian, at the same time "located, moving and noncentred" in F745, which Stein identifies as a revision of psalm 121: "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth" (42).

[22] Juhasz argues that Dickinson uses teasing as a strategy of humor to voice criticism and to tackle topics otherwise unmentionable for women such as erotic love (Juhasz, "Tease" 26-62). Homans agrees that teasing questions power relations in Dickinson's poetry and functions as a "means of self-defense" (Henneberg 10).

[23] A poem that similarily genders a celestial body and extends its realm to the limitless is "The Moon was but a Chin of Gold" (735) which describes the physical features of the moon's face and her dress in detail. However, this poem lacks the erotic and voyeuristic components of "The Day undressed – Herself –" (F495), detailing only a "Chin of Gold," a "Forehead" "of Amplest Blonde," a "Beryl hewn" for a "Cheek," an "Eye" like a "Summer Dew," and "Lips of Amber." What makes this poem interesting despite its rather normative description of a beatuful female moon is that the moon's "silver will" extends to the rim of the cosmos, her clothes consisting of "Firmament," "Universe," " Stars," and the sky's "Blue."

[24] "Daisy" is Dickinson's nickname, which she also uses frequently in letters to friends like Samuel Bowels (Leiter 93, 355). The most cited letter featuring "Daisy" as a surname for Dickinson herself is L93, where she warns Susan of the dangers of marriage. The flower also appears in poems about hierarchies between the genders, as "The Daisy follows soft the Sun –" (F161): "the pleasure of the poem's narrator (figured as heliotropic Daisy) is derived from the feeling of her own insignificance in relation to the power of the beloved (figured as declining sun) (McClure 9). Homans points towards the etymology of the word 'daisy' as "'day's eye,' making her etymologically a mock sun " (204). This is interesting, as it equalizes the daisy and the sun (also a symbol for God in a centralistic world view). Henneberg combines this finding in her reading of "the Sun – just touched the Morning –" (F246) where the morning is not dependent on the presence of the sun. The daisy's "apparent reliance on [the sun's] power parodies the dependence of the weak on the strong, because it is his absence that she desires, not his presence" (Homans 204). In the second and third *Master Letters*, which are characterized by a stark submissiveness and theatrical pleading on part of the female lover, the writer also identifies herself as "Daisy."

[25] The terms and associated images Stein uses to describe this new, typically female sexuality she detects in Dickinson is dominated by phallic imagery. This indicates how challenging a description of female sexuality that excludes male participation seems to be: not even feminist scholars are able to find vocabulary that does not rely on masculine phallocentric concepts of sexuality.

[26] In "Animal/Insectual/Lesbian Sex: Dickinson's Queer Version of the Birds and Bees" Landry claims that Dickinson emancipates women from the limiting vision of women in Puritan conversion narratives by blending its discourse with pollination acts between bees and flowers. This combination is made possible by the importance of eating and drinking during the Lord's Supper, which mirrors the bee sucking the nectar out of the flower in a kind or marriage (Landry 48).

[27] Wolff sees "[s]exual stimulation and the act of artistic creation … commingeled [sic]" in "I would not paint – a picture -" (F348) (117).

[28] Weisbuch humorously answers a fellow literary scholar's question why we cannot read the poem simply as a realistic narrative of a little girl visiting the sea with her dog and getting scared of the incoming tide: "because, sir, mermaids don't really exist" ("Prisming" 203).

[29] This poem's metaphorical setting proofs ideal for psychoanalytical analysis such as Cody's, who interprets the sea as "representing the vast unconscious … and drowning in it representing the loss of one's psychic integrity in psychosis" (*Great Pain* 307).

[30] For sexual references to the "Pearl," see Comment's article on bawdy in Shakespeare and Dickinson's appropriation of Antony and Cleopatra: Comment, Kristin M. "Dickinson's Bawdy: Shakespeare and Sexual Symbolism in Emily Dickinson's Writing to Susan Dickinson." *A Journal of American Woman Writers* 18.2 (2001): 167-181. Print.

[31] In her poetry featuring swamps and bogs, Parks insists, Dickinson does not automatically connect "wetland places " with gendered associations, but rather counters such cultural constructions (21-22). On the contrary, Parks shows, Dickinson thinks of the swamps as a space that is "liberated from the conventions of religion and gender" (20).

[32] Johnson presents "Who robbed the Woods –" (F57) as poem 41 in Johnson's edition. It differs from Franklin's version in the use of the first person singular pronoun: "I robbed the Woods –" and "I grasped – I bore away," the poem reads, "My fantasy to please-." This completely changes the perspective of the poem and eliminates the opening question about the identity of the robber. If we read Johnson's version biographically, we can identify the speaker with Dickinson and read the poem as a comment on her expeditions into nature and her collection of plants for her herbarium. The version Johnson advocates seems humoristic, but, with the male pronoun and the opening question as Franklin presents the poem, it gains sincerity and depth, allowing for a serious investigation of the relationship between nature, men, and women.

[33] Leiter says that there is evidence that the original poem was on Susan, not nature, and that the poem could also be read as a comment on the mysteries of the human condition, similar to "One need not be a Chamber – To be Haunted –" (F407) (228). The original version of the poem on Susan includes the variants: "But Susan is a stranger yet; / The ones that cite her most/ Have never scaled her haunted house, / Nor compromised her ghost." (L2:598).

