Emily Dickinson was twenty on 10 December 1850. There are 5 of her poems surviving from 1850-4.

**Poem 1 F1 ‘Awake ye muses nine’**

In Emily’s youth the feast of St Valentine was celebrated not for one day but for a whole week, during which ‘the notes flew around like snowflakes (L27),’ though one year Emily had to admit to her brother Austin that her friends and younger sister had received scores of them, but his ‘highly accomplished and gifted elderly sister (L22)’ had been entirely overlooked.

She sent this Valentine in 1850 to Elbridge Bowdoin, her father’s law partner, who kept it for forty years. It describes the law of life as mating, and in lines 29-30 she suggests six possible mates for Bowdoin, modestly putting herself last as ‘she with curling hair.’

The poem shows her sense of fun and skill as a verbal entertainer.

**Poem 2 [not in F] ‘There is another sky’**

On 7 June 1851 her brother Austin took up a teaching post in Boston. Emily writes him letter after letter, begging for replies and visits home. He has promised to come for the Autumn fair on 22 October, and on 17 October Emily writes to him (L58), saying how gloomy the weather has been in Amherst lately, with frosts on the fields and only a few lingering leaves on the trees, but adds

‘Dont think that the sky will frown so the day when you come home! She will smile and look happy, and be full of sunshine then – and even *should* she frown upon her child returning…’

and then she follows these words with poem 2, although in the letter they are written in prose, not verse. The garden of her love and affection for Austin knows no frost or winter.

**Poem 3 F2 ‘Sic transit gloria mundi’**

This Valentine of 1852, at 68 lines easily Emily’s longest poem, was sent to thirty year old William Hoyland, a tutor at Amherst College, and was published in the *Springfield Daily Republican* of 20 February of that year. The reader can enjoy this
sixteen stanza romp, with its opening burst of quotations and abrupt changes of subject and plug for science in the sixth stanza, without understanding all the references, but it is worth knowing about the Peter Parley of line 9, as he reappears in a more serious context in poem 65. Peter Parley was the pen name of Samuel Goodrich, who wrote books for ten year olds and upwards, and also the name of the hero of these books.

In the penultimate stanza the ‘Bonnie Doon’ which she had plucked was presumably the ‘good gift’ of a flower, accompanying the Valentine. The ‘Tuscarora’ of the penultimate line were a Red Indian tribe.

**Poem 4 F3  ‘On this wondrous sea’**

About March 1853 Emily sent this poem to Sue in Baltimore, with just the words *Write! Comrade, write!* at the head of the poem and her signature of *Emilie* at the end (L105).

Susan Gilbert had come to Amherst in 1850, and Emily had rapidly become closely attached to her. In February 1852 she had written these passionate words to her:

‘Oh Susie, I would nestle close to your warm heart, and never hear the wind blow or the storm beat again…..thank you for loving me, darling ….dearer you cannot be, for I love you so already that it almost breaks my heart – perhaps I can love you anew every day of my life, every morning and evening (L74).’

Sue, however, was not a satisfactory correspondent, and Emily continually begged her to reply to her letters. The heading *Write! Comrade, write!* could be one such appeal for a letter, with Emily in the poem saying that if Sue asks where she can find a safe haven, the answer is that she can find it in ‘the peaceful west’ with Emily.

Alternatively, the heading could be an encouragement to Sue to write poems, and the poem an example of what Emily herself can do. If this is so, the poem will be the first on what Emily called her ‘flood subject,’ namely life after death. In the first stanza she asks the Pilot, who is God or one of his angels, if he can guide her through this wondrous life to the safe haven of eternal rest. The second stanza is the pilot’s confident reply.

**Poem 5 F4  ‘I have a Bird in spring’**
This poem was also part of a letter (L173) to Sue while she was absent from Amherst. It was sent in September 1884, about eighteen months after poem 4. In the meantime Sue had become engaged to Emily’s brother Austin, and so was unable to continue her relationship with his sister with the fervour Emily wanted. Emily could not conceal her disappointment, and wrote this letter which Richard Sewall calls ‘an extraordinary one for Emily, the nearest approach to surliness and dismissal of any that survive.’ The letter begins bitterly, ‘Sue – you can go or stay – There is but one alternative – We differ often lately, and this must be the last.’ It ends on a resigned, despondent note, ‘We have walked very pleasantly – Perhaps this is the point at which our paths diverge – then pass on singing, Sue, and up the distant hill I journey on.’

Then follows the poem, in which Emily acknowledges a happier possibility. The spring in which she had been ‘decoyed’ and caught by the bird that was Sue may have been replaced by the summer of Sue’s absence during which ‘little doubts and fears and discords’ have grown up, but Emily tells her ‘doubting heart’ that on Sue’s return she will bring back with her some new melody which she has learned in her absence, and they will live ‘in a serener Bright.’

In a letter to Mrs Holland written a month later Emily comforts herself in her friend’s absence by writing, as prose, words which echo the end of poem 5, ‘Then will I not repine, knowing that bird of mine, though flown – learneth beyond the sea, melody new for me, and will return (L175).’

1858 (Emily is twenty seven. She writes 51 poems)

Poem 6 F24 ‘Frequently the woods are pink’
Ruth Miller offers the following acute reading of a seemingly simple poem. The poet describes seasonal change twice. Firstly she mentions the pink blossom of spring, the brown tree trunks of autumn and the bare hills of winter (lines 1-4). Secondly she describes the head of a tree, which in summer has its full crest of leafage, but which when reduced to trunk and branches in winter, provides a cranny through which we can see (lines 5-8). Finally she concludes how amazing it is that this passage of the four seasons in their twelve months, which we know so well and see so clearly, is connected with still greater cycles in nature, which we do not see and have to be told about (lines 9-12).
Nature is personified in this poem: the hills undress, and the months perform, as upon a stage, their changes.

**Poem 7 F16** ‘The feet of people walking home’

In the first two stanzas Emily three times moves from changes experienced in this life to the change to immortality at death: people returning home, the crocus rising from the snow and then the saved on heaven’s shore singing the Hallelujahs they had long practised in this life; divers winning pearls and then earthly pedestrians becoming winged seraphs; night stealing and bequeathing the day and then death becoming our ‘rapt’ experience of immortality.

But in the third stanza she admits her ignorance of the exact nature of eternal life, though she still has the faith to adore that resurrection, however shrouded in darkness the details may be.

The ‘Classics’ of line 21 are perhaps her best-loved books, including the Bible.

**Poem 8 F42** ‘There is a word’

Sue received a copy of this poem. As she was used to accusations that it was ages since she had sent Emily a letter, she no doubt will have taken Emily herself to be the ‘epauletted Brother’ (line 9) slain by the ‘barbed syllables’ (line 4) of that sword-piercing word ‘forgot’ (line 18) – and perhaps winced at Emily’s assertion that the whole world over there is never anything which wounds the heart so deeply as the noiseless arrow of being forgotten, as she has been forgotten by Sue.

In the first stanza Emily imagines life as a battlefield on which ‘the saved’ (= those not forgot) report the death of Emily, killed by forgetfulness.

In poem 92 Sue is described as having ‘barbs,’ and in poem 479 Emily says of her that ‘She dealt her pretty words like Blades.’

**Poem 9 F43** ‘Through lane it lay – through bramble –

Our journey through life, with its fourteen lines of perils summed up in lines 15 and 16, reaches its safe destination in the emphatic last line: it is the only fifth line in the stanzas of the poem, ‘fluttered’ is a rare transitive use of that verb, and home is reached in the last word after the perturbations of the journey.

In line 14 ‘the valley’ is presumably a temptress rather than a haven.
Poem 10 F61  ‘My wheel is in the dark!’
Again the speaker is on a voyage. Perhaps she is at the close of her life and beginning to sail from this world to the next. She knows she is still alive and moving along from the paddle-wheel going round, but all she knows about her journey on this tide where she has never been before is that it will have an end. Those who have already died cannot tell us about the destination. They merely fling the problem of its nature back at those of us who are still alive.

‘Loom’ (line 8) is the part of the oar between the rowlock and the hand.

Poem 11 F38  ‘I never told the buried gold’
Ruth Miller gives valuable clues to the meaning of this poem. The speaker tells how the setting sun seemed to her one day to be like a pirate crouching over his stolen ingots of gold. She is so enraptured by the closeness of what she sees that a snake could have attacked her unnoticed.

She ponders whether to tell anyone of the theft or whether, as she ponders, the pirate sun, called Kidd in line 17, may suddenly disappear. She needs advice. With a wise adviser she is willing to divide the booty. If the advice is no help, she leaves it to fate. (‘Atropos’ was one of the three Fates in Greek mythology.)

Poem 12 F32  ‘The morns are meeker than they were’
Emily will put a ‘trinket’ on so as not to be old-fashioned when autumn displays her new colours. The word ‘trinket’ is used in a more solemn context in poem 687.

Poem 13 F35  ‘Sleep is supposed to be’
Many of Emily’s poems are about waking to eternal life, but, despite the last stanza, this one is not. The reader should not be misled by its grandiose language. It is in fact a poem of teasing, written as a letter to her father who, as she told Dr and Mrs Holland (L175), habitually rapped on her door to wake her. In the letter the poem is prefaced by the words

‘To my Father –

to whose untiring efforts in my behalf, I am indebted for my morning-hours – viz – 3.AM to 12. PM. these grateful lines are inscribed by his aff
It is to be hoped that 3 am is a playful exaggeration, in line with her teasing her father as not being included in ‘the souls of sanity’ or ‘the people of degree.’ Anyway the message in her teasing is that all down the ages ‘the souls of sanity’ have known that sleep time is for sleep, and that day starts with the arrival of morning at daybreak, and not in the hours of darkness preceding it. ‘And daybreak, in case you didn’t know it, dearest papa, is when Aurora reddens in the East, the place of Eternity.’

Poem 14 F5 ‘One sister have I in the house’
The poem is the whole of a letter (L197) to Sue, perhaps sent to her as a greeting on her twenty-eighth birthday, 19 December 1858. If so, Austin and Sue by that time had been living in the Evergreens, next door to Emily at the Homestead, for two and a half years. It cannot have been easy for Emily to have the two people whom she loved the most married to each other and living only a hedge away from herself and her younger sister, Vinnie.

Does Emily put a completely brave face on the situation in this poem? Or does she allow some of her anxiety to show through? Anxiety has been seen in the third and fifth stanzas, but not necessarily so. Admittedly the third stanza shows Sue as different from the Dickinsons and singing a music which is not theirs, but differences can enrich as well as mar a relationship. The difficulty with seeing anxiety in the fifth stanza is that it is joined by ‘and’ to ‘I held her hand the tighter – Which shortened all the miles.’ So it could be that Emily is saying that still Sue’s music enchants the Butterfly and that still several Mays later her eyes have a violet gleam.

Certainly, if any anxiety has been expressed, it is triumphantly cast aside in the ecstatic last stanza.

Poem 15 F44 ‘The Guest is gold and crimson’
We might have guessed that ‘He’ in this riddle poem is the sunset, even if Emily herself had not given the poem the title of *Navy Sunset* in the copy of it which she sent to Sue. When the sun sets, he seems to be wearing clothes of many colours including a gay Capuchin or hood. Next morning you can find him high in the Lark’s sky or, earlier, just rising above the Lapwing’s shore.
Emily describes a similar sunset in prose, when in a letter (L189) of the same year to Mr and Mrs Samuel Bowles, she says, ‘Though it is almost nine o’clock, the skies are gay and yellow, and there’s a purple craft or so, in which a friend could sail.’

Emily may have been reminded of the lapwing by Hero’s remark about Beatrice

For look where Beatrice, like a lapwing, runs
Close by the ground, to hear our conference. *(Much Ado about Nothing 3:1:24-5)*

**Poem 16 [not in F]** ‘I would distil a cup’

This quatrain comes in a letter (L193) to Mr Bowles of late August 1858, immediately after she has written, ‘Summer stopped since you were here……..The men are mowing the second Hay. The cocks are smaller than the first and spicier,’ thus making it clear that the ‘her’ of the poem is the summer of 1858. Emily would like all her friends to drink a toast of gratitude to the summer that has just departed.

In the letter the words are written as prose, and Franklin omits them from his collection of her poems.

**Poem 17 F66** ‘Baffled for just a day or two’

As Emily sent this poem to Mrs Holland with a rosebud attached, she was presumably intending her on one level to take the ‘unexpected Maid’ of the poem to be the rosebud and to understand the poem as saying that this first rosebud has ushered in a spring of greater loveliness than Emily has ever experienced before.

But this interpretation does not explain Emily’s reaction to the rosebud described in the first two lines, and Judith Farr (G) suggests that on another level the rosebud may symbolise the Muse of Poetry. Emily, who has written verse all her life, suddenly realises that she is being called by the Muse of Poetry to be a real poet. For a day or two she is ‘baffled’ and wonders whether it can be true, and she is ‘embarrassed’ though ‘not afraid’ at the greatness of the calling. But then the Muse nods, her stream of poems begins and she exclaims ‘Surely, such a country/I was never in!’

**Poem 18 F21** ‘The Gentian weaves her fringes’

It is the time of the year when the blossoms of summer depart and can no longer be walked past (= ‘obviate parade’ in line 4), and when the maples and gentians of
autumn appear. In fact the summer of 1858 (= the ‘one below’ of line 7) after a ‘brief...illness’ died that morning and Emily held a funeral service for her. The only two other mourners present were an ‘aged Bee’ who preached the sermon, and ‘the Bobolink,’ a North American singing bird, who presumably provided the music. Emily prayed that one day they might follow their sister, Summer, as seraphs to heaven, and closed the service with a delightfully alliterative Doxology, in which the persons of the Trinity were replaced by items from nature.

Poem 19 F25 ‘A sepal, petal and a thorn’
In lines 1-4 Emily seems to be asking ‘What am I?’ and herself provides the answer in the last line.

Poem 20 F26 & 27 ‘Distrustful of the Gentian’
For whatever reason Emily left out the two syllable name needed to complete the metre of line 5, the gap should almost certainly be filled by ‘Susie,’ Emily’s pet name for Sue. As Judith Farr points out, it begins the ‘s’ alliteration of lines 5-8. But are the lines one poem, as printed by Johnson, or two poems, as printed by Franklin?

In the first stanza Emily seems to say, ‘If I show distrust of my friend Sue (= the Gentian), she chides my lack of trust, so that, although I am weary with longing for her, I will singing go (and not show distrust).’

In the second stanza she says emphatically with four similes that the phantom that is Sue always remains just out of reach of the grasp of her hand.

Two such stanzas can only be joined by supplying something like ‘Despite Sue’s reassurance so that at present I am singing, in fact she always flees me.’ This is so implausible that Franklin is more likely to be right. The unreachable Heaven appears again in poem 239.

Poem 21 F28 ‘We lose – because we win’
Lines 2 and 3 explain line 1. It is because we expect, having won, to win again, that we toss again – and lose.

Poem 22 F29 ‘All these my banners be’
Ruth Miller’s explanation of this poem is based on her view that Emily thought of the decay and rebirth of Nature in the changing seasons of the year as visible and so reliable evidence of our rebirth as immortal souls after the decay of our bodies. The fundamental law of Nature is change, and we too ‘shall all be changed, in a moment,’ as Emily’s favourite chapter from St Paul’s letters asserts. *(1 Corinthians 15)*

In the poem Emily seems to be viewing the flowers in her garden in mid-summer and describes them as her truth-proclaiming ‘banners.’ Each year they are sown and flower and die, but today is mid-summer and flowers fill all the garden, which she calls her ‘chancel,’ as it is the source of her most fundamental religious belief.

We can afford to lose and miss our flowers in autumn, as we shall find them appearing again. No burglar or broker can prevent us finding nature reborn each spring. We can gaily help this process with our spades and our seed sowing, because we, like the Crocus and the Orchis, know that the snow will melt in spring into a swamp which will be pink with flowers in June.

**Poem 23 F12**  ‘I had a guinea golden’

The meaning of the poem is clear, as Emily herself explains in the last stanza what the poem means, though she might have added a footnote saying that the seven Pleiades make up a constellation of seven stars of which only six are visible to the average naked eye, and that Greek myth consequently portrayed the Pleiades as seven sisters, of whom one, Electra, was lost.

The last stanza also makes it clear that the tone of the poem is tongue-in-cheek and that Emily is teasing her absent friend rather than expressing anguish, but the identity of the ‘missing friend’ of line 26 is a mystery. It would be tempting to link this poem with poems 5, 14 and 92 which unmistakably refer to Sue, except that the poem makes the person a man and living ‘in country far from here,’ neither of which are true of Sue.

At some time she sent a copy of the poem to Samuel Bowles, and he is perhaps the likeliest missing friend, as he was a frequent traveller and the teasing note is right for him.

The lost Pleiad also appears in poem 851.

**Poem 24 F13**  ‘There is a morn by men unseen’
Emily imagines the heaven which she has never seen as being dancing and games on a village green, and prays each ‘new May morn’ that she may one day join the departed dead in their ‘different dawn’ of eternity.

The ‘distaff’ in line 11 is presumably the stalk of a plant without its flower.

Poem 25 F15 ‘She slept beneath a tree’
That it was only Emily who remembered where the tulip bulb was wintering is a possibility, but that the tulip should recognise Emily’s foot above its bed and in consequence get dressed to appear is a typically whimsical conceit.

Poem 26 F17 ‘It’s all I have to bring today’
Perhaps the repeated ‘this’ in lines 2, 3 and 7 refers to this actual poem. Emily’s contribution is this poem and countless other poems, in which her understanding heart reveals the truth discernible in flowers and fields and in ‘all the Bees, which in the Clover dwell.’

Poem 27 F18 ‘Morns like these – we parted’
Emily describes the long day which ended in the death of a loved one. After their morning farewell no more words were exchanged. Emily could not speak for tears, and the loved one for the transport of approaching near to heaven.

Emily’s own obituary notice in the Springfield Republican, written by Susan Dickinson, ended with the first stanza of this poem.

Poem 28 F19 ‘So has a Daisy vanished’
Line 7 summarises lines 1 to 6. Emily knows that someone’s death was as unobtrusive as the disappearance of a daisy in bloom, as light as tripping feet walking on tiptoe, as flowing as the ebb tide at sunset. But is the person with God? Of this she does not claim knowledge, but only asks the question.

Poem 29 F20 ‘If those I loved were lost’
Thomas Johnson, in his 1955 edition of the poems, explains that Philip is Philip van Artevelde who led the men of Ghent in a successful rebellion against their overlord, the count of Flanders. But in a later battle the rebels were defeated and Philip ingloriously crushed to death in a ditch outside Ghent. In a play on this subject, a copy
of which was in the Dickinson household, Philip’s last words, as he is borne towards the town, are, ‘What have I done? Why such a death? Why thus?’

Philip, being carried into the town with his riddle unanswered, is contrasted with the speaker who would know if her loved ones were lost or found, and who, even if they were dead, would be impelled by the reappearance of the daisy in spring to believe in their continuing existence.

Poem 30 F6  ‘Adrift! A little boat adrift!’

The boat in the poem is a metaphor for the soul of a man sailing on the ‘wondrous sea’ of life of poem 4. The crisis of the night of his death approaches.

The next day different reports are given of what happened. The unbelieving mourners, characterised as Sailors, report that at dusk the boat gurgled down into extinction, but the angels and those on the side of the angels report that at dawn the boat sped exultant on into eternity.

The ‘So’ in lines 5 and 9 both times means ‘As follows.’ For example, ‘Sailors say as follows.’

Poem 31 F7  ‘Summer for thee, grant I may be’

Emily gives a testimonial of her devotion to some loved one. She asks if she may be his summer in winter, and his music when the birds have stopped singing. She can make such high demands, because, if her loved one were dead, she would by-pass the tomb, row the blossom she provides over the sea of death, and pray her lover to take her in his arms as his own special Anemone.

Poem 32 F8  ‘When Roses cease to bloom, Sir’

Emily sent a copy of the poem to Samuel Bowles, presumably with the flowers mentioned, and it may be him she has in mind, when she says in effect, ’Please take the flowers now when we are both alive, as one day I will be dead, and roses will have ceased to bloom for me then or Bumblebees to fly.’

In line 7 ‘Auburn’ refers to Mt. Auburn cemetery in Cambridge, just outside Boston, which Emily had visited when she was fifteen, while staying with her aunt and uncle.

Poem 33 F9  ‘If recollecting were forgetting’
This poem, which was sent to Samuel Bowles, was accompanied by flowers, and shows how unhappy Emily is in his absence, though Mr Bowles may have needed to work that out on paper, as follows:

If recollecting (which I do) = forgetting, then I do not remember you.
If forgetting (which I don’t do) = recollecting, then I had almost forgot you – but for that equivalence.

And I would only be sending you these flowers _blithely_ today, if to miss were merry and to mourn were gay.

**Poem 34 F10**  ‘Garlands for queens, may be’

Emily appears to have sent a rose to a humble friend rather than to some important person, and to have accompanied it with this poem contrasting the garlands of queens and laurels of saints and war heroes with the rose, which Nature in her kindness and fairness has created for simpler souls like Emily and her friend.

**Poem 35 F11**  ‘Nobody knows this little Rose’

Here is another rose sent to a friend. This particular rose might have remained a pilgrim on the way of life unnoticed by anybody, had not Emily picked it. But it was easy for the rose to die, as she was not the centre of human love, and will only be missed by bee and butterfly, by bird and breeze.

**Poem 36 F45**  ‘I counted till they dance so’

This is one of only three poems given a title by Emily herself. It is pleasing to read that Emily is so excited by the snowflakes that she has to put down her pencil for a jig across the room – or even outside.

**Poem 37 F46**  ‘Before the ice is in the pools’

Emily does not name the ‘wonder’ which will arrive in Amherst before winter and Christmas. As she ‘wept’ (line 15) in its absence, and it lives ‘just a bridge away,’ the wonder is almost certainly Sue. ‘What we touch the hems of’ reminds us of the woman in Matthew’s gospel who touched the hem of Jesus’ garment, saying, ‘If I do but touch his garment, I shall be made whole.’ (Matthew 9:21) Emily, it seems, was enough of an ordinary woman to wonder what frock to wear when Sue returns.
Poem 38 F47 ‘By such and such an offering’
The records of the martyrs show that it is they, the martyrs, who by the sacrifice of
themselves (not to mention the miracles they perform) weave the web of life and are
remembered. On the other hand history may well forget the name of the despot who
compelled their sacrifice, knowing him only as ‘Mr So and So.’

Poem 39 F50 ‘It did not surprise me’
As Aristotle observes, life without loving someone is worth little. But as soon as you
begin to love somebody, you open yourself to the possibility of loss. The deeper your
love, the greater your loss will be.

Emily understood this very well. It was no surprise to her that some lesser love
left her, just as she had forecast, but the pain of this had become manageable, and is
now ‘but a story.’ But if she were to lose the greater love of the one who is now
‘within my bosom,’ then there would be a ‘coffin in the heart.’ Presumably she has
Sue in mind. Her girlhood friend, Abiah Root, may be the ‘Birdling’ of the poem.

Emily looks the same reality in the face when she says in a letter of 1861, ‘I think
it sad to have a friend – it’s sure to break the Heart so – and yet – if it had none – the
Heart must seek another trade (L243).’

Poem 40 F51 ‘When I count the seeds’
As in poem 22, Emily uses rebirth in nature as evidence for the immortality of the
soul. When she sees seeds blooming as flowers, when she thinks of buried people now
on high, when by faith she believes in the immortal garden of heaven, she can say
goodbye to the summer of this life ‘unreluctantly.’

In line 10 the ‘Bee’ is perhaps the sting of doubt which she experiences from time
to time.

Poem 41 F57 ‘I robbed the woods’
Hemlock, more familiar as a poisonous plant, is also a north American fir tree. Both
fir tree and oak are personified as artists who have put their productions on display to
please Emily as she walks in the woods. (‘When we were little children,’ her sister
later recalled, ‘we used to spend entire days in the woods hunting for treasures.’)
What would the trees say about her carrying off their works of art? Would they regard
her as a thief? Or would they be glad they had sold their pictures? The only clue is
that the Hemlock is ‘solemn.’

Poem 42 F58  ‘A Day! Help! Help! Another Day!’
Every day we need the prayers of others, for, in the simple, common passing of the
days, today may be the day of a Victory, or decide the fate of nations. And every day
the soul needs to get its arrow on target.

Emily returns to this theme in poem 1174, and she would probably have
appreciated the poem of Philip Larkin called *Days* with its line ‘Days are where we
live.’

Poem 43 F59  ‘Could live – did live’
Emily records the death of a person, who through his faith in Jesus to introduce him
into heaven, could face the totality of life and death with a ‘smile,’ and could
contemplate the voyage between the two ‘with unpuzzled heart.’ She and her fellow
mourners saw the launching of his ship, but have still to make that voyage themselves.

Poem 44 F60  ‘If she had been the Mistletoe’
When Samuel Bowles received his copy of this poem, no doubt with a rose attached,
he may have thought that Emily had sent him a rather similar puzzle already, namely
poem 33. Presumably he knew that mistletoe was venerated by the Druids, and
perhaps worked it out for himself as follows:

“She has actually sent me a rose, not some mistletoe, but says ‘Suppose the rose I
sent you like the mistletoe had stayed in Amherst, and that I had come as the rose.
Well then,

How gay upon your table
My velvet life to close.’
But since she is naturally a Druid or mistletoe sort of person and claims she lacks the
freshness of a rose, she has decided not to come in person, but to send me this
traditional buttonhole of a rose.”

Poem 45 F62  ‘There’s something quieter than sleep’
Emily was fascinated by deathbed experiences, and frequently asked witnesses of
them for details of how people died (e.g. L153, 826). In this poem she is present
herself in a room with the body of someone who has died young. The distinction of death is incomprehensible to her, but at least she feels that weeping is out of place as it might upset the angel come to bear the body back to its native heaven. The simple-hearted dwell on the fact that the person died so young. Emily and her fellow believers claim in a more roundabout fashion that the bird has fled – elsewhere.

**Poem 46 F63**  ‘I keep my pledge’

Seemingly Emily and an unnamed woman pledged eternal love. The woman has now died. Emily brings her a rose and renews her pledge, swearing by items from nature which are sacred to her. She is sure that she and her ‘Blossom’ will one day exchange vows again face to face.

**Poem 47 F64**  ‘Heart! We will forget him!’

It is clear that Emily is finding it difficult to forget a man who brought warmth and light into her life and it is probable that the man is Samuel Bowles. The change to a trochaic rhythm in line 7 in an otherwise iambic poem has a suitably lagging effect.

**Poem 48 F65**  ‘Once more, my now bewildered Dove’

The poet knows that *columba* is the Latin word for ‘dove,’ and that the dove returned three times to the patriarch Noah in *Genesis* 8: 8-12. But Emily, if she is the speaker of the poem, is hoping that her dove may bring good news the third time after two failures, whereas in *Genesis* the dove returned the first time with nothing, the second time with an olive leaf, but the third time ‘returned not again unto him any more.’

All that can be guessed about the identity of the messenger or the nature of the question is that the messenger is someone close and trusted, and that the question is an urgent one. Is she perhaps asking her sister, Vinnie, to bring back a message of affection from Sue?

**Poem 49 F39**  ‘I never lost as much but twice’

Emily has experienced three losses. The first two were loved ones who died and were buried ‘in the sod.’ But God heard her prayer and angels brought replacements for these two. Now she has lost the second replacement, and appeals again to God, who is successively described as the burglar who has stolen the three lost ones, the banker who has a store of further loved ones, and the father who will take compassion on her
and send a fourth. She does not name her three lost ones, but the third is likely to be Sue. In April 1852 she had written to Sue, ‘I can only thank “the Father” for giving me such as you (L85).’

**Poem 50 F40** (I hav’nt told me garden yet)

Emily confronts the fact that she will not be able to tell anybody when she is about to die. If she told it to her garden and her bees, she would be unwilling to go. As she had written in an earlier letter to Sue, ‘This is but Earth, yet Earth so like to heaven, that I would hesitate, should the true one call away (L85).’ The shops in the street would not believe such a shy girl was bold enough. She could not bear to upset her companion hillsides and forests with the news or her loved ones at table. It would even be out of place if she accidentally hinted to a passer-by that today she would walk within the riddle of death.

**Poem 51 F 41** ‘I often passed the Village’

From when she was ten until she was twenty-five Emily lived in a house on North Pleasant St, which at the back overlooked the town cemetery, where she was eventually to be buried herself. From the windows of her room she saw many funerals. When she was fifteen she wrote to her friend Abbiah Root, ‘I have just seen a funeral procession go by of a negro baby, so if my ideas are rather dark you need not marvel (L9).’ This cemetery is ‘the Village’ which she passed as she came home down the hill from a school day at Amherst Academy.

In the poem she imagines that she has died an early death, and promises Dollie (one of her names for Sue) that she will embrace her in the grave when her turn comes to die. We may wonder how comforting Sue will have found this macabre promise, but at least she had heard it before. In April 1852, when she was in Baltimore, she had received a letter from Emily which included the words, ‘You wont cry any more, will you, Susie, for my father will be your father, and my home will be your home, and where you go, I will go, and we will lie side by side in the kirkyard (L88).’

**Poem 52 F33** ‘Whether my bark went down at sea’

If this poem continues the image of the soul as a boat, sailing the sea of life, which Emily had used in poems 4 and 30, she is presumably describing the day after death. Did the bark which was the soul vanish into nothingness or has it arrived in heaven? If
heaven, how exactly is the soul held safe in its mooring by God? These are the questions it eagerly seeks to answer.

Alternatively Emily may be eager to know how her relationship with Sue stands, for in June 1852 she wrote to her saying, ‘I shall only hope, my Susie, and that tremblingly, for hav’nt barques the fullest, stranded upon the shore (L93)?’

The poem could even be spoken by a merchant, standing on the quayside and wondering about the fate of his vessel, or by an artist wondering about the reception his work will receive.

The same metaphor appears again in poem 1234.

Poem 53 F34 ‘Taken from men – this morning’
Emily knows that a little playmate of hers has died this morning and reflects that Eden’s rooms must now be full of guests, if the young are going to die alongside the old. Our dead have gone on a journey as far as the East is from the West, and are as dim to our sight as the star on the border of earth and heaven. All we can do is to imagine them as ‘courtiers quaint’ in the kingdoms of heaven.

Poem 54 F36 ‘If I should die’
Here Emily confronts death with an insouciance and irony not shown before. Surely it won’t be too bad, she suggests, if everything continues just the same without us, and especially if the business world functions as briskly as ever. It is hard to imagine that Emily took much interest in economics or politics. Her comment ‘What Miracles the News is! Not Bismark but ourselves (L354)’ shows that she is much more likely to have agreed with the aphorism of Dr Johnson that, ‘Public affairs vex no man.’

Poem 55 F37 ‘By Chivalries as tiny’
Emily practised these chivalries assiduously herself, as the next poem reminds us.

Poem 56 F53 ‘If I should cease to bring a rose’
This poem was presumably sent with a rose to a friend on the friend’s birthday. ‘Take’ perhaps means ‘take up to send flowers to.’ In the last line Johnson reads ‘claps and Franklin ‘clasps’’ In a fragment about her childhood Emily says of the things she does not remember that ‘memory drapes her lips (Prose fragment 117).’
For her life is the word.
Poem 57 F 55 ‘To venerate the simple days’
With the exception of poem 55, this poem is one of a run of nine poems, all concerned with ‘mortality.’ Roughly a third of all her poems are about death. Her fifteen years on North Pleasant St are at least part of the reason for this emphasis.

Franklin’s text gives this poem a second stanza. Its structure and subject are so similar to the first stanza, that the two probably belong together.

1859 (Emily is twenty-eight. She writes 93 poems)

Poem 58 F 67 ‘Delayed till she had ceased to know’
The transitus or passing of the soul from this world to the next was not just a peculiar interest of Emily Dickinson’s. Its fascination and importance for everybody of that time is described by Willa Cather in ch. 2 of book 5 of her novel Death comes for the Archbishop. ‘In those days death had a solemn social importance. It was not regarded as a moment when certain bodily organs ceased to function, but as a dramatic climax, a moment when the soul made its entrance into the next world, passing in full consciousness through a lowly door to an unimaginable scene. Among the watchers there was always the hope that the dying man might reveal something of what he alone could see; that his countenance, if not his lips, would speak, and on his features would fall some light or shadow from beyond……The dying murmurs of every common man and woman were listened for and treasured by their neighbours and kinsmen. These sayings, no matter how unimportant, were given oracular significance and pondered by those who must one day go by the same road.’

In this poem Emily sees before her mind’s eye the events of ‘Yesterday.’ She has been delayed and arrives just too late for the transitus of a dear friend. She sees the doubt and helpless surrender still visible in her friend’s face, and thinks that if only her friend could have been told of the imminent arrival of Emily with her message that dying ‘was a way of being born to the purple, a coronation as much as a crucifixion,’ she might have had the look of victory on her face instead.

All others who at death are not experiencing victory, should learn from the example of her friend, and not give up hope of coronation too soon.

Poem 59 F145 ‘A little East of Jordan’
In *Genesis* 32 Jacob was apprehensive about a meeting next day with his brother Esau. That night he sent the rest of his company over a ford called Jabok, and, left alone, he wrestled with a man till break of day. When finally the man said to him, ‘Let me go, for the day breaketh.’ Jacob said, ‘I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.’ The man, revealing himself as God, gave a blessing to Jacob. And Jacob called the place Peniel (a word meaning ‘the face of God’).

Emily’s poem about this encounter has a Gymnast and an angel instead of Jacob and a man, and her angel’s asking permission to return to breakfast is in *Genesis* only implied rather than stated, but otherwise she follows the bible story and has the dawn breaking correctly over Peniel. ‘Stranger,’ or its variant ‘Signor’ would be easier to understand inside the inverted commas.

The poem may be just about a bible character Emily admired, or it may reflect her own life-long wrestling with God, as she desperately tried to be blessed with a clearer vision and knowledge of his nature.

Poem 60 F150  ‘Like her the Saints retire’
Emily’s ‘nature riddle’ poems are among some of her most baffling. But as she herself once said in a letter to Sue, ‘In a Life that stopped guessing, you and I should not feel at home (L586),’ so, at a guess, the ‘her’ in the poem is the fuchsia. The purple and crimson of the fuchsia resemble the splendour of the haloes or mitres of the saints as they return to heaven from visiting the earth. They also resemble the colours of the sunset. People say that both the saints and the light of the sunset have “departed.” This is true, but the motionless aster and the daffodil with its bulb deep in the ground are evidence that saints and the sunlight have only been temporarily ‘gathered away’ into hiding and so will return.