[34] Numerous poems criticizing God and religion use the voice of a childish figure in order to unveil inherent contradictions. See "I never felt at Home – Below –" (F437), "Is Heaven a Physician?" (F1260), "Why – do they shut me out of Heaven?" (F268), "The Savior must have been" (F1538), "It's easy to invent a Life –" (F747), "It was too late for Man –" (F689), "Eden is that old fashioned House" (F1734), "Paradise is that old mansion" (F1144), and " God gave a Loaf to every Bird –" (F748).

[35] Compare this to "I had been hungry, all the Years" (F439) and "It would have starved a Gnat –" (F444) where the speaker acquires her difference by starvation. For the topic of starvation in Dickinson and its interpretation as a means to "stave off a feminine fate" by the refusal to growing into a woman's body, consult Pollack, Vivian: "Thirst and Starvation in Emily Dickinson's Poetry" in: *American Literature* 51 (March 1979), 33-49. Print.

[36] "It will be Summer – eventually." (F374) similarly ridicules the attire of the civilized members of society in a natural setting. The "Ladies" carry "parasols," the men "Canes," and the "little Girls" "Dolls."

[37] For a more detailed analysis of how Dickinson understands gender and power relations between two people, see my article "Interchangeability and Mutuality: The Relativity of Power in Dickinson's Gendered Relationships" in the second issue of *The Emily Dickinson Journal* from 2014.

[38] The calm scenery portrayed in the first two stanzas waking associations of back and forth tidal movements remind of a lullaby, I claim. The rhythm of the waves suggesting gentle rocking and their breaking's sound, the repetitions in the second stanza, and the rhyme reinforce this context, further reinforcing associations of maternal care and a small child's uncritical dependence.

[39] In my article on the relativity of power and an understanding of gender as role play, I explain that the Italian " Signor," besides being considered exotic and erotic, is an address that expresses respect and a different social

hierarchies between speaker and addressee (Caci “Interchangeability” 88). Furthermore, in a religious context the term also signifies “God” (Caci “Interchangeability” 88).

[40] Finnerty sees this poem as a manifestation of Dickinson’s theatrical performance of gender in her poetry, as he distinctively calls attention to the switching of functions as if they were merely masks (“Cross-Dressing” 77).

[41] See also Heydt p. 34.

[42] In “I reckon – When I count at all –” (F533) Dickinson constructs a hierarchy that positions poets above the “ Heaven of God,” upsetting traditional configurations of power and conventional world views.

[43] Today, ‘nooky’ (or ‘nookie’) signifies sexual intercourse. The term shares its etymology with ‘nook,’ which due to its visual and physical quality of a glen opening and deepening the landscape’s surface certainly encourages a metaphorical use with erotic implications. However, it is uncertain whether these associations of ‘nook’ or the word ‘nookie’ were in common use during Dickinson’s time. Fact is that the nineteenth-century Victorian upper class which Dickinson was a part of did not provide language to name sexual acts, declaring this part of human interaction a taboo. However, the poem’s cheeky, light, humorous, and teasing character suggest that a pun is intended.

[44] As “symbol of the immense” and “unknown,” the sea stands for God in this poem, Leiter declares, and a female speaker who converted dreads the “overwhelming loss of self” that threatens her, as the God’s infinite sea would absorb her “Drop” (185-186). I do not focus on a religious interpretation in this poem, however.

House and Home (pp. 102-167)

[1] Grabowsky states that Dickinson increasingly shunned the public from the mid-1850s, when she was only in her twenties, on and did not leave her father’s house for the last twenty years before her death at fifty eight (17). This and other “odd behavior” leads to her classification of Dickinson as agoraphobic. The idea that Dickinson suffered from a “psychological disorder of significant magnitude” has been put forward since the beginning of scholarship and lingers especially in popular views of the poet (Cody, “Foreword” 12).

[2] Dickinson, Emily: The Letters of Emily Dickinson. Ed. Thomas H. Johnson. 3. Vols. Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press, 1981. Print. Quote from vol. 1, p.99.

[3] Murray presents a chart showing the significant changes in Dickinson’s poetic creativity depending on whether or not the family employed help managing the household, whether there were sicknesses in the family, or whether Dickinson and her sister Lavinia could divide the housework between themselves or not (79-80).

2 October 1891ATLANTIC MAGAZINE: Emily Dickinson’s Letters, accessed online at:
http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1891/10/emily-dickinsons-letters/306524/

[5] *Boston Cooking-School Magazine*, June-July 1906.

[6] See the statement by a relative in Leyda, Jay: *The Years and Hours of Emily Dickinson*, vol.2. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960, p. 482. Print:

> Emily Dickinson was a past mistress in the art of cookery and housekeeping. She made the desserts for the household dinners; delicious confections and bread, and when engaged in these duties had her table and pastry board under a window that faced the lawn, whereon she ever had pencil and paper to jot down any pretty thought that came to her, and from which she evolved verses, later. (Leyda 482)

[7] For more information on the needle-pen dichotomy, see Elaine Hedges: “The Needle or the Pen: The Literary Rediscovery of Women’s Textile Work” in: *Tradition and the Talents of Women*, Florence Howe (Ed.). Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991, pp.338-364. Print.

Also check “Don’t put up my thread & Needle” (F681) for Dickinson’s ideas on this, and Susan Stewart’s “Some Thoughts about Dickinson’s ‘Don’t put up my thread & Needle’” in *The Emily Dickinson Journal* 15.2 (2006), 58-65.

Print. In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Gilbert and Gubar link the female craft of sewing with the creation of poetry via the figure of the spider, and again mention Dickinson's sewing of her poems into fascicles (638-640). Sewing, then, becomes a metaphor for female poetic art, and a means to communicate via a specifically female frame of reference: "Not only her [Dickinson's] sewing but her poems about sewing indicate she was a conscious literary artist, anxious to communicate, though on her own terms" (Gilbert/Gubar 641).

[8] Bayley explains that according to the Cult of Home Religion, homes had to be arranged according to 'divine order, the art of cooking was elevated to "divine ministery", and the women in the house were viewed as "divine domestic priests" (*Home* 27). This raises the question whether Gilbert's view of Dickinson as a "priestess of the daily" and Dickinson's mystification of the domestic really represents a characteristically female strategy to empowerment, or whether the mystical element in Dickinson's domestic portrayals have to be understood in this tradition which expected women to lay out their homes like churches and which understood the home as "synecdoche of nation and idealized civilization" (Bayley *Home* 27).

[9] Gilbert lists five categories of mysteries in Dickinson's work: "the mystery of romance (a woman's literary genre); the mystery of renunciation (a woman's duty); the mystery of domesticity (a woman's sphere); the mystery of nature (figuratively speaking, a woman's analog or likeness); and the mystery of *woman's* nature" (Gilbert 30, original italics).

[10] A segregation of the sexes, Kross argues, took place within the house long before the American Revolution and the creation of "'separate spheres'" which limited women to the domestic realm and seemed to be established by the 1820ies (386).

[11] Fuss asserts that Dickinson's brother Austin was well informed about contemporary architectural ideology, seeking advice from Frederick Law Olmstead, the designer of New York's Central Park, and suggests that it is very likely that Dickinson's father also was familiar with literature on the topic (*Interior* 223).

[12] Space in great houses of course was not only marked according to gender, but other social markers as class and age (children were only allowed in some parts of the house) were also played out in domestic settings. Housework like cooking and doing laundry was made invisible by moving the premises where this work was done by paid laborers or the housewife to the back of the house and out of visibility. The layout of the house at the same time makes visible and determines divisions of class, gender and race and defines spaces as private or public (Pohl 9).

[13] Kross insists that the library was an all-male space that in some houses even remained locked (Kross 385).However, this might not have been the case in all houses. We know that Dickinson had access to the Homestead's library and even used the room to meet with friends (Bayley *Home* 37).

[14] As Fuss points out, Dickinson's bedroom had "the best light, the best ventilation, and the best views", granting her "maximum visual control" of the street below (Interior 56-7). The liminal space of her bedroom was thus at the same time very central (Fuss *Interior* 58).

[15] Logan explains that in Victorian England, men and women first gathered in the parlor before forming pairs and continuing into the dining room during dinner parties, and women withdrew into another room after the meal, while men reminded seated for some time drinking and smoking before rejoining the women (Logan 32). It is interesting to note that the time for conversation was timed according to occupation and the room the party occupied: in the parlor, men and women mingled freely, when transitioning to the dining room, men and women formed couples and sat next to each other at the dinner table. After dinner, men and women separated, allowing for conversation among men respectively women exclusively. When the men rejoined the women, Logan reports, the women chatting in groups quickly broke up so that "next each of them should be a vacant chair, into which a man inserted himself, prudently avoiding those who had been his neighbours at dinner" (32). I have not found evidence that fixed patterns like these were practiced in New England during the time but assume that gender was an important factor and

likewise subject to preset behavioral patterns, albeit potentially in weaker form than in Britain, in formal environments where both men and women took part.

[16] Rose adds that feminist geography understands the home, albeit its ideologization as "haven in a heartless world ", as a product of capitalist and patriarchal processes of reproduction (5). The home then becomes essentially as a workplace, misused for exploitation, a "space where women are expected to work, cooking, cleaning and caring, without wages and privacy" (Rose 5). This view, Rose summarizes critically, paints a negative and reductive picture of domestic space as restrictive and exploitive, without taking into account that the idea of the home as a female space also offers possibilities for individual appropriations beyond confinement (5).

[17] "Above all, doorways must be strictly preserved in order to prevent the confusion of one room-identity with another " (Bayley *Home* 45).

[18] Rose undertakes a study of family photographs displayed within homes, circulated among family members, and stored in albums. While the photograph's property of extending outwards, encompassing "absence, emptiness and loss as well as togetherness" seems obvious, Rose's statement about the referential propriety of objects in a house pointing outwards is not limited to visual material, but on the contrary refers to analyzes of objects in a more economic sense (6-7).

[19] Logan defines the 'cult of domesticity' as the effect of the discourse of individual based religiousness according to evangelicalism, which saw the home, as opposed to the authority of churches and their rituals, as the "source of personal and civic virtue" (25).