Poem 61 F151  ‘Papa above’
Emily complains to God that man in the universe is just like a mouse or a rat being played with by a cat. All man can do is to beg for a secure bolt-hole in one of the many ‘mansions’ which Jesus promises to his followers, as the mysteries of the universe go on around him.

Richard Sewall notes the informal, whimsical tone of Emily’s chiding.

Poem 62 F153  “Sown in dishonor”
In his first letter to the people of Corinth Paul argues that just as a seed planted by a farmer turns into wheat which is totally different from the seed, so our own bodies, which as a thing of earth are sown in dishonour and corruption, will be raised as incorruptible spiritual bodies in power and glory. *(1Corinthians 15:36-43)* Emily seems to be disagreeing with Paul’s low estimates of our earthly bodies. If her earthly body was only half as wonderful as it actually is, she could spend her life looking at it without noticing anybody else at all. This is hardly ‘dishonour.’ And does it make sense to describe it as being sown in corruption, if it is to be raised in power and glory?

**Poem 63 F155**  ‘If pain for peace prepares’

*If* pain is followed by peace, calm ‘Augustan’ years await, as we know about pain.

*If* winter is always followed by spring, we can never count all the anemones.

*If* night comes before noon to prepare us for looking at the sun, what will it be like when the noons of heaven blaze upon our developed eyes!

In her pencil copy of this poem to Sue, Emily ended line 9 with a dash rather than an exclamation mark. This makes it easier to take ‘What gaze!’ with the last three lines.

**Poem 64 F162**  Some Rainbow – coming from the Fair’

In late April 1873, in a letter to her cousins, Louise and Frances Norcross, Emily wrote, ‘Spring is a happiness so beautiful, so unique, so unexpected that I don’t know what to do with my heart (L389).’ This poem expresses that feeling in verse. In the first stanza she uses similes. The coming of spring is like a rainbow or the world at its costliest best, with its beauties like the scattered purple feathers of a peacock. The remaining stanzas end in a crescendo of awe and wonder, with the idea that spring is a sign of new life after death not very far away.

Judith Farr (G) explains some of the details in the last two stanzas. ‘Bog,’ however unpoetical it may seem, is accurate. Indeed Emily once told Higginson, ‘I had long heard of an Orchis before I found one, when a child, but the first clutch of the stem is as vivid now, as the Bog that bore it (L458).’ And ‘the Regiments of Wood and Hill’ in Amherst are rows of the wild ‘Turkish tulip.’ Circassia was a region of Turkey ceded to Russia in 1829.
The ‘Circassian’ is mentioned again in poem 970 and ‘Cashmere’ in poems 86, 110 and 725.

Poem 65 F164 ‘I can’t tell you – but you feel it’
This poem makes explicit what is hinted at in the previous poem, that the days of April are a sign of and prepare us for the still sublimer days of heaven. Only saints can properly describe their swiftly vanishing sweetness. All we can do is to walk modestly through them, and not spoil the wonder of this presage of heaven by reducing them to chatter about the weather. As was noted on poem 3, Peter Parley wrote books helping children to learn to read.

In 1862 Emily was moved to write to Thomas Higginson by reading his newspaper article Letter to a Young Contributor. In the course of this article, he says, ‘I fancy in some other realm of existence…..we may say to one another, “Do you remember yonder planet, where once we went to school?”

Poem 66 F110 ‘So from the mould’
This poem seems to require the reader to supply a ‘Just as’ clause before the poem begins, so that Emily is saying, ‘Just as we shall rise from this life into a heavenly life, so the flower rises from the bulb, and the butterfly leaps from the cocoon. These are all processes whose nature is hidden from the wise and which we peasants gaze at in perplexed wonder.’

Judith Farr suggests that we could also supply before the poem begins the clause ‘Just as the secret artist is discovered.’ The butterfly from the cocoon appears again in poem 354 and the flower from the mould in poem 392.

Poem 67 F112 ‘Success is counted sweetest’
Apart from her Valentines, this was the first poem of Emily’s to be published. In 1876 her friend, Helen Hunt Jackson, tried to persuade her to contribute a volume of poems to a No Name series. Emily refused, but she did agree two years later to contribute one poem to a No Name anthology. This was the poem she chose, perhaps because the meaning is clear once it is realised that the ‘purple Host’ are the victors who have captured the enemy’s flag in battle.
It is not known what particular experience she has spurred her to write the poem. It may equally well have been suggested by the American Civil War or by her own personal battles against that ‘Cavalry of Woe’ which she mentions in poem 126.

George Whicher points out how the poem begins with two statements of two lines each, with ‘sweetest’ in the first statement leading to ‘nectar’ in the second statement, and then swells and expands into an eight line example of her theme.

Poem 68 F115  ‘Ambition cannot find him’
‘Leagues of nowhere’ lie between Emily’s loving ambition to find the departed and the place where he now is. He was undistinguished in life, but in death he is honoured by the immortality which Emily herself will one day share.

Poem 69 F99  ‘Low at my problem bending’
Emily’s bafflement at a minor problem has no point when a ‘larger’ one arrives. She does not say what the problems are. The ‘larger’ one could be the news of a death. But instead of giving biographical detail, she writes a poem which is endlessly applicable to the lives of its readers.

Poem 70 F117  “Arcturus” is his other name’
The Emily who had climbed the hill of Science in poem 3 often writes from a scientific standpoint. For example in poem 185 she points out that ‘Microscopes are prudent/in an Emergency’ and she perfectly sums up the scientific method in poem 1770. But she is also capable of poking fun at scientists. In this poem they give the stars classical names; they call a dead worm a ‘centipede’ and whisper to it in Latin ‘I shall rise;’ they classify, collect specimens and chart the heavens; they may even say one day that north is south and south is north.

Emily just hopes that heaven hasn’t been similarly brought up to date, or, if it has, that God the father will still lift an old-fashioned girl like her over the stile into his kingdom.

Poem 71 F105  ‘A throe upon the features’
The structure of this poem seems to be four exclamations about a death in lines 1-5, followed by a three line relative clause in lines 6-8. If this is right, in the last three lines Emily will be saying, ‘But when I’ve steadied myself and got used to this death,
I will then admit to myself that at least the dead person has been allowed to rejoin its own departed loved ones.’

Poem 72 F106 ‘Glowing is her bonnet’
Ruth Miller suggests that the lady in the first stanza is departing autumn, who wears glowing colours of red so that none can fail to notice her departure. But it would be better, continues the poet, to slip off like the daisy, whose departure is unnoticed except by the birds with their tearful rills of song (or the tearful brook) and the passers by.

As in poem 288, Emily thinks it better to be a ‘Nobody’ than a ‘Somebody.’ She also refers to the vanishing of the daisy in poem 28.

Poem 73 F136 ‘Who never lost, are unprepared’
Aeschylus says in his play Agamemnon, ‘Things go by turns.’ And so they do in this poem. First failure, then success. Thirst, then a drink and the fruit of the Tamarind tree (or its shade). Hard days of marching with Pizarro, and then the triumphant sight of the Pacific from the shores of Peru. And the greatest example of this principle: first the wounds and scars of life’s journey, then God instructing his angels to admit us to heaven.

In reading the poem we find a stress on the word ‘Flagons,’ which is taken from its metrical place at the end of the previous line, and put at the beginning of the normally shorter second line of the pair. Also, as George Whicher points out, lines 6-8 echo lines 8-10 of poem 15.

In ch. 4 of Mrs Gaskell’s Wives and Daughters Mrs Gibson, describing the life of a doctor’s apprentice, says, ‘And on Sundays he shall have a taste of tamarinds to reward him for his weekly labour at pill-making.’

Poem 74 F137 ‘A Lady red – amid the Hill’
The publishers of the 1896 collection of Emily’s poems appropriately called this poem The Waking Year. All winter a red flower, perhaps the ‘tulip’ of poem 64: 19-24, and the white lily have been keeping themselves secret underground. When the house-cleaning breezes of spring arrive, we ask the breezes what guests they are expecting, as we and our neighbours have apparently forgotten. But the woods know
who is coming and smile at the imminent resurrection, even though they are taking such a strange event very nonchalantly.

One imagines that if we ourselves are resurrected, it will seem natural and ‘nothing very strange.’

**Poem 75 F141**  ‘She died at play’
This is one of Emily’s most perplexing ‘nature riddles.’ The first stanza immediately suggests a butterfly, but the ghost of a butterfly is a strange concept. A better guess may be that the first stanza refers to the sun and the second stanza the moon. This at least makes some sense of the whole poem and in poem 228 Emily does describe the sunset as having a ‘spotted face.’

**Poem 76 F143**  ‘Exultation is the going’
As in poems 30 and 52 Emily uses the image of a boat to describe the soul’s passing from life to death. We live our life among the mountains as inland souls. At death we become the sailor of line 6, and put to sea into Eternity. For Emily this setting sail will be an ‘exultation,’ but no more than in poem 52 can she, a mountain girl, actually describe the divine intoxication of this voyage into Eternity.

**Poem 77 F144**  ‘I never hear the word “escape”’
Emily does not say what she wishes to escape and fly away from, but merely that it is childish to try to do so, as she knows it is impossible. One out of many possible meanings could be that she knows she has to spend some time doing her share of the household duties, however much she might like to escape to her room and write poems.

Her niece, Martha, Austin’s daughter, told the story of how at times Emily would look down from the landing outside her room, and, with her thumb and forefinger closed on an imaginary key, say, with a quick turn of her wrist, ‘It’s just a turn – and freedom, Matty.’

**Poem 78 F125**  ‘A poor – torn heart – a tattered heart’
A dying person, ‘intent upon the vision/of latitudes unknown,’ does not notice that the close of the day mirrors the close of life, but as he dies is taken up by angels to the safe harbour of heaven.
Emily sent to Sue many harder poems than this one, but she made its meaning completely clear by stitching to her copy of the poem a picture of little Nell being taken up to heaven, clipped from her father’s copy of *The Old Curiosity Shop*.

‘Tenderly’ in line 11 is stressed by its clash with the iambic rhythm of the rest of the poem.

**Poem 79 F128 ‘Going to heaven’**
The ‘two I lost’ in line 15 are perhaps two of the losses referred to in poem 49. Light-hearted as the poem may first appear, Emily reveals some ambivalence in her views about heaven which was to become more marked later in her life. Here in the last stanza she claims that a completely sure belief in heaven would take her breath away. Also, this curious Earth is itself so fascinating that Emily would prefer to stay and examine it rather than die and go to heaven.

**Poem 80 F129 ‘Our lives are Swiss’**
Emily confesses in poem 124 that she never saw in person the Alps lifting their curtain of mist so that Italy could be seen in the plain below. It is tempting to suggest that for her a ‘Swiss life’ meant normal daily existence, with the Alps being the humdrum household tasks which fell to her lot, the baking, gardening, sewing, nursing, canning, as Judith Farr (G) lists them. Such tasks were ‘solemn’ as having their own importance, but ‘siren’ because she knew that the other side of them was the land of her poems. Every so often the mist lifts, and she sees her own country.

**Poem 81 F82 ‘We should not mind so small a flower’**
Judith Farr (G) explains that ‘so small a flower’ is the blue gentian. We take notice of it because in its quiet way, when it blooms in the autumn, it reminds us of the spicy drunkenness of full summer which has now departed from the garden. More than that, it is a forerunner of the everlasting beauties of Paradise.

**Poem 82 F48 ‘Whose cheek is this?’**
Emily sent this poem as a pencilled note to Sue. At the top of it was mounted a tiny picture of a bird, and the thread which probably attached a flower to the note still remains. In the traditional story robins covered the dead bodies of the ‘Babes lost in the Wood.’ A ‘pall’ is the funeral garment for a dead body. The ‘lost Pleiad’ was
explained in the note on poem 23. But that is as far as the facts take us. All else is
guesswork. Did Emily find in the woods a flower which seemed to be lost or dead,
which, when she got it home, was so far gone that she could not tell the difference
between its flower (‘the cheek’) and its leaves (‘the pall’)?

**Poem 83 F88** ‘Heart not so heavy as mine’

On the assumption that Emily is the speaker in the poem and that the incident actually
happened, the reader learns that Emily with ‘heavy heart’ and ‘irritated ear’ was for a
moment cheered by someone whistling under her window. She hopes that he may
pass by tomorrow night as well, and by his whistling stop her feeling ‘weary and
sore.’

She sent copies of this poem to both Samuel Bowles and Kate Anthon. It is
uncertain whether or not she was hinting that one or both of them were responsible for
her sorrow. Bowles had been a regular visitor to the Evergreens since the beginning of
1858. The young widow Kate Anthon had visited Sue and Austin in both March and
August 1859. They all enjoyed what Kate called ‘celestial evenings’ in which Emily
and Bowles played shuttlecock. Emily herself called them ‘evenings of bliss’ and by
the end of the year had sent Kate two sensuous letters (L203, 209) and one poem
(poem 222).

**Poem 84 F121** ‘Her breast is fit for pearls’

The ‘her’ in this poem is usually taken to be Sue. Emily knows she cannot dive for the
pearls that befit Sue, nor is she a king with a crest for her, but what she can do is build
a nest in her heart to be their home.

Ruth Miller, on the other hand, takes ‘her’ to be the Muse of Poetry. Emily
knows she cannot write the large scale epics usually associated with the muse, but if
the muse is willing to accept small, ‘homely’ poems as well, Emily can construct out
of her small poems a nest for the muse which will be perennial.

The only extant copy of the poem was sent to Samuel Bowles not Sue. This is
perhaps a small piece of evidence for the ‘muse’ interpretation.

**Poem 85 F87** “They have not chosen me,” he said’
The words Jesus actually said to his disciples on Maundy Thursday, and in Jerusalem rather than Bethlehem, were, ‘You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you (John 15:16).’ For Emily Jesus’ words have an implication of dishonour. The disciples, despite being chosen by him, are about to dishonour him by falling asleep in the garden and running from the soldiers. She, an insignificant Daisy, is bold enough to say the same thing with its implication of dishonour because her sovereign Jesus said it first.

But to what group of people is she saying it? The likeliest group seem to be the group of friends that she had spent such blissful evenings with recently at the Evergreens, especially Sue and Austin, Samuel Bowles and Kate Anthon. Throughout her life Emily suffered from her deepest affections not always been returned in the same measure, and this poem may indicate that she had sensed a cooling off in their affections towards her.

Poem 86 F98 ‘South winds jostle them’
Thomas Johnson says that Emily often sent this poem to accompany a gift of flowers to a friend. But she also sent it as one of three poems included in her second letter to Thomas Higginson on 25 April 1862 (L261). In this context it seems to present to him as though they were flowers her other poems which she sent him, and implies that her poems, as Sewall finely says, were ‘things of nature that had come with no practice at all.’ Two months later she would ask Higginson to become her poetical ‘Preceptor’ (L265).

Emily believed butterflies flew huge distances, as poem 137 shows us, so a ‘passage Cashmere’ may be literal rather than a metaphorical expression.

Poem 87 not in F ‘A darting fear – a pomp – a tear’
This poem is part of a letter (L200) of 13 February 1859 to Mrs Joseph Haven. Her husband had been professor of philosophy at Amherst College, but he and his family had moved to Chicago a few months ago. Emily ends the letter by saying how much she misses ‘the geranium at the window’ of their house and ‘the clustering frocks at the door,’ and by summing up her mixed feelings at their move in the four lines of the poem.
She feels a sharp pang when she wakes and realises anew that her friends are breathing ‘a different dawn’ in Chicago. She is glad that Joseph Haven has an important new post, but a tear still falls.

**Poem 88 F78**  ‘As by the dead we love to sit’
This poem comes in a letter of 2 March 1859 (L204) sent to her dear friend, Mrs Holland. Emily tells her friend that she gathers from the *Springfield Republican* newspaper that Dr Holland is about to return home from a lecturing tour, and exclaims, rather girlishly, ‘Am told that fasting give to food marvellous Aroma, but [I] by birth a Bachelor, disavow Cuisine. Meeting is well worth parting.’ But she then gives this point its most serious possible application by saying that unless people dear to us died, we would never experience after a period of impatience the rapture of meeting them in heaven. Then follow the two stanzas of the poem.

As we mourn for our dead, in mathematics broken by our tears we work out that the greater the penury of our loss, the vaster will be the prize of reunion in heaven.

‘Fading’ is a mysterious word. In poem 687 ‘faded child’ means ‘dead child,’ so perhaps ‘fading ratio’ means ‘the sort of ratio imposed by death.’

**Poem 89 F68**  ‘Some things that fly there be’
The first two stanzas appear to be a contrast with the third. Emily says that at the moment she is not concerned to write a poem about things that fly, nor is it her business to reflect on things that stay. What she would like to be able to do is to ‘expound the skies’ of heaven to which the dead rise, but, alas, ‘how still that riddle lies!’ as it waits for explanation.

**Poem 90 F69**  ‘Within my reach’
Judith Farr (G) reminds us that violets were especially precious to Emily ‘because their loveliness came up in meadows often “unsuspected” or unseen or too late,’ and argues that at a literal level the poem is about the violets which Emily has missed seeing because she sauntered the wrong way through the village and just too early for the appearance of the violets. This literal missing of violets may of course stand for other precious things missed by the poet because she took the wrong road.

The poem was understood differently and at a more literal level by Mrs Caroline Dall, who in *The Boston Transcript* for 22 December 1894 advanced the theory that
the saunterer through the village was the man who was Emily’s lover, and that missing him marred Emily’s chances of love for ever. But Vinnie, in a letter of reply to Mrs Dall, said stoutly ‘Emily never had any love disaster.’

In Farr’s interpretation ‘so’ in line 6 means ‘therefore’ and the subject of ‘sauntered’ in lines 4 and 5 is ‘I.’ In Dall’s interpretation ‘so’ means ‘in the same way’ and the subject of ‘sauntered’ is ‘he.’

**Poem 91 F70** ‘So bashful when I spied her’
Emily will never tell for whom she picked the wild flower. The poet describes the flower as though it were a human being with human feelings.

Judith Farr (G) sees darker overtones in this poem, the picking of the helpless, struggling flower suggesting the forcible deflowering of a woman by the more powerful male.

**Poem 92 F71** ‘My friend must be a bird’
The ‘friend’ of the poem is almost certainly Sue. Emily cannot think why Sue has flown, as in poem 5, or why she utters barbed syllables, as in poem 8.

**Poem 93 F72** ‘Went up a year this evening’
Emily describes someone who exactly a year ago died an enviable death, ascending to the skies in death’s balloon. He humbly and cheerfully accepted the fact of separation. He was grateful for this life and talked softly of another, thus pleasantly diverting his attention from the actual moment of death. Finally he was released from his ‘moorings’ and taken to heaven. Emily, a mere daisy by comparison, can only say of the place where he now is that it is different.

**Poem 94 F73** ‘Angels, in the early morning’
In poem 78 angels had tenderly carried to God a ‘tattered heart’ at the moment of its death. In this poem they are shown to be work throughout our lives. They look after us when we belong to them as buds in the morning of our lives. And when in our adult lives we are like parched flowers in the hottest sun of midday, they still stoop down to us, and with a sigh carry us along.

In a later letter of 1883 (L824) to her friend Maria Whitney Emily says, ‘the Angel begins in the morning of every human life.’
Poem 95 F74 ‘My nosegays are for Captives’

The nosegays are Emily’s poems, which she hopes will bring foretastes of a long-denied heaven to life’s captives here on earth.

Poem 96 F75 ‘Sexton! My Master’s sleeping here’

Emily asks a sexton at a cemetery which grave is her Master’s. She wants to sow daisies and build a bird’s nest, so that, when the snows of winter melt from off his grave, the daisies and the song of the troubadour bird may lead her to it.

Poem 97 F76 ‘The rainbow never tells me’

The rainbow, says the poet, never tells me in words that the storm is over, yet I believe her more than I do the words of the philosophers. My flowers do not speak in Forums either, yet they and the birds prove that nature’s resurrection in spring foreshadows our resurrection after death more successfully than could be done in words by Cato, one of the greatest orators of ancient Rome.

Poem 98 F77 ‘One dignity delays for all’

There is lying in wait for all of us one day when we shall be the centre of attention, namely the day of our own funeral. The pomp for us on that day will be greater than that of ermine-wearing nobles. ‘Our meek escutcheon’ is our shield, presumably depicting who we are and what we have done.

When self-effacing Matthew dies in the penultimate chapter of Anne of Green Gable, we read, ‘For the first time in his life Matthew Cuthbert was a person of central importance, the white majesty of death had fallen upon him and set him apart as one crowned.’

Poem 99 F79 ‘New feet within my garden go’

It is spring. Emily seems to have a new gardener, who works in solitude broken only by a bird singing on an elm. The children who now play on the green and the company of the dead are also new and different from those of last spring. But the recurring spring and winter are always the same, the spring giving us cause for thought, and the winter punctual.
For Emily the thought is that spring is the sign of our rebirth after death. The Roman poet Horace, interpreting the same sign differently, concluded that the springs return but we don’t. *(Odes 4:7)*

**Poem 100 F147 ‘A science – so the Savants say’**

Emily is more respectful of the Savants of Science here than in poem 70, but she still does not grant them any superiority over the ordinary observer of nature. A scientist from a single bone may be able to give a description of the whole corpse buried in earth or tomb, but similarly the observer of nature who is on the lookout for it can infer from a single flower the manifold glories of the spring which are to follow.

Johnson’s index suggests that ‘the meekest flower of the mead’ is the dandelion. This seems likely, for ‘little Leontodon’ wakes first in spring both in poem 142 and in Emily’s letter (L81) to her friend Abbiah Root where she says, ‘as soon as the first green grass comes, up from a chink in the stones peeps a little flower, precious “leontodon.”’

**Poem 101 F148 ‘Will there really be a “Morning”’?**

This lucid, simple poem is most easily understood as Emily in childlike fashion eagerly demanding from some wise adult details of our future life in heaven. But she may also have in mind the question of whether she will ever receive fame as a poet.

**Poem 102 F149 ‘Great Caesar! Condescend’**

According to Thomas Johnson this poem derives from a copy of it sent to Austin, and the mocking, teasing note of these witty four lines is exactly right for one side of her relationship with her brother. The poem perhaps accompanied an actual daisy picked by Emily and sent by her across to the Evergreens. There may be also a little teasing of their father, as Cato was one of the severest and sternest of the ancient Romans.

**Poem 103 F157 ‘I have a King, who does not speak’**

The ‘King’ of the poem is probably God the father. As he does not reveal himself to Emily during the day, she can only hope that he will reveal himself to her in her dreams when she is asleep. If she wakes after a dream in which she has just glimpsed heaven, jubilation! But if no dream of heaven has occurred, the little bird in the
orchard does not trill his message of regeneration, and Emily cannot pray to God, as that would be perjury.

Poem 104 F158  ‘Where I have lost, I softer tread’
The last stanza is a contrast with the first three. When she has lost someone to death, Emily knows perfectly well what to do, what to say and what to wear, but she does not know why she has lost her loved one. Only those of a purer faith who died and entered Bliss a century ago can answer that question.

Poem 105 F160  ‘To hang our head – ostensibly’
After a run of four fairly straightforward poems in Johnson’s edition Emily returns to her epigrammatic densest. Ruth Miller helpfully suggests that Emily is berating herself for hanging her head and outwardly meekly accepting the less than enthusiastic response to her poems offered by Samuel Bowles. If she later finds that this was the wrong attitude to take to her poems, since in fact they are touched with immortality, she will slyly be able to conclude that Bowles got it wrong as well. Judging by the muddled, fuzzy standards of the world, he adopted its ‘Cobweb attitudes’ and operated on ‘a plane of Gauze’ instead of penetrating to the deep truth of her poems which lay below.

Miller gives as an example of Bowles using the world’s standards this sentence of his from the *Springfield Republican*, ‘Now in the flower season, let us welcome the kindred flowers of poetry and romance, and never idly fancy the time is lost that is spent in their enjoyment.’

Poem 106 F161  ‘The Daisy follows soft the Sun’
Emily compares Samuel Bowles to ‘the Sun’ in Letter 908 and frequently calls herself ‘Daisy,’ as in poem 85. Whether or not she sent Samuel Bowles a copy of this poem, it seems to portray her growing affection and love for this friend of the family, even though he himself was married to Mary Bowles.

Emily, like the daisies on the lawn, softly turns her face towards her sun as day declines, and is still there, sitting shyly, when the sun appears next morning. But, unlike the daisies on the lawn, she can be regarded as a ‘Marauder’ of her sun’s peace, who has to be forgiven for the intensely erotic feelings of the last stanza, in which she boldly imagines ‘Night’s possibility.’
Poem 107 F152  ‘Twas such a little – little boat’
Emily returns to the metaphor of the soul being a boat, which she had used in such poems as 4 and 30. In this poem her boat was very small, and the statelier craft around did not notice when her little boat was enticed too far from the shore and overwhelmed by a wave.

If Emily herself is the speaker of the poem, the loss of the boat must be a metaphor for the loss of something else, other than our life at the point of death.

Poem 108 F156  ‘Surgeons must be very careful’
Presumably ‘Life is the Culprit’ in the sense that it is Life which is responsible (though hardly guiltily) for surgeons having to be very careful. In ch. 21 of Thomas Hardy’s *Far from the Madding Crowd* the shepherd, Gabriel Oak, performs forty-nine successful perforations on sheep swollen by eating clover. ‘Only in one case did he miss his aim, striking wide of the mark.’

Poem 109 F163  By a flower – By a letter’
It is tempting to regard all these flowers and letters, which her love is so quick to devise, as being sent to Samuel Bowles. All the intense labour which they involve will be forgotten, if they only fix more tightly the rivet which holds their relationship together.

Poem 110 F111  ‘Artists wrestled here!’
A guess at the meaning of this terse poem would be that artists have always struggled to depict a sunset, using expensive pigments and a suitable rose colour. But even the Student of the Year, the most proficient artist, would be best advised to give up painting the picture on his easel, as he has no chance of catching the magic of the actual sunset.

If this is right, Emily repeats her point in the last stanza of poem 291.

Poem 111 F113  ‘The bee is not afraid of me’
Emily seems to be saying, ‘I’m such a favourite with the whole of nature on a summer’s day, that it’s hard to understand why I have these silver mists of tears in my eyes. Summer’s day, please tell me.’
If this is right, the answer to her question might be Shakespeare’s line, ‘For summer’s lease hath all too short a date.’ *(Sonnet 28)*

**Poem 112 F114** ‘Where bells no more affright the morn’

Emily’s plea to her father in poem 13 not to wake her so early in the morning does not seem to have had its desired effect, as in this poem we find her again begging her father to stop his early morning bell-ringing, a practice which means that she has to scrabble around in the dark to get dressed.

No doubt the ‘nimble Gentlemen’ of Amherst have a good reason for getting up early, but for herself it would be a bliss as great as heaven itself, if she could occasionally sleep until noon, undisturbed by father’s bells or factory hooters.

Thomas Johnson explains that the last stanza nicely alters just the third and fourth lines of the fourth verse of Isaac Watts’s hymn *There is a land of pure delight*. In Watts’ hymn those two lines are

> Not Jordan’s stream, nor death’s cold flood  
> Should fright us from the shore.

Like the earlier poem 13, this poem reveals an Emily with a twinkle in her eye.

**Poem 113 F116** ‘Our share of night to bear’

We journey through the ‘joy and woe’ which Blake says ‘man was made for.’ *(Auguries of Innocence)* Sometimes we are lost in a mist, sometimes we have a star to guide us. Eventually we emerge into the day of heaven.

‘Filling the blanks’ might nowadays be described as ‘ticking the boxes.’ ‘Scorning’ is an odd opposite to ‘bliss.’ Did the exigencies of rhyme take over?

**Poem 114 F97** ‘Good night, because we must’

‘We all have to die. What happens to the dead body is an intricate puzzle beyond our solving in this life. It would be worth dying incognito just to find out. The saucy angels have refused to give me any information. Father God, couldn’t you tell them to tell me?’

Emily is capable of teasing God the Father as well as her own father.
Poem 115 F100  ‘What Inn is this’
The poet presents herself as a stranger venturing into an Inn, only to find that she has arrived at the ‘curious rooms’ of death. Only the Landlord, a Necromancer who communicates with spirits, can tell her who the people there are.

Poem 116 F101  ‘I had some things that I called mine’
It is autumn and Emily is complaining that God has recently sent his Bailiff (= the flower-killing frosts of autumn) to claim the carefully sown flowers which until them had belonged to her. However eminent the claimant, Emily is her father’s daughter and she will bring an action against him, retaining as her counsel Lemuel Shaw, the Chief Justice of the Massachusetts Supreme Court.

As in the previous two poems, Emily continues to talk to God in much the same way as she talked to her own father in poem 112.

Poem 117 F102  ‘In rags mysterious as these’
Emily imagines ‘shining Courtiers’ (perhaps Angels) disguising themselves in rags as beggars, and then testing some great man by asking for alms at his door. If they receive alms, they will receive him with a smile when he ‘walks barefoot/upon their golden floor (of heaven).’

But the first line of the poem suggests that Emily herself is disguised in similar rags. Perhaps she is implying that her shining poetic skill is hidden by the rags of her womanhood and her humility, but like the Courtiers she is hoping for the alms of approval from the great critics.

Emily may have derived her picture of Angels in disguise testing men from Ovid’s story of Jupiter and Mercury visiting men in disguise and finding only Baucis and Philemon hospitable. *(Metamorphoses 8:618ff)*

Poem 118 F103  ‘My friend attacks my friend’
Emily is perhaps describing how quarrels escalate. Her friend A attacks her friend B – a pretty sort of battle for her to hear about. She turns soldier herself, and attacks friend A for making the attack. Friend A sarcastically reproaches Emily for attacking him.

There is so much unpleasant aggression around that she would like to shoot the human race before killing herself!
Poem 119 F118  ‘Talk with prudence to a Beggar’

The general application of this poem is clear, once we know that Potosi in Bolivia was famous for its silver mines. To think carefully how we talk to the poor, the hungry and those in prison, the very categories mentioned by Jesus in his parable of the sheep and the goats, shows respect for such people and in extreme cases may even avert suicide.

But the poem may also have a particular application to the poet’s own life. Ruth Miller refers to a letter (L205) to Samuel Bowles of April 1859 in which Emily says, ‘Friends are gems – infrequent. Potosi is a care, Sir.’ So it is may be that in the poem Emily is warning Samuel Bowles not to offer the Potosi mines of friendship to herself, even though she is a beggar with a desperate need of friendship, unless the offer is made with prudence, reverently and with caution.

Poem 120 F119  ‘If this is “fading”

Emily is perhaps watching from her bedroom windows a sunset more glorious than usual. She herself would be proud to shut her eyes in death during such a sunset, as she would at least be able to die, while calling attention to the glorious peacock sunset that surrounds her.

Poem 121 F120  ‘As Watchers hang upon the East’

Both stanzas have the same structure, five lines of ‘just as’ examples followed by a ‘so’ conclusion in the sixth line. Just as the East beguiles those who watch for dawn, an imagined feast the beggar, and the babble of brooks in deserts beguile those too distant to have the delight of seeing them, so does Heaven beguile the tired. And as the dawn, when it arrives, is welcome to the watcher, and the flagon welcome to the beggar when he at last presses it to his lips, so welcome is ‘heaven to us, if true.’

Emily sent a copy of this poem to Samuel Bowles, perhaps suggesting that he is such a heaven to her.

Poem 122 F104  ‘A something in a summer’s Day’

In three line stanzas, a form used again in poems 130 and 132, Emily describes how the ‘solemnizing’ and ‘transporting’ experience of a summer’s day and night takes her beyond the ecstasy of the actual experience to thoughts of heaven. This vision is so precious that she has to veil her face, lest too close an inspection of such a grace should make her lose it.
But even if on one summer’s day the vision prove fugitive, that wizard God, in his opulence, is never at rest and is already creating another summer’s dawn and day to follow the previous one.

Poem 123 F107 ‘Many cross the Rhine’
The speaker with his brown Cigar is hardly Emily herself, but one of those many travellers who, when back home, can imagine they are crossing the Rhine as they drink a Rhenish wine, or breathing Frankfurt air as they smoke a cigar from the region.

Poem 124 F108 ‘In lands I never saw – they say’
As far as is known, Emily never sent this poem to Samuel Bowles, but its picture of ‘a Myriad Daisy’ meekly at play at the foot of the immortal, towering Alps is so like the picture of ‘the Daisy follows soft the Sun’ of poem 106 that Mr Bowles would have had no trouble answering the playful question with which the poem ends.

Poem 125 F109 ‘For each ecstatic instant’
Emily describes a universal experience. From the mountain of transfiguration we always have to descend to the plain of everyday life (Mark 9:2-14). And the more intense the ecstasy, the sharper the pain when the ecstasy is no longer present. For one beloved hour we may have to endure years of scanty rations in which each farthing has to be struggled for and all we heap up is tears.

Poem 126 F138 ‘To fight aloud, is very brave’
The inner battle we all fight against woe is ‘gallanter’ even than the battles fought by soldiers for their country, as our inner battles are unseen and win no praise from patriots. But Angels with plumed wings lead in heaven the procession of those who on earth have fought the battle against woe. They are the ‘Rank after Rank with even feet,’ wearing the white uniforms of salvation (as in poem 325).

Poem 127 F139 “Houses” – so the Wise Men tell me’
The Wise Man Emily has in mind is Jesus. St John records that the night before Jesus was killed he spoke at length words of encouragement to his disciples. (John 14-16).
This great discourse begins with the words, ‘Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.’

Emily may not know the Father who has built the mansions, but she trusts the words of Jesus. Indeed the very word ‘mansions’ has such a comforting sound that she would be ready to set out for them tonight, if she could find the way.

**Poem 128 F140  ‘Bring me the sunset in a cup’**
Emily wants to know who has imprisoned our spirits in bodies so that there are countless things about the universe that we do not know. Even more importantly, who will let us out ‘some gala day,’ so that we can find answers to all our questions.

*Withes* (l. 15) are literally branches of willow or osier, used for tying and binding.

*The wampum of the night* (l. 17) are here a metaphor for the stars. In actuality they were beads made from the ends of shells by N. American Indians.

*This little Alban House* (l. 19) is the body, so called because ‘Alban’ is derived from *albus*, the Latin word for ‘white.’

*Passing Pomposity* (l. 24) is an unexpected ending to the poem. Perhaps she means that, if our spirits are released some day to the heaven of knowledge, we shall find that the answers are in fact very simple, so that we shall have ‘passed Pomposity’ on the way there.

**Poem 129 F142  ‘Cocoon above! Cocoon below!’**
Before its ‘hour in Chrysalis’ the butterfly is ‘all Cocoon,’ hiding its ‘gay secret.’ As it emerges from its chrysalis state, we only have a moment to interrogate it before it is flying high above the ‘receding grass,’ knowing the Universe first hand, and so wiser than us, its earthbound deputies – though we may be as wise when released from our ‘Cocoon’ at death.