[20] "If looked at in true womanly fashion," Welter adds sarcastically, "most of housework could be regarded as uplifting " (164).

[21] Welter explains that during the nineteenth century, True Womanhood was a ubiquitous term whenever women or women's issues were discussed. Despite or maybe because of the terms usualness, she could not find a direct definition in "almost all of the women's magazines published for more than three years during the period 1820-60" and numerous additional sources such as novels, religious texts, cooking books etc. (Welterer 151).

[22] Wheeler states that modesty and "proper feminine discretion" closely resemble the "elisions of modernism" (Wheeler 8). The initiation of modernism might therefore be related to the specific need of women for reserve and secrecy called forth by the cultural imperative of modesty, and might have been spurred by this need (Wheeler 8).

[23] Wheeler calls Dickinson's "poetics of enclosure" both a strategy and a critique, a stance that I transfer to her use of the domestic (11).

[24] A male relative like a husband, brother or father.

[25] Frances Osgood, Lydia Sigourney Elizabeth, and Helen Hunt Jackson in the U.S., and Elizabeth Barret Browning, Emily Brontë, and Christina Rosetti in England, among others, were very popular female poets and contemporaries of Dickinson.

[26] Emerson, Wordsworth, and Withman wrote "manifestoes" defining the poet and their method in specifically male terms (Nekola 41). Emerson's "spermatic book" and Whitman's perception of the poet as made of "fatherstuff" using a language that "offers the sweet firmfibred meat that grows men and women" directly link gender and poetry with the use of metaphors of male sexuality and reproductive capability (Emerson 547/ Whitman 6, 11/ Nekola 42). These concepts of poetry and the poet, Nekola insists, do not allow for identification of female readers and for women to consider themselves poets (41). For female readers and poets, poetry (at least by those authors) became an "out-of-gender experience" (41).

[27] It is interesting that male selfhood and individuality are dependent on the feminine realm to exist. As Crumbly points out, this understanding of the self and fitness for democracy are "vulnerable and hence feminine", as they

are continuously subjected to external influences, and the independency of thought and opinion can only be cultivated and maintained within the privacy of the domestic (35).

[28] Yet, Wolosky adds, a lot of activities women were engaged in on a political and social level like prison reforms, Indian civil rights, women's civil rights and the planning of parks, public libraries and sanitation, could not be embedded within domestic ideology or viewed in terms of moral values (*Poetry* 7). It is due to this fact, Wolosky argues, that these movements, as opposed to those perceived as extensions of the domestic, found less public support and did not equally succeed in bringing about change (*Poetry* 7).

[29] In "Dickinson and the Public" Dandurand delivers a very convincing case for an view of Dickinson as much more widely known and read than generally anticipated. Although she only published very few poems during her lifetime, each poem, Dandurand shows, was circulated in great numbers and was potentially read by thousands (255).

[30] Thomas Wentworth Higginson was an abolitionist and women's rights activist, and so was Helen Hunt Jackson.

[31] Bennett emphasizes that the American "late-eighteenth-century public sphere" was "a profoundly masculinist and class-bound institution", excluding large parts of the population on racial, gender, ethnic, or religious grounds (8-9).

[32] Bennett points out that the qualities essential to the sentimental lyric, the idealization of the home and the family, originated in European works by Goethe (Werther) and Rousseau (Julie, Émile), both male authors, although in these writers sentimentality is "tailored to suit male, not female needs" (Bennett 22-3).

[104] Pollak interprets this poem biographically, equating the "King" in this poem with Dickinson's father, taking his silence as a precondition for her to speak (*Anxiety* 237).

[105] Franklin gives the variant "crumbling" instead of "Wooden", which Wheeler attributes to an earlier version (35).

[106] Taking "Remembrance has a Rear and Front." as an example, Sánchez-Eppler argues that Dickinson's frequent use of the image of the house is a critique on the association of the female with the household and the domestic domain (114). She uses the metaphor of the deep cellar in order to claim that Dickinson aimed at deconstructing the house as metaphor: "Her [Dickinson's] configuration of the self in terms of domestic architecture ultimately serves, quite literally as the cellar deepens, to undermine the domestic" (Sánchez-Eppler 114).

[107] Bayley connect the "Showman" in the last stanza and the "Decks – to seat the Skies –" in the third stanza with Dickinson's theatricality, calling the visual elements of the poem a "parlour theatrical" "operating through the conceit of the windowpane" (*Home* 38).

[108] According to Stein, the metaphor of botanical fertilization is a deliberate hint at human sexual intercourse, as Dickinson with her deep interest in botany and horticulture "knows well that flowers are literally the sexual organs of plants" (45-6). The described relationship thus not only becomes sexualized, but the described social roles can be read as (initially) gendered.

[109] Finnerty contrasts this poem with F475 „Myself was formed – a Carpenter –," again assuming that the speaker of the poem is female, here taking on a male voice ("Cross-Dressing" 80). I find this poem interesting because of other features: the carpenter is very immodest, comparable to the speaker of „Perhaps I asked too large", claiming that it was nothing below temples that he would build. The process of building is empowering here, and the fact that the "Tools too Human – Faces –" in the last stanza points towards the social construction of all spaces and the consequential allocation of cultural values with physical structures.

[110] Finnerty shows convincingly how Dickinson associates freedom with manhood or, most often, boyhood. Accordingly, Finnerty points to "It would have starved a Gnat –"
(F444) where the "Gnat" is also male ("Cross-Dressing" 81).

[111] Some of the vocabulary Dickinson uses in "They shut me up in Prose –" (445) is identical in her earlier "I have a King, who does not speak –" (F157): in both poems, a "Bird" identifiable with the speaker and poet breaks the silence with a "peep." The verb remains ambiguous because besides its auditory meaning, it also signifies visual capacities.

[112] The "Pools" offer an image of double enclosure: the water embracing the body, and the pool holding the water.

[113] Wilt discusses the fact that Dickinson's house of doom lacks a door, asking whether the house that is "entered from the Sun" is actually an inside or outside, arguing that as a black hole, swallowing all light, this house is both inside and outside, containing the "Sun" and providing shelter from it when "Escape – is done –" (159).

[114] Johnson gives us a slightly different version of this poem, letting the "Berries die" instead of "dye" (J475). This makes sense in context with the following line, where "Hemlocks," a poisonous plant, "bow – to God." This adds a certain morbidity to the poem, the dead berries and the poisonous plant dislocating the "Dream" of existence beyond "Doom" in the afterlife where God serves as gatekeeper.

[115] The omission of the "if" only highlights the conditional sense, especially because the verb "were" requires this grammatical context.

[116] Larsen develops several arguments to identify the "errand" in stanza three. He first names it the Puritan "errand of knowledge of the human self" which in this case ended with the speaker's realization that she is unable to unite a fragmented gendered identity and to acknowledge this disruption (67). He parallels this first definition of the "errand" with the Puritan duty to cultivate the American wilderness in order to create a platform for a new divine human race, a duty which he later reinterprets as the taming of the human psyche (Larsen 67). Only in his third attempt does Larsen identify the "errand" with the "little duties" mentioned in the poem. The task to cultivate wilderness is now to keep destruction and chaos away from the already cultivated and domesticated sphere (Larsen 68).

[117] Gilbert and Gubar use this term in The Madwoman in the Attic. The "beautiful angel-woman's key act", they say, is to become an "*objet d'art* or a saint" by renouncing all personal wishes or desires (Gilbert&Gubar 25, original italics).

[118] Welter notes however that housewifery, considered by many an increasingly complex task, did not necessarily exclude science. *Godey's*, a very popular nineteenth-century women's magazine, she illustrates, proposed the knowledge of chemistry useful for cooking (Welter 165).

[119] I read "Surgery" in correspondence with "Rearrange a "Wife's" Affection!" (F267), where the dislocation and amputation of body parts result in a convergence to the male gender, the speaker becoming "bearded like a man!"

[120] Larsen perceives the last two lines of stanza two as "erotic or sexual" with apparently "clear orgasmic connotations" (p.71):"And yet – existence – some way back –/Stopped – struck – my ticking – through –." He thus explains the "Reward" in the last stanza. I cannot follow this argumentation.

[121] Larsen centers his interpretation of this poem on five lines that in occur in Franklin occur in an altogether different poem, "A Pit – but Heaven over it –" (F508), and according to Smith were falsely added to "I tie my Hat – I crease my Shawl –" (F522) by Mabel Loomis Todd and uncritically reprinted by Johnson (*Eden* 93). Johnson's version of the poem consists of only three stanzas, combining stanzas two and three in Franklin, and adding the five lines of "A Pit – but Heaven over it –" (F508) to the third stanza. The additional five lines are:

F508

'Twould start them –
We- would tremble –
But since we got a Bomb –
And held it in our Bosom –

Nay – Hold it – it is calm –

To Larsen, the speaker's instable split gender identity as neither "Man/ or Woman" signify a "violent disruption in her life" that, give her the power of "a demonic god" who is able to "re-create and re-instate destruction," the speaker's "explosive mystery" (65).

[122] Among others, Walker cites "I tie my Hat – I crease my Shawl –" (F522) as a poem conforming to conventions. She reads it as an affirmation of the necessity of the "little duties" women were to perform and thus as a statement about Dickinson's own acceptance and confirmation of her female role (179). The reference to role play and the rejection of simulation I point out in my analysis strongly suggest otherwise.

[123] As in F358 "Perhaps I asked too large –" where the "Basked holds – just - / Firmaments –", we may identify the basket as a female accessory.

[124] „I would have starved a Gnat –" (F444) is comparable to "I was the slightest in the House –" (F473), again portraying a child that is so small (even smaller and weaker than a gnat!) and so ignored that he or she risks to disappear.

[125] It is possible that the lamp, book and plant hint at the speaker's interest in horticulture. Dickinson kept a very extensive herbarium, and turned the conservatory off the library into an indoor garden (Fuss *Interior* 32).

[126] According to Wheeler, Dickinson copied "It would have starved a Gnat –" (F444) to the same sheet as "They shut me up in Prose –"(F445), the "Gnat" preceding "They shut me up" (36). Consequently, Wheeler calls "They shut me up in Prose –" a "paired poem" (36). Both poems are written from the perspective of a child.