Emily’s niece, Martha Dickinson, called her aunt’s garden a ‘butterfly utopia,’ and Emily wrote more than fifty poems about butterflies.

**Poem 130 F122  ‘These are the days when Birds come back’**
Emily poignantly describes the days of ‘Indian Summer.’ The skies, as beautiful as those of June, can delude us humans, though not the Bee, into mistakenly believing that proper summer has returned. Even Emily is almost tricked into such a belief, until
she sees unmistakable signs of autumn. (Franklin has a comma after ‘belief’ at the end of l. 9, which makes better sense than Johnson’s full-stop.)

Even so, these last days of summer have a sacramental quality, and are, as it were, the last bread and wine that Emily will receive from the communion table of summer until the return of summer the following year. She adapts the communion service she had known in church to her own simpler worship of nature, in which even a child like herself can ask to join.

Poem 131 F123 ‘Besides the Autumn poets sing’
This poem was aptly titled November when it was first published in 1891. Emily is not now describing autumn, with its ‘sheaves’ as described by the poet James Thompson in The Seasons and its ‘Golden Rod’ of William Bryant’s poem The Death of the Flowers,’ but those November days before the snow comes. The mornings and evenings are sharp. The brook is quiet and the fairies of summer have fallen asleep. Only a squirrel remains to share her sense of loss.

The last line is reminiscent of poem 1075 and the whole poem of Emily’s comment in a letter (L311) of early November 1865 to Mrs Holland, ‘The noons [now] are more laconic and the sundowns sterner……..November always seemed to me the Norway of the year.’

Poem 132 F126 ‘I bring an unaccustomed wine’
Emily brings a glass of restorative wine to lips parched with fever. After an hour she returns, only to find that the person has died, her hands still holding the glass, the wine not drunk. All Emily can do is always to carry the cup of wine with her for ‘some other thirsty,’ of whom the dead person might have told her if she had lived. If this happens Jesus will be able to say to Emily at the last judgement, “Unto the little, unto me” (a shortened form of Jesus’ words at Matthew 25:45 ‘Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of my brethren, ye have done it unto me’).

As it is difficult to see why any ‘pilgrim’ should have refused a literal gift of wine from Emily’s hand, it may be that the ‘unaccustomed wine’ is a metaphor for her poems. They are certainly unusual, and as yet she has barely found any pilgrims on life’s journey interested in reading them.

Poem 133 F127 ‘As Children bid the Guest “Good Night”’
Emily responded to her flowers as though they were people. She once wrote to her Norcross cousins, ‘The career of flowers differs from ours only in inaudibleness. I feel more reverence, as I grow, for these mute creatures whose suspense or transport may surpass my own (L388).’

In this poem her flowers get ready for the night just as reluctantly as children go upstairs when a guest is in the house, and wake next morning with equal merriment, glad that it is day again. She used similar language in a letter (L228) to her cousin Louise Norcross the following year during the winter snow, writing that ‘Now gilliflowers are asleep. The hills take off their purple frocks, and dress in long white nightgowns.’

**Poem 134 F92** ‘Perhaps you’d like to buy a flower’
Just as in poem 132 Emily seemed to compare her poetry to a cup of wine, here one of her poems becomes a flower. She would never sell it, but she is willing to lend it until the coming of spring and summer – when their real flowers make her poem flower redundant.

Bees do seem drunken as they zig-zag from flower to flower. The daffodils are planted in the door-yard, the garden patch about the door of a house. The Dickinsons’ house in North Pleasant St apparently had roses planted in its door-yard.

**Poem 135 F93** ‘Water, is taught by thirst’
We appreciate a thing, for example water or land or the transport of joy or peace, through having known its opposite first. The same is true of our loved ones and of the birds that return each spring. Our love for our dear ones, when they are in our presence once more, is all the keener through our only having remembered them in their absence by means of a ‘Mold’ or photograph. And the return of the birds in spring is all the more precious to us because we have endured the snows of the preceding winter.

Some evidence for ‘Mold’ meaning photograph is that when Thomas Higginson asked Emily to send him a photograph of herself, she had to admit that she did not have one, and adds that this ‘often alarms Father – He says Death might occur, and he has Molds of all the rest – but has no Mold of me (L268).’

**Poem 136 F94** ‘Have you got a Brook in your little heart’
Once we learn from a dictionary that ‘blow’ in line 2 can mean ‘bloom,’ we understand the poet’s picture of a little brook and the different dangers which it is exposed to in March and August. But Emily is not talking of a real brook or even of our mental image of a real brook, but rather of any object, action or relationship from which we personally drink our ‘daily little draught of life.’ Whatever this draught of life may be, it is exposed to the two same dangers of flood or drought faced by the real brook. We can have too much of it or too little.

Poem 137 F95 ‘Flowers – Well – if anybody’
Throughout her life Emily, when confronted with the beauty of flowers as in this poem, felt both a ‘transport’ of joy and a ‘trouble.’ If someone could only tell her the source of these contradictory feelings, she would give him ‘all the daisies which on the hillside blow,’ a phrase reminiscent of poem 26.

She herself, a simple Amherst girl, is too moved by the pathos on the faces of flowers to be at ease with or to understand her contradictory feelings, whereas exotic butterflies that cruise from St Domingo in Haiti past the purple line of the equator to Emily’s garden ‘inhabit the beautiful in its various aspects with painless ease,’ as Judith Farr (G) finely puts it in her valuable discussion of this poem.

Poem 138 F96 ‘Pigmy seraphs – gone astray’
Any puzzlement caused by the opening lines of this poem is dissipated when line 11 reveals that its subject is the rose, ‘the little damask maid,’ a flower first met in poem 17. Roses are so dear to Emily that she can think of them as little angels dropped from heaven. Their velvet texture reminds her of the cultured people from Vevey on lake Geneva, while the bud folded in its leaf is a creation which even Paris designers could not match.

Vevey is also mentioned in poem 206, and Exeter reappears as the last word in poem 373. In both places Exeter is probably a nobleman of English legend.

Poem 139 F89 ‘Soul, Wilt thou toss again?’
Perhaps Emily is considering tossing a coin to decide whether to do the good action or the bad action. She knows that it is such choices which will place her with the hundreds of goats in hell or the tens of sheep in heaven. (cf. Matthew 7:13-14) The angels linger with poised pen, desperately hoping to record that the coin has come
down ‘heads’ for a good action. The imps of the devil are equally eager for the luck to go their way and for the coin to come down ‘tails’ for a bad action.

Or perhaps ‘heads’ is a belief that God exists, and ‘tails’ a belief that he does not. There is so little evidence for either belief that it can only be decided by the toss of a coin.

Poem 140 F90 ‘An altered look about the hills’

‘Nicodemus’ Mystery’ (line 17) is related in St John’s gospel (3:3-4). When Jesus tells this learned Jewish elder, ‘Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God,’ Nicodemus, completely mystified, replies ‘How can a man be born when he is old?’ Emily claims in this poem that Nicodemus’ question is answered every year by the return of spring. The annual rebirth in nature, described in such loving detail in lines 1-14, is for her a sign that man too will be reborn when he dies.

She poignantly makes another reference to Nicodemus in a letter of the spring of 1886, written just before she herself died: ‘If we love Flowers, are we not “born again” every Day, without the distractions of Nicodemus (L1037)?’

A Tyrian light (line 2): the magical light of April days is compared to the light of the seaport of Tyre in the eastern Mediterranean.

Vermilion foot…purple finger (lines 5-6): perhaps the tulip and the violet.

A furtive look (line 14): the look is presumably saying ‘Dare we believe this miracle?’

Poem 141 F91 ‘Some, too fragile for winter winds’

Emily describes the graves of children who died early. They were lambs who never entered the sheepfold of adult life, much less the winter of old age, despite Jesus’ bold claim to his disciples that ‘not one sparrow shall fall to the ground without your Father’s leave (Matthew 10:29).’ The only loving qualities in this situation are shown not by the Father, nor by Jesus the good shepherd, but by the ‘thoughtful grave’ which ‘tenderly tucks them in’ and provides for them a safe covering with which no one will tamper.

Poem 142 F85 ‘Whose are the little beds, I asked’

It is the end of winter. The speaker wishes to know which flowers are sleeping in which beds. The flowers themselves make no reply, but when the speaker asks the
question again in the second stanza, mother Nature herself gives him a full reply in the remaining stanzas of the poem.

*Little Leontodon, nearest the door* is the dandelion, the first flower to appear in spring.

*Bartsia* belongs to the order of flowers including snapdragons and foxgloves.

*Epigea* is a ground-covering shrub of early spring.

*Rhodora* could be the rhododendron.

Judith Farr (G) well describes Emily’s tone in this ‘jaunty’ poem as ‘cosy, rosy and purposefully naïve.’

**Poem 143 F86** ‘For every Bird a Nest’

In her fourth letter to Thomas Higginson (L268) Emily was to describe herself as ‘small, like the Wren,’ and Jane Donahue Eberwein suggests that Emily identifies herself with the wren in this poem in order to tell Higginson of her ambitions as a poet. She will not write ordinary poems. They are too obvious and easy. Her proud desire aspires to something much higher and rarer. The lark which builds its nest upon the ground rejoices to do its own thing. And so will she rejoice to be a wren that builds its nest on high.

Eberwein also suggests that the last stanza may refer to the wren and not the lark, but its position after the lark stanza makes this difficult.

**Poem 144 F81** ‘She bore it till the simple veins’

Someone Emily knew died at the time of the year when the daffodils were just over. She bore her suffering until the blue veins stood out on her hands and her eyes were ringed with purple. Now this patient figure wears a crown of immortality and takes her place in heaven among the ‘courtiers quaint’ of poem 53.

**Poem 145 F83** ‘This heart that broke so long’

Emily is at the funeral of another friend. Her life too was hard and full of heartache, as she watched in vain for a star. Her soul that has just fluttered away in death is now safe from the pursuing Hounds of this life, and in the next life cannot be deprived of the reward won there by the tenderness she showed on earth.

Many of Emily’s poems are about deathbeds and funerals, but most of them are about imaginary figures. Jane Donahue Eberwein states that there is no biographical
evidence for Emily attending any deathbed between the death of her friend Sophia Holland in 1844 and the death of her nephew Gilbert in 1883.

Poem 146 F84 ‘On such a night, or such a night’
Emily returns to the death of children, a theme which she had written about in poem 141. She imagines a child, perhaps herself, dying so softly and unobtrusively at nightfall or at daybreak that nobody in the house at first notices its passing. But the family of the child has only to think that for each small grave in the cemetery there was once a busy child bubbling over with life to be filled with sorrow and wonder that ‘feet so precious charged/should reach so small a goal.’

Poem 147 F52 ‘Bless God, he went as soldiers’
‘He died bravely, thank God. I hope that he is now accounted the bravest among the blest warriors of heaven. If only God would allow me to see him in his white robes of victory (the ‘uniforms of snow’ of poem 126), I should not be afraid when it comes to my turn to face the enemy that is death.’

Poem 148 F146 ‘All overgrown by cunning moss’
‘Currer Bell’ was the pen-name of Charlotte Bronte, who was buried in the ‘little cage’ of her coffin in the churchyard of her father’s church at Haworth in Yorkshire. This poem was perhaps written on 31 March 1859, the fourth anniversary of Charlotte Bronte’s death.

Thomas Johnson in his 1955 variorum edition explains that in Emily’s manuscript the poem consisted of five stanzas, with stanzas 2 and 3 being separated from stanzas 4 and 5 by a gap containing just the word ‘or.’ Presumably Emily had not decided whether the poem should consist of stanzas 1, 2, 3 or stanzas 1, 4, 5. In their reading versions of the poems Franklin prints the poem as stanzas 1, 2, 3 while Johnson prints it as stanzas 1, 4, 5. In Franklin’s version the poem ends:

This Bird – observing others
When frost too sharp became
Retire to other latitudes –
Quietly did the same –
But differed in returning –
Since Yorkshire hills are green –
Yet not in all the nests I meet –
Can Nightingale be seen –

In Franklin’s version the bird that was Charlotte Bronte quietly retired elsewhere when the frosts of life became too sharp, but, unlike all other birds, has never returned to Yorkshire hills. In Johnson’s version, Charlotte Bronte, after the wanderings and sufferings of this life, reached heaven, or the Asphodel, as the flowers were called which grew in the Elysian fields in Homer’s *Odyssey*.

Emily herself regarded the versions as alternatives, although they would make some sense placed side by side, as Charlotte Bronte, while never returning to her native Yorkshire after death to our irreparable loss, could still be alive in Elysian fields.

**Poem 149 F159** ‘She went as quiet as the Dew’
Just as Charlotte Bronte in one version of the previous poem did not return to her Yorkshire hills, this dead person did not return with the Dew. Indeed she is like a star that has ‘softly dropt’ out of Emily’s life, whereas the French scientist Leverrier was partly responsible for discovering a star, the planet Neptune in 1856.

**Poem 150**
F154 ‘She died – *this* was the way she died’
This poem is so comparatively simple that it is no wonder that Higginson, with his anxieties about Emily’s unusual verses, predicted – wrongly – that it would be the poem by which she would be best known.

**Poem 151 F133** ‘Mute thy Coronation’
Here Emily seems to return to the world of poems 106 and 124 in which she had described herself as a mere Daisy and Samuel Bowles as the Sun or the Alps. This time she emphasises the difference between herself and Bowles by saying that she wishes to share in the splendour of his metaphorical coronation as nothing more than a hardly-speaking courtier of Lilliputian size tucked into a fold in his robes. It will be
enough for her if she can silently revere him during the pageant – provided that she can tell him she was present when the pageant is over.

1860 (Emily is twenty nine. She writes 63 poems)

Poem 152 F182 ‘The sun kept stooping – stooping – low’
Emily’s first floor bedroom at the Homestead faced south and west, with two large windows on each wall, so that she had a perfect view of sunsets from the ‘chimney corner’ of her room. She could easily see the exotic Tyrian light of a sunset filled with gay banks of colour, which were so like armies drawn up that Emily herself ‘felt martial stirrings.’

The italicised letter ‘I’ in line 11 shows Emily as well aware how unlikely it was that she should charge from her chimney corner, even if she had once been young and crazy enough to do it when she ‘the Cockade wore.’ The humorously bathetic last line is reminiscent of Schumann’s Soldatenlied in which a young boy dresses as a soldier and sings

I march out of doors
To go to the wars
Then back with my gun
For dinner at one.

Poem 153 F166 ‘Dust is the only secret’
Emily views Death as a person. It is impossible to find out any facts about his early life. All she can do is to describe some of the ways in which he operates as an adult: never stops working, but says little; calling when expected or delaying; employing a swift, bold stroke or biding his time, as still as a becalmed fleet.

But he does not have it all his own way. His victim may be in the nest of the grave which he has built, but Christ, like a schoolboy, robs that nest and smuggles the victim to his rest in heaven.

Poem 154 F173 ‘Except to Heaven, she is nought’
On the surface this poem appears to be about a daisy on Emily’s lawn. It is part of God’s great plan, but, living as it does in provincial backwoods, it is visited only by
wind, bee and butterfly, and no more noticed than a single drop of dew. Even so this
daisy helps to make ‘Existence – Home’ for the Dickinson family.

But under the surface Emily perhaps sees herself as the ‘flower’ and ‘the
smallest Housewife in the grass.’ In poem 486 she was to describe herself as the
‘slightest in the house’ and certainly had she been ‘taken from the lawn’ her family
would have lost a face that made existence home.

Poem 155 F217  ‘The Murmur of a Bee’
Emily cannot explain exactly how or why the ‘Murmur of a Bee’ for her is a
‘Witchcraft,’ or why she is so smitten by the red sunset on the hill, or why the miracle
of dawn adds to her stature as a human being. All she knows is that God is in all three,
and that only He can explain them fully.

Poem 156 F218  ‘You love me – you are sure’
As in poem 51, ‘Dollie’ is Emily’s pet name for Sue. Emily’s own love for Sue is
beyond question, but she desperately needs from Sue some reassurance that Sue will
always be there for her, both when she wakes in the morning, and when she runs
frightened to Sue in the night. If Sue cannot give her this reassurance, Emily would
prefer Sue to say so now, rather than comfort her and then sting again.

It is not known whether Sue took Emily’s dependence on her as a compliment or
a burden, but Judith Farr suggests that Sue’s ‘stings’ may have come, in part, from her
dread of the immense responsibility of ‘mothering’ which Emily as a child was
seeking to place upon her.

Poem 157  F229 ‘Musicians wrestle everywhere’
The text for this brief sermon might be Emily’s remark in her second letter (L261) to
Thomas Higginson, ‘The noise in the Pool, at Noon, – excels my Piano.’ For the
music which she hears all day long everywhere is the music of Nature, telling her that
nature is a sign of the ‘New Life’ of the body. There is so much of this music that it is
as though musicians were wrestling everywhere in silver strife. This music is not the
actual birdsong or the tunes of a brass band or hymns sung in church, even if the
hymn were about the creation of the world. It is rather what she hears in all these
things, namely the music of the spheres, or the songs sung by the departed dead as
they worship God.
The ‘Morning Stars’ of ‘Time’s first Afternoon’ refers to God’s words to Job, ‘Where was thou when I laid the foundations of the earth…..when the morning stars sang together, and all the Sons of God shouted for joy (Job 38: 4,7)?’

The ‘Spheres at play’ may derive from Lorenzo’s words to Jessica

There’s not the smallest orb which thou beholdest
But in his motion like an angel sings
Still quiring to the young eyed cherubims (The Merchant of Venice 5:1:60-2)

Poem 158 F 222 ‘Dying! Dying in the night!’
As in poem 156 Emily describes her dependence on Dollie, her name for Sue. She imagines she is dying. Jesus hasn’t arrived, even though Emily is saying, ‘This way, Jesus, Let him pass.’ But suddenly Jesus doesn’t matter, because she hears Dollie’s feet upon the stair.

In poem 51 Emily had imagined being enfolded in Dollie’s arms in the grave. Here she imagines Dollie helping her on the passage from life to death through the ‘great gate.’ In both poems it in only via death that she can be sure of ‘getting hold’ of Sue.

Poem 159 F135 ‘A little bread – a crust – a crumb’
Emily seems to be describing what she would regard as a satisfying relationship between herself and Sue. To share in trust a little bread they have baked and a demijohn of home-made wine from time to time would be enough to ‘keep the soul alive,’ provided that the relationship has not grown ‘portly’ with age, but is still as warm and alive as Napoleon was the night before his coronation.

Such a ‘modest lot’ would be enough for Emily, especially if there was the sexual element of ‘a brief Campaign of sting and sweet.’ Just as a sailor is habitually heading for shore or a soldier for cannonballs on the battlefield, so Emily is content to remain a woman, habitually building ‘of twigs and twine [her] perennial nest’ (poem 84). To ask more is to wish to be somebody else.

Paula Bennett offers a more lesbian interpretation of this poem.

Poem 160 F132 ‘Just lost, when I was saved!’
Lines 2-6 explain line 1. Emily imagines she nearly died. She was lost to this world, voyaging to Eternity, when she was saved by the accident of the wind changing and the tide receding which was sweeping her on to Eternity. The tide was disappointed that he had lost his passenger. Emily does have ‘odd secrets’ to tell from this near-death experience, in which she skirted the shore which is the equator line between earth and heaven, but it is only when she dies properly that she will have the chance to learn all the secrets of Eternity – and ample time in which to do so!

Emily shows that her knowledge is necessarily limited to her sense experience and inferences from it.

**Poem 161 F208**  ‘A feather from the Whippoorwill’

Emily sent this poem with a sprig of white pine to Samuel Bowles. Perhaps a Whippoorwill bird was singing on a bough of that same pine tree when she wrote the poem. Ruth Miller notes that this poem follows poem 214 in packet 14 and considers that both poems refer to Emily’s experience of poetic inspiration. In this poem the bird is singing an immortal song about cyclical nature, and in so doing produces in its ‘Emerald nest’ the perfect ‘Beryl Egg.’ Emily hunts as eagerly as a schoolboy for a similar ‘Beryl Egg’ of a poem.

**Poem 162 F 219**  ‘My River runs to thee’

A copy of this poem concluded a letter (L235) sent by Emily to Mrs Mary Bowles in August 1861. Both the letter, with its repetition of the name ‘Mary,’ and the poem seem rather desperate attempts by Emily to build up an intimacy between herself and Samuel Bowles’ wife. Indeed the letter ends, just before the poem, with the words, ‘Please remember me, because I remember you – Always.’ Unhappily for Emily the poem with its letter did not succeed and her correspondence with Mrs Bowles remained, as it had always been, a one-sided affair, even Emily herself having to admit on one occasion ‘My cheek is red with shame because I write so often (L213).’

**Poem 163 F131**  ‘Tho’ my destiny be Fustian’

Ruth Miller suggests that Emily, in this poem sent to Dr and Mrs Holland, is contrasting her unpublished poetry with the poems of some female poet which have been printed in the *Springfield Republican*, perhaps those of Collette Loomis whose poem *The Portrait* began
It had hung for years in the old south room,
Where the May afternoons always lingered so.

At the moment Ms Loomis has a ‘damask destiny’ and ‘wears the silver apron,’ as her poems have been published, while unpublished Emily is still wearing the coarse cloth of Fustian. But even now Emily prefers her genuine little poems, written by a gypsy with sunburnt bosom who has been close to Nature, to the rosier and showier expanse of Ms Loomis’ verse. And when both are dead, her rival will not be remembered, but Emily herself and lovers of true poetry like Dr and Mrs Holland will then ‘bloom eternally.’ Her poems will be read ‘steadfastly’ down the ages. No reaper will cut them down, no Autumn will take its colours away from them.

Poem 164 F130  ‘Mama never forgets her birds’
Emily’s condolence letters after the death of a loved one show her power of love and her skill in writing at their highest. We no longer have the letter written to her little cousins when their mother, Emily’s aunt Lavinia, died, but it may have accompanied this poem in which ‘Mama’ is aunt Lavinia, the favourite sister of Emily’s own mother.

However Vinnie, Emily’s sister, happened to be staying with the family when the death occurred, and we do have the letter which Emily sent to Vinnie about their aunt’s death. It begins, ‘I can’t believe it, when your letters come, saying what Aunt Lavinia said “just before she died.” Blessed Aunt Lavinia now; all the world goes out, and I see nothing but her room, and angels bearing her into those great countries in the blue sky of which we don’t know anything.’ And it ends, ‘Well, she is safer now than “we know or even think.” Tired little aunt, sleeping ever so peaceful! Tuneful little aunt, singing, as we trust, hymns than which the robins have no sweeter ones. Good-night, broken hearts, Loo and Fanny, and Uncle Loring. Vinnie, remember Sister (L217).’

Poem 165 F181  ‘A Wounded Deer – leaps highest’
Emily is fond of what Ruth Miller aptly calls ‘yoked opposites.’ Such opposites have already appeared in poems 67,125 and 135, and they do so again in this poem. Some of her examples are powerful partly through her choice of unusual words: ‘brake’ for
a clump of bushes, or ‘mail’ for the chain-mail or armour provided by that frivolous laughter with which the despairing person tries to cloak his anguish.

And the poem as a whole becomes more powerful when it is realised how well Emily’s examples fit her own story. As Richard Sewall suggests, she herself, when feeling wounded and smitten and trampled upon by Sue’s cruelties, may well have responded in just this way, concealing her real hurt by putting on a cheerful face, but eventually surviving to transmute the experience into the art of her poems, so that the smitten rock did gush, and the trampled steel spring. Without the wound, she could not have leaped so high.

Poem 166 F183  ‘I met a King this afternoon’

The King of this poem is twice described, in its fourth and last lines, as being ‘barefoot.’ Ruth Miller links this description with Emily’s description of herself in her third letter to Thomas Higginson, written on 7 June 1862, where, disclaiming any intention to publish her poems, she says, ‘If fame belonged to me, I could not escape her – if she did not, the longest day would pass me one the chase – and the approbation of my Dog, would forsake me – then – My Barefoot-Rank is better (L265).’

If this is a deliberate link, it follows that Emily is not the speaker of this poem, but the barefoot King whom the speaker meets. In fact the King is not so much Emily herself as her poetry, while the speaker is that critic she was waiting for who would have a true appreciation of her quality as a poet.

Up to now the royal status of her poetry as been disguised, but the speaker is sure that it is there under the faded jacket (recalling the Fustian of poem 163) and as imposing and majestic as it could possibly be. The horses may have been inadequate for bringing the poems before the public, but the wagon, representing the poems themselves, has given the speaker a transport of joy such as he cannot hope ever to meet again.

The ragged Princes accompanying the King are probably those editors who made the first attempt at understanding Emily’s poems. Such editors may have hesitated to acclaim her poetry, but the speaker is sure that her ‘barefoot’ unpublished poems are of more ultimate significance than the Royal Coach of accepted poetry with its Footmen attendants.
If this reading of Miller’s is correct, Emily shows the same high estimate of her work that she had shown in poem 163.

**Poem 167 F178** ‘To learn the Transport by the Pain’
Emily returns to the yoked opposites of poem 165. For Emily, those crowned with laurel as victors are the men and women who somehow manage to create the transport of joy out of pain and are undefeated by ‘Sovereign Anguish’ and ‘signal woe,’ whether they are blind, or die knowing what they have missed, or linger in some foreign country, far from their true home.

The hymns of praise that ascend from such saints are incomprehensible to those with a duller sense of how ‘God moves in a mysterious way, his wonders to perform.’

**Poem 168 F179** ‘If the foolish, call them “flowers”’

Ruth Miller again provides a valuable clue for the understanding of this poem, namely the fact that Samuel Bowles had written in the *Springfield Republican* the following words:

> Now in the flower season, let us welcome the kindred flowers of poetry and romance, and never idly fancy the time is lost that is spent in their enjoyment.

This poem could well be Emily’s reply to such a statement. She says in effect, ‘If foolish Savants like Bowles want to classify amateur poems and call them ‘flowers,’ that’s all right, as those who appreciate great literature mustn’t complain about those who are blind to it.

After all, if we had a proper vision of great literature as Moses once had a proper vision of the Promised Land, no doubt we should deem superfluous the information in the columns of newspapers as being ‘not pursued by learned Angels in scholastic skies.’

> I myself would like to win at least a low place as a star among the Galaxies of great writers at the right hand of God.’

In *Deuteronomy 34:1-4* God shows Moses all the land of Canaan from the top of mount Pisgah, but says of it, ‘I have caused thee to see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not go over thither.’ Poems 112 and 597 also refer to Moses’ sight of the Promised Land.
Poem 169 F180  ‘In Ebon Box, when years have flown’
In this poem the long-forgotten trinket and other contents of the black wooden box have no great effect on the speaker. They can just be put back and the box cared for in the future as if it were ‘none of our affair.’ The trinket suddenly found in poem 687 on the other hand ‘Blisters the Adamant.’

Poem 170 F174  ‘Portraits are to daily faces’
In poem 106 ‘the parting West’ is an expression of the deepest feeling for Emily. So here she is saying that a good portrait reveals more of a the character of a person than our daily sight of his face, just as the ‘Evening West’ is more powerful than the ordinary sunshine of the lighter hours.

Poem 171 F169  ‘Wait till the Majesty of Death’
Emily returns to the theme of poem 98, namely that the day of death conveys an equal ‘democratic’ dignity on all of us, and on that day talk about ‘Preferment’ and ‘Station’ will be completely out of place.

Purple for her is the colour of triumph and victory, as also in poems 67 and 73. Thomas Higginson recorded in his diary that at Emily’s funeral her sister had appropriately tucked two purple heliotropes inside her casket.

Poem 172 F170  ‘Tis so much joy! Tis so much joy!’
As in poem 139 Emily is staking her all upon a throw, and it may be again that what she is staking her all on is the existence of God and immortality. But another possibility is that she has sent some of her poems to an influential critic and has asked him, as she was to ask Thomas Higginson two years later, ‘Are you too deeply occupied to say if my Verse is alive (L260)?’ If the critic approves, she will have gained the victory despite her hesitation. But things are what they are, and if the critic disapproves, at least she knows the worst and ‘defeat’ is but ‘defeat.’ But he may approve! Well then, the news will have to be repeated slowly for this sudden awaking in heaven might kill her.

Or she may have declared her love for someone in a letter. As so often, there is a hole of uncertainty in the middle of the poem.
Poem 173 F171 ‘A fuzzy fellow without feet’
This is a nature riddle poem to which Emily herself gives the answer in the last stanza – though she wonders if she is the right person to tell of the astonishing life-stages of the butterfly (described earlier in poems 66 and 129).

Poem 174 F172 ‘At last, to be identified’
This poem was written on the same sheet of paper as poem 172, and Ruth Miller believes that, as in the last stanza of the earlier poem, it is a cry of triumph as she imagines her verse accepted and recognised. To be identified as a poet is to see the rest of life with a light shining on it coming from herself. But the struggle has been a long one as she traversed the leagues from the dark Midnight where she was unknown to the full daylight of her recognition as a poet.

Judith Farr, on the other hand, believes that the poem is the words of the risen soul as it reaches the Day of eternal life. The editors of the 1890 poems also took this view, as they titled the poem Resurgam (the Latin for I shall arise).

Poem 175 F165 ‘I have never seen “Volcanoes”
Structurally the poem is one long sentence:
‘I have never seen Volcanoes,
but, when travellers tell of their obliterating power,
(I then wonder) if the pain Titanic hidden in a quiet human face is not like a dormant volcano, which will smash the person when it at last erupts (as Vesuvius smashed Pompeii),
leaving us only with the hope that on resurrection morn the buried Pompeii that is the smashed person may return to life.’

If the poem refers to Emily’s own life, she leaves unexplained the nature of her ‘pain Titanic.’ Ruth Miller believes it could refer to an article written for the Springfield Republican by Samuel Bowles, which Emily could have construed as an attack on her poetry, especially the words, ‘The writers of what may be called the literature of misery are chiefly women, gifted women may be, full of thought and feeling and fancy, but poor, lonely and unhappy…..the lacerated bosom must first be healed, before it can gladden other natures with the overflowings of a healthful life.’
Certainly she talks about herself as a Pompeii buried by Vesuvius in the second ‘Master’ letter, which was probably intended for Samuel Bowles (L233). On this
reading of the poem Emily is wondering whether she will have the strength to endure this criticism or be smashed by it, leaving only the hope of resurrection some day when her poetry is viewed more favourably.

**Poem 176 F167** ‘I’m the little “Heart’s Ease”
Judith Farr gives a loving and helpful analysis of this conversation between Emily and the Heart’s Ease in her book *The Gardens of Emily Dickinson*. In lines 1-8 the Heart’s Ease says to Emily, ‘Unlike the butterfly and the bee who wait for warmer weather, I’m braver and appear in early spring, not bothered about the unfriendly skies of those days. Anyway, as I’m so little and insignificant, who would speak in my defence if I stayed away?’

Then to the Heart’s Ease’ surprise Emily herself in lines 9-12 answers the question which the Heart’s Ease had assumed to be rhetorical, and provides the defence asked for. Finally in lines 13-14 the Heart’s Ease gratefully accepts the defence provided by the poet.

No doubt the heart’s ease, or pansy-violet, was a favourite flower of Emily’s because she identified with it. Like the flower she was small, stubbornly brave and in many ways liking the simple and the traditional.

**Poem 177 F168** ‘Ah, Necromancy Sweet’
In poem 115 God, as Landlord and Necromancer, was the only one who could describe the Inn of heaven to Emily. In this poem only God, as Wizard and Necromancer, can tell her of a medicine which she can instil into the pain too great for surgeon or earthly medicines. The pain is presumably that caused by the loss of a loved one or the pain of death.

**Poem 178 F175** I cautious, scanned my little life’
Although in Emily’s lifetime there was a huge barn just a few yards from the east wall of the Homestead and her father’s 14 acre estate could be called a farm, we never hear of her doing any substantial farm-work such as winnowing (even digging the flower garden was done by Vinnie), so the operation she describes must be symbolic of something.

Ruth Miller suggests that the ‘priceless Hay’ represents Emily’s poems. Like any author she one day sorts through her work, separating the wheat from the chaff, and
carefully stores the wheat (the good poems) in a barn. But one day these good poems have disappeared, and are no longer where she stored them on the barn’s platform or roof-beam. She must find who has taken them, and also begin searching the barn to see if her Hearts (her poems) are still there.

On this interpretation the disappearance of her good poems perhaps means that ‘one winter morning’ she found that she had lost the ability to write good poems. From being a ‘thriving Farmer’ who produced good poems she has become a ‘Cynic’ who doubts her ability to produce ‘alive’ verse any longer. All she can do is to try to find the reason, for even God might be responsible, and to search until one day she recovers the ability to write poems which could properly be called ‘Hearts.’

Line 15 shows that Emily did not possess the blanket belief which automatically believes God is guiltless.

Poem 179  F176  ‘If I could bribe them by a Rose’
As in many of Emily’s poems the sequence of thought is clear, while the particular situation which she has in mind is left unstated. What is the ‘business’ that she holds ‘so dear’ in line 6? Who are the ‘they’ who in the last stanza might hear her at last because of her very importunity and say ‘Yes,’ just to see the back of her?

Is she desperately seeking from Samuel Bowles and the other editors of his newspaper a favourable verdict on her flower or bird poems? Or is she seeking from Austin and Sue jointly as man and wife the affection which she once enjoyed from each of them as separate individuals?

Poem 180 F177  ‘As if some little Arctic flower’
Not only does Emily, as in the preceding poem, give us a clear sequence of thought but with an important particular omitted. She even in the last two lines challenges the reader to guess the particular which she omits. In that case presumably the easy inference is the correct one, namely that when we ourselves exchange earth for the Eden of heaven, it will be just like some little Arctic flower that wandered down the Latitudes to a paradise of tropical summer.

Poem 181 F209  ‘I lost a World – the other day!’
Yet again, what exactly was the world she lost the other day? Ruth Miller suggests that it might have been one of her Bibles, a guess based on the fact that a poem about
a lost Bible by a William Leggett had appeared in Emily’s Thursday afternoon newspaper some years previously. The first line and the second stanza fit this suggestion. Lines 3-4 are more puzzling, but they could refer to some decoration on the binding towards the top of the book.

Poem 182 F210 ‘If I shouldn’t be alive’
Emily is able to confront the prospect of her own death with some humour.

Poem 183 F211 ‘I’ve heard an Organ talk, sometimes’
A ‘Bernardine girl’ would be a follower of St Bernard, the founder of the Cistercian order of monks with its notable simplicity of living.

Ostensibly the poem is about the power of music. Emily may not have understood the form of the music or the process by which the music affected her, but she knows that she has been uplifted and brought nearer to God. But the poem may also hint at the process of her poetic inspiration.

Poem 184 F212 ‘A transport one cannot contain’
The two stanzas are presumably a contrast. A transport of joy that fills your life so that it’s not really containable, is still a transport, even if God forbids you to share it with anybody.

But that is such a pity because if you could draw a diagram of this transport of rapture and actually show Holy Ghosts for a sixpence entrance fee, the whole world would go.

Line 3 is perhaps, as Ruth Miller suggests, an ironic jibe at those public arbiters who had blocked the publication of her poems. And this is a pity because her poems are as near as you can get to ‘a diagram of Rapture’ or ‘Holy Ghosts in Cages.’

Poem 185 F202 “Faith” is a fine invention’
Richard Sewall and Ruth Miller both think that this poem, when viewed in the context of the letter (L220) which contains it, is a plea to Samuel Bowles to reconsider his refusal to publish her poems. The letter) begins with ‘Thank you.’ Then comes the poem. Finally come these lines:

You spoke of the ‘East.’ I have thought about it this winter.
Dont you think that you and I should be shrewder, to take the *Mountain Road*?
That – *Bareheaded life* – under the grass – worries one like a Wasp. The Rose is for Mary.’

Sewall and Miller interpret this extract as saying that she might have faith that some Gentleman editor east in New York would publish her poems, if only she thought that such editors could ‘see’ the quality of her poems, but she does not think this. So in such an emergency it would be more prudent for Bowles himself to take up a microscope so that he might see the quality of her poems when the letters are enlarged and consequently publish them in the *Springfield Republican*.

On this interpretation lines 3-4 of the poem would be saying the same thing as ‘Dont you think that you and I should be shrewder, to take the *Mountain Road*?’, as hills separate Amherst from Springfield. Also ‘that *Bareheaded life*’ might refer to her unpublished state, as does ‘Barefoot Estate’ in the last line of poem 166.

**Poem 186 F237** ‘What shall I do – it whimpers so’

In another poem sent to Samuel Bowles Emily imagines that her love for him is like ‘a little Hound within the Heart,’ in fact like her own dog, Carlo. She asks Mr Bowles what she should do about this little hound which is her love for him and which will not stop whimpering. Would it stop if she sent the little hound to him even now? It would behave well at all times without teasing him, even if it sat on his knee. Please to tell her through Carlo.

In whatever way the images in the poem relate exactly to real life, Emily is clearly still envisaging her relationship with Samuel Bowles as that of obedient dog and master – though not without an erotic element, as his ‘dizzy knee’ would not just refer to its height from the ground.

Carlo, a gift from her father, was named after St John Rivers’ dog in Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre*.

**Poem 187 F238** ‘How many times these low feet staggered’

Emily suggests the awesome difference death makes, even if the dead person was just a humble housewife, for now we cannot undo her ‘soldered mouth’ so that she might tell us of how tremendously busy she used to be. We can still lift her fingers, but they ‘never a thimble – more – shall wear.’ As for her house, now she is ‘in Daisies – lain,’
the flies buzz unthreatened, the windows are dirty, and even the cobweb hangs fearless.

Poem 188 F239 ‘Make me a picture of the sun’
Emily seems to be back in one of her childhood winters, playing a make-believe game of ‘Summer,’ perhaps with her sister, Vinnie. If she draws a sun, Emily can imagine she is getting warm in the early morning. If a robin, she can dream she is hearing it singing – until its song stops in the Orchards. ‘I hope,’ Emily continues, ‘you’ll tell me in our game that it is really warm at noon, and the basic facts about buttercups and butterflies. But let’s never play that the frost has come, or the russet apple on the tree.’

The russet is the last apple to appear in the year, showing that winter has arrived. As John Moore puts it in his book *The Season of the Year,* ‘Last on the bare November boughs come the old-fashioned, moss-brown russets, wrinkled like the faces of ancient peasants, which will be as sweet and brown in March as they are at Christmas.’

Poem 189 F220 ‘It’s such a little thing to weep’
‘Trades’ may have the last meaning given in the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary,* namely ‘stuff, goods, materials, commodities, especially for use in bartering with savages.’

Weeping and sighing are such little and short things, but they are how we deal with death – and how we die.

Poem 190 F221 ‘He was weak, and I was strong – then’
Emily appears to fantasise actively engaging in sexual relations with a man. She, the stronger, invites him into her house. He, the stronger, persuades her to go to bed with him. In tense, wordless excitement they climb the stairs. But at daybreak neither of them is strong enough to effect a parting – or, less likely, by daybreak neither has been strong enough to produce sexual union.

Poem 191 F213 ‘The Skies can’t keep their secret!’
In some poems, for example 22 and 40, Emily is confident that nature reborn in spring is a sign of our rebirth in heaven. In this poem the Skies, the ‘Sapphire Fellows’ of line 15, have actually passed on the secret of what happens in our heavenly rebirth to
the Hills. The secret has eventually reached a Bird, but in this poem Emily prefers not to find out for certain from the bird whether Summer actually is an axiom or sign of rebirth, or whether Snow actually is a sorcerer’s sign that we shall stand one day in heaven in garments of snow.

**Poem 192 F214**  ‘Poor little Heart’

Emily does not tell us the cause of the deep feeling of rejection which she bravely deals with in this poem. But in view of the confidence she shows in the last stanza that one day glory will be hers, the cause is more likely to be rejection of her poems by the critics, rather than the rejection of her love by Sue or Samuel Bowles. Her little Heart can be ‘debonnaire’ and unbroken, because one day it will rejoice when arrayed like the Morning Glory flower (*Ipomoea Hederacea*), which the sun and wind open each day.

**Poem 193 F215**  ‘I shall know why – when Time is over’

The last two lines appear to describe a pain even more intense than the despair of the previous poem, even if the possible causes of it are the same. They recall her words in the third Master letter, ‘I’ve got a Tomahawk in my side, but that don’t hurt me much (L248).’

She will only understand this pain when Christ explains it to her in heaven, when the anguish will be less as Christ will have told her about the anguish suffered by Peter when he betrayed his Lord (*Mark 14:29-31, 66-72*).

**Poem 194 F216**  ‘On this long storm the Rainbow rose’

This poem falls into two halves, lines 1-6 and lines 7-12. In the first half Emily describes how a long night of storm and gales gives way to a Rainbow and clearing skies as the clouds disappear over the horizon. In the second half she abruptly switches to a person who died at the end of the storm, and is now unaware of the summer sunshine clothing the earth.

However the juxtaposition of the two halves invites us to wonder whether for the dead person also, when awoken by the Archangel’s syllables, the summer of eternal life may not be shining after the long storm of her existence on earth.

Emily refers to both death and resurrection (poem 74) as nonchalant.
Poem 195 F230  ‘For this – accepted breath’

It is more probable that ‘accepted’ is short for ‘I accepted’ and not an adjective agreeing with ‘breath,’ for then the poem opens with three statements which are grammatically similar:

‘For this – (I) accepted breath
Through it – (I) compete with death
By it – my title (I) take.’

And ‘this’ is most likely to be the production of her poetry. For that she accepted the breath of life and poetical inspiration. Through it she can outdo death, a claim also memorably made by Horace in *Odes 3:30*. By it she takes her title of ‘poet.’ It was indeed a royal gift from above.

As long as her poetic skill remains, she has nothing to fear, in this world or the next. If senior archangel Gabriel, or the newest junior saints, were asked to say what trance on earth was most like their trance of glory in heaven and so most fit for a crown, they would all reply ‘the trance of poetry.’

On this reading of the poem, Emily is not far away from the claims for poetry made in poem 569. But, as Richard Sewall reminds us, a poem may have more than one reference point, and as she sent the second stanza only of the poem to Samuel Bowles with ‘can be’ in the first line and ‘this’ in the second underlined, it seems as though she took the ‘this’ of the poem to be also his affection for her.

Poem 196 F231  ‘We don’t cry – Tim and I’

In this poem Emily creates for herself an imaginary little boy companion – the classic comfort of the imaginative child.

On the journey of life towards death, the two of them don’t cry but bury their face in their hand and bolt the door, unable to admit even friendly visitors. They don’t even dream that all might be well, but just shut their eyes until the end comes. Emily does mention the ‘Cottages’ or mansions in heaven Jesus promised to his followers, but these are too ‘high’ for Tim’s comprehension. All they can do, as they shake in fear, is to read a hymn, pray for mercy to be given to them as sinners who always wandered from the pathway, and to ask God, like Baucis and Philemon in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, that they might at least die at the same time.

Poem 197 F223  ‘Morning – is the place for Dew’
Dew comes in the morning. Corn ripens in the noonday sun. Flowers grow in the light of the afternoon after dinner. Dukes belong to the glory of sunsets.

Poem 198 F224  ‘An awful Tempest mashed the air’
Like poem 194, this poem describes a storm and the ensuing calm. But whereas the emphasis in the earlier poem is on the aftermath of the storm, here the emphasis is on the storm itself and the demonic spirits inhabiting it. Only in the last four lines do the morning light, the birds and paradisal peace return, as the ‘monster’ storm dies away and seeks his lair.

Poem 199 F225  ‘I’m “wife” – I’ve finished that’
Emily imagines that she is married to her Master, a full woman now with the power of a Czar. An eclipse has occurred of her former life as an unmarried girl, but it is ‘soft’ rather than traumatic and is like being in heaven after life on earth. She ends with a cry of triumph, but of course it is all in her imagination, as she envisages what married life with Samuel Bowles might have been after Sue’s coldness.

Poem 200 F226  ‘I stole them from a Bee’
In the third Master letter (L248) after saying in effect, ‘Tell me my fault. Forgive me. Don’t banish me,’ Emily continues, ‘Wonder [at your unforgiving behaviour] stings me more than the Bee – who never did sting me – but made gay music.’

If the poem refers to the same situation, she is perhaps saying in the same metaphor to Samuel Bowles, ‘Because you have heard my sweet plea, and pardoned me, I have stole the stings from the Bee.’ In other words, I am no longer stung with wonder at your lack of forgiveness, because you do forgive me.

Poem 201 F227  ‘Two swimmers wrestled on the spar’
This poem constituted the whole of a letter (L219) to Samuel Bowles apart from the introductory sentence ‘I cant explain it, Mr Bowles.’ What she couldn’t explain was presumably why, when two swimmers after a shipwreck were hanging on to the same spar and wrestling with the seas to stay alive, one swimmer reached land, while the other was drowned. It is tempting to guess that Samuel Bowles was the swimmer who reached land, while it was Emily herself who lost her life in the struggle. This guess would make the poem a desperate appeal to Samuel Bowles, but whether the appeal
was for love or acceptance of her poems or help in some other tight place involves the reader in further guesses. Such is the despair and agony of the last stanza that the poem being an anguished cry for a return of love from him seems the likeliest guess.

**Poem 202 F228  ‘My Eye is fuller than my vase’**
Assuming that ‘my Eye’ in line 3 is the object of the verb and not the subject as it had been in line 1, it could be that the poem is a crescendo of despair, viz: her eyes with their tears have more water in them than her vase with its neutral rainwater. But her heart is still fuller of heartache than her eyes of tears (as they stop occasionally) for her unobtainable East India, presumably some longed for lover, most likely Sue or Samuel Bowles.

**Poem 203 F232  ‘He forgot _ and I _ remembered’**
The incident of Peter saying to a maid that he knew not Jesus as he warmed his hands at a fire is in all four gospels, but only Luke records Jesus’ look in his sentence ‘And the Lord turned and looked upon Peter (Luke 22:61). Jane Donahue Eberwein believes the look was a reproachful one, and suggests that ‘someone as suggestive as Emily was to slights and withdrawals could only identify with Jesus as he cast a reproachful look at Peter.’ This may well be correct. On the other hand the Greek verb for ‘looked’ is neutral in meaning, and as Luke is often called ‘the compassionate gospel’ the look may have been one of mingled sorrow and forgiveness rather than of reproach.

The ‘he’ in the first line may possibly be Samuel Bowles, but what he forgot and Emily remembered is a mystery.

**Poem 204 F233  ‘A slash of Blue’**
Emily sent a copy of the poem to Samuel Bowles, who may have heaved a sigh of relief upon receiving a poem which he will have understood completely at first reading. He will surely have enjoyed her personification of the Morning Sky.

**Poem 205 F234  ‘I should not dare to leave my friend’**
Emily reveals again how important to her was the passage from this world to the next, and how a primary duty of a friend was to be with the dying person during this transitus. She had made the same point in a letter (L86) of 1852, ‘I look at my father
and mother and Vinnie, and all my friends, and I say _ no, cant leave them, what if they die when I’m gone.’ The unusual repetitions, especially in the second line of each stanza, show her depth of feeling on this matter, as does her extreme statement that if she arrived after the death, she would wish her heart to have broken before her arrival when it might have been of some use.

Poem 206 F235  ‘The Flower must not blame the Bee’
Starting from the botanical fact that the honeybee’s rape of a flower may damage it, Emily composes a poem of apology. She is aware that she (the Bee) has pestered her lover (the Flower) too often. She feels bad about this, and suggests that the Flower should instruct her Footman to deny Emily further admittance. Judith Farr (G) suggests that a footman from Vevey on lake Geneva would have the cool but cultured Swiss manners appropriate for the denying of admittance (see poems 80 and 138).

Poem 207 F199  ‘Tho’ I get home how late _ how late’
As Emily was not in the habit of being away from home for long stretches of time, if she is the speaker in this poem, it is tempting to take ‘home’ to be not Amherst but heaven, where at her death she rejoins her loved ones. The phrases ‘decades of agony (line 8)’ and ‘the Centuries of way’ in the last line more suitably describe life’s journey than a temporary journey away from Amherst, and the change from the plural ‘they’ to the singular ‘itself’ in line 12 may be from her loved ones to God himself.

Alternatively, it could be a poem which is meant to be spoken by Samuel Bowles after a long journey in Europe. ‘Itself’ would then be Emily.

Poem 208 F200  ‘The Rose did caper on her cheek’
The poet imagines a confused maid, whose confusion puzzles Emily until she sees an equally confused lover sitting opposite the maid. All ends happily as ‘those two troubled _ little Clocks, Ticked softly into one.’

This is one of Emily’s rare poems about happy love, possibly because unhappy love provides more opportunities for drama.

Poem 209 F201  ‘With thee, in the Desert’
The welcoming cool shade of the Tamarind tree was mentioned in poem 73. The Leopard is presumably Emily. She has been through difficult times with her lover, but
comes to life again in their time of joy. Or the ‘Desert’ and the ‘thirst’ may simply be
the absence of the lover and the ‘Tamarind wood’ his presence.

**Poem 210 F203** ‘The thought beneath so slight a film’
Ruth Miller believes that in these four lines Emily gives us two images for her own
poems. Harsh sunlight and photographic clarity are destructive of truth, and, just as
we get a better idea of the splendour of the Apennines through mists or the surge of a
bosom through lace, so in her poems the thought is ‘more distinctly seen’ for being
concealed beneath ‘so slight a film of difficulty.’ Or as she puts it in poem 1129, ‘Tell
the Truth but tell it slant.’

**Poem 211 F205** ‘Come slowly, Eden!’
Ruth Miller, while admitting the sensuous imagery of this poem, believes that the
Eden which Emily is asking to come slowly is the acceptance of her poems for
publication. Like the fainting bee, she has almost given up hope of her goal, but to
reach it would be to be ‘lost in Balms.’

But most scholars take the poem to be sexual in content as well as in imagery.
Emily, aged twenty-nine and possibly with no full sexual experience to that time, asks
for that particular Eden to come slowly, if and when it comes. Paula Bennett believes
that the poet is envisaging Lesbian love-making in the second stanza, but Emily is
only envisaging her Eden as being subject to the same delay as the fainting bee
experiences in ‘reaching late his flower.’

**Poem 212 F206** ‘Least Rivers _ docile to some sea.’
Emily seems to return to the ‘Daisy _ Sun’ type of relationship between herself and
Samuel Bowles, which she had described in poems 106 and 124. She herself is only
the smallest of rivers, but hopes one day to be mingled with the Caspian sea which is
her Master.

She placed this poem after poem 211 in packet 37, and this would tend to suggest
that poem 211 also is sexual in content as well as imagery.

**Poem 213 F134** ‘Did the Harebell lose her girdle’
The simplest way to take this poem, in which both questions expect the answer ‘No,’
is to assume that Emily is the ‘Harebell’ and the ‘Paradise,’ and that the question she
is asking is, ‘If I loose my girdle and yield my moat of pearl to some male lover, will I be hallowed much as formerly _ or will my Eden and my Earl lover both have lost status?’ So, for example, Judith Farr (G).

But Paula Bennett takes Emily to be the Bee and asking the question, ‘If I persuaded my female lover to let me enter her, would we both be besmirched?’

A third possibility is suggested by Ruth Miller. She also takes Emily to be the Bee, but asking the far different question, ‘Just as the nectar of a too compliant Harebell would not be so prized as formerly, similarly, if I tried to reach the Paradise of the publication of my poems by persuasion rather then by their intrinsic worth, would not my Eden be a lesser achievement and my Earldom spurious?’

We are left to choose.

Poem 214 F207  ‘I taste a liquor never brewed’

Of the many poems which Emily sent to Samuel Bowles as the editor of the Springfield Daily Republican before the winter of 1862, the only one which he printed was this poem. It appeared anonymously in the issue of 4 May 1861 under the title The May Wine.

On the surface this title seems apt. Emily appears to tell how she is intoxicated by the ‘endless summer days,’ using, as Whicher puts it, ‘language at its utmost extravagance, fantasy at its furthest reach.’ The third stanza describes how she is even more intoxicated by late summer when the bees lie drunken and sluggish in the foxglove’s petals and the butterflies are nearly dead. In the final stanza she reaches the height of fantasy as she imagines the dwellers in heaven rushing to their windows to look at her as she leans intoxicated against the Sun as a lamppost.

But it is possible that Emily being drunk on summer is a metaphor for her being intoxicated by the realisation of her poetic genius, so that the poem would be more properly titled ‘The Wine of Poetry.’

Poem 215 F241  ‘What is _ ‘Paradise’

As in poems 79, 101 and 127 Emily plays the role of an Amherst child, wondering and asking questions about heaven with its ‘jasper floor,’ and bravely concluding that, with all the ‘ransomed folks’ in Eden, she may be less lonely there than as a child in New England.
1861  (Emily is thirty. She writes 81 poems)

Poem 216 F124  ‘Safe in their Alabaster Chambers’
We know more about the composition of this poem than any other Dickinson poem. First she wrote the 1859 version. She must have showed it to Sue who made some criticisms of it because in 1861 she sent to Sue a version with a new second stanza, adding the comment, ‘Perhaps this verse would suit you better _ Sue (L238).’ (Both 1859 and 1861 versions are printed by Johnson, but Franklin prints only the 1861 version.) Sue’s reply was that the new stanza did not go so well with the ‘ghostly shimmer’ of the first stanza, and indeed that the first stanza might be a stronger poem just on its own. Emily then wrote two more variants of the second stanza, the first of which she sent to Sue with the question ‘Is this frostier?’ (The first of these variants can be found in Emily’s letters (L238), the second variant in Johnson’s 1955 Variorum edition.) The Springfield Daily Republican printed the 1859 version in its issue for 1 March 1862.

The 1859 second stanza does provide a greater contrast with the first stanza than do later second stanzas, suggesting that life goes trippingly along, even above the graves in a churchyard. But the 1861 version of the second stanza is more powerful. The meaning of this version of the second stanza becomes clearer if the reader mentally supplies before its last line the words ‘While they remain, safe in their alabaster chambers.’ In other words the whole poem would have been clearer but less effective, if the first stanza had begun ‘While, safe in their Alabaster Chambers,’ and if ‘Soundless as dots _ on a Disc of Snow’ had been the last line of the first stanza, coming immediately after ‘Rafter of Satin _ and Roof of Stone!’

The dead in this poem are sleeping in their graves wrapped in their shrouds of Satin, awaiting the second coming of Christ and their resurrection to heaven. In this poem at least Emily does not imagine death as an immediate transitus to heaven. Ruth Miller brilliantly points out how the dead, who as they wait are no more than a dot on a snowflake, will rise to new life, while powerful kings and doges collapse and surrender. And this will remain true, however much time elapses before the Last Judgment and however vast is the universe with its movements of planets and stars.

Poem 217 F295  ‘Savior! I’ve no one else to tell’
Emily wrote two versions of this poem in 1861. The shorter version is in Franklin, the longer, discussed here, in Johnson.

The Savior of line 1 is Christ. Feeling perhaps abandoned by her Master, Emily now has no one else to turn to but Christ, however much she may have forgotten him in the past. She has not come all the way to him to save herself, for ‘that were the little load,’ but because of her ‘imperial Heart’ which has such sway over her. She had described this heart in her second letter (L233) to her Master by saying, ‘God built the heart in me _ Bye and bye it outgrew me _ and like the little mother _ with the big child _ I got tired holding him.’ Similarly she says in this poem that her heart has become so enlarged with unreturned love for her Master that she cannot hold it in herself any longer and can only bring it to Christ. Can even he carry it _ though, strangest of all, her burden of unrequited love is still heavier now that she is not trying to carry it herself and has stopped being obsessed by that love.

**Poem 218 F189**  ‘Is it true, dear Sue?’

This poem is the whole of the note (L232) that Emily sent across to the Evergreens, on hearing the news of the birth of Susan and Austin’s first child, Edward (Ned) Dickinson on 19 June 1861. Despite Emily’s apparent trepidation that she might upset the unfamiliar new baby, if he were handed to her, she and Ned became firm friends. Toby was the family cat.

**Poem 219 F318**  ‘She sweeps with many-colored Brooms’

This is another sunset poem, like poems 11 and 15, only now the sunset is a busy housewife, as busy with her brooms as the ‘tidy Breezes’ of poem 74, but seemingly rather scatter-brained. She has forgotten to dust the pond, dropped various items, and left tatters of green all over the East behind her.

Johnson prints the version of the poem which is in packet 23. Franklin prints the alternative third stanza which Emily wrote for a copy of the poem probably sent to Sue. It runs:

And still she plies Her spotted thrift
And still the scene prevails
Till Dusk obstructs the Diligence
Or Contemplation fails.
Poem 220 F188  ‘Could I _ then _ shut the door’
This poem is the whole of another note (L239) sent by Emily to Sue, and like the questions in poem 213 expects the answer ‘No.’ No, Emily could not shut the door on Sue, if only for fear that her own beseeching face be finally rejected by Sue.

But for what reason does Emily need to say that she could not shut the door on Sue? It is hardly likely that Sue would have accused Emily of shutting the door on her, but more possible that Sue, busy with the new baby, has not replied to Emily’s notes. Some confirmation of this can be found in a letter which Sue sent to Emily in late October 1861. She says, ‘I have intended to write you Emily to day but the quiet has not been mine _ I should send you this, lest I should seem to have turned away from a kiss _ If you have suffered this past Summer I am sorry. I Emily bear a sorrow that I never uncover _ If a nightingale sings with her breast against a thorn, why not we? When I can, I shall write (Sewall, p. 203).’

Poem 221 F265  ‘It can’t be ‘Summer’
Kate Scott Anthon visited Sue and Austin some four or five times during 1859-61. (Her first husband died in 1857 and she married John Anthon in 1866.) She was sent a copy of this poem by Emily, and she recorded that three clover heads and some bright autumn leaves were included with it. The autumn leaves show that ‘autumn’ is the answer to this ‘What is it?’ poem, but the last two lines are mysterious. At a guess, sunset with her yellow cuffs of Chrysolite shuts the question down by indicating that the answer is autumn, which is as yellow as she is.

Poem 222 F49  ‘When Katie walks, this simple pair accompany her side’
Kate Scott Anthon was also sent a copy of this poem (L 208). To her transcript of it she added the note, ‘Emily knitted a pair of garters for me, and sent them over with these lines.’

Four other letters sent by Emily to Kate survive (203, 209, 232 and 317). Emily certainly missed her sparkle when she was absent from Amherst. The strongest statement of her longing to see Kate again comes in a letter (L222) tentatively dated by Johnson to summer 1860. She says, ‘Distinctly sweet your face stands in its phantom niche _ I touch your hand _ my cheek your cheek _ I stroke your vanished hair, Why did you enter, sister, since you must depart? Had not its heart been torn
enough but you must send your shred? Oh! Our Condor Kate! Come from your crags again! Oh: Dew upon the bloom fall yet again a summer’s night.’

These lines are the corner stone of Rebecca Patterson’s view that Kate was the great love of Emily’s life, but Emily tended to express her longing for all her absent friends in such extravagant terms.

Poem 223 F258  ‘I Came to buy a smile _ today’
Emily sent a copy of this poem to Samuel Bowles. In poem 119 she had regarded his friendliness towards her as the equivalent of the silver mines of Potosi. Here she spiritedly regards herself as a person of great riches, which she is willing to give to him in return for just a single smile. Most men would have found irresistible Emily’s teasing and spirit and the humour which can suggest that even a Jew would have regarded her riches in return for just a smile as a bargain, but we do not know what effect they had on Samuel Bowles.

Poem 1391 shows that this poem is not all make-believe. Emily knew the value of even a single smile.

Poem 224 F253  ‘I’ve nothing else _ to bring, You know’
Samuel Bowles received a copy of this poem as well. If it was accompanied by a gift of flowers, ‘These’ in line 2 may refer to the flowers, and Emily will be apologising for her frequent, familiar gifts of flowers, by saying that he might miss them if they didn’t come.

But the two opening lines are reminiscent of the beginning of poem 26, and perhaps in both poems all she has to bring is primarily her own poetry. If this is so, she is possibly claiming some value for her poetry in the last two lines.

Poem 225 F197  ‘Jesus! Thy Crucifix’
This poem concluded a letter (L242) of December 1861 sent to Samuel Bowles by Emily. Her friend had spent the autumn in nearby Northampton undergoing a water cure for sciatica, but had now returned to New York. The last paragraph of the letter before the poem runs as follows. ‘Dear Mr Bowles _ We told you we did not learn to pray _ but then our freckled bosom bears it’s friends _ in it’s own way _ to a simpler sky _ and many’s the time we leave their pain with the ‘Virgin Mary.’
In fact in the poem she leaves his pain with Jesus, the Virgin Mary’s son. For the pain Jesus suffered at his crucifixion enables him to appreciate our lesser human pain. And she asks that his post-resurrection face in Paradise may remind him of our human face.

Poem 226 F275 ‘Should you but fail at _ Sea’

This poem concludes another letter to Samuel Bowles (L 249). It is preceded by the line ‘To “thank” you _ shames my thought!’ So great is her indebtedness to him that a mere ‘thank you’ is shamefully inadequate. In fact it requires, in Richard Sewall’s phrase, the statement of ultimate loyalty which follows in the poem. She imagines three crises befalling Bowles, in which she would harass God himself to save him.

Sewall also points out the similarity of this poem to poem 220. Both poems make extravagant protestations of loyalty, the first to Sue, the second to Samuel Bowles. But in both poems there is also ‘a lingering fear that the loyalty is only one way.’

Poem 227 F198 ‘Teach Him _ When He makes the names’

This is a happier poem sent to Samuel Bowles and his wife, for it was sent shortly after the birth of their son Charles on 19 December 1861 with the title Baby.

Presumably ‘some’ in the last line is short for ‘something.’ ‘Forbid us not’ is in quotation marks perhaps because Emily has in mind the words of Jesus, ‘Suffer the little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven (Luke 18:16).’

Poem 228 F321 ‘Blazing in Gold and quenching in Purple’

In this poem about the sun’s daily process across the sky the reader has to supply ‘the daylight’ as the object of ‘quenching’ in line 1. ‘The Otter’s Window’ in line 5 is Emily’s own later change for ‘the kitchen window’ of an earlier version. The earlier version is less mysterious, but fits better with the following line.

Poem 229 F289 ‘A Burdock _ clawed my Gown’

Emily sent this poem to her brother, prefaced by the words, ‘Austin _ Father said Frank Conkey _ Touched you.’

Thomas Johnson in his Variorum edition explains that Edward Dickinson and Frank Conkey were political opponents, Emily’s father being a traditional Whig and
Frank Conkey a new, up-to-date Whig. Her father had presumably told Emily that Austin was becoming affected (= touched) by Conkey’s new style political views.

Emily in this poem puts the blame on Austin for going too near the Burdock and Bog that is Frank Conkey. He is a ‘Minnow’ to fall for the new-fangled and to despise his father’s political views. He should take pity on his father and adopt the calm, wide gaze of the ‘Elephant’ who sees things at their true value.

Franklin prints the later packet 92 version which omits the line ‘Ah, pity _then’ and replaces ‘clawed’ with ‘twitched’ in line 1, ‘Trade’ with ‘art’ in line 8 and ‘can’ with ‘should’ in line 9.

Poem 230 F244  ‘We _ Bee and I _ live by the quaffing’

Emily is as intoxicated in this poem as she was in poem 214. There she had been a drunken bee. Here she and Bee are drinking companions. Life for them is drinking, and when the drink is of poor quality, they chant poems about the best wine. But repeatedly they do get drunk, though this doesn’t result in them beating their wives. For Emily never wed, and Bee uses the drink to pledge his. Such are their revels when filled with wine that Emily would not be surprised if, when their intoxication was at its noonday height, they were both found dead of nectar, the bee literally killed ‘by thyme’ and Emily metaphorically killed ‘by time,’ in other words by all the nectar she has imbibed during the time of this wonderful life. One would guess that Emily was never literally drunk, but few have found the world we live in so intoxicating.

Alternatively Ruth Miller believes that what she is drunk on is the realisation of her poetic genius.

Poem 231 F245  ‘God permits industrious Angels’

Emily has already mentioned the work of angels in poems 78 and 94. Here she audaciously claims to have met one herself, briefly during afternoon play when she was a school child.

Ruth Miller suggests that the Angel stands for the inspiration of a poem, a positive ‘Crown’ compared with the ‘dreary Marbles’ of ordinary life.

Poem 232 F246  ‘The Sun _ just touched _ the Morning’

The poem tells a clear story. The Sun touches the Morning into life and confers high status upon her, as Morning imagines that the Sun has come ‘to dwell.’ But, instead,
the sun trails her slow way ‘along the Orchards’ so that, by midday, Morning cannot feel the Crown which the Sun had put on her a few hours previously and can only stagger back to her lowly pre-dawn estate.

But whatever inner significance the poem may have is less clear, unless perhaps it is the message of poem 125 that ecstatic experiences are invariably of limited duration, or unless, like poem 637, it describes a child growing up.

Poem 233 F247  ‘The Lamp burns sure _ within’
The poem is partly a literal impossibility. Although it is true that the wick will burn steadily even if the oil is supplied by ‘Serfs,’ it is not true the Lamp will ‘burn golden on,’ if the oil is out and the Slave has vanished. So it follows that the poem is a metaphor.

Ruth Miller suggests that the burning Lamp stands for Emily writing her poems. And she will ‘burn golden on,’ whether or not serf critics supply her with the oil of encouraging appreciation. In fact she will not even have noticed whether they have supplied such appreciation or not.

Poem 234 F249  ‘You’re right _ ‘the way is narrow’
Emily is having a dialogue with Jesus. She imagines that he has just said in his Sermon on the Mount, ‘Enter ye in by the narrow gate: for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be that enter in thereby. For narrow is the gate and straitened is the way that leadeth into life, and few be they that find it (Matthew 7:13-14).’

Emily agrees with him that anything ‘purple,’ in other words anything worth having, will be costly, but points out that ‘the way that leadeth into life’ is extremely costly. For not only does it require a life of service to others on earth if the ‘Good Man’s Dividend’ is to be obtained in heaven. It also requires paying the price of the surrender of the breath of our life, with just the discount of the ‘Grave’ transitus.

Poem 235 F250  ‘The Court is far away’
If the speaker in this poem is Emily herself, her Sovereign is perhaps Samuel Bowles, whom for some unexplained reason she has offended. He is far away, in a place where Emily has no one to plead for her. She will seek him out in person and remind him that he should forgive her, because one day he himself will be at the Last Judgment as
a little child asking for mercy from the Czar of heaven, and on that day Emily, small as she is, will pray for the royalty to intercede for him.

As in poems 220 and 226 Emily here is nobly one-sided.

Poem 236 F251  ‘If He dissolve _ then _ there is nothing _ more’

In this poem Emily shows her desperate need for a response from her lover, probably Samuel Bowles. Facing the same situation in poem 217, she had turned to her Savior and addressed him directly. Here, with the good things of life submerged under the black desolation that floods her, all she can do is hope that some God will tell him that his little spaniel is dying for love of him, with Death’s Chariots actually at the door waiting to take her away.

Emily had used the spaniel as an image of her devotion when in a letter (L196) of December 1858 she had written to Mrs Mary Bowles, ‘Since I have no flower to send you, I enclose my heart; a little one, sunburnt, half broken sometimes, yet close as the spaniel, to it’s friends.’ Also in poem 186 she had not known how to stop the whimpering of ‘this little Hound within the Heart.’

Poem 237 F252  ‘I think just how my shape will rise’

This poem was written just below and on the same sheet of stationery as poem 236 (the sheet eventually becoming part of packet 37), so it is probable that in this poem too Emily is examining her relationship with Samuel Bowles. Her great need is for his forgiveness, just as in poem 235 and just as in the third Master letter (L248) where she says, ‘Dont banish Daisy _ shut her in prison, Sir _ only pledge that you will forgive _ sometime _ before the grave, and Daisy will not mind.’ But such is her despair in this poem that she has no hope of being forgiven ‘before the grave,’ even if other anguishes she has known have drifted away in this life (stanza 3). It will only happen when, after her long period of trust, she rises to heaven (stanza 1), asks God to consider her as one of his sparrows (stanza 2), and drops her heart, still unshriven, before him (stanza 4).

She had used Jesus’ statement about sparrows (Matthew 10:29) in poems 141 and 164.

Poem 238 F309  ‘Kill your Balm _ and its Odors bless you’
Emily expresses the depth of her love for her Master. He could kill her who is his Balm, and she would still bless him. He could destroy her who is his Jessamine, and she would still charm him with her perfume. If he stabs Emily, the bird that has built in his bosom, her last words between her gaspings of breath would be forgiveness for him and a prayer that he might find some better poet when she has gone.

The thought in the first stanza is reminiscent of her sentence about George Eliot in poem 1562, ‘In vain to punish honey, it only sweeter grows.’ The repeated ‘Bubble!’ in the penultimate line is perhaps the speech bubble of the comic strip.

Poem 239 F310  ‘Heaven’ _ is what I cannot reach’

In this poem Emily defines heaven as ‘the unattainable:’ the apple on the tree she cannot reach, the colour on a cloud, the forbidden land behind the hill. She will return to this theme in poems 251 and 1377.