[127] See F1373 "The Spider as an Artist", where the spider- artist is the "Neglected Son of Genius" and thus evidently male, and F513 "The Spider holds a Silver Ball" where the act of creation is described female terms of dancing and spinning or sewing.

[128] Guthrie deems it very plausible that Dickinson wrote this poem for Judge Otis Phillips Lord[128], as he identifies the humor of the poem as distinct for the conversation between the two and reads the exclamation "forbid it Lord" at the end of the poem as a direct address (34).

[129] I would like to pay some attention to the unusual structure of this poem. "Alone and in a Circumstance" is divided into two four line stanzas, the first being preoccupied with the avoidance of context, only naming a spider, which in the second stanza is identified as the reason for the speaker's abandonment of the premises that are sought to be reclaimed by juridical means in a long uncharacteristic twenty line third stanza.

[130] Jackson uses "Alone and in a Circumstances" in combination with the collage consisting out of a postal stamp depicting a tank engine and two clippings from a magazine saying "George Sand" and "Mauprat" glued onto the page where the poem was later composed as an example of the difficulty readers have to understand the relationship between these clippings and the handwritten text. The poem's many gaps, she argues, cannot be filled with the help of the enclosed objects, and their relationship, if we assume there is any, remains opaque (167).

[131] According to Runzo , the body, when mentioned at all in Dickinson's poetry, is often restrained and bound in "spaces of limitation" like "pits, prisons, tombs, closets" and is marked by society's effort to control the speaker (Runzo 61). The privy with its association of bodily functions and the silence imposed on them certainly constitutes such a space of constraint.

[132] The poems that do talk about the body represent a transgression of the norm and a departure from virtuous womanhood. The poems treating the body in its physicality, even if they are not sexual and therefore not directly seen as immoral by her contemporaries, represent a transgression as the mentioning of bodily matters was improper for a woman. Therefore, critics like Miller plead for an understanding of all body poems as an "important part of Dickinson's resistance to dominant constructions of gender, and point to the gender politics that may underlie even those poems with no apparent stakes in gender roles or the feminine" ("Humor"118).

[133] Crumbly presents medical discourses during Dickinson's lifetime that denied women the capacity to interpret their own bodies and links this to the question whether such a body, always in need of another mind to understand it, lives up to the idea that privacy is the precondition for literary originality (177).

[134] I provide a detailed analysis of "The Frost of Death was on the Pane –" (F1130) in my chapter on death and the grave in Dickinson's poetry.

[135] Rather than a Ghost, we should maybe regard the intruder in this Gothic poem as a vampire, as opposed to Ghosts which merely frighten their victims, the vampire according to Tracy can hurt the bodily, and therefore is feared as a "sexual menace" (Tracy 33).

[136] In "A Wife – at Daybreak – I shall be –" (F185) a female speaker is similarly directly transformed from being a child into a "Bride" ("How short it takes to make it Bride –." Note the "it!"!) and perceives of this change as ascension into heaven: "Softly – my Future climbs the Stair – / I fumble at my Childhood's Prayer - / So soon to be a Child – no more - / Eternity – I'm coming – Sir –."

[137] Check my analysis of "I had not minded – Walls –" (F554) in my chapter on death and the grave, which also portrays lovers separated by a wall.

[138] In my article on the exchangeability of power relations in Dickinson's poetry, I analyze "He was weak, and I was strong – then –" (F221) with a Foucauldian background.

Death and the Grave (pp. 168-220)

[1] Griffith presents his own statement as in need of clarification and adds that Dickinson's attitude towards death differed when it concerned others or herself: she feared the pain of loss, was appalled by the "moral and physical ugliness" of the corpse, but welcomed death for herself as a relief from earthly burdens, although the annihilation of the self after death presented a major threat to her (Griffith 48-50).

[2] Mahoney claims that Dickinson, although she was thankful for consolatory words from her friends and wrote such notes and poems to her friends after they lost a loved person, did not believe in the genre. The transformation of grief into text and the object of grief into text, Mahoney states, bares the "risk for disloyalty" for Dickinson (55). Utmost pain and loss, Mahoney explains, according to Dickinson cannot be explained, as the inability to put these feelings into words defines them as extreme states (55). Only silence, Mahoney goes on, can seal the "space of time" that loss signifies (57).

[3] As Petrino reports, many female poets' fame and the recognition of their art depended on the success of their poems on the deaths of children and infants (*Contemporaries* 59).

[4] A lock of auburn hair Emily Dickinson sent to Emily Fowler along with a letter (L99) in 1853 is now in the possession of the Amherst College Archives and Special Collections. Johnson notes that Dickinson's hair was short at that time (comment to L99). In her letter to Emily Fowler, she clearly states that she intends the lock of hair to be a reminder of her youth as well as an artifact to be kept after her death: "It will serve to make you remember me when locks are crisp and gray. And the quiet cap, and the spectacles, and 'John Anderson my Joe' are all that is left of me" (L99). Emily Fowler owned a collection of hair of several friends (Johnson's comment to L99).

[5] This means that at average, she completed a poem every second day (Miller *Time* 149).