It may be that she uses the images of the poem to describe the heaven of the Bible, unobtainable before death, but Paula Bennett convincingly suggests that the heaven out of reach is the unobtainable Sue. ‘Purple’ is a suitable colour for Sue, who has such a rich personality that, even when she ‘spurned [Emily] yesterday,’ she easily by her magic decoys Emily into remaining enamoured of her. Bennett is prepared to believe that the hill which guards the house of Paradise is Sue’s mons Veneris.

If we could know that Emily had read translations of Sappho’s poems, some support for Bennett’s theory would be given by the fact that ‘the unreachable apple’ was a metaphor first used by the lesbian poet Sappho for the untouched maiden who hung like an apple on the topmost branch of the tree ‘by harvester….not reached.’

Poem 240 F262  ‘Ah, Moon _ and Star!’

Emily returns to the light-hearted mood and whimsical conceits of such a Master poem as 124. If the furthest objects away from her were Moon and Star, she would be with them tonight, having borrowed the Lark’s crest and making use of the Chamois and Antelope. But as there is one still more distant from her than Moon or Star, who is too far to be visited by any means.

The still more distant person is probably Samuel Bowles. If he read this, he may have smiled at Emily’s way of describing the distance between them.
Poem 241 F339  ‘I like a look of Agony’

In a world where much was guess-work, pain and death were undeniable certainties which could not be feigned. Of the three persons of the Trinity it was Jesus to whom Emily was most drawn, partly because he was ‘a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief (Isaiah 53:11).’ As she said in a much later letter (L932) to Mrs Henry Hills, ‘When Jesus confides to us that he is ‘acquainted with Grief,’ we listen, for that is also an acquaintance of our own.

Poem 242 F343  ‘When we stand on the tops of Things’

Ruth Miller offers a profound analysis of this difficult poem. She suggests that Emily imagines us in heaven after death ‘looking down on Things.’ We no longer have to guess, as the smoke has been cleared away. We now have perfect vision from the light-producing mirrors of heaven. And what we see is that the flawed soul cannot bear the light there but ‘winks’ because of its imperfection, whereas the Sound, Perfect souls are not afraid to be seen even in the bright noon-day of heaven. Indeed it is because the Perfect have proved their goodness that those still in the ‘spotted World’ receive occasional illumination from the Stars. In fact the Perfect are ‘the axle that by its own probity keeps the universe secure.’

It is possible that the poet is contrasting the light-laying mirrors of heaven with the earthly mirrors of St Paul’s day in which things could only be seen ‘darkly,’ or more literally, ‘by guessing.’ (1 Corinthians13:12)

Poem 243 F257  ‘I’ve known a Heaven, like a Tent’

In powerful, metaphorical language Emily describes a Heaven which one day dazzles, but the next has disappeared as completely as a dismantled circus tent, when the Marvels of its Ring are replaced by ‘miles of Stare.’ Emily gives no clue to the Heaven she has in mind. Perhaps it was a happy gathering at Sue’s house, which took place on the day before all Sue’s guests departed and were swallowed up as utterly as a bird which flies out of our sight.

The ‘Yard’ is the cross-beam supporting a tent.

Poem 244 F242  ‘It is easy to work when the soul is at play’

Emily describes the universal experience of pain in the soul being more inimical to ‘work’ than bodily pain ‘in the Bone, or the Rind.’ A gimlet in the nerve may be a
‘daintier,’ less conspicuous object than a broken leg, but it is much more terrible, in fact like having a panther in the glove of your body.

Poem 245 F261  ‘I held a Jewel in my fingers’
We are more likely to be able to think of a ‘Jewel’ which we lost under similar circumstances than to be sure of the Jewel which Emily has in mind. If we wish to pin her down to one possibility, perhaps the likeliest lost Jewel is Sue (as in the last stanza of poem 299). She lived so near that Emily held her in her fingers. But circumstances were never propitious for Emily to make an overt move, ‘the winds being prosy,’ and anyway Sue was married to her brother, so that when Emily awoke to the truth of her loss, all she could do was to chide her fingers for being too ‘honest.’ At least she still had a precious ‘Amethyst remembrance,’ the Amethyst being the twelfth and last foundation stone of the new Jerusalem described in what Emily called her ‘gem chapter’ (Revelation 21).

Less momentously but less plausibly, the ‘Jewel’ could be the words of a new poem which were lost before she could write them down, as she had to engage in prosy housework.

Poem 246 F264  ‘Forever at His side to walk’
Emily imagines a marriage with a man in which the wife is subordinate to the husband. The husband is possibly Samuel Bowles, as she uses the same language of subordination at the beginning of the third Master letter, ‘Daisy bends her smaller life to his, it’s meeker every day _ who only asks _ a task _ something to do for love of it _ some little way she cannot guess to make that master glad (L248).’ She is equally extreme in the poem. If they meet with grief, she claims for herself the largest part. If they meet with joy, she gives her part of the joy to her husband.

She also envisages a marriage which will continue after death, forgetting Jesus’ words, ‘For when they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels which are in heaven (Mark 12:25).’ Emily wants the marriage to survive death because even after a lifetime together, they will still not know each other perfectly. Also it would be bliss to be together when they join the rapt company of the dead and find out at first hand without a dictionary the facts about eternal life which had puzzled them on earth.
Poem 247 F266  ‘What would I give to see his face?’
If this poem was intended for Samuel Bowles and actually sent to him, he must at least have smiled at Emily’s extravagant language and her outrageous way of making her points. For just ‘One hour _ of her Sovereign’s face,’ indeed a fairly ‘Niggard Grace,’ she would be willing to pay with her life and every other good thing she can think of. Even Shylock, like the Jew in poem 223, would regard as a complete bargain the ‘Kingdom’s worth of Bliss’ given by her in exchange for this ‘Ecstatic Contract.’

‘Him’ (line 6) is the Bobolink she has just offered.
Zanzibar (line 9) is no doubt chosen for its sound as well as its foreign-ness.
‘Lily tubes _ like Wells’ (line 11): the gradually tapering tube or stem of the lily can easily be imagined as a well.
‘Strait of Blue’ (line 13) are the blue skies the butterflies sail through.
‘Purple from Peru’ (line 20): see poem 73.

Poem 248 F266  ‘Why _ do they shut Me out of Heaven?’
This poem could be taken literally. Emily may be saying that she feels excluded from the church of her day and so from heaven because her ‘loud’ poems are too unorthodox for its narrow, traditional theology. Or, as in poem 85, she may be feeling excluded by her group of friends at the Evergreens, headed by Sue and Samuel Bowles, though it is difficult to conceive what behaviour of Emily’s towards those friends could be construed as ‘singing too loud.’
Ruth Miller boldly suggests that the heaven she has been shut out of is the fame of publication because of the loud jangling of her unusual poems, and she is asking her angel critics to give her one more chance. She herself would give another chance to an aspiring author if she were a critic publisher. Also she could manage a poem or two of the usual type (= ‘say a little “Minor”’).

Poem 249 DF269  ‘Wild Nights _ Wild Nights!’
The poem does not describe a past experience, but an experience which the poet imagines happening in the future. Nor does she tell us who the ‘thee’ is, with whom she imagines having this experience. She certainly talks about ‘the Sea of love’ throughout her life, from her saying to Kate Anthon in a letter (L209) of 1859, ‘I am pleasantly located in the deep sea, but love will row you out if her hands are strong’ to
her declaration to Otis P. Lord in a letter (L559) of 1878, ‘the exultation floods me _ I cannot find my channel _ the Creek turns Sea _ at thought of thee.’

But she also says in a letter (L332) of 1869 to a cousin that ‘Dying is a wild Night and a new Road,’ so that Ruth Miller interprets the poem as expressing a longing for Jesus and heaven. This interpretation, however, does not fit the poem’s unmistakable erotic tone and language.

If we ignore Emily’s warning in her letter (L268) of July 1862 to Thomas Higginson, ‘When I state myself, as the Representative of the Verse _ it does not mean _ me _ but a supposed person,’ and want to think of the speaker of the poem as being Emily with a particular lover in mind, Judith Farr sets out a detailed case for that lover being Samuel Bowles, based on such facts that after Bowles’ death Emily declared that he ‘was himself Eden (L567),’ and that Samuel Bowles, in a letter to Sue and Austin, wrote about his rowing experiences off the Maine coast from his vacation place at Eden.

Poem 250 F270  ‘I shall keep singing!’
This poem, copied out just below Wild Nights in packet 8, does seem intended for Samuel Bowles, the ‘Signor’ of line 9, but for him as an uncooperative publisher rather than a lover. In the poem Emily bravely states her determination to go on writing poems, despite currently being passed and outdone by her fellow poets, and her confidence that she will learn how to sing the ‘fuller tune’ which will eventually win her a more prominent place among the poets. ‘Noon’ for Emily was a metaphor for fulfilment, whether in love or in her quest for God or, as here, as a poet.

Beatrice calls Benedick ‘Signior.’ (Much Ado About Nothing 5:2:43)

Poem 251 F271  ‘Over the fence’
Emily returns to the forbidden fruit of poem 239, and again the forbidden strawberries of this poem may be Sue, who does live more or less ‘over the fence.’ But God would certainly disapprove of any Lesbian relationship, though no doubt even he wouldn’t be able to resist Sue’s strawberries, if he were a boy! As we saw in such poems as 114 and 116, Emily does not always speak about God in reverential terms.

Poem 252 F312  ‘I can wade Grief’
Richard Sewall points out that Austin in his courtship of Sue had shown the tendency of Emily’s described in this poem, being capable like her of enduring long periods of uncertainty, but having his feet taken from under him at ‘the least push of Joy.’ Emily asks not to be laughed at for this tendency by more normal people, whom she calls ‘pebbles,’ a request that may have a reference to the first Pentecost. On that day the spirit-filled apostles were laughed at by the crowd who said mockingly ‘they are filled with new wine (Acts 2:13).’ But both the apostles and Emily experience that ‘New Liquor’ which is the joy of the spirit.

Power, she goes on to say, comes only from the endurance of pain, when, left ‘stranded’ with it, we discipline ourselves so much that we can have weights hung on us. After all, giants are the same. Living a pleasant life, they wilt. Give them the Himalayas to carry (in Emily’s esoteric spelling), and they will do it!

**Poem 253 F313**  ‘You see I cannot see _ your lifetime’

Emily, separated from her lover, is sure of her own love for the absent one, but can only guess how often she is thought of by her absent loved one. Judith Farr suggests that the absent loved one is Sue.

The thought of the poem is compressed, but might be paraphrased:

I cannot see how you live.

I can only guess how often you ache and how often your eyes film over for me, and you would have to confess whether I am right.

But guessing is painful. Your face is too vague as I try so often to imagine I am looking at you. Your strength is too distant, as I timidly imagine embracing it. Your strength and your distant face haunt my heart, and with their absence tease the want which only their presence can remove.

**Poem 254 F314**  “Hope” is the thing with feathers’

This, like poem 239, is a definition poem, written almost as though she were writing an entry for a Lexicon. She was not satisfied with this entry, as she wrote two further poems defining hope (1392, 1547). Here she startlingly imagines immaterial hope as a bird that sings endlessly a wordless song within our hearts, however great the storm, and no matter where we may be. And it never asks for a crumb.

**Poem 255 F315**  ‘To die _ takes just a little while’
The first eight lines of the poem express thoughts about death we might have had ourselves. But more startling is the bold guess in the last stanza that the dead person might have gone to sleep less unhappily _ but for his love for us whom he was leaving behind. Poem 1564 is another slant on the same bold guess.

**Poem 256 F316 ‘If I’m lost _ now’**
The first line and the last four lines of the poem are reasonably straightforward. The ‘Sir’ in the penultimate line suggests that this is a poem to her Master, Samuel Bowles, telling him that she is ‘lost’ now that he has banished her. How foreign such banishment feels, he himself will know when in heaven the Savior turns his face from him, just like Bowles has turned his face from Emily now.

But the intervening lines 2-9 are more problematical. Ruth Miller believes Emily is saying, ‘Although you banished me, my subsequent welcome into the world of God has eased my pain.’ Unfortunately on this interpretation the past tenses of the verbs in lines 1-9 do not fit easily with the present tense of ‘I’m lost.’

Perhaps lines 2-9 are a metaphor for the joy she felt when she first knew Samuel Bowles and before he banished her. She may be lost and banished now but she still remembers that transport of joy when Samuel Bowles opened the heavens for her.

**Poem 257 F317 ‘Delight is as the flight’**
The very fleetingness of life’s delights increases their preciousness. The more precious the delight, the more fleeting it is _ what the schools of the philosophers would call a Ratio. Take, for example, a rainbow. As a child, Emily asked the East if the rainbow would last, taking such lasting to be a usual thing, but the adult Emily knows that, although we might think the rainbow would suit as a permanent bright object, it is its very transitoriness which somehow nourishes us. Similarly it is the fleetingness of lives or of butterflies which makes them so magic.

**Poem 258 F320 ‘There’s a certain Slant of light’**
Emily has in mind the sort of winter afternoon described by Thomas Hardy in his poem beginning

I leant upon a coppice gate
When Frost was spectre-grey,
And Winter’s dregs made desolate
The weakening eye of day.

She compares it to the oppressive effect organ music in a cathedral can have, even though in poem 183 she had imagined herself uplifted by such music. The desolate sadness of a winter afternoon, this hurt sent by heaven, this affliction sent through the air by imperial powers, leaves no mark on our bodies but causes us internal pain. No one can explain this despair, which is sealed up inside us. All we can say is that the very Landscape with its shadows seems as afflicted as we human beings, and that, as the desolation dies away, its distance from the normal pulse of human life seems as great as the distance on the face of a dead body.

No thrush sings its hopeful song at the end of this poem, as it does at the end of the poem of Thomas Hardy.

Poem 259 F322 ‘Good Night! Which put the Candle out?’

Richard Sewall, quoting Albert Parr, reminds the reader that in Amherst in Emily’s day, ‘No street lights brightened the paths along the unpaved roads. At night each house became a little island, where indoors the family gathered around an oil lamp after dark, and went to bed by the light of a tallow candle.’

So perhaps the poem takes its starting point from Emily saying ‘Good Night!’ to the rest of her family, and then, as she climbs the stairs, her candle goes out causing her to exclaim, ‘What put my candle out?

But the speaker then seems to use such an ordinary occurrence as a metaphor for something larger and more important. For this candle, put out by ‘a jealous Zephyr,’ is no ordinary candle. Angels laboured long in its making, and it might have been the light which saved a lost sailor or lit the path of a drummer boy to heaven.

A possible guess is that in the metaphor of the extinguished candle Emily is returning to the non-publication of her poems. She has laboured diligently at them. They might have provided light for the endangered and the dying. But a jealous editor, friend though he is, has extinguished that possibility by his refusal to publish them.

Poem 260 F323 ‘Read _ Sweet _ how others _strove’
When this poem was first published in 1890, it was aptly titled *The Book of Martyrs*. It deals at greater length with a theme first stated in poem 38. The ‘Sweet’ to whom the poem is addressed may be Sue. ‘A Kingdom’ is the company of saints in the kingdom of heaven, and ‘renown’ is sainthood in heaven.

Richard Sewall tells how Mabel Todd recorded in her journal, when she began studying Emily’s poems, how she felt ‘helped _ as if a Kingdom _ cared.’

**Poem 261 F324**  ‘Put up my lute!’
In such a poem as 250 Emily is sure that she will one day rank among the great poets. But here she falters. She gives instructions to put up her lute, for what use is her music proving to be. She may just as well sob as write psalms of poetry, since the one person she wished to impress, perhaps Samuel Bowles, is as passive as granite when he reads her poems. If her poetry is to make any headway with the critics, she needs a miracle like that which Memnon enjoyed daily.

Memnon was a king of the Ethiopians. On his death they erected a celebrated statue in his honour. When the rays of the rising sun fell upon his statue, it would utter a melodious sound.

Emily gives the opposite instruction to ‘Put up my lute!’ in the first line of poem 617.

**Poem 262 F326**  The lonesome for they know not What’
Just as birds, who in their customary heavenly home may pick up a song from the very air some blissful morning, will struggle to recapture this song when they have tumbled from the clouds, so the ‘Eastern exiles’ will struggle in vain to climb back into their original blissful home, once they have strayed beyond its limits ‘some madder Holiday.’

But who are these ‘Eastern exiles,’ who feel a loss for something unspecifiable? Roger Lundin suggests that they are all of us, cast out of the Garden like our first parents Adam and Eve, and stranded somewhere east of Eden, exiles from the bliss that was originally ours. Or, in more Freudian terms, we are exiles looking for the infantile heaven of unseparated existence.

Poem 959 considers the same question.

**Poem 263 F293**  ‘A single Screw of Flesh’
Of such a difficult poem only a tentative interpretation is possible. Emily seems to be saying that ‘a single Screw of Flesh,’ that is her body, is all that pins the soul of God to her soul. A veil separates her soul from God, just as Moses put a veil over his face before declaring the truths of God to the Israelites (Exodus 34:29-35). When her soul was in some plight, she just caught sight of God through the veil coming to smuggle her soul into Eternity, but once she had been rescued, she put God’s name away and forgot about him.

But Emily is only one out of millions, who, when they are in some peril, are all granted by God a ‘new-mailed nerve’ and that ‘striding Giant Love’ to deal with the peril. So in a way the Gods are inferior to us men of Clay, because, despite all that they must have in their heaven besides us, they will not let us, their Keepsake, go.

**Poem 264 F294** ‘A Weight with Needles on the pounds’

The poem is Emily’s gloomiest picture of life so far. The human frame has as many ways of experiencing pain as there are species which require names.

‘Heft’ meaning ‘weight,’ was also used in poem 258. It is probably formed from ‘heave,’ as ‘cleft’ is from ‘cleave.’

**Poem 265 F296** ‘Where Ships of Purple gently toss’

This could be the entry for ‘Sunset’ in Emily’s Lexicon of definitions. The ‘fantastic sailors’ are probably the shapes of bits of cloud.

**Poem 266 F297** ‘This is the land the Sunset washes’

This is a more elaborate sunset poem. The ‘merchantmen’ are the ‘purple craft’ mentioned in the note to poem 15. ‘Orioles’ are an apt comparison, because as they dip their golden heads, their black wings and upper tails are less conspicuous.

Jane Donahue Eberwein believes that ‘the land the Sunset washes’ has overtones of another world beyond the circumference of this one, and that the ‘Western Mystery’ is the question of the existence and nature of that world.

‘Is’ in line 3 in Johnson’s *Complete Poems* is a misprint for ‘it.’

**Poem 267 F299** ‘Did we disobey him?’
The speaker, at least one time, could not learn to forget ‘him,’ as commanded. But if ‘he’ were a similar dunce, the speaker would still go on loving ‘him’ the best, as would anybody else.

The speaker and the ‘him’ may be Emily and Samuel Bowles. The bouncy, ‘skipping-rope’ metre of the poem creates the same atmosphere as poems 223 and 240, and there is the same ‘one-sidedness’ that was apparent in poem 226.

**Poem 268 F281**  ‘Me, change! Me, alter!’
As in poem 729, the speaker is completely scornful of the possibility of change. The content of 729 more clearly suggests that the two people concerned are Emily and Samuel Bowles, but they may be the people in this poem also.

The ‘Everlasting Hill’ is the ‘hill’ of sunset we see every day. Line 6 may mean ‘as Day closes above it.’ The South American mountain range, the Cordilleras, reappears in poems 534 and 1029. In this poem the exotic place name adds weight to the speaker’s protestation.

**Poem 269 F240**  ‘Bound _ a trouble’
The poem tells us ways of dealing with trouble. We can deal with it mathematically, by putting a boundary or limit around it as in geometry and realising that it is not the whole of life, or by counting the drops of blood as in Algebra and saying to the trouble that it is only likely to last another 14 days. Or it will diminish if we sing at its pain, as a Workman sings as the end of his working day approaches.

**Poem 270 F248**  ‘One life of so much Consequence’
Richard Sewall and Judith Farr (G) give different explanations of the ‘pearl’ in the poem, but it is possible that Emily had both references in mind.

Sewall believes that the pearl, the ‘One Life of so much Consequence,’ is primarily Emily’s commitment to her poetic vocation. For this she would give up everything, even her life. And the last stanza is her prediction that the verdict of time will place her among the monarchs of poetry, however dense is the current crowd of lady poets whose verses are printed in the *Springfield Republican*.

Farr on the other hand thinks that the pearl which is so signally important to Emily is Sue. She would sell her life to possess Sue, who stands out from all the other people in the world, and whose quality is perceptible wherever she is.
Whether the pearl in the poem stands for poetry or Sue or both, in the gospel verses which are presumably the source for Emily’s metaphor the pearl stands for something quite different. And Jesus said, ‘Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it (Matthew13: 45-6).’

Poem 271 F307  ‘A solemn thing _ it was _ I said’
Emily’s picture of herself as a nun wearing white and devoted to God is her response to God counting her fit to devote her life to the writing of poetry. She will drop her life into the depths of the purple well of poetry, even if that means she will not call it her own again until Eternity (stanzas 1 and 2). A doubt assails her in stanza 3. Will the bliss of writing poems be as big when she actually does it, as it seems when it is seen ‘hovering through fog,’ or ‘glimmering,’ a variant suggestion of the poet?

But she conquers the doubt in stanza 4. The worldly-wise may consider a private, nun-like life devoted to poetry a ‘small’ thing, but Emily knows that nothing is more valuable, however modestly she may make this point.

From roughly this point in her life Emily did habitually wear white dresses.

Poem 272 F308  ‘I breathed enough to take the Trick’
This is one of Emily’s most macabre poems. Because of some catastrophe, she feels dead. But she has lived long enough to ‘learn,’ a variant reading for ‘take’ in line 1, how to simulate ‘life.’ So now, when she feels dead and ‘removed from Air,’ she can still pretend to be breathing normally, so that one would have to descend deep inside her to realise how numb and dead to ordinary feelings she actually is. Emily gives no hint of the nature of the catastrophe which had caused her ‘deadness.’

Poem 273 F330  ‘He put the Belt around my life’
The poem is another version of the theme of poem 271. God has imperiously put a belt around her life, and enrolled her as a ‘Member of the Cloud,’ dedicated to the practice of writing poetry.

But Emily will still be available to do her little household tasks, which belong to ‘the Circuit of the Rest’ of her life, and she will still smile upon callers and ask them in, although we know that she may have to decline their invitations to her for the sake of her poetry.
Poem 274 F331  ‘The only Ghost I ever saw’
The only ghost Emily ever saw was the one in this poem, suitably dressed in Mechlin, the raised, lace embroidery traditionally made in the French town of Malines, but otherwise described mainly in negatives. Even so, the ghost was terrifying.

Poem 274 F332  ‘Doubt me! My Dim Companion!’
Whoever her distantly dim companion is, Emily cannot believe that he doubts her and seemingly questions her devotion to him. She has poured out her Life for him and given him all ‘the Woman can.’ She has no wealth of spirit or body (= ‘Dust’) left, as all has been surrendered to him by her, ordinary ‘freckled Maiden’ though she is, and the highest future rank she could obtain would be that of his timid companion in heaven. If he were to test and examine her, this cavilling doubter would find all his doubts consumed in the fire of her love for him, and could not but hallow the snow of her virginity, kept intact for him.

Emily had expressed the same extremes of devotion in poem 246, though with rather less gaiety than in this poem, and both poems may have been intended for Samuel Bowles. For Emily as a ‘freckled Maiden’ see poems 166 and 401. In line 2 the commas are presumably used to put stress on ‘God.’

Poem 276 F333  ‘Many a phrase has the English language’
Emily may at last have received the Valentine which she amusingly complained of not receiving in 1850 (see note on poem 1), for the phrase of the English language which has given her ‘the push of joy’ and which she wants whispered to her again can only be ‘I love you.’

She is in a fever of excitement. She cannot sleep for the letters of the phrase flashing brightly before her eyes. The words may be the same as ever, but, as said to her, their inflection is different, just as the repeated notes of the Whippoorwill’s song strike us differently. As she had said of herself in poem 252,

The least push of Joy
Breaks up my feet _
And I tip _ drunken.
‘Saxon’ is not a clue to the person who made the declaration, as Emily herself gives ‘English language’ as a variant reading for ‘Saxon.’

‘Orthography’ in line 9 may have been suggested by Benedick’s description of the lovesick Claudio, ‘He was wont to speak plain and to the purpose, like an honest man and a soldier, and how he is turned orthography; his words are a very fantastical banquet, just so many strange dishes.’ *(Much Ado about Nothing 2:3:20)*

**Poem 277 F305**  ‘What if I say I shall not wait!’

In this poem Emily seems to be contemplating suicide and escaping to Jesus (= the ‘thee’ of line 3) as the only way of filing off the hurt of this mortal life and wading in Liberty. Once she is dead, the assaults on her which have brought her to this despair will have as little meaning for her as an old joke, or feminine frippery, or a circus which has passed on _ or as a person who died yesterday.

Emily does not tell us who her attackers (the ‘they’ of line 7) are. Ruth Miller wonders if Emily may have written the poem as a riposte to a letter of Samuel Bowles to an unidentified recipient which contains the words, ‘Our business of this life is to give what we have to give….the return we have nothing to do with. It will all come in due time _ in this world or another.’ Unfortunately there is no evidence that his letter was sent to Emily or ever read by her. (For the ‘disappearance’ of yesterday, see poem 1222.)

**Poem 278 F306**  ‘A shady friend _ for Torrid days’

In this poem Emily concludes that, as Judith Farr puts it, ‘God has made men far less afraid of passion than women.’ It might be paraphrased: ‘I can more easily find a woman friend to cool me when I’m hot than one to arouse me when I’m cold. For sexual desire (= ‘the Vane a little to the East’) scares the ‘Muslin souls’ of women away and in this situation the ‘Broadcloth Hearts’ of men are bolder. This is all very bewildering, but the paradise of sex was made by God, the weaver, not by me _ and without him taking any notice of the troubles it might cause.’

Edith Wharton makes the same point in ch. 29 of her novel *The Reef*. (For the meaning of ‘notelessly,’ compare ‘noteless,’ the second word in poem 282.)

**Poem 279 F338**  ‘Tie the Strings to my Life, My Lord’
Emily describes the adventure of death in many ways. This poem is one of her most whimsical pictures of it, for here death is no more than a buggy ride to the Day of Judgment with Jesus as a friendly coachman, whom she asks to place her on the firmest side of the buggy and to fasten her seat belt for her, as the horses go so fast. Emily, a stay-at-home who rarely travelled, is bravely willing to go on the most awesome journey of all, if held fast by Jesus.

Poem 280 F340  ‘I felt a Funeral, in my Brain’

By contrast with her jaunty attitude in the previous poem, Emily now delineates anguish at its most extreme. As Richard Sewall puts it, ‘She seems as close to touching bottom here as she ever got.’ Although she is silent about the cause of this anguish, she does not shrink from describing the feeling as precisely and accurately as she can.

At first, she says, it was though in her brain she pictured her own funeral with mourners and her coffin being carried. But worse followed. The human mourners faded away, and she was left, ‘wrecked, solitary,’ alone with Being but in Silence. Finally the plank holding up her reason broke, and she plummeted down past worlds, knowing nothing _ or realising that there in nothing to be known. Only in the last word of the poem is there a faint glimmer of hope, for ‘then,’ followed by a dash rather than a full stop, suggests that her complete absence of knowledge may not be permanent.

Although the poem does not give the reason for her anguish, she seems to return to this anguish in a letter (L261) of 25 April 1862 to Thomas Higginson, where she says, ‘I had a terror _ since September _ I could tell to none _ and so I sing, as the Boy does by the Burying Ground _ because I am afraid.’

Poem 281 F341  ‘Tis so appalling _ it exhilarates’

Emily herself put this poem side by side with the previous poem in packet 32, so there is some justification for regarding poem 281 as the start of a small recovery from the nihilism of poem 280. She at least knows that she has faced up to the truth of terror at its worst and has emerged the stronger and even with some exhilaration from the experience. This truth is bald and cold, without hope and beyond prayer. As long as she kept mulling over the anguish, she kept dying, but once she acknowledged the truth of the death of her hopes, she was as immune to it as the pillow at her cheek. She
has wrestled successfully with her greatest terror, and will be able to face up to its ‘gay, ghastly holiday,’ when that same fright and terror is set at liberty by some future woe.

One of the possible explanations for these last two poems recognised by Richard Sewall is that they may express Emily’s despair when she lost all hope that Samuel Bowles would return her love and her recovery from that despair.

Ruth Miller, on the other hand, sees both poems very differently. For her the poems are part of an ordered sequence of eleven poems which make up packet 32. She believes that poem 280 describes a real death and poem 281 the survival from that death, rather than both poems being a metaphor for some other disaster and the survival from it.

Poem 282 F342 ‘How noteless Men, and Pleiads, stand’
This poem probably followed poems 280 and 281 in packet 32. If this sequence is intentional, poem 282 does follow 280 and 281 more significantly on Ruth Miller’s reading of the two earlier poems. For poem 282 takes us to the ‘Members of the Invisible’ dead in heaven. Men on earth and the constellation of the Pleiades in heaven are equally regardless of some human being, until ‘a sudden sky’ (= a shooting star) reveals that this human soul has been rapt from the Eye of its loved ones to become a member of the invisible dead, overtakeless now and a measureless distance away. We who are left on earth wonder why we could not keep our dead with us. The Heavens sweep by smilingly, but without giving an answer to our question. (For Pleiads see the note on poem 23.)

Poem 283 F254 ‘A Mien to move a Queen’
This poem is Emily’s balanced self-portrait in verse. Whereas other poems stress just one side of her nature, for example poem 612 her smallness and poem 528 her wealth and power, this poem declares that her primary characteristic is that she is both small and great at the same time.

She can put on a manner which would move a Queen, but she is still half a child. She can look at you as though she were the duke of Orleans, but behaves normally with her ordinary companions, and often cries when there is nobody there to see. She can wear a duke’s headgear or behave as shyly as a wren. Her hands are tiny, and her usual voice is as low and gentle on the ear as the snow which the skies let fall. But
when uttering the diadem subjects of her poems, she can change her voice so that she
speaks like a ruler of the realm. Her smallness and distance preclude fear and
affection, but enable her to be revered for her poetry.

Emily’s voice resembles King Lear’s description of Cordelia’s voice, ‘Her voice
was ever soft/Gentle and low, an excellent thing in woman.’ *(King Lear 5.3:274-5)*

**Poem 284 F255** ‘The Drop, that wrestles in the Sea’
In another poem sent to Samuel Bowles, Emily again aligns herself with the minimal.
In poem 61 she had been a mouse, in poem 283 a wren, and here she is the smallest of
the small, a drop of water. But just as the drop can only become large if it engages
with the Sea and becomes part of it, so Emily can only become larger if, like the drop,
she merges with the Ocean who is her lover and loses herself in his waters. The Ocean
smiles at the idea, thinking it ridiculous. But Emily persists with her plea, quite
forgetting that the Ocean already has a wife, the sea nymph Amphitrite.

Emily makes the same point but more seriously when she says in her third Master
letter, ‘Master _ open your life wide, and take me in forever (L248).’

**Poem 285 F256** ‘The Robin’s my Criterion for Tune’
The reader should avoid the temptation to take the last 3 lines as a unit. The last 2
lines are a unit, but line 15 sums up lines 1-14. In these first 15 lines Emily is saying
that because she is a New Englander, the robin, whose song she hears each noonday,
is her most admired songbird and daisies and buttercups her favourite flowers, and
that she knows it is autumn when the nuts fall and winter when the snow lies
everywhere.

Then in lines 16-17 Emily widens the poem by stating that even the Queen sees
provincially, in other words that she inescapably sees things through queenly
spectacles, just as Emily inescapably sees things New Englandly.

**Poem 286 F243** ‘That after Horror _ that twas us’
As in poem 160 Emily records a near death experience, but her recall of this later
experience has a nightmarish, terrifying quality which is missing from the first. The
‘us’ in the first line is perhaps Emily and her soul. A paraphrase might be:

‘The horror that came next was that we almost died. We got to the end of the pier
of life, just as its granite broke into crumbs, and we should have sunk into the deep
sea of death, had not our Savior rescued us by a hair. The possibility that we might at any moment pass without any warning into the grim presence of death, who is unknown to us apart from conjecture, is too terrifying to contemplate.’

Emily later used the last eight lines of this poem at the end of a letter (L282) she wrote to Thomas Higginson, in which she asked him to forgive her and accept her apology. The point of the lines presumably is that she needs his apology because she may die at any time, and does not want to die unshriven.

Poem 287 F259  ‘A Clock stopped’
Emily uses the metaphor of a clock stopping to describe the death of a person. The cleverest clock-maker from Geneva cannot set going this stopped clock. Its numbers have ceased to tell the time. It has passed into the ‘Degreeless Noon’ which is the timelessness of death. No doctor can bestir this broken pendulum, no shopman persuade it to begin going again. The chasm between the dial life of the clock and where it is now is too wide to bridge. The decades when it arrogantly assumed it knew would never die stand in the way.

Poem 288 F260  ‘I’m Nobody! Who are you?’
Emily’s words have even more resonance in today’s ‘Celebrity Culture’ than when she wrote them in 1861. It is all too easy to think of contemporary figures who, mistaking publicity for importance, have their behaviour described in the last three lines.

Wendy Barker suggests that the poem may have been sent to Sue, with Emily implying that the pair of them are the only real poets in a world of ‘show off’ lady versifiers whose poems are published in the papers. The poems of real poets will not become any better by being published.

Ronald Blythe points out that the poem was written in the year in which Abraham Lincoln became president, but was not the poem to be read out at his inauguration.

Poem 289 F311  ‘I know some lonely Houses off the Road’
In her longest poem since poem 2 Emily surprises the reader by imagining a speaker trying to persuade a friend that the lonely house just off the road, lived in by an ‘old couple,’ would be the ideal target for a burglary. They could easily effect entry, gag the clock, and, unobserved except by the Moon and various helpfully dumb household
objects, make off with some of Grandmama’s valuables. Stealthy burglary is not a quick business, but by the time Chanticleer woke the world, they would be well away and the old couple would ‘fancy the Sunrise _ left the door ajar!’

‘And Echoes _ Trains away’ (line 37) is perhaps an abbreviated way of saying ‘and echoes, as far away as the hooting of distant trains.’

Emily’s vivid imagination and high spirits are delightfully on view in this poem. It is no wonder that Higginson, when planning the 1891 publication of the poems with Mrs Todd, wrote to her saying, ‘we must have that burglary _ the most nearly objective thing she wrote.’

Poem 290 F319  ‘Of Bronze _ and Blaze’
The awe-inspiring appearance of the Aurora Borealis one night infects Emily’s spirit with equally disdainful feelings of majesty. She draws herself up, ignores the arrogant criticism of her poems made by men who breathe, and concludes, ‘My splendid poems may only be the equivalent of a travelling circus compared with the Aurora Borealis, but even so these unparalleled works will still be read centuries after I have been buried in a forgotten grave.’

Alternatively the last stanza may be saying, ‘My poems are Splendors, but they are only as a travelling circus compared with the everlasting ‘Competeless Show’ of the Aurora Borealis.

Poem 291 F327  ‘How the old Mountains drip with Sunset’
Emily judges the competing claims of art and nature differently in different poems. In poem 308 (mockingly) and poems 307 and 569 (seriously) she puts art first. In this poem she makes nature superior. Neither she as a poet nor three of the most celebrated renaissance painters can match the splendour of the actual sunset. As Jane Donahue Eberwein observes, ‘the sunset, both in its defiance of artistic arrest and in its tantalising distance from man, offered daily rebuke to human finitude.’

line 2 ‘hemlocks’: these are North American fir trees, as in poem 41.

stanza 2: perhaps the poet is suggesting that the red sunset links the church steeples on the horizon until it fills the whole ball of heaven. She then wonders whether she is a poet of sufficiently exotic brightness to dare to describe it.

lines 11-12: the blue of the sky departs before the advancing sunset, as if a duchess wearing sapphires had passed by.
line 15: the ‘odd Flambeau’ is the odd streak of light which still comes from the sky.

**Poem 292 F329** ‘If your Nerve, deny you’

This poem might be titled ‘Fortitude.’ Emily gives two pieces of advice for getting through life. If your Nerve fails you and starts swerving, go above him and steady him with thoughts of death. There will be no opportunity for nervously swerving when you are once clamped in the arms of death.

If it is your Soul which is unsteady and seesawing, (perhaps the bliss-depression syndrome to which manic depressives are prone), all the cowardly poltroon wants is some oxygen, which you can give him by lifting the door of the flesh and letting in the wonderful things of this world.

**Poem 293 F292** ‘I got so I could take his name’

Jane Donahue Eberwein points out the difference between the first three and the last three stanzas of this poem. The speaker has been deserted by or at least separated from her lover, with lines 3-4 describing the actual moment of separation, and in the first three stanzas, each beginning with ‘I got,’ she reports three actual successes which she herself has had in dealing with the desertion (in line 1 ‘hear’ is a marginal variant for ‘take).

But when in the last three stanzas she moves on to say what help she has received from God, she is much less definite. She has only been ‘dimly’ able to get in touch with him, and is scornful of the powers usually attributed to him. She puts her hands together in prayer, but does not know the words an ordained priest might use. And in the last stanza her appeal to him dies away in a list of hypotheticals. She is calling God to her aid

_ if there is a power behind the Cloud
_ if it is not subject to despair
_ if it cares for such a small thing as human misery
_ if it is not too vast to be interrupted by requests from her.

**Poem 294 F298** ‘The Doomed _ regard the Sunrise’

The sunrise has a different ‘delight’ for different people. For the man doomed to die there is only the sad delight that tomorrow will be his last sunrise and the early morning birdsong the signal for his execution. . But the sunrise is joyful for all those
with an ‘Enamored’ day in front of them and for whom the Meadow Bird sings other songs than the elegy of sorrow.

Poem 295 F300  ‘Unto like Story _ Trouble has enticed me’
Emily, in some unspecified trouble extreme enough to be called a ‘crucifixion (lines 1 and 15), has been encouraged by the stories of the martyrs who died singing and smiling and without shame. As she weeps, she imagines the crowns worn on the heads of those who were rejected on earth. The ‘perpetual mention’ of their honours so encourages her that she is emboldened to ‘step martial’ at her crucifixion, and to lift her hands in witness. She does not want to fall short of their ‘sublime deportments,’ which are printed and ‘drilled brightly’ in men’s memories and which invite her to follow their example of martyrdom.

The invitation of the martyrs is perhaps called ‘Etruscan’ because the ancient Etruscans were famed for their superstitions and enchantments.

Poem 296 F301  ‘One Year ago _ jots what?’
Ruth Miller offers a detailed reading of this poem. Emily is writing to someone, perhaps Samuel Bowles, with whom she shared a memorable experience a year ago. On its first anniversary, she reflects as follows:

‘When I think about the experience now, what does it make me want to jot down about it? That it was Glory. And that the only suitable anniversary for such a momentous experience would be the sort of reunion that sometimes two loved ones have when they meet again in heaven, and cannot believe that it is happening.

Also at the time of the experience, I did not realise its uniqueness. You should have told me, so that I might bear the pain easier now. But all you said was that you were hurt most, and even that was not true. For if you had looked in me properly, you would have seen that my ‘Acorn’s breast’ was in fact a Giant’s heart, quite as big as yours for suffering pain.

Also, since we stopped breathing the breath of love twelve months ago, who has borne it best? You might think that I was ‘the patientist,’ because I was only a child who did not understand love. But if to be ‘Elder’ and not a child means to have more capacity for pain, I know I’m pretty old now. And how much longer will it be before my pain is equal to yours? One birthday? Ten? If you let me choose the date, I know my pain is equal now.’
Poem 297 F302  ‘It’s like the Light’
Emily returns to her riddle poems. The editors of the poems published in 1896
guessed the answer to the riddle to be ‘The Wind,’ but then line 6 would be saying
‘the wind is like the breeze,’ and the last two lines seem too grand a conclusion for the
mere stopping of the wind.

Ruth Miller’s guess that the answer is ‘Death’ seems more likely. This fits the
comparisons in the second and third stanzas, with the everlasting clocks of heaven
chiming noon when the dead person enters its bliss, and death’s likeness to ‘woods’
being that it is a dark, mysterious place. But it is more of a struggle to squeeze the
first stanza into this interpretation, unless the reader stresses the adjectives
‘fashionless’ (= impossible to imagine, as in line 7 of poem 1573) and ‘dateless,’ and
soft pedals the nouns ‘delight’ and ‘melody.’

But as Emily says in poem 1222

The riddle that we guess
We speedily despise.

Poem 298 F303  ‘Alone, I cannot be’
The hosts who visit Emily are the angels of poetic inspiration. She cannot name or
describe them or say where they come from. She has no key to their identity, but her
own artistic spirit, her ‘Couriers within,’ recognise their presence and they are always
with her. These ‘Visitors – the fairest’ are also mentioned in line 9 of poem 657.

Lines 7-8 are difficult. We would expect a ‘Gnome’ to be a dwarf. But it is also
the ancient Greek word for an aphorism or maxim, and, when in February 1863 Emily
sent a short letter (L280) to Thomas Higginson which contained two aphorisms of two
lines each, she signed herself ‘Your Gnome,’ or ‘Your poet who specialises in
aphorisms.’ This explanation fits the poem, as gnomes such as these do only have
‘general homes.’

The aphorisms in the letter appear in Johnson as poems 684 and 685.

1862 (Emily is thirty-two. She writes 365 poems)

Poem 299 F418  ‘Your Riches _ taught me _ Poverty’
As Emily sent a copy of this poem to Sue headed ‘Dear Sue’ and concluding with the words, ‘Dear Sue _ you see I remember (L258),’ it seems extremely likely that the ‘you’ of the poem is Sue herself, although Whicher suggested that it was Emily’s friend, Benjamin Newton, who helped to awaken her delight in literature but who died young.

On the assumption that the poem is addressed to Sue, it might be paraphrased: ‘Your riches taught me how poor I had been before I met you. I had only been a ‘Millionaire’ in the little wealths that Girls can boast about, until you brought to me (= ‘drifted’) your Dominions, which were a ‘different Peru’ and as ‘broad as Buenos Ayre.’ Then I realised that all I had known before was poverty, compared with the estate of Life you showed me in our friendship.

Now, although I’m not an expert in gems or mines and know only just enough about diadems to recognise the queen if I saw her, I know that your wealth must have been something different from jewels, as my loss of it has been so devastating.

I miss you so much. Those who can look at you all day without a blame have all the wealth of India. Would that I were a rich Jewish merchant like them! Just to have a smile for mine each day would be better than diamonds from the mines of Golconda.

At least I know what the gold of true love is, even if it vanished into the distance almost as soon as I found it, and I can estimate the value of the pearl that slipped through my young fingers.’

The last two lines bring to mind poem 245.

Poem 300 F191 ‘’Morning’ _ means ‘Milking’ _ to the Farmer’

Emily begins with two things that morning always is. It is always milking to the farmer, and it is always a spectacular dawn on the island of Teneriffe.

But then she seems to switch to mornings which have a special significance, as in poem 42. On one morning a maid has to choose with a throw of the dice to see if she will accept the revelation her Lover has just risked making to her. On other mornings an epicure had a fabulous breakfast, a bride experienced the ‘Apocalypse’ of marriage, a world found itself flooded, a faint-heart decided to stop sighing. Most importantly, on one morning someone took the plunge of faith and began ‘the Experiment of Our Lord.’
Poem 301 F403  ‘I reason, Earth is short’

As Jane Donahue Eberwein notes, this is Emily’s most logically structured poem, and the one with most repetitions. The logic is used to buttress her pessimism. That our short life on earth is full of anguish and death certain are inescapable facts. But equally inescapable is the fact that we cannot know how heaven will compensate for earthly deficiencies. We can only hope that ‘somehow’ it will be so. Perhaps the repeated last line of each stanza means, ‘And there’s nothing we can do about it.’

Poem 302 F408  ‘Like Some Old fashioned miracle’

Remembering summer when it is over is like remembering a miracle of past ages. It has become an endlessly repeatable story, like the bay horses that took Cinderella to the ball, or the exploits of Little John, Robin Hood’s deputy, or the galleries in which Bluebeard imprisoned his victims. The bees of summer are now just fiction, her blossoms a dream, but still so real and present to our imagination that we could weep for their actual loss. To remember summer is like reviewing and going over tunes in your head when the orchestra is silent and the violin replaced in its case.

Poem 303 F409  ‘The Soul selects her own Society’

From roughly this time onwards Emily herself to a large degree did what she describes in this poem. She took little notice of the citizens of Amherst, the ‘divine Majority’ amongst which God had placed her. Nor was she interested in receiving important visitors from afar who arrived in their ‘Chariots’ and begged in vain to see her. To be alone to write her letters and poems was the kind of society selected by her soul.

The identity of the ‘One’ chosen ‘from an ample nation’ to be her sole companion remains uncertain. It could be Jesus, or some lover or friend, or the muse of poetry.

Even her ‘Emperor,’ Samuel Bowles, did not always gain admission to her presence. On one such occasion he shouted in exasperation up the stairs, ‘Emily, you damned rascal! No more of this nonsense! I’ve travelled all the way from Springfield to see you. Come down at once (L515 note).’

Poem 304 F572  ‘The Day came slow _ till Five o’clock’

If Emily is the speaker of this poem, we see that she can still be awake early, despite the pleas to her father in poems 13 and 112. Words and similes tumble over each other in
her eagerness to capture the excitement of daybreak. Such similes may be visual: daybreak is like rubies long hidden away. Or they may be aural: the winds take up their timbrels. Or they may be both at once: the sudden flash of a musket shot. Her similes may be grand: the wind is the Prince of the birds. Or they may be homely: the sunrise is like a bolt of cloth unrolled by a lady housekeeper, and the person watching the daybreak is like a guest in the Parlour, awaiting admittance to the family.

In stanza 2 the word ‘which’ needs to be supplied at the beginning of lines 2 and 4.

**Poem 305 F576**  ‘The difference between Despair’
Emily continues to probe and analyse and dramatise mental phenomena. If fear is like the moment when we feel the ship being wrecked under our feet, despair is like the blankness that descends on those who have experienced some dreadful wreck of their hopes. They are as stunned and motionless as the unseeing eye in a statue.

**Poem 306 F630**  ‘The Soul’s Superior instants’
This poem might be regarded as Emily’s explanation for the choice of her ‘Select Society’ of poem 303. For it is only when the Soul is on her own that she is so carried aloft than she cannot see anything ‘lower’ than omnipotent God and in these ‘superior instants’ has glimpses of heaven. These rare moments of fair beauty when ‘mortal life’ is left behind cannot be switched on by us. They happen when God pleases, and he gives this vision of ‘the Colossal substance of Immortality’ only to a favoured few.

**Poem 307 F549**  ‘The One who could repeat the Summer day’
In this and the following poem Emily returns to the theme of poem 291. There she claimed that even the greatest artists could not properly reproduce the sunset. Here she says that *if* (the meaning of ‘And’ in line 4) an artist *could* reproduce the actual moment of sunset, his name would remain until the end of time, even if he were the ‘minutest of mankind,’ since he would be greater than nature itself.

Of course Emily herself attempted to reproduce the sunset in many poems.

**Poem 308 F557**  ‘I send Two Sunsets’
Emily sends to somebody two sunset poems, with two reasons why they could be considered superior to the actual sunset. Firstly, she wrote two sunset poems, with
reference to the stars as well, while Day was making one sunset. Secondly, her sunset poems are easier to carry.

As Judith Farr remarks, ‘despite its playful overtones, this is a serious claim.’ The actual sunset vanishes, but her poem is always there, to be read at any moment.

Poem 309 F542  For largest Woman’s Heart I knew’
Emily sent a copy of this poem to Sue. What little can Emily do when Sue’s heart is so large? Well, Emily knows that Cupid has fixed in her own heart an arrow of love for Sue, and so, instructed by this, she can with more tenderness than ever suggest to Sue that there is plenty of room in her large heart for Cupid to fix an arrow of love for Emily. Presumably at the end of the last line something like ‘you, to make this suggestion’ has to be supplied.

Poem 310 F422  ‘Give little Anguish’
If we have little to worry about, we will complain and fret, because life is too bland. But if we are submerged in avalanches of woe, we are knocked sideways at first, but then we straighten up and get our breath back, though we utter no words. In this dumbness we are like death whose ‘Marble Disc’ has no need of speech. (In her copy of this poem to Sue Emily changed ‘marble disc’ to ‘granite face.’)

The structure of this poem is reminiscent of the last four lines of poem 252, although the conclusion seems less optimistic. The dumbness of this poem is like the motionless despair of poem 305.

Poem 311 F291  ‘It sifts from Leaden Sieves’
Thomas Johnson in his Variorum edition says that Emily at different times produced two versions of this poem, which only have the first four lines in common. In 1862 she wrote the 20 line version printed by Johnson, and in 1864 the 12 line version printed by Franklin. In Johnson’s version a mental full-stop is needed after ‘Fleeces’ at the end of line 11, as lines 12-16 are one unit. The snow covers with heaven’s veil the stumps, stacks and stems, those ‘acres of joints,’ which are the only record of the harvests in a room otherwise left empty by summer.

The last two lines perfectly capture the soundless ceasing of the snowfall. Where did all that snow come from?
Poem 312 F600  ‘Her _ “last Poems”
This poem is one of Emily’s three verse tributes to the poet, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, the other two being poems 363 and 593. In her second letter (L261) to Thomas Higginson, Emily said, ‘For Poets _ I have Keats _ and Mr and Mrs Browning.’ She also had a framed portrait of her in her bedroom. Emily and Elizabeth were not only both female poets. They were also both well-educated, eldest daughters, and the favourites of wealthy fathers who wanted them to stay at home. But Mr Browning eloped with Elizabeth when she was 39 and took her away to Florence.

Mrs Browning died on 30 June 1861, and her husband collected and published her Last Poems in February 1862. This verse tribute to her is more easily understood with breaks after Johnson’s lines 6, 10 and 15, as printed in Franklin. Emily says in effect:
1-6: I can only pay sufficient tribute to the divine poetry of Mrs Browning by making the hyperbolic claim that poetry ended with her Last Poems.
7-10: Not even the New England robin (see poem 285) poured forth half the song which gushed too freely for praise from her lips.
11-14: It is too late to praise her properly by putting a diadem or ducal coronet on her head, for her head is now too high in heaven for such a crown. But her grave is sufficient sign of the bliss she now experiences.
15-19: Even so she is a great loss to our world. I am no kinsman of hers, but even I cannot ‘suffocate with easy woe’ my mourning for her. And just suppose I had been the bridegroom who had snatched her from her English home and put her down in Italy? How much greater would my sorrow have been then?

Poem 313 F283  ‘I should have been too glad, I see’
Emily does not say what the experience was which would have made her too glad to be alive. Perhaps it was the experience of finding her love returned. If so, the poem might be paraphrased:
1-6: The ‘little Circuit’ of my previous ordinary life would have been ashamed of this new vastness (= ‘Circumference’) of finding my love returned, and also would have blamed ‘the homelier time behind’ for being inadequate.
7-12: I would have been afraid that my former constant prayer, ‘Father, father, why hast thou forsaken me?’ would become so dim that I could no longer spell it. (‘Sabachthani’ is part of this prayer in Hebrew. It was recited by Jesus on the cross (Matthew 27:46).
13-18: I would have had so much happiness on earth that the happiness of Heaven would have been insufficient. Also, we only truly appreciate something through having known its opposite first, for example the Palm through having known the Calvary (see poem 135), so, Savior, it is better that you continue to crucify me in this life, and withhold the blessing of my love returned.

19-24: For defeat makes eventual Victory all the sharper, though ‘Faith’ bleats to understand why this should be so.

**Poem 314 F457** ‘Nature _ sometimes sears a Sapling’
Emily contrasts trees and human beings. A tree may occasionally be so seared and scalped that it appears completely dead. But after a time her Green People, that is her leaves, can faintly be seen to be bringing the tree back to life, for they have not died after all.
The human Soul ‘dies oftener,’ but never looks so completely dead as the occasionally blasted tree.

**Poem 315 F477** ‘He fumbles at your Soul’
Emily describes in detail the experience of listening to a great speaker who has a ‘whirlwind’ effect on his stunned hearers (lines 14-16), but does not say who the speaker is. George Whicher believes the speaker is the noted preacher and close friend of Emily’s, Charles Wadsworth, whom Emily may well have heard preach on her visit to Philadelphia in March 1855.

Or Emily may have in mind the kind of hell-fire preacher she described in a letter (L175) of 1854 to Mrs Holland, when she wrote, ‘He preached such an awful sermon though, that I didn’t much think I should ever see you again until the Judgment Day……the subject of perdition seemed to please him, somehow.’

Or the one who ‘fumbles at your Soul’ could be God, at his unceasing work of the gradual revelation of himself to men

**Poem 316 F494** ‘The Wind didn’t come from the Orchard _ today’
This high-spirited poem teasing the Wind needs little explanation. In line 5 ‘transitive’ means ‘going past us.’ It is hard to read line 19, ‘With an occasional Steeple,’ without a smile. Emily knew about the cutting of hay from the work in her father’s meadow.
Poem 317 F263 ‘Just so _ Jesus _ raps’

Emily sent a copy of this poem to Sue, and it is probably meant to remind Sue of Emily’s unwearying devotion to her. Jesus raps on the doors of our hearts in just the same persistent way that Emily raps on the door of Sue’s heart. Indeed so devoted is Emily to Sue that she is willing to wait ‘patient _ upon the steps’ until Jesus has finished, before she begins her own low knocking on the door of her heart’s desire.

Judith Farr thinks that Emily may have based her poem on William Holman Hunt’s painting of 1853-6 called The Light of the World, in which Jesus in a white robe (see poem 248, lines 9-10) is shown knocking at a door. The painting was exhibited in New York in 1857, and Emily may have seen a reproduction of it.

The dashes in the first line perhaps represent rapping.

Poem 318 F204 ‘I’ll tell you how the Sun rose’

This was one of the four poems which Emily enclosed in her first letter (L260) to Thomas Higginson of 15 April 1862. The other three were 216, 319 and 320. Lines 7-9 are a skilful modulation from the excited opening lines about the sunrise to the quieter, more mysterious concluding lines about the sunset. Emily’s sunset, personified as children coming home to a gray-robed Dominie, may hint at our reaching ‘the other side’ at death and joining Jesus’ flock.

Sundown remained a constant numinous experience for Emily. In an early letter (L175) to Mrs Holland she had used the same personification as in this poem, telling her, ‘Tonight the crimson children are playing in the West,’ and in her next letter (L261) to Higginson she said, ‘You ask of my Companions. Hills _ Sir _ and the Sundown.’

Poem 319 F304 ‘The nearest Dream recedes _ unrealised’

Ruth Miller skilfully unpacks the complex structure of this poem. ‘Nearest’ in line 1 means ‘most important,’ and our most important dream is our perennially unsuccessful search for the religious certainty that there is a heaven. We chase this dream as unsuccessfully as a school boy tries to catch a bee in June. We will always be homesick for the ‘steadfast Honey’ which symbolises this religious certainty, but, alas, such religious certainty does not exist. There is no such Bee for us to catch.
George Whicher points out the contrast between the metrical regularity of lines 1-4 and of lines 11-13 and the freer rhythms of lines 5-10 which describe the zig-zag flight of the bee.

Poem 320 F282 ‘We play at Paste’
As often, Emily uses a metaphor to describe a process but leaves out what is being signified by the metaphor. Practising on paste (= the hard, brilliant glass used in making artificial gems) for work on real pearls, and exploring the crystalline nature of sands as practice for the tactics to be used for work on crystalline diamonds could stand for a number of things for Emily. It could be this life as practice for the next; early friendships and love affairs as practice for more mature ones; her early, sometimes sentimental poems as practice for her later, greater ones. If she had something specific in mind, it was probably the writing of poetry, as she sent this poem to Higginson and his article which had first brought him to her notice had stressed the need for poets to practise their art.

The advantage of the poem being purely process is that the reader can give his own example of the process, for example playing cricket with a tennis ball as practice for the real thing with a hard ball.

Poem 321 F334 ‘Of all the Sounds despatched abroad’
Ruth Miller believes that this poem, which with poems 322 and 86 were enclosed in her second letter (L261) to Thomas Higginson, is telling him about her poetic inspiration.

As her special responsibility, she has been charged with the writing of poems which she can only describe as ‘tufts of Tune’ brought down to her from heaven by the Wind as his fingers ‘Comb the Sky (1-8).’

Her poetic skill is not an art she has learned, but an instinctual part of her, inherited from her parents and as such can never be taken away from her by any robber during her lifetime (9-15).

Indeed, even when she is dead, she cannot be sure that she will not still be writing poems, if in heaven there are winds of inspiration with birds as their orchestra (16-24).

And if there is some outcast from poetry who has never heard the huge ‘Caravan of Sound’ of nature reflected in her poems, she prays that he may receive the grace of spiritual instruction from ‘Summer Boughs,’ that is, from nature herself (25-33).
Poem 322 F325  ‘There came a Day at Summer’s full’

Ruth Miller boldly takes the two persons of the poem to be Emily and Jesus, so that the ‘new Marriage’ in line 27 will be Emily’s mystical marriage of eternal communion with Christ in heaven. Admittedly, Jesus was Emily’s favourite person of the Trinity, but for her to have in this life the rapt, extended communion of stanzas 4-6 with Jesus seems beyond her usual practice. Also, on this view, ‘we’ in the last stanza is awkward.

The more usual view is that the poem describes a farewell meeting which the speaker had with a human lover on earth, with their only possible future a reunion in heaven. This theme of passion, renunciation and heavenly consummation is also explored in poems 474 and 577, and the following paraphrase is along these lines.

‘At the height of summer I was given a day of sunshine and blossom so blissful that it seemed ‘entirely for me.’ I thought only the Saints in heaven experienced such days. For on that day I passed the solstice and came to a new understanding with my loved one (1-8).

Speech was no more needed than it is at Sacrament, where the Lord clothes us with his love. We were sealed off as two of those who will make up the church in heaven (Revelation 7:4) and allowed our communion of love so that we would not ‘too awkward show, at Supper of the Lamb’ in heaven (9-16).

The precious time of communion passed quickly. The only bond we made before parting was that we bound on each other’s crucifix, indicating that we each accepted the privation of forsaking love with all others in this life. (16-24).

We needed to plight no other troth. It was enough for us to know that one day, having suffered Calvaries in the name of our love, we would rise from the Grave to our marriage in heaven (25-8).

Poem 323 F14  ‘As if I asked a common Alms’

This poem is part of Emily’s third letter (L265) to Thomas Higginson, written on 7 June 1862. Towards the end of the letter she says, ‘If I might bring you what I do _ not so frequent to trouble you _ and ask you if I told it clear _ twould be control, to me………..the ‘hand you stretch me in the Dark,’ I put mine in.’ Then comes the poem, and the letter ends with the question, ‘But, will you be my Preceptor, Mr Higginson?’

There is some irony in Emily saying to Mr Higginson that she would be incredibly grateful for his help with her poetry in a poem which blazes off the page and shows she
has no need of actual help, even if she would have found his support and appreciation fortifying.

As for the relation of the poem to Emily’s own life, the ‘Kingdom’ and the ‘Dawn’ could stand for her exceptional poetic gift (see poem 343), with ‘a common Alms’ being perhaps something worthwhile to do. Or the poem could express what Emily might feel on being visited by inspiration for a particular poem.

The last four lines require ‘Dawn’ to be a considerably more awesome experience than ‘Morn.’

Emily also used the poem in a letter (L963) of 1885, thanking an unknown recipient for a gift.

Poem 324 F236  ‘Some keep the Sabbath going to Church’

Emily went to church on a Sunday in her youth, and as late as November 1854 she was writing (L175) to her friend, Mrs Holland, ‘The minister to-day, not our own minister, preached about death and judgment, and what would become of those, meaning Austin and me, who behaved improperly _ and somehow the sermon scared me, and father and Vinnie looked very solemn as if the whole was true.’ But by April 1856 she is writing (L184) to her cousin, John Graves, ‘It is Sunday _ now _ John _ and all have gone to church _ the wagons have done passing, and I have come out in the new grass to listen to the anthems. Three or four Hens have followed me, and we sit side by side,’ and for the rest of her life she was one of those who kept the Sabbath ‘staying at Home.’ Mrs Proudie and Mr Slope would not have approved (Barchester Towers ch.5)

Emily tried to be part of conventional religion, but she failed. When all the rest of her friends at school were being converted, she could not ‘give her heart to Jesus.’ And she found family prayers a penance. In her famous description (L261) of her family to Thomas Higginson, she wrote, ‘They are religious _ except me _ and address an Eclipse, every morning _ whom they call their “Father.”’ She turned instead to worshipping God in nature. Although this practice gave her a meaningful faith, it also cut her off from a large part of normal Amherst social life.

For her orchard to be a ‘Dome,’ we must imagine high fruit-trees meeting overhead. Her ‘Wings’ are the exultation her garden gives her. Her ‘little Sexton’ is presumably the Bobolink.

Poem 325 F328  ‘Of Tribulation, these are They’
Judith Farr suggests that the ‘lesser Rank of Victors, designated by their ‘Spangled Gowns,’ are cosmopolites like Sue, who thought themselves victorious and conquerors in this world, when wearing their sequined evening dresses.

But the greater rank of victors are ‘They, denoted by the White.’ In poem 271 Emily had envisaged herself wearing white to indicate her devoted response to God’s calling her to be a poet. But in this poem the wearers of white are those who, having endured great tribulation in this life but ‘overcame most times,’ now stand in heaven, ‘before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.’ (Revelation 7:9) They never surrendered. They assimilated defeats. Their difficult moments when they only just dragged themselves past the next milepost are but a dim memory, now that they have arrived at their goal of the house of heaven and can gasp ‘Saved!’ (In her copy of this poem to Higginson Emily wrote ‘Saved’ in capital letters.)

Poem 326 F381 ‘I cannot dance upon my Toes’

This poem is enclosed in a letter (L271) to Thomas Higginson together with poem 327, and she begins the letter by asking about the two poems, ‘Are these more orderly? I thank you for the Truth _ I had no Monarch in my life, and cannot rule myself, and when I try to organise _ my little Force explodes _ and leaves me bare and charred (L271).’

So it looks as though Thomas Higginson has suggested that her poems lacked the regular organisation usually expected of a poet. Emily replies to this charge by admitting that she cannot write such poems, or in her metaphor ‘dance upon her toes,’ because ‘No Man instructed me.’

But then Emily seems to be teasing Higginson, because having asked him if this poem is ‘more orderly,’ she ends the poem with four extravagantly virtuoso stanzas whose structure is not immediately obvious or orderly. One possibility is to supply ‘that’ after ‘and’ in line 9, and to take the last three stanzas as one massive clause, all depending on ‘And (that) though.’ With this structure, she is saying:

‘If I did have this Ballet knowledge (= the ability to write orderly poems), I would gleefully put it abroad (= publish them), and by my dazzling display outdo not only the whole corps de ballet (= other contemporary poets) but also the Prima Ballerina (= the best of these poets), and that though I did not have their usual trappings, viz

• A tutu of Gauze
• My hair in ringlets
• Doing dance steps on one leg (= the ballet step known as the extension)
• Performing vast leaps as softly as balls of down
• Lightly dancing in a whipped turn off the stage out of sight, while the House roared its applause
• Being advertised to the public
• Placards outside the House saying, ‘House full for ballet tonight, as it usually is for opera.’

The final irony is that although Emily may not have the usual equipment to write usual poems, she is gleefully aware that she is able to write different, more powerful poems, this poem itself being an example.

Poem 327 F336  Before I got my eye put out’
In this poem Emily describes two stages in her life. In the first stage she saw the world around her just as the rest of us see it, we ‘other Creatures, that have Eyes (lines 1-3.’ But one day she had her ‘eye put out’ by the Sun (lines 1 and 20), and she was dazzled by seeing the whole of Nature as the handiwork of God and realising that she could regard all of it as belonging to her, in the sense that God was in every part of it for the taking. But now, in her life after this vision of the immanence of God in nature, she thinks that the vision was too powerful for her, and if she were told today that she could have the vision again, her ‘Heart would split,’ and ‘the News would strike her dead (lines 5-16.’ She concludes that it is safer to see the world as the rest of us see it, with a window pane between us and God, and forget about the Sun dazzling her (lines 17-20.)

Emily saw things intensely. As she said to Thomas Higginson when he visited her, ‘If I read a book and it makes my whole body so cold no fire ever can 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. Is there any other way (L342a).’ But, as she realised in poem 327, such intensity can be overwhelming.

The pianist, Charles Rosen, once played all 32 sonatas of Beethoven in one day. When asked about it, he said that the physical endurance needed was manageable, but the spiritual intensity of the experience almost too much for him. Emily would have understood.
Poem 328 F359  ‘A Bird came down the Walk’

As Paul Bennett points out, the language of this poem changes at line 15. Down to that point the poem is an accurate, factual description of a New England robin, but at line 15 the sound of the poem becomes smoother and in a lower register and the texture becomes more ‘poetic.’ And this is so because for Emily the bird is a messenger from heaven (see L455), and the last six lines describe his return home. He rows himself home more softly than real oars in the sea, and as soundlessly as butterflies launch themselves into the midday air, and in too silver a light for any seam dividing earth from heaven to be discernible.

Poem 329 F608  ‘So glad we are _ a Stranger’d deem’

This is the first of three successive poems sent to Samuel Bowles, who was travelling in Europe from April to mid-November 1862. This poem seems to have been sent to him at the time of his return to Massachusetts. Emily says to him in the riddling style he was becoming familiar with, ‘I’m glad you are back. Though somebody who didn’t know me would think that I was sad, for he would see me crying instead of regarding your return with holiday feelings. Nor would this stranger realise that my tears are justified, seeing that Grief and Joy are so similar that even an Optics expert could not decide between them.’

Poem 330 F186  ‘The Juggler’s Hat her Country is’

If this couplet was sent to Samuel Bowles on his travels, at a wild guess Emily could be saying that in his absence Emily’s Country consists in juggling the possible dates of his return, while Samuel Bowles, the bee, is flying around some distant Mountain Gorse.

Poem 331  ‘While Asters’

This poem was later adapted for the fourth stanza of poem 342. Franklin only prints it in its adapted form.

As asters and gentians are both autumn flowers, it looks as though Emily is saying to the absent Samuel Bowles, ‘It’s now autumn time, and I’m still waiting for your return.

Poem 332 F420  ‘There are two Ripenings _ one _ of sight’
Emily sent a copy of this poem to Kate Scott Anthon, perhaps while Kate was visiting Sue and Austin at the Evergreens. She contrasts two ripenings. We can see the velvety peach ripening as it grows round and sphere-shaped in summer. But the less exotic chestnut growing inside its burl cannot be seen. It is only disclosed when the frosts of autumn bite open the burl.

Rebecca Patterson suggests that Emily intends Kate to regard her as the chestnut \_ ‘a bit homely, a bit late in maturing, but sound and sweet.’ Could Emily also be hinting that the less homely, velvety peach stands for Sue?

**Poem 333 F379** ‘The Grass so little has to do’
This playful poem about the Grass needs little comment.
‘Sphere’ (line 2) is a surprise. Meadows and lawn are usually seen as flat.
‘to brood’ (line 3) perhaps means ‘to have as its children.’
‘For such a noticing’ (line 12) means ‘in comparison.’
‘And even ……perishing’ (lines 13-16) compares the pleasant smell of grass when it is mown to lowly spices, or even to Spikenard, one of the costliest ointments. Emily is likely to have remembered Spikenard from its mention in St Mark’s gospel, where as Jesus sat at meat in the house of Simon the leper ‘there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured it on his head.’(Mark 14:3)

‘Sovereign Barns’ (line 17) perhaps means the barns where the hay reigns as sovereign.
‘a Hay’ (line 20) was frowned upon by Thomas Higginson as being ungrammatical, the correct grammar being ‘the hay.’ If bad grammar is thought to spoil an oddly appealing phrase, the day can easily be saved by reading the last line as ‘I wish I were a [load of] Hay.’

**Poem 334 F380** ‘All the letters I can write’
A cousin of Emily’s called Eudocia Flynt recorded in her diary that she visited Amherst for commencement on 10 July 1862 and that on 21 July she received a letter from Emily with a rose enclosed. The letter began
‘Dear Mrs Flint, You and I, didn’t finish talking. Have you room for the sequel, in your Vase?’ and concluded with poem 334.
On one level the poem is inviting Mrs Flynt to imagine her lips are a humming bird and to sip the rose enclosed by Emily.

But roses are smelt rather than sipped, and ‘me’ has replaced ‘rose’ in the last line, so that on another level Emily, consciously or unconsciously, seems to be offering herself to her cousin for cunnilingus. The punctuation used by Mrs Flynt to record in her diary her receipt of this letter seems to show that she took the poem this way _ ‘Had a letter from Emily Dickinson !!!!’