[6] Miller lists *the Harper's Monthly Magazine* Lavinia had subscribed to, *Harper's Weekly*, which was available at Sue and Austin's, the *Springfield Republican*, *Franklin and Hampshire Gazette* and the *Atlantic*, which featured war poetry (*Time* 148).

[7] Petrino discovers striking similarities between Dickinson's account of the last words of her nephew Gilbert and the popular writer Lydia Huntley Sigourney's poem "Request of a Dying child" from 1847, showing how Dickinson moved within conventional frames even when recounting her own experiences with death and dying ("Child Elegy" 317).

[8] In a letter from 1854 Dickinson wants to know if her friend Benjamin Franklin Newton, whom she had known since she was a teenager and had loved like "an elder brother" (L153), had passed peacefully: "He talked often of God, but I do not know certainly if he was his Father in Heaven – Please Sir, to tell me if he was willing to die, and if you think him at Home, I should love to know certainly that he was today in Heaven" (L153).

[9] Petrino mentions epidemics of yellow fewer in Philadelphia and Boston in 1819 and 1822, and in New York in 1822 that claimed thousands of victims and decidedly contributed to the removal of burying sites from cities (*Contemporaries* 102).

[10] No such casts of Emily Dickinson exist. Opposed to her father's wishes, Emily Dickinson refused to have her portrait or molds taken. Raymond interprets this as an active refusal of handing her physically over to her father and to have her likeness displayed publically, opting instead for bodilessness (113).

[11] As examples, Eggener names Père-Lachaise in Paris, founded in 1804, that features "streets", tombstones that resemble houses, and "cast-iron street furniture", while American examples such as Laurel Hill in Philadelphia (1836) and Bellefontaine in St. Louis (1849) resemble scenic suburbs or deliver models of perfect order and social segregation such as New Haven Burying ground (1796) and Lone Mountain (1854) in San Francisco where the dead were buried in different sectors according to their wealth, ethnicity, religion, or trade (Eggener 16).

[12] Parks explains that the "ignis fatuus" is the Latin name for „the will-o'-the-wisp," a "greenish light that flickers in swamps and marshes" (19). The organic decomposition taking place in swamps releases a gas, which produces the green gloom of the "ignis fatuus." Historically, the light was thought to disorient people in the swamp, leading them into death (Parks 19). Because Dickinson values swamps positively, Parks believes that in this poem, she " earnestly offers the 'ignis fatuus' as an alternative to Christian belief," favoring a "naturalized religious experience" (19).

[13] Discrepancy exists among critics about the exact temporal frame of the poem: the first stanza reports of the death of the speaker in the past tense, and uncertainty prevails whether the voice of the poem is to be considered postmortem or still in the process of dying, and thus factually still alive (Nesteruk 34).

[14] Possibly, the idea that the soul does not leave the body immediately after death helps to explain the Americans' preference and exclusive dominance of embalming over cremation and the aversion against decay of the body until today (Eggener 13).

[15] Other major American and British poets like Robert Browning and A.E. Houseman also employ the figure of the conscious corpse (Bolton 98).

[16] „I felt a Funeral in my Brain" (F340) according to Schöberlein's suggestion describes "an axial cut through the brain," revealing the "coffin-shaped *corpus callosum*" at its center, and the black small dots visible in illustrations of such an axial cut could, he maintains, be represented as dark-clad "Mourners" in the poem (54, original italics).

[17] In order to distance herself from Calvinist and other religious notions of her day, according to Barnstone Dickinson used classical mythology when envisioning an afterlife: Dickinson locates this in-between state of consciousness in the world of Greek mythology in "This Consciousness that is aware," (F817) where, "attended by a single hound" (F817), the many-headed Cerberus guards the underworld, segregating the living world from Hades (Barnstone 94, 102). "This Consciousness that is aware" (F817), Barnstone maintains, is "a poem alluding to Emerson's 'Self-Reliance' on several levels, and constructs an "anti-Calvinist notion" where, instead of being allowed in heaven or

banned in damnation, the self which relies on itself only after death is left lonely in a uncertain search after its (spiritual?) destiny (Barnstone 94, 102).

[18] Dollimore names Camille Paglia as the foremost advocate of the association of women with death in feminist theory, as she links women with nature and nature with instability and dissolution (xxiv).

[19] Maybe this is what Dickinson meant when she told Higginson how she defined poetry: "If I read a book and it makes my whole body so cold no fire can ever warm me, I know that is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry. These are the only ways I know it. Is there any other way?" (L342a[19]). „ She lay as if at play" (F412) certainly fulfills this requirement, haunting the reader just as a Gothic novel does. Find more information on the Gothic later in this chapter.

[20] Bronfen mentions Novalis as an example of a poet who delves in the memory of the dead beloved (247-9).

[21] Bronfen demonstrates this by comparing the poems „Ulalume" and „Annabel Lee."

[22] The perfect Victorian woman becomes the ideal art object with the "porcelain immobility of the dead" (compare to F614, stanza two: "The Forehead copied stone –") (Gilbert&Gubar 25).