Poem 335 F528  ‘‘Tis not that Dying hurts us so’
This poem ends a letter (L278) Emily wrote to her cousins, Louise and Frances Norcross, on the death of their father on 7 January 1863. She is at her tenderest in condolence letters such as this and in another letter (L279) written to her cousins a week or so later. In the first letter she tactfully asks them, ‘Wasn’t dear papa so tired always after mamma went, and wasn’t it almost sweet to think of the two together theses winter nights? The grief is our side, darlings, and the glad is theirs.’ She apologises for Vinnie not attending the funeral by saying, ‘Vinnie intended to go, but the day was cold, and she wanted to keep uncle Loring as she talked with him, always, instead of this new way.’ And she ends the letter with these words which lead into the poem, ‘Good-night. Let Emily sing for you because she cannot pray.’

In this poem Emily faces squarely the truth that the living are almost completely cut off from their loved ones who in death are ‘behind the Door.’ All the living can hope for, as they shiver in their grief, is that God will feed them with some crumb of comfort, some glimpse of life behind the door, until the day when the pitying snows of death take them also to the same Home behind the door.

Poem 336 F395  ‘The face I carry with me _ last’
Just as Dante in his *Inferno* grades the sinners in Hell according to their sins, so Emily imagines that her rank in Heaven (= the ‘West’ of line 3) will depend on the ‘face’ which at death she hands to the Angel at the door. This face from the kingdoms of the living will so impress the Angel that he will return with a crown such as even Gabriel has never seen before, and Emily will become a queen in heaven because she ‘bore her Master’s name.’

The usual view of this poem is that the face which Emily imagines carrying with her at death is the face of her master, Samuel Bowles. However it is not easy to see
why his face should have such an electrifying effect on the Angel that it procures a
crown of royalty for her, and Ruth Miller suggests that the ‘Master’ in the poem is
Jesus, and that Emily is admitted to a high rank in heaven because, as one who has
endured the ‘Tribulation’ of poem 325, her own face is akin to the face of the
suffering Christ.

But then the whimsical humorous element in lines 7-14 seem to fit better with
Samuel Bowles being her entry card, whatever the theological difficulties this causes.
And on this view the hyperbolic ‘Sufficient Royalty’ of the last line would be the
same sort of compliment to Samuel Bowles that Lucy Snowe pays to M. Paul
Emmanuel towards the end of Villette when she says of him, ‘He was my king.
Royalty for me had been that hand’s bounty; to offer homage was both a joy and a
duty.’

Poem 337 F363  ‘I know a place where Summer strives’
Emily returns to the theme of the cycle of the seasons. She knows a place, perhaps her
own lawn, where each year the experienced Jack Frost kills the daisies, so that
Summer has to bear away their bodies and record ‘Lost’ on their tombstones. But
each year the south winds of spring make Summer renounce her vow that she will
never grow daisies again, and yet once more she pours the annually repeated rains
into the adamant lap of winter, together with ‘spices _ and the Dew.’

Then the whole process begins again and the new life, brought by the ‘Amber
Shoe’ of Summer, quietly through the months crystallises into quartz and deadness.

Poem 338 F365  ‘I know that He exists’
The opening line, ‘I know that He exists’ sounds a confident assertion of belief, but it
is undercut by all the rest of the poem. God exists, but he is silent, hidden, his
whereabouts unknown. He seems to be playing a game of hide and seek with us, so
that our bliss may be all the greater when he surprises us by jumping out on us. But
suppose the reality was that God was dead and in fact did not exist, would not that be
taking the apparent game of hide and seek a bit too far?

Poem 339 F361  ‘I tend my flowers for thee’
As in the previous poem, the first line is undercut by what follows. Her ‘Bright
Absentee’ is probably Samuel Bowles, who was travelling in Europe in 1862, but,
despite her claim in the first line, the next 16 lines show that the lovesick Emily has *not* been tending her flowers, but has been dreaming of her lover instead (line 4). For during her inactivity the fuchsias, for example, have been ripped, the geraniums developed black spot, the daisies and carnations not dead-headed, while the cactus has overgrown and split. Even Emily’s favourite roses have not been picked, but merely scattered their red petals on her ‘garden floor.’

This last area of neglect, however, is symbolically appropriate, for, in her lover’s absence, Emily, his ‘flower,’ cannot be gay with red petals. She is content to be a grey, unopened daisy, keeping herself in modesty for him

Judith Farr (G) considers that the poem also lays down a sexual challenge to Samuel Bowles. In the vigorously described stripping and undressing of the flowers she is reminding him that ‘she has a body as well as a voice.’

**Poem 340 F371**  ‘Is Bliss then, such Abyss’
Again Emily describes a process without giving its context. To reach Bliss, she has to cross a stream which could spoil her shoe. Her brain knows that a spoilt shoe can be easily replaced in any store, while her foot may not be given another opportunity of reaching the bliss of the other side. But when she actually asks her foot whether she should cross the stream or save her boot by not crossing it, her physical foot says she should save her boot and not go on this adventure.

Her ‘Bliss’ might be a successful love affair. If this is so, she would seem to be saying that she would have to break with convention to achieve it. Her brain tells her to make the break, but her body is unwilling to do the action which is required to reach her Bliss.

Ruth Miller, on the other hand, suggests that the poem, like poem 160, shows Emily withdrawing from the possible bliss of death. But in that poem the escape from death was something which happened to her. In this poem it is Emily who is making the decisions.

**Poem 341 F372**  ‘After great pain, a formal feeling comes’
In her handwritten copy of this poem Emily suggests in the margin that lines 2 and 3 of the second stanza should be transposed, so that the first four lines of the second stanza would read
The Feet, mechanical, go round _
A Wooden way
Of Ground or Air, or Ought _
Regardless grown

Franklin prints the poem according to this suggestion, and these notes follow this transposition.

Emily gives an exact description of the time ‘after great pain.’ The Nerves, which should be carrying messages to the brain, are as inert as Tombs. The stiff heart can just manage to ask ‘Was it I that suffered that?’ and ‘When exactly did it happen?’ The feet carry her mechanically through her daily tasks, without her noticing where she is going or anything (= ‘Ought’ in line 7) of the world about her, so closed up is she to all feeling. It is indeed the ‘Hour of Lead,’ but it may be possible to outlive it, and even remember the full horror of it without dissolution.

If the ‘great pain’ was Emily’s own, the poem gives no clue to its cause.

Poem 342 F374  ‘It will be Summer _ eventually’
Emily returns to one of her favourite themes, the changing seasons and the regenerative power of summer. At the time of writing Amherst lies deep in snow (lines 7-8), but it will be ‘Summer _ eventually,’ though even summer will one day ‘fold her miracle’ (line 17) and come to an end.

‘Parian’ (line 7) can mean ‘snow,’ as the Greek island of Paros in the Aegean Sea was famous for its white marble. As lilacs come before the aster and the gentian, stanzas 3 and 4 sketch the progression of summer. In the last stanza Emily views summer as a sacrament, just as she had done in lines 13-15 of poem 130.

Lines 16-18 have already appeared as poem 331.

Poem 343 F375  ‘My reward for Being, was This’
Emily exults in the bliss of having been given the grace of poetic artistry. Besides this, admiralties, sceptres and realms count for nothing. When thrones and dominions challenge her to look at their importance, she will unroll her poetry, for she knows that the ‘Ballots of Eternity’ will vote for her poems rather than their political power.

In Cynthia Voigt’s novel The Runner a teacher tells his class that the first lesson of history is that ‘while events change, the human creature doesn’t,’ and that the
second lesson of history is that all that really lasts of history is art. ‘Song and story, picture and statue, these are the enduring fruits of history.’ Emily would have agreed.

Poem 344 F376  ‘’Twas the old _ road _through pain’
Emily remembers or imagines a person, who, after the many painful experiences of life, has just travelled the painful road, unfrequented by her before, which ‘stops _ at Heaven.’ Through the metaphor of a journey the poet describes the stages of her final hours, and then affectionately dwells on the objects she has left behind, her hat, her shoe, her ‘little Book _ the leaf _ at love _ turned back.’ Tonight her bed is being made for her in the ‘Chambers bright’ of heaven, too distant for her to hear the Good Night of her friends.

In lines 12-13 Emily leaves us in no doubt where the centre of her universe lies, in the written word and love.

Poem 345 F677  ‘Funny _ to be a Century’
Emily imagines how odd it would be to be a Century and to know the secrets of all the people who had passed by during his time. Fortunately he is a reliable fellow and never reveals the secrets he knows _ which is just as well, as the inhabitants of this Globe are very bashful about having their secrets made public.

Poem 346 F678  ‘Not probable _ The barest Chance’
Emily tells how her soul had come very close to the Paradise of love with a woman, when by the merest chance of a ‘smile too few’ or ‘a word too much’ she offended her beloved, with the result that Emily found herself as far from her beloved as everybody else.

It was as if a bird had flown a long way, allured by ‘Sweets,’ and then had forgotten how to fly when but a bough away from them. Just as the bird’s foot groped for the bough in vain, so Emily can now only call her queen a ‘Phantom Queen.’

The queen, now a phantom, is probably Sue. In a letter (L177) of seven years earlier Emily had written to Sue, ‘If it is finished, tell me, and I will raise the lid to my box of Phantoms, and lay one more love in.’

Poem 347 F679  ‘When night is almost done’
At first reading this poem seems to describe those familiar ‘midnight’ terrors, which, as dawn approaches, seem so much less terrible that we can ‘smooth the hair’ and face the day. But Ruth Miller may be right to suggest that ‘Night’ is the night of death, and ‘Sunrise’ our rising into eternal life. The phrase ‘touch the Spaces’ does seem more applicable to arriving in eternity than awaking in our bedroom.

Poem 348 F347 ‘I dreaded that first Robin, so’
In poems such as 64 and 65 Emily has sung of the bliss of the early days of spring, forerunner of the summer to come and symbol of rebirth. But in this poem she tells of a year in which she, as a ‘Queen of Calvary’ (line 24), was so weighed down with woe that she dreaded the coming of spring and ‘that first Robin.’ In her numbed state of sadness she was out of key with spring, and unable to give the Daffodils and the Bees her usual joyful welcome.

As always, the first step is the hardest, and having heard the robin once, although it still hurt, she hoped not to be totally overcome by all the miracles of growth in the woods. She wished the grass would grow tall so quickly that it would overlook her lack of warmth. It would have been kinder if some of the usual signs of spring had stayed away, but they unthinkingly all burst upon the scene as usual. Emily can only acknowledge their arrival by lifting her plumes of mourning, not yet adult enough to have assimilated her woe.

Sylvia Townsend Warner, having just lost her beloved Valentine, wrote in her diary for January 1970, ‘I realise that spring will be the cruel season, the thorniest ascent to climb.’

Poem 349 F350 ‘I had the Glory _ that will do’
A possible reading of this poem is that Emily herself has said ‘No’ to a love affair. Her ‘Nay’ has deformed and dwindled ‘Bliss’ early shape’ and gulped up ‘Time’s possibility.’ But at least when tempted by the love of lesser men, she can turn her thoughts to the Glory and the Honour of the love which she has foregone.

Emily said no to much in her life, to church, to travel, to society. Many years later than this poem she could even contemplate saying no to the man who most returned her love, the judge Otis P. Lord. She begins a letter (L562) of 1878 to him with the words, ‘Don’t you know you are happiest while I withhold and not confer _ don’t you know that “No” is the wildest word we consign to Language?’
Jane Donahue Eberwein’s book *Dickinson: Strategies of Limitation* is built around the idea that Emily imposed limits in order to increase her power inside those limits.

**Poem 350 F352** ‘They leave us with the Infinite’
The ‘Comrade’ of line 9 is perhaps Samuel Bowles. Because of the conventions of ‘They’ (= society) in line 1, the two of them can only meet as lovers in the ‘Infinite’ of Heaven. But as she pictures the ‘Infinite’ as a huge giant, with his arm as big as the Himalayas (see poem 252) and carrying Gibraltar ‘poised lightly on his Hand,’ they can be sure that whom he establishes, that person shall stand secure. Her lover should put his trust in Eternity, and Emily will do this for both of them.

Emily associated Gibraltar with the warmth and the south. In a letter (L722) of 1881 to Susan Dickinson she says, ‘It was like a breath from Gibraltar to hear your voice again, Sue,’ and, writing (L808) to Mrs Holland in the cold March of 1883, she says, ‘I have seen one Bird and part of another _ probably the last for Gibraltar’s Feathers would be dismayed by this savage Air.’

**Poem 351 F357** ‘I felt my life with both my hands’
Whether in this poem Emily is arriving in Heaven and checking to see if she is still the same person, or whether, as Ruth Miller believes, she is considering how life without Samuel Bowles is going to feel, now that she has realised she cannot have him as a lover, the delight is in the details and the amused tone that Emily manages in this crisis.

She looks at her spirit in the Glass to see if this new life is ‘possibler’ than she thought. She very gradually turns round inspecting herself and asks the name of this new person, not sure that she will recognise it when told. She examines her features and shakes her hair vigorously to test if it is still her, and pushes in her dimples to see if a recognisable face smiles back from the mirror.

She concludes that she is the same person, but needs courage for this new home. She has no need to say like the old woman in the nursery rhyme whose petticoats were all torn about, ‘Lawks a mussy, this is none of I.’

**Poem 352 F358** ‘Perhaps I asked too large’
At the end of her book *The Passion of Emily Dickinson* Judith Farr leaves the reader with this poem. It reflects, she suggests, both Emily’s nature and her art.

She asked to be a poet (= the skies) rather than an ordinary housewife (= the earths, which are as thick as berries in Amherst). This basket dangled easily on her arm, whereas the duties of a wife and mother would have stifled her.

Similarly, perhaps asking too large, she wanted immortality as the subject of her poetry rather than the themes of the lady poets published in the *Springfield Republican*. This was the subject where she felt at home and could breathe easily, whereas the *Springfield Republican* subjects would have choked her.

**Poem 353 F335  ‘A happy lip _ breaks sudden’**

Franklin prints this poem as the second half of the poem numbered 335 by him, while Johnson prints the two halves as separate poems numbered 353 and 514. This note is on Johnson’s poem 353.

Emily contrasts two smiles, a sudden, unpremeditated happy smile and the fixed merriment of that smile which its owner puts on to conceal pain from those whose eyes are not qualified to perceive it. This fixed smile demands both patience and the ability to deceive people, for it appears to be ‘fresh gilded.’

Such a smile was perhaps something Emily herself used when facing the ‘terror’ that came upon her in the year of this poem.

**Poem 354 F610  ‘From Cocoon forth a Butterfly’**

This poem begins as a delightful, light-hearted picture of a butterfly that emerged from its cocoon one ‘Summer Afternoon.’ The butterfly skims along from clover to clover with no thought for what she is doing. But when her ‘pretty Parasol contracts in a Field,’ Emily builds up a contrast between the butterfly and the haymakers, bees and flowers that share the afternoon with the butterfly. While the butterfly with its fellow butterflies (= ‘Parties _ Phantom as Herself’ in line 13) just makes an exotic display (= ‘Tropic Show’ in line 16) and flies at random through the skies in ‘purposeless Circumference,’ even if sometimes buffeted by ‘an opposing Cloud,’ the earthbound haymakers, bees and even the flowers are hard at work, zealously fulfilling their functions, and disdained for their efforts by the butterflies who form an ‘Audience of Idleness from the Sky.’
Finally the sonorous last stanza strikes a more solemn note. As Judith Farr points out in her detailed reading of this poem, we are made to think not just of the sunset which ended that afternoon for its participants but also of the eternal sunset in which all the sons of earth are extinguished. ‘Time, like an ever rolling stream, bears all its sons away,’ as Isaac Watts wrote in his hymn *O God, our help in ages past*.

**Poem 355 F612**  ‘‘Tis Opposites _ entice’

Emily has already made use of the ‘polar’ opposites of this poem in such poems as 67, 135 and 313. Here she seems to be building them up to a plea in the last stanza for her loved one to return her love. She says in effect, ‘I pray that your lack of love for me may inspire you with its opposite, love for me, even though it is only Me who is asking you to make her your loved Divinity.’

Judith Farr thinks it is probable that Emily is making this plea for love to Sue, who, ironically, was Emily’s opposite in many ways.

The meaning of lines 7-8 is not obvious. Perhaps the Captive is choked by his desire for new life outside the prison, while beggars play their musical instruments, hoping to be considered somebody.

**Poem 356 F613**  ‘The Day that I was crowned’

Emily clearly describes the day that she was crowned. When she rose that morning, she looked as plain as Carbon looks in the Coal, but by the time ‘the Day declined’ she was like Carbon when it has crystallised into a gem, for she had received a crown at a coronation. At the close of day she and the Day ‘in Majesty were equally _ adorned,’ she with her crown, the day with its sunset.

But she does not reveal the nature of the crown. She does hint in lines 7-8 that she may have appeared too dull for such a diadem. And in the last stanza she states that the grace that she was chosen to be crowned gave her more pleasure than the actual crown, the fact that even the grace was hers being so astounding. But such clues are too slight for any sure identification of the crown. A guess would be that it stands for a declaration of love made to her on that day, or for the visitation of the certain knowledge that she by grace had been given supreme poetic skill.

**Poem 357 F615**  ‘God is a distant _ stately lover’
In an old New England tale John Alden, who was in love with the fair Priscilla, sent his friend Miles Standish to woo her in his place. In this witty poem Emily uses John Alden for ‘God,’ Miles Standish for ‘Jesus’ and the fair Priscilla for ‘mankind.’ She begins with the neat point that the two situations are exactly similar, for God sent his son to woo us, just as John Alden sent Miles to woo Priscilla.

Then she concludes with an even neater point. In the story it so happened that Priscilla chose Miles, not John Alden, and Emily comments that if mankind behaves in the same way as Priscilla and chooses Jesus rather than God, God will merely state with ‘hyperbolic archness’ that he and Jesus are one and the same person anyway.

It is to be hoped that Jesus himself would have smiled at Emily’s wit, had he read the poem, but at the poem’s publication in 1891 it was greeted by an indignant public response and withdrawn from publication until 1929, when it again on publication received the same response.

**Poem 358 F616** ‘If any sink, assure that this, now standing’

Having survived some catastrophe herself, Emily gives a message of encouragement to any others in the same situation. She cannot tell them what gave her the force to survive, but only that she gained strength as she felt it happen. All they have to dread is the moment before the catastrophe (= ‘the Whizzing, before the musket-ball’). Once the worst has happened, it becomes easy in a moment, for it cannot happen again (= ‘Dying _ annuls the power to kill.’)

Emily does not say what catastrophe she survived. She may have hoped that she would be able to say the same thing about death itself. The point made in line 8 is repeated in lines 10-12 of poem 457.

**Poem 359 F639** ‘I gained it so’

Emily’s Bliss hung so high above her that she might as well have tried to devise a strategy for reaching the sky. But having by her persistence gained her ‘instant’s Grace,’ she clutches it tight, since she will no longer feel contentment in the beggary that was hers before the Bliss.

**Poem 360 F640** ‘Death sets a Thing significant’

We might have hurried by the little picture done in wool ‘upon the Closet shelves,’ had we not remembered it was the last picture done by a dead friend. Emily herself is
deeply affected by a certain book, with passages marked in pencil in the margins, because it was given to her by a friend now dead. She cannot see the print for her tears, but she cannot stop them because her friend was so dear to her. Thomas Johnson suggests that the friend may have been Benjamin Newton, and the book Emerson’s *Poems*, given by him to Emily in 1850.

Many books from the Homesteads have passages marked in the margins, so notching the place with a pencil may have been Emily’s practice too. For an instance of passages marked in the margin coming to the rescue of a later reader of the book see George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss* (Bk 4 Ch. 3)

**Poem 361 F641**  ‘What I can do _ I will’  
What Emily can do is write poems, and this she will do, even if her poems have no more affect upon the reader than a daffodil. Those options which are not within her powers must remain unknown.

The claim she makes for her poems may seem modest, unless she has in mind the ‘wealth’ which the show of daffodils brought Wordsworth whenever he later thought of them.

**Poem 362 F636**  ‘It struck me _ every Day’  
In this poem Emily seems to revert to the period of the anguish described in poem 280 ‘I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,’ and in her comment of April 1862 to Thomas Higginson that ‘I had a terror since September _ I could tell to none (L261.’ In this period lightning struck her every day. The anguish burned her every night in dreams and ‘sickened fresh’ every morning. The wildest storm was not, as she had always thought, the soonest over.

But then a tiny touch of rueful humour in the last two lines gives the poem a slight lift at the end.

**Poem 363 F637**  ‘I went to thank Her’  
Like poems 312 and 593 this poem was written in memory of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, who died in Florence 30 June 1861. In her imagination Emily travels to Florence to thank Mrs Browning for her poetry and ‘to look upon Her like _ alive,’ only to find that the poet is dead and buried in the ‘funnel stone’ of her grave.
The two long syllables after a dash at the end of line 10 give the poem a suitably heavy end.

Poem 364 F398  ‘The Morning after Woe’
As in poem 348 ‘I dreaded that first Robin, so,’ Emily has suffered such woe that the glories of Nature, which normally uplift her, cause her further anguish because of Nature’s apparent uncaring inability to share in her suffering. Emily, Nature’s victim, can only stare blankly at Nature’s parade which tends to be especially joyful ‘the Morning after Woe.’ If the birds only knew how their tunes fall upon the ears of some creatures like ‘Litanies of Lead,’ they would modulate their Glee to some more suitable ‘Key of Calvary.’

In his painting The fall of Icarus Breughel takes this lack of sympathy one stage further and shows other human beings also completely failing to notice Icarus’ downfall.

Poem 365 F401  ‘Dare you see a Soul at the White Heat?’
Emily describes a blacksmith at work. The unworked metal ore is heated in the red fire of the forge until it is white hot and colourless. It can then be hammered into shape by the blacksmith on his anvil. But then she specifically says that this process ‘stands symbol’ for us hammering the materials of our life into shape when they glow white hot in ‘the finer Forge...within.’ In other words we can best make progress when we are exposed to extreme conditions.

Scholars who start from the assumption that this poem is about Emily’s own experience, disagree on the nature of that experience. Paula Bennett and Roger Lundin take her soul at white heat to be shaping and coming to terms with the sufferings inflicted on her by life, whereas Wendy Barker and Judith Farr believe that the heat of the forge stands for Emily’s experience in producing a poem. It is only in the white heat of inspiration that the impatient poet can at last hammer into shape a true poem which will last. On this reading the invitation in the first two lines would mean, ‘If you dare to know about poetic inspiration, come close within the door and I’ll show you.’

Poem 366 F405  ‘Although I put away his life’
If the speaker of the poem is Emily herself, she imagines that she has renounced marriage with a man who was ‘too grand’ for her, but she still fantasises what marriage with him might have been like. Surprisingly for one who was not too keen on housework she only sees married life as a list of things which she might have done for him. She would have regarded his ‘weariest Commandment’ as something sweeter than any girlish pastimes. Indeed when his Servant, the Surgeon, the World and his own Fame fail him, and it is a February day with the cold making its way into their cottage, if only he should say to her, ‘A load of sticks in your apron would make the cottage gay,’ that promise would be for her wealth beyond the dreams of avarice. Indeed she would then be able to teach the Angels in Paradise what inordinate wealth such a promise brings.

Poem 246 is the only other poem in which Emily takes such an unfeminist view of marriage. In act 3 of Chekov’s play Ivanov Sasha uses similar language when she says to Ivanov, ‘it would be sheer happiness for me to copy out your papers all night long, or watch over you all night so that no one woke you up, or just walk with you for miles, a hundred miles… the greater the effort, the greater the love.’

Poem 367 F406  ‘Over and over, like a Tune’
Emily tells us that she keeps thinking about Paradise. She imagines she is hearing its drums and cornets and the songs of the baptised, as ‘the redeemed of the Lord return again, and come rejoicing into Zion.’ Such music would be too grand to be believable, if she did not remember that Jesus promised in the parable of the sheep and the goats that the sheep would be on ‘his right hand,’ justified by their good actions (Matthew25:33).

Poem 368 F410  ‘How sick _ to wait _ in any place _ but thine’
Emily declares anew her love for her Master. When last night someone tried to comfort her in her sorrow with an embrace, she haughtily rebuffed the attempt. The arms of her rightful master are the only port for her Brig to lie at anchor. Better both of them tossing at sea than only her at anchor. Better no love making at all, than love making not shared with him.

Emily also views her master as a port for her mooring in poems 249 and 506.

Poem 369 F412  ‘She lay as if at play’
Emily imagines looking down on a young girl who had just died. She lay there as if her life had suddenly left her while she was playing. This life had always intended to return to heaven, ‘but not so soon.’ This particular ‘Morning at the door,’ instead of waking her up as usual, is working out how ‘to force her sleep _ so light _ so deep’ the sleep of death.

**Poem 370 F413  ‘Heaven is so far of the Mind’**

Emily states that Heaven can only be imagined in the mind. If our minds were dissolved, no architect could do a plan of its site from visual observation. Heaven is as big and as fair as we make it in our minds, and if we want it hard enough, we can experience it in this life.

The last two lines are reminiscent of the ‘realised eschatology’ of St John’s gospel, where Jesus reiterates that the new life of heaven begins in this life for those who are ‘born again of the spirit.’ *(John 3:7-9)*

**Poem 371 F569  ‘A precious _ mouldering pleasure _ tis’**

This is the first poem which reveals the importance of books to Emily. Later poems on the same theme are 604, 1263, 1587.

The texts she mentions are all old ones and suitably bound in vellum. Sappho was ‘a living Girl’ writing her poems on Lesbos in the 7\(^{th}\) century BC (see notes on poem 239). Sophocles wrote his tragedies in Athens in the 5\(^{th}\) century BC, and Plato, also an Athenian, began writing his philosophic dialogues at the end of this century. Dante, whose *Divine Comedy* was inspired by Beatrice, lived much later, but still some three centuries before Emily was born.

The ‘Antique Book’ is both of Emily’s world and not of it. The basic emotions of human beings change little over the centuries, so the themes of her antique book are still ones which ‘concern our mutual mind (line 11).’ But its opinions still have a quaintness simply because they are so old, traversing facts familiar ‘Centuries before.’ And because old volumes were written when the world was young, they possess an enchantment which makes you believe for a moment that your dreams are true, but like dreams themselves they ‘tantalise _ just so.’

‘mouldering’ (line 1): this adjective, which properly describes the book, is transferred to the pleasure of holding the book.
‘Plato _ was a Certainty (line 15): Plato may be described in this way because, unlike for example Aristotle, he believed that ‘goodness’ was something which could be found as a certainty. Or, more simply, it just means when Plato was certainly alive.

‘Dante’ (line 19): Dante only saw Beatrice three times before her early death, but his vision of her so affected him that he ‘deified’ her by making her his guide on his imaginary journey through Paradise. (‘Beatrice’ needs to be pronounced as a 4 syllable word in the Italian manner in order to fit the metre.)

‘deified’ (line 19): a mental full-stop is needed after this word.

The day after typing this, I read in The Times

‘There is still no tactile pleasure to compare with opening an old book: the gust of vellum and parchment, the knowledge of countless eyes tracing the page before you, the marginalia, the chance to hold some knowledge in your hand.’ (Ben Macintyre 16 November 2007.

Poem 372 F574 ‘I know lives, I could miss’
As poem 303 showed, Emily was not gregarious. In this poem her dearest friends are just two in number. To be without either of them for an instant would seem an Eternity. But the rest of humanity is summarily dismissed. Their significance for Emily is no bigger than the distance between a Gnat and its horizon.

As she said in a letter (L275) of this time to Samuel Bowles (who with Sue probably made up the two), ‘how extraordinary that Life’s large population contain so few of power to us.’ Nor had she changed when Thomas Higginson met her for the first time in 1870, for one of her comments which he passed on (L342a) to his wife was, ‘How do most people live without thoughts. There are many people in the world (you must have noticed them in the street) How do they live. How do they get strength to put on their clothes in the morning.’

Sylvia Townsend Warner records a similar opinion in her Diaries when she writes, ‘Walking along Smith St among all those spiritless shopping women, the thought came into my mind – why did all those poor creatures take so much trouble to get on to their hind legs.’

Poem 373 F575 ‘I’m saying every day’
In this poem Emily is every day practising how to become a Queen, in case the summons should come on the next day (lines 2, 18-19). She practises her behaviour (line 3), attends to her clothes (lines 4, 12-15, 29), pitches her voice unnaturally high (lines 16-17) and starts to use stately language even though her daily companions are only the Cricket and the Bee (lines 20-5). For if she does wake to find herself a Bourbon queen of Aragon in France, she does not want it to be a total surprise (lines 5, 30-3). Nor does she want people to say that she is unfit for the role on the grounds that yesterday she was only a beggar maid (lines 5-9, 29).

So much is fairly clear. But what does being a Queen signify for Emily? Ruth Miller suggests it refers to people’s recognition of her as a leading poet. But it seems odd that she needs to practise daily how she might respond to such recognition. Perhaps, alternatively, she is fantasising how she would behave as a Queen if one day Samuel Bowles declared that he returned her love. After all, lines 7-9 could well be a reference to Tennyson’s poem titled The Beggar Maid,’ in which king Copheuta swears that he will make a beautiful beggar maid his bride. Even ‘Exeter,’ the last word in the poem, might not be the county town of New Hampshire, but that earl of Exeter who in a British legend married a humble village maiden.

In lines 14-15 ‘not too plain’ goes with ‘me.’ In other words, ‘so that when rank overtakes me, I am not too plain.’

Poem 374 F577 ‘I went to Heaven’
Only in this poem does Emily imagine that she actually went to heaven. She did not find it to be as opulently splendid as in her favourite book of the bible, Revelation. It was ‘a small Town,’ just like Amherst, and lit by a single ruby. It may have been peaceful and beautiful and with a ‘unique Society,’ but the people were so insubstantial and their activities so undefined that she can give no more enthusiastic report of heaven than to say that she could be almost contented with it.

Mechlin lace is mentioned in poem 274, and Eider balls of down in poem 326.

Poem 375 F578 ‘The Angle of a Landscape’
What Emily sees every morning through her window when she wakes sounds very ordinary. It is ‘just a Bough of Apples,’ a chimney and a hill, and occasionally a weather vane on the church steeple. And the only change in the view is that, although
the chimney, hill and steeple are always the same, the bough changes from emerald green in summer to leafless in autumn to snow-covered in winter.

So it is nothing very much, but Emily gives the impression that she sees this familiar scene with an artist’s eye, and that for her, as for a painter like Bonnard, the ordinary elements of her view are as filled with the numinous as the stones of Venice might be for a Venetian patiently waiting for the dawn to appear.

Presumably Emily did not draw her curtain at night, or not completely, so that the crack between her curtain and the wall was the window.

The steeple belonged to the First Congregational Church, which Emily attended in her youth. By the time it was rebuilt in 1867, she no longer went to church, but the story goes that she crept out one evening with Austin to inspect the new building.

Edith Wharton begins ch. 42 of her novel Hudson River Bracketed with the words, ‘Just outside the cottage window an apple branch crossed the pane……it was a warped unsightly branch on a neglected tree but so charged with life, so glittering with fruit, that [to Vance] it looked like a dead stick set with rubies.’

Poem 376 F581 ‘Of Course _ I prayed’
Mental full-stops should probably be put after ‘Give Me’ in line 5 and after ‘Yourself’ in line 7. Emily is bitter about God’s caring no more for her prayer than if a Bird had cried ‘Give Me.’ Her reason is that she would not have been given life except for God, but, in her present distress, it would have been more loving for him never to have created her than to leave her unaided in this stinging misery.

Richard Sewall comments on this poem, ‘she never made a starker statement of a deprived existence.’ Her attitude to prayer is different in poem 502.

Poem 377 F632 ‘To lose one’s faith _ surpass’
The extreme statement of this poem, that if one item of the faith you are born with is lost, then life is no better than Beggary, could refer to the same situation of ‘smart Misery’ as in the previous poem. It is easy to be overwhelmed by the power of these lines, except that a voice will ask, ‘Is it absolutely impossible for a faith, once lost, to be found again?’ Or, ‘Need the loss of one article of faith necessitate the loss of all the others?’

Poem 378 F633 ‘I saw no Way _ The Heavens were stitched’
This poem equals the previous two in bleakness. Jane Donahue Eberwein helps to unravel its meaning. Emily, she suggests, sees life as a ‘circuit.’ Beyond the circumference of this circuit lies the spiritual realm, the other world of God’s kingdom. Starting with this clue, we see that in the first two lines the speaker of this poem, presumably Emily, was trapped within the confining columns of this circuit world with no route open to heaven. The closing columns may hint at the narrowness Emily found in traditional church life.

But then there was a moment of release. ‘The Earth reversed her Hemispheres,’ so that Emily, instead of being somewhere in the middle as usual, was on the edge, actually walking out upon the circumference of the circuit world, ‘a Speck upon a Ball,’ and touching ‘the Universe.’ Indeed she went ‘beyond the Dip of Bell,’ the bell or buoy being that which marks off the harbour of the traditional beliefs of the circuit world from the ocean of doubt and speculation.

Emily does not say what she found when she ‘went out upon Circumference,’ but the tone of the poem does not suggest that it was anything glorious or comforting.

**Poem 379 F664  ‘Rehearsal to Ourselves’**

Emily feels as though some friend or lover had stabbed her to death with the Dirk of treason. She keeps reviewing the fact that her ‘delight’ has been ‘withdrawn,’ holding the dirk which did the betrayal in her hand to remind her of the fact. This rehearsal is so upsetting that she feels she would like to know the ‘Bliss….Omnipotent _ Acute’ of murdering the betrayer.

Her murderous desires in this poem are much more serious than the ones of poem 118.

**Poem 380 F642  ‘There is a flower that Bees prefer’**

The ‘Purple Democrat’ (line 3) of this poem is the common clover.

‘several’ (line 7) = ‘individual.’

‘for June’ (line 13) needs a full stop after it.

‘sweet litigants’ (line 20) are the grass and the clover.

‘Providence’ (line 26) = ‘caretaker.’

‘Her Progress….Tune’ (lines 27-8) means that the growth of the clover is not charted by gardener but only by the bee, as it buzzes on a single note and hovers commandingly over the clover.
Judith Farr (G) points out that it is all of Emily’s love for small flowers that she gives the humble clover 32 lines of affectionate description and describes the flower in anthropomorphic terms. The generous clover (lines 5-8) has a ‘sturdy little Countenance’ (line 15). It is a kinsman and a litigant (lines 18-20). It is not jealous (line 24) but the ‘Bravest _ of the Host’ (line 29). Farr also notes that the frequent use of ‘be’ instead of ‘is’ or ‘are’ gives the poem a biblical note, and that the omission of the name of her subject may be a good-humoured game played with her imaginary reader.

**Poem 381 F643**  ‘A Secret told’

Emily claims that it is better to keep a secret and be appalled by it yourself than to tell it to somebody and then to be afraid both of the secret and the somebody as well.

This is unusual advice. Mike Leigh in his film *Secrets and Lies* argues the opposite, as does Molly Gibson, who, in ch. 43 of Mrs Gaskell’s *Wives and Daughters* says to her friend Cynthia that she would feel much better if she told her secret both to herself and to Molly’s father.

**Poem 382 F644**  ‘For Death _ or rather’

For Death and its ‘Things,’ what we have to put away is ‘Life’s Opportunity.’ Death will certainly give us the negative things of space and escape ‘from Circumstances and a name,’ but we cannot tell how the positive gifts of Death compare with those of Life, since it is only with Life that we have estimated values, for example that its sunsets are estimated highly.

The list of things which Death will buy for us in the second stanza are not surprising if we remember poems such as 288 and 303, and the story that Emily once hid in a wood to avoid being questioned by her neighbours.

**Poem 383 F645**  ‘Exhilaration _ is within’

Emily defines ‘Exhilaration’ as the inner wine of the soul. The soul may drink it on her own or put it away to drink with a visitor or offer it to God as a sacrament. And suppose a Man who had a well-stocked wine cupboard at home should call. It would be no ‘Holiday’ or easy task to give him a drink which would stimulate his palate. The best offering that you could breathe out to him would be your inner wine.
This reading requires starting a new sentence at ‘Tis not.’ Wine is also associated with the river Rhine in poems 123 and 214. Poem 1118 is another attempt to define Exhilaration.

**Poem 384 F649 ‘No Rack can torture me’**
This poem probably refers to Emily’s great crisis of 1862. She has faced it and survived. Behind her mortal bone, the bone of her soul has been ‘knit bolder.’ It is now at Liberty, and cannot be damaged by anything. In general terms, if all is well with your soul, your body may be bound, but your soul can fly and gain the sky of liberty as easily as the eagle can soar upwards from his nest. But if your soul is at war with itself, you are truly captive.

The last stanza of Richard Lovelace’s poem *To Althea, from Prison*, written about 1650, makes the same point:

Stone walls do not a prison make,
   Nor iron bars a cage;
Minds innocent and quiet take
   That for an hermitage;
If I have freedom in my love,
   And in my soul am free;
Angels alone that soar above
   Enjoy such liberty.

**Poem 385 F651 ‘Smiling back from Coronation’**
This poem is one long sentence, consisting of a main clause (lines 1-8) and a conditional clause (lines 9-12). Mentally changing line 9 to ‘If the Triumph had no Conviction’ makes the meaning clearer.

Emily had described the day of her Coronation in poem 356. Here she adds to that description the humble point that she could enjoy the luxury of smiling on those who began the procession with her but are now outdistanced, if she was not convinced that those outdistanced must be in misery. If this poem is connected with poem 356, it becomes slightly more likely that the coronation she is receiving is the recognition of her supreme poetic genius.
Poem 386 F667 ‘Answer July’
This poem, like poem 6, seems to be saying that the four seasons form a regenerative cycle in the pattern of the year.
Stanza 1: Where does summer come from?
Stanza 2: Where does spring come from?
Stanza 3: Where does the winter come from?
Stanza 4: Where do the Haze and Bur of autumn come from?
Here _ said the Year _
Perhaps the dash at the end suggests that the process recurs.

Poem 387 F671 ‘The Sweetest Heresy received’
A heretic is one who holds variant views. The sweetest exchange of variant views is when a Man and a Woman get married. Each needs to be a sympathetic convert towards the views of the other. Only two are involved. Their ‘services’ are so frequent, their views are about such small matters that opportunities for showing grace come thick and fast. To fail to take these opportunities is to be an Infidel towards the church that is marriage.

Poem 388 F672 ‘Take your Heaven further on’
Emily scornfully refuses to see a caller who brings too late his Heaven of love for her. He should have come much earlier. In the meantime this Heaven of his (i.e. Emily) has gone to ‘Heaven divine’ and put on ‘Eternity,’ as her white dress shows. In fact it would be easier for him to apologise to the Skies than to the suffering Emily. The best thing he can do now is to ring the doorbell of the Evergreens just beyond her house.

Perhaps this poem is addressed to Samuel Bowles on his return from Europe. In poem 271 ‘dressed in white’ signified that Emily had accepted her vocation as a poet, while in poem 325 white clothes denoted those who had overcome tribulation. Either significance would fit here. She no longer has time for his love, either because she is now totally committed to poetry, or because she has overcome the suffering caused by his failure to declare the ‘Heaven’ of his love early enough.

Bowles may be referring to this poem when in a letter to Austin of 1863 he says, ‘To the Queen Recluse my especial sympathy _ that she has “overcome the world.”’
(1John 5:4-5)
Poem 389 F547  ‘There’s been a Death, in the Opposite House’
The meaning of this poem is fairly clear. In a Country Town like Amherst it is as easy
to intuit a death from what is seen happening as from a Sign saying ‘Death here
today’ (lines 23–4). The man of ‘the Appalling Trade’ is the undertaker, and the
‘measure of the House’ is the size of the coffin.

Emily declaring what she used to do ‘when a Boy’ (line 12) may be a surprise,
but she is a boy in poem 986 as well, and on one occasion when her young nephew,
Ned Dickinson, was in disgrace for stealing a pie, she tried to cheer him up by
sending a note (L571) which included the sentence, ‘Mother told me when I was a
Boy, that I must “turn over a new Leaf”_ I call that the Foliage Admonition.’

Poem 390 F556  ‘It’s coming _ the postponeless Creature’
Emily describes the courteous but implacable and certain approach of Death. His
arrival dresses the houses of the mourners in ‘icicle.’ Admittedly Death carries the
dead person ‘to God,’ but these two words do not feel like a strong upbeat ending.

Poem 391 F558  ‘A visitor in Marl’
Judith Farr convincingly shows that ‘Marl’ is not dew but a shortened form of
‘marble’ by pointing to Emily’s sentence in a letter (L432) of January 1875 to Mrs
Holland, ‘Mother is asleep in the Library _ Vinnie _ in the Dining Room _ Father _ in
the Masked Bed _ in the Marl House.’ For in this sentence the ‘masked bed’ must be
her father’s coffin and the ‘marl house’ his grave with its marble headstone.

This visitor in marble is that disastrous frost of late autumn which kills all the
remaining flowers in the garden. After he has kissed and caressed the flowers, they
are turned into ‘stone busts,’ as glassy in their elegance as their marble killer.

Frances Partridge in her diary volume A Pacifist’s War notes that on 28 January
1940, ‘A sharp frost on top of rain had encased every twig in ice as thick as a man’s
thumb………each blade of grass had its glass envelope and the plants in the rockery
were solid coral.’

Emily clearly distinguishes between frost and dew in poem 782.

Poem 392 F559  ‘Through the Dark Sod _ as Education’
‘Beryl’ as an adjective means ‘pale greenish-white.’ This would fit the suggestion of
Judith Farr (G) that the lily Emily has in mind is the Calla lily with its one white
funnel or bell. But, as Farr continues to say, the lily is not so much a botanical fact as a human prototype, perhaps, for example, a novice nun who after long training has the mystic pleasure of communion with God.

But the poem could equally well refer to Emily preparing herself for writing striking poems, or to all men passing through the education of this life to the ecstasy of the next.

**Poem 393 F560  ‘Did Our Best Moment last’**
The ‘Best Moments’ of this poem are presumably what Emily called ‘the Soul’s Superior instants’ in poem 306. If ‘this Sort’ (line 3) is taken to mean such best moments, the poem could be read as follows:

‘Because our best moments, if they lasted, would obviate the need for heaven, and because a few, knowing this, have procured them riskily by means of drugs, the result is that these best moments are not given except partly as flashes of hope when we are up against it _ and the remaining others as ‘Heavenly Moments’ of illumination, when we’re not.’

**Poem 394 F562  ‘Twas Love _ not me’**
Throughout this difficult poem Emily maintains the strange conceit that in her great love for some unnamed man there were two persons involved, she Emily and Love itself, even though ‘We Two _ looked so alike’ (line 10).

The poem is also heavily ironic. She is saying in effect to her lover, ‘If you want to punish me for loving you so much that I died for you, you should punish not me, but love, the real guilty one _ except that if loving you is to get the deepest punishment and to be forgiven last, that would be like Jesus dying for us on the cross being regarded as base!’

In poem 196 Emily used ‘Tim’ as an alter ego.

**Poem 395 F565  ‘Reverse cannot befall’**
Just as poem 383 declares ‘Exhilaration is _ within,’ so this poem says that ‘interior Prosperity’ can no more be damaged by misfortune than can some mishap mar a diamond ‘in far _ Bolivian ground.’

This is classic Stoic doctrine. Ruth Miller wonders if Emily’s own ‘fine Prosperity’ is her poetic skill.
Poem 396 F552  ‘There is a Languor of the Life’
Ruth Miller links this poem with Emily’s second letter (L261) to Thomas Higginson. It was written in April 1862 and begins, ‘Your kindness claimed earlier gratitude _ but I was ill _ and write today, from my pillow. Thank you for the surgery _ it was not so painful as I supposed.’

Miller takes the surgery inflicted by Higginson’s criticisms of the poems she had sent him to be the same as the illness which causes her to write from her pillow. She is as prostrated by his criticisms as much as a patient after a real surgical operation. They were painful and severe. But Emily now generously excuses him. He can always say, ‘If my criticisms ‘killed’ you, it was because my skill arrived on the scene too late. A Mightier one than me, namely your friend Samuel Bowles, had failed to give you enough encouragement and Vitality to write verse that was alive.’

Poem 397 F553  ‘When Diamonds are a Legend’
This poem starts bravely, but falters. Emily later said in a letter (L767) to Thomas Higginson, ‘I never wear Jewels,’ so the ‘Brooch and Earrings’ are probably a metaphor for her poems, and in the first stanza she is confident enough to say, ‘Even when Diamonds and Diadems are no more, I shall still be able to write my poems _ even for sale.’

But in the second stanza she has to admit the market for her poetry has been small. In fact she has only had two patrons so far, one a Queen and the other a Butterfly. These two patrons, like the two close friends of poem 372, may again be Sue and Samuel Bowles, her names for them perhaps indicating that she had great respect for Sue’s judgement but rather less for that of the editor of the Springfield Republican.

Poem 398 F554  ‘I had not minded _ Walls’
In this poem, in which Emily considers the obstacles between her and her lover, a strong contrast is set up between the two halves of the poem.

In lines 1-8 a forceful Emily declares that, even if the Universe had been one solid mass of rock, she would have tunnelled through to meet her lover, just so that she might have looked into his eyes.
But in lines 9-16 she implies that she is prevented from meeting him by what seem the flimsiest of barriers, a single hair, a filament, a cobweb, a fortress of straw, a lady’s veil. However, the cobweb is ‘wove in Adamant.’ Every mesh of the lady’s veil is ‘a Citadel’ and every crease conceals ‘a Dragon.’ Also ‘a law’ stands in the way.

Such barriers, which seem flimsy when compared with a Universe of Rock but which have their own strength, could indicate the barriers standing in the way of the consummation of a love affair with Samuel Bowles (he was married) or with Sue (she was married and a woman).

The ‘Dragons’ bring to mind Keats’ poem *The Eve of St Agnes* which ends with the lovers escaping on tiptoe, ‘For there were sleeping dragons all around.’

**Poem 399 F555 ‘A House upon the Height’**

Jane Donahue Eberwein sees in this poem ‘the conventional environmental horrors of Gothic fiction.’ This ‘House upon a Height’ remained a mystery. There was much ‘Conjecture,’ but ‘He’ (= Conjecture) never satisfactorily told what the house was. It might at its least awful have been merely a house which had stood empty for years, but the combination of height and emptiness easily enabled the mind to imagine horrors within.

**Poem 400 F673 ‘A Tongue _ to tell him I am True’**

Emily would pay gold for some ‘Ragged Child’ to go as a messenger to her lover and tell him that so far she is true. (In line 7 ‘Charge thee speak it plain,’ Emily seems to imagine that she has the child in front of her and is giving him instructions.) She also wants him to tell her lover what she has been doing ever since the Midnight when her lover left her. But for the most important message of all (and in lines 14-15 ‘Pardon _ Boy _ the Magnitude’ she again addresses the boy), she will give a vast fortune to him, and to a helper, if he needs one. For the most important message of all for her lover is that at the end of the world the ‘Bond’ of her love is ‘just begun,’ and, even if the heavens dissolve, he can still look for her, the ‘Least Figure _ on the Road.’

Emily no doubt intended the irony of the least figure on the road sending her lover a message of the extremest devotion expressed in the most extravagant terms. Emily similarly belittles herself in poem 486 which begins, ‘I was the slightest in the House.’
Poem 401 F675  ‘What soft _ Cherubic Creatures’
As Richard Sewall puts it, Emily’s target in this poem is the ‘self-righteous sewing circle’ of Amherst, with its over-refinement in sexual matters and horror of ordinary human nature. She bitterly comments that one would be as likely to want to rape a star as one of them. They are even ashamed of God who gives his glory to common fishermen like Peter, the first disciple. But one day Redemption will be equally ashamed of these ladies, who are ‘Soft’ in body but ‘Brittle’ in soul. As Jesus himself said, ‘If anyone is ashamed of me and mine in this wicked and godless age, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him, when he comes in the glory of his Father and of the holy angels.’ (Mark 8:38)

For Emily’s own freckles see the notes on poem 225. ‘Dimity’ is literally a puckered, decorative cotton cloth.

Poem 402 F526  ‘I pay _ in Satin Cash’
The ‘Satin Cash’ is the flower which she encloses with a letter to pay her debt to a correspondent.

Poem 403 F532  ‘The Winters are so short’
Emily makes two points about Winters. Firstly, looked at in one way, they are only short interruptions. Scarcely has she moved into the Pod of her house for winter when the Phoebes or pewits have arrived (see poem 1690) and it’s time to go into the garden again.

Secondly, she cheekily imagines that winters only began when, in the days of Noah, a winter preceded the ‘forty days and forty nights’ of rain that caused the Deluge (Genesis 7:12). Then, even more cheekily, she suggests that no one nowadays believes that there was a man called Noah, whose ark was washed ashore on Mt Ararat (Genesis 8:4).

By ‘no one’ Emily probably means herself and her brother Austin, who often scandalised their mother with their theological free-thinking. As Emily said in a letter to Mrs Holland, ‘I don’t know what she would think if she knew that Austin told me confidentially “there was no such person as Elijah (L650).”’ And in poem 597 Emily suggests that there may have been no Moses either.
Poem 404 F534  ‘How many Flowers fail in Wood’
The answer to these two sad exclamations made about flowers as though they were people is ‘All of them do.’ The word ‘Scarlet’ anticipates the seed turning into a flower.

Poem 405 F535  ‘It might be lonelier’
Emily is so accustomed to her Fate of Loneliness that, paradoxically, it might feel lonelier without it. Indeed the arrival of ‘Him’ (line 8) might ‘crowd the little Room’ and blaspheme ‘Its sweet parade _ ordained to Suffering.’

The thought in the last stanza is typical of Emily. As she was to say in a later letter (L898), ‘Success is dust, but an aim forever touched with dew.’ But whether the ‘Him’ who would be too big for her little room is God or her lover is uncertain. ‘Peace’ (line 4) and ‘Sacrament’ (line 8) may suggest God, but her room ‘ordained to Suffering’ (line 12) is more suggestive of suffering in the absence of her lover.

Poem 406 F536  ‘Some _ Work for Immortality’
Emily is probably contrasting her own writing ‘for Immortality’ with contemporary lady poets writing for the Springfield Republican. They will get paid immediately in ‘the Bullion of Today.’ She will have to wait for ‘Fame,’ but she will be paid in the ‘Everlasting Currency of Immortality.’

A beggar like herself can see further than the financial acumen of a Broker and realise that lady poets receive just ‘Money’ which is soon spent, whereas her fame will be an ever workable ‘Mine’ _ as indeed it is.

Lines 1-5 seem to be one sense unit, with lines 6-8 in apposition to it. Judith Farr thinks the poem’s contrast is more narrowly between Emily’s poems and ‘Sue’s writings, such as her Annals of the Evergreens.

Poem 407 F540  ‘If What we could _ were what we would’
If I can have what I want to have, there’s little room left for discussion or judgment. But if I can’t, to complain about the inability to a friend is one of the ultimate satisfactions of talk.

Poem 408 F543  ‘Unit like Death, for Whom?’
The poem begins with the question ‘A thing like death, for whom (is this explained before they die)?’ And the answer is ‘For nobody.’ For truly, the Grave, like the Tomb, tells no secrets. Only corpse and bearer are admitted to the graveside and only the corpse is buried. When the living say ‘goodbye,’ the dead person makes no reply. The chatter and the fine Bohea black tea are only to be found at the wake after the burial. At the graveside all is serious. The mourners waver between hope and fear, and with just a tremor that ‘All’s not sure.’

**Poem 409 F545**  ‘They dropped like Flakes’

Emily finds three moving similes for the countless soldiers who fell in the American Civil War. The field of combat was so vast that no eye could find the place where a particular soldier fell. But they are all on God’s list, with which there is no arguing.

**Poem 410 F423**  ‘The first Day’s Night had come’

Emily returns to the trauma described in poems 280 and 348. And just as she was glad in poem 348 to have ‘mastered the first Robin,’ so here she is glad to have endured the first terrible day since the trauma. At nightfall she even told her soul to sing. But it was too soon. She had to spend the night mending her soul. And then the second day dawned just as horrible as the first day, making a pair. She began to laugh and mumble, and down the years she has continued to do this, not sure whether she is mad or not, so different is she from what she was before the trauma.

She still does not tell us the cause of the trauma, but on this issue Paula Bennett states firmly, ‘Omitting the cause is not a deficit but one of the poem’s great strengths. For it allows us to identify with the speaker’s feelings, whether or not we share their cause.’

**Poem 411 F424**  ‘The Color of the Grave is Green’

This is an orderly poem. It consists of three pairs of two stanzas each, and each pair begins with two lines which echo each other. The first two pairs have also an echoing third line.

In summer the grave is green, indistinguishable from the grass apart from its Stone, and too sleepy to stop people to tell them where it is.

In winter the grave is white, indistinguishable from the snowdrifts until the sun has ‘furrowed out the Aisles’ between the graves.
But the grave within the mourner’s mind can never be green or white. It is as black as the ribbon ‘upon a Bonnet bound.’ It is too difficult and painful to remember when you last had this colour in your mind _ even if you were to send a ferret in search of it.

Poem 412 F432  ‘I read my sentence _ steadily’
Ruth Miller suggests that the ‘sentence’ which Emily ‘read steadily’ was the verdict contained in an article published in the *Springfield Republican*. It was written by her great friend Samuel Bowles and was titled ‘What should we write.’ It contained these words (p. 163):

‘There is another kind of writing only too common….It may be called the literature of misery. The writers are chiefly women, gifted women may be, full of thought and feeling and fancy, but poor, lonely and unhappy. Also that suffering is so seldom healthful. It may be a valuable discipline in the end, but for the time being it too often clouds, withers, distorts….We would say to our suffering friends, write not from the fullness of a present sorrow……Ordinarily the lacerated bosom must first be healed, before it can gladden other natures with the overflowings of a healthful life.’

Miller believes that Emily could have construed this article as an attack upon at least some of the poems she had been writing, and that she was completely dismayed by it. Even the words ‘gifted women may be, full of thought and feeling and fancy’ had no more real comfort than the ‘God have mercy’ spoken in court when the death sentence is passed.

But Emily was tough. Instead of hastily throwing the article away, she made herself completely acquainted with the death to her hopes which it contained, so that, paradoxically, she and the article and its writer could ‘meet tranquilly, as friends.’ That was how it was, that was what had been written, and it just had to be accepted.

Poem 413 F437  ‘I never felt at Home _ below’
Emily was perhaps not ordinary enough always to feel ‘at Home _ Below,’ and in this poem at least she is not consoled by the prospect of Heaven either, as she imagines it as a perpetual church service even on ‘bright Wednesday afternoons.’ Indeed, if only God would leave his Telescope and go on a visit somewhere or take a nap, she would
run away from the whole business of this world and the next. But she can’t, as the ‘Judgment Day’ awaits.

Emily’s irony and humour help to veil but do not completely blot out her dissatisfaction and fears.

Poem 414 F425 ‘Twas like a Maelstrom, with a notch’
Emily returns to the madness of poem 410. In this poem she describes in three different similes her escape from that madness just when it was about to overwhelm her, before asking in the last two lines of the poem which was better, to be lost in the madness or to return to normal life.

In the first simile she imagines that the Maelstrom she is in is like the paddle wheel of poem 10. A notch at a time it was closing in on her and actually almost touching her hem, when ‘something broke’ and she escaped.

In the second simile a Goblin was ‘measuring the Hours’ and seconds to the time when he would get full control of her. But, just as, helpless and numb, she was passing into the creature’s control, God remembered and ‘the Fiend let go.’

Or finally it was as though you were being led to be hanged and had shut your eyes, when ‘a Creature gasped “Reprieve!”’

For ‘the Film’ of death in line 21, see also line 15 of poem 504.

Poem 415 F427 ‘Sunset at Night _ is natural’
Line 3 shows that this poem is written to her Master. But why she should tell him that Midnight at Noon or an unpredicted eclipse reverses nature and God’s order is left unexplained. Is she hinting that a reversal of their love _ or, at least, of her love for him _ would be just as unnatural? At any rate, it is to be hoped her master raised his eyebrows at ‘Jehovah’s watch.’

Poem 416 F433 ‘A Murmur in the Trees _ to note’
In this poem Emily perceives creatures unseen by anybody else. If she said who they were, she would never be believed, and, anyway, she has promised never to tell. Whoever these creatures are, whether fairies and elves, or perhaps guardian angels, who as Robins even share the Trundle bed with the children, they inhabit a spirit world, perceptible only to such consciousnesses as Emily’s. The rest of us, who do not see the angels, can go our own way. There is no fear that we shall be led astray
from the road of ordinary, common-sense, down to earth existence by angels glimpsed in the distance. We lack th. As Emily says in poem 685

‘Not “Revelation” _ ‘tis _ that waits,
But our unfurnished eyes _ ‘

Poem 417 F434 ‘It is dead _ Find it’

Emily confronts the unassailable mystery of death with a command and its response and with three questions and their answers:

Find the dead man. We don’t know where he is.
Is he ‘happy’? We don’t know, any more than the wind does.
Is he ‘conscious’? Ask the ground where he is buried.
Is he ‘homesick’? Many have died before, but not even through them can he tell us, for they are as dumb as he.

Poem 418 F435 ‘Not in this World to see his face’

As in poem 322 the ‘Him’ of the poem could be her lover, whom for some reason Emily will never see again in this world. This sounds a long separation until Emily reads in the Bible that this life is but the Primer to the more glorious Book of Heaven, a book which as yet is shut with clasps for her lover and herself. But Heaven, even with her lover, is cold comfort to Emily, for she cannot imagine herself becoming wise by a sweeter book than the ABC Primer of this life. The ‘learned’ man can ‘have the Skies.’

But, again as in poem 322, the ‘Him’ of the poem could be God, as it seems odd for Emily to imply that she prefers this life without her lover to heaven with him. If the ‘Him’ is taken to be God, line 6 will mean that true communion with God is a closed book to her in this life.

The last stanza of poem 65 saw the relation of earth and heaven differently. There the primer of earth was seen as the necessary preparation for the ‘sublimer recitation’ of heaven.

Poem 419 F428 ‘We grow accustomed to the Dark’

If the ‘Darkness’ of this poem is again the trauma of poems of 410 and 414, as the third stanza suggests, Emily is at least facing it more optimistically in this poem as
now ‘Life steps almost straight’ (line 20). Perhaps the poem relates to some lesser anguish, for example Austin’s marriage to Sue.

At the beginning of the poem the reader needs to remember that Amherst was without street lights, so that Emily can say that when the Neighbour takes her lamp back indoors, having held it up to say goodbye to us, for a moment we are completely in the dark.

The last stanza speaks directly to all who have lost loved ones, for whatever reason.

Poem 420 F429 ‘You’ll know it _ as you know tis Noon’

‘It’ in line 1 is an experience of God in this life. None of the ‘Mightiest things’ reveal themselves to us by words or ‘terms.’ We can only intuit them from the glories that we do actually see around us.

Poem 421 F430 ‘A Charm invests a face’

This poem is a variant of poem 210 with the added psychological vignette of a lady who ‘dare not lift her Veil,’ although she wishes to do so. For her actual face may lack the charm of her ‘imperfectly beheld’ face. Indeed it is a common discovery that the actual loved one is less potent than the imagined loved one.

Poem 422 F415 ‘More Life _ went out _ when he went’

There is a misprint in Johnson. In line 17 ‘lift’ should be ‘life.’

This poem contrasts people who live life intensely with those who live a torpid, ‘peat’ life. Richard Chase explains why the first category should be called ‘Anthracite’ (line 8). A favourite author of Emily’s youth was Ik Marvel, who in his *Reveries of a Bachelor* contrasted the ‘anthracite’ person, who is steady, dependable and profound with the ‘sea-coal’ person, who is mercurial, shallow and unsteady. This first type of person can only just be quenched by the extreme coldness of the tomb and ‘a Frost more needle keen,’ as he lives so anthracite a life.

On the other hand, for people whose lives are so sluggish that they never experience any ‘volcanoes’ like Etna or Mexican Popocatapel, one small fan of a Gnat’s wing can extinguish such ‘a tract of Citizen.’

Emily also used the Gnat as a system of measurement in poem 372.
Poem 423 F416  ‘The Months have ends _ the Years _ a knot’

Just as the months have ends, so the ‘Skein of Misery’ which is the years of our life ends in a knot, which no Power can untie and lengthen. At our allotted time Earth will lay us in her drawers, as tenderly as if we were children, too tired to put away our ‘noisy Plaything.’

Emily here seems to belittle life but welcome death. She took the opposite view in poem 418.

Poem 424 F417  ‘Removed from Accident of Loss’

Judith Farr takes this poem, like poem 299, to refer to the triangular relationship between Emily, Sue and Austin. But, whereas poem 299 referred to the time when Austin had won Sue for his own, this poem refers to an earlier period when Austin was still unaware that he could win Sue’s rich personality.

The poem consists of two sentences, the first ending at ‘marked His’ (line 8), and the second being the rest of the poem. In these two sentences Emily says in effect:

‘As it will never happen in my simple, unromantic life that the accident of my losing Sue will change to the accident of my gaining her, I just have to get what I can from our relationship, all the time being as unconscious of her real wealth of love, as at the moment is Austin, who is like a Brown Malay and does not see he pearl marked ‘His.’

Could he only imagine a fraction of the bliss that awaits him with Sue, what Holiday!’

Poem 425 F382  ‘Good Morning _ Midnight’

Emily preferred Day to Midnight, for how could she ever have tired of Day, but now that Day has turned away from her, she can only say to Midnight ‘please take a little Girl’ _ but still allow her to look at Day, especially ‘when the East is red.’

Ruth Miller finds this ‘the most wistful poem in the canon,’ and believes that ‘Day getting tired of her’ refers to the rejection Emily felt when she read Bowles’ article in the Springfield Republican, quoted in the notes to poem 412. Even if the rejection is more general than Miller supposes, one can only echo her loving comment, ‘It is so direct, the poet’s wound lies so exposed, that the beauties of the verse may be relinquished, for who would have the wish to look close.’

Poem 426 F384  ‘It don’t sound so terrible _ quite _ as it did’
One of the actual deaths that affected Emily and her family most was that of Lieutenant Frazer Stearns, son of the president of Amherst Academy, who was killed in action during the Civil War on 14 March 1862. In a letter (L256) to Samuel Bowles Emily wrote, ‘Austin is chilled _ by Frazer’s murder _ He says_ his Brain keeps saying over “Frazer is killed” _ “Frazer is killed,” just as Father told it.’ The second and last lines of poem 426 echo so strongly the wording of the letter, that the poem almost certainly reflects on the same death.

‘under rule’ (line 4): presumably under the rule that the Latin for ‘dead’ is ‘mortuus.’

Stanza 2: bracketing ‘full in the face a Trouble looks bitterest’ and mentally supplying ‘a little’ after ‘Shift it _ just’ make the meaning clearer.

‘It’s shrewder then’ (line 14): ‘shrewder’ here has its less usual meaning of ‘hurtful/injurious,’ and the repeated ‘then’ refers to the time when the Tomb is new.

In stanzas 3 and 4, line 14 is the last line of the first sense unit. A new one begins with line 15: in a year’s time what I now call a ‘murder’ may seem to be more fittingly called an apoplectic fit.

**Poem 427 F385  ‘I’ll clutch _ and clutch’**

Emily presents the reader with a metaphor of herself diving for pearls. The next one might be a beauty. She could take this one to add to her collection, and then wait for other diamonds, as she is diving late in the day, even though the stars are slow to bring in the night.

What can she do with her collection of pearls? She can make them into necklaces, tiaras, and diadems that would adorn a Countess. Like Silas Marner, she can count them, and then lose them to have the joy of finding them again. She could wear them at Court, on her breast so that they are lifted high as she breathes. And when she dies, she could display them to the saints in the skies, but meekly, so that she is not accused of taking too much wealth there and consequently banished.

Judith Farr believes that Emily’s pearls are her experiences of love with Sue, actual or imagined, but Ruth Miller’s suggestion that the collection of pearls stands for the poems she is diving for day by day seems more convincing. The poems are all real, not partly imagined, and more likely to be what she relies on when she is asked in heaven what she has done with her life. Lines 12-14 seem to describe exactly the joy of coming across a poem she had forgotten and finding it good.
**Poem 428 F386** ‘Taking up the fair Ideal’

To take up an Ideal and then discover a flaw, at least means that the Ideal is now more bearable, even though its perfection can now seem to be a lie. Even Adam scowled at Eden as long as he failed to discover any ‘fracture’ or ‘splinter’ there (his scowl being a ‘perjury’ as he knew it was baseless).

But we can still take comfort from continuing to cherish our flawed Ideal, until the Ideal, which we had only imagined, slowly becomes a reality.

This poem could literally refer to Emily’s search for heaven and God, but perhaps makes more sense as a brave and generous description of her relationship with Sue. She has discovered flaws in Sue, but she will continue to cherish her until the day when ‘transfigured _ mended’ she is restored to wholeness and meets Emily ‘with a smile.’

**Poem 429 F387** ‘The Moon is distant from the Sea’

This moving description of complete devotion to a ‘Signor’ was surely written for Samuel Bowles in his absence from Amherst in 1862. Emily had previously called him ‘Signor’ in poem 250. Just as in poem 212 she had said, ‘Least River _ docile to some sea,’ so here Emily as the sea is led ‘docile as a Boy.’ And in this poem she describes herself as ‘obedient to the least command,’ just as in poem 366 she had declared that obeying ‘his weariest Commandment’ was sweeter than any game.

Did Emily pick up ‘Signor’ from Beatrice’s use of it for Benedick in *Much Ado about Nothing,* e.g. 5:2:43?

**Poem 430 F388** ‘It would never be Common _ more _ I said’

This poem is perhaps most likely to be an attempt, like poem 299, at sketching the history of Emily’s relationship with Sue. After earlier relationships which had ended bitterly (see poem 39), Emily began with Sue a relationship of such uncommon bliss that any bitterness in that relationship down the years was easier to bear (lines 1-8.) Emily’s flushed cheek, the sparkle in her eye, her swift movements and her ‘word of Gold’ to every Creature showed clearly that she was in love (lines 9-20.) But then suddenly Sue, ‘her drop _ of India,’ deserted her, her ‘Riches shrank,’ and the ‘Wilderness’ returned as she groped around. The dress on her hook is now the ‘Sackcloth’ she always used to wear, her moment of wearing ‘Brocade’ over.
Ruth Miller, less plausibly perhaps, takes the golden time of lines 5-20 to be the publication of poem 214 in the *Springfield Republican* of 4 May 1861, and the Wilderness of lines 21-32 to be the period of Emily’s later realisation that Bowles had no true appreciation of her poetry.

**Poem 431 F389** ‘Me _ come! My dazzled face’

Emily’s poem is a reply to some words in the last chapter of the Bible: “Come” say the Spirit and the bride. “Come” let each hearer reply.’ (Revelation 22:17) But Emily’s reply is very modest. The Saints have forgotten that she is too ‘bashful’ for ‘such a shining place’ as heaven. In fact it will be ‘Holiday’ (= holy day) and ‘Paradise’ enough for her, if ‘they’ (= the people left on earth) remember her name as that of a poet.

She had similarly shied away from heaven in poem 413, but had been more confident in the last stanza of poem 427.

**Poem 432 F390** ‘Do people moulder equally’

Emily suggests that at least some people (= a Species) do not moulder equally in the grave with all the rest, but live on as positively as she is alive now and breathes as a gift from heaven. Emily bases her confidence on Jesus’ statement to his disciples, ‘Verily, I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power.’ (Mark 9:1)

As often, Emily puts her trust in Jesus rather than in the other two members of the Trinity, but perhaps forgets the ‘till’ clause which ends Jesus’ statement.

**Poem 433 F391** ‘Knows how to forget!’

Ruth Miller makes the general point that Emily occasionally writes a poem as a response to something which she has read, and suggests that this poem was written to show her disagreement with Thomas Browne’s assertion that we *do* have the ability to forget. Browne had written, ‘To be ignorant of evils to come, and forgetful of evils past, is a merciful provision in nature…..whereby our sorrows are not kept raw by the edge of repetitions.’

But Emily, as was seen in poem 203, does not forget, and she begins this poem by asking if Browne’s book, which says it ‘knows how to forget’ could also ‘teach it’ to others. Then follows a list of other possible teachers or methods of acquiring
forgetfulness, but Emily implies that none of them help her to forget, not even Jesus, the ‘Rabbi of the Wise Book.’ For the last two lines of the poem, although wistful and tender, still expect the answer ‘No.’

If this poem was written during the same days as poems 434 and 438, it looks as though what Emily found hard to forget was her love for Sue.

Poem 434 F618  ‘To love thee Year by Year’
This poem was probably sent to Sue. Emily wryly admits that Sue might prefer her to break off her love rather than to go on loving her for ever. But because paradoxically ‘forever’ could seem a ‘short’ idea as nothing might happen during it, Emily has decided to break it into sections by sending Sue a flower with this poem.

Poem 435 F620  ‘Much Madness is divinest Sense’
Emily knows that she is so different from other people in her comparative isolation and her commitment to writing ‘strange’ poems, that she can be accounted mad and dangerous by the Majority. But in this poem she bravely asserts that her way of living is in fact ‘divinest Sense _ to the discerning Eye,’ convinced as she is that her poetry is the special outlet offered to her for the expression