[23] The introduction of the Gothic mode, flourishing during the early nineteenth century, according to Wardrop, changed American literature fundamentally: between the 1820s to the 1850s, even books that cannot be classified as Gothic frequently featured a Gothic tone or described a Gothic occurrence (Wardrop Gothic 5). As examples " revolving intrinsically around gothic themes," she lists *The Scarlett Letter*, *Huckleberry Finn*, and *Moby Dick* (Wardrop Gothic 5).

[24] Denman argues that Dickinson achieves this by using her dashes, which "turn… the silent and nonverbal into language" (201). Fagan reads the dash as a "thread between the sayable and the unsayable" (Fagan 70).

[25] Even though the genre was not yet widely read during Dickinson's time, vampire fiction nevertheless already existed and it is not impossible that Dickinson knew of its existence or even read vampire stories. Tracy names John Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819) as "the first important vampire novel in English," instituting the central elements of vampire fiction for British writers (36).

[26] As described earlier, a link can be made between marriage and death on several levels. Check Berecca and Wheeler.

[27] "Rime" here signifies frozen dew but is also a homophone of 'rhyme.' This second meaning adds interpretational possibilities. As "Frost" takes over the woman's body "Rime by Rime," the poem kills her off "rhyme by rhyme."

[28] Raymond reads "Because I could not stop for Death" as a poem featuring a speaker who embarks on an "adult romance," but as the poem progresses regresses to "child speaker" (116). Death, who kidnaps the speaker, takes her on a "circular journey back to her father's name" (Raymond 116). She anchors her argument in stanza four where the male "Sun" passes the carriage. The word "sun," she argues, is unique as it is the only sun in our sun system and therefore only exists as a proper name (Raymond 117). It can therefore not function as a metaphor but only refers back to itself, stands as "catachrestic gap at the center of metaphor" like "an empty father" (Raymond 117).

[29] Ernst sees Dickinson as a recluse lacking an adequate sense of self and therefore in need of a way to create one, much in the sense of how Porter sees her (162). I do not believe that Dickinson lacked a constitutive other in order to differentiate herself as an individual. Rather, in accordance with latest findings that Dickinson's audience was significantly bigger than previously assumed despite her reluctance to have here poems printed, and considering the fact that she had a large circle of friends and (epistolary) acquaintances, I see her as embedded in her society and culture.

[30] A widely recognized example of how Dickinson blends erotic desire and poetic pleasure is "All the letters I can write" (F380) which blurs the line between poem, flower, hummingbird and speaker, offering the reader a "invitation to cunnilingus" (Henneberg 7):

F380

All the letters I can write
Are not fair as this –
Syllables of Velvet –
Sentences of Plush,
Depths of Ruby, undrained,
Hid, Lip, for Thee –
Play it were a Humming Bird –
And just sipped – me –

Henneberg emphasizes that the poem does not imagine sexual intercourse with a man or a woman, but with a text, which represents "a source of sexual pleasure" (p.7-8). Similarily, the corpse turned into a statue and thus an object of art offers an aesthetical pleasure that is experience in terms of erotic pleasure.

[31] Henneberg recognizes the postmodernn aspect of this strategy and claims that Dickinson was conscious of the destabilizing power of her poetry without placing the poet within this tradition (14).

[32] He identifies the same lack of consciousness as a central element to the eroticism of the *Dracula* narrative, where the sleeping victims are unaware of the penetrating vampire teeth (Barker 243).

[33] Already at the beginning of their relationship, Dickinson "turned to Sue as a compensatory source of mother religion and mother love," Erkkila maintains ("Homoeroticism" 167). Even stronger than the motherly component of their relationship was a sisterly bond, Erkkila insists, emphasizing that both the sisterly bond and the mother figure try to integrate Susan into a family setting. Despite passionate love, Erkkila further ads, Dickinson and Susan also partook in a "struggle for possession, power, and dominion" ("Homoeroticism" 167).

[34] "I see thee better – in the Dark" (442) also compares death to a mine, where paradoxically the "Dark" provides better conditions for seeing the lover, or communication with the lover, than "Light" does. Opposites are reversed here, time standing still, as there is no "Day," the "Years" of separation improve the knowledge of one another instead of estranging the lovers from each other, and the "Sun" is stuck "Continuously –/ At the Meridian." The space described is thus timeless, and this timelessness and the darkness that paradoxically enables vision "nullify the Mine."

[35] Cameron identifies Dickinson's "endlessly raising questions of relation and magnitude" as the major characteristic of her poetry, saying that Dickinson economized meaning ("Fascicles" 155).

[36] Examples in Christian religion are Archangel Michael, and Saint George, the patron saint of England. While the former defeats Satan's dragon, the latter converts the victims of the dragon to Christianity. Saint Beatus of Lungern, most widely known in a Swiss context, also kills a Dragon. In Medieval literature, there are numerous dragon slayers, among them Beowulf, the hero of Norse mythology Sigurd, who reappears as Siegfried in *Nibelungenlied*, and Tristan in *Tristan and Iseult*.

Conclusion (pp. 221-234)

[37] As Xu explains, "to assume the feminine role deliberately is to exercise a resistance from within the phallogocentric discourse, so as to disrupt it by forcing it to admit the consequences of its own logic which it cannot or does not want to admit according to the same logic" (Xu 80).

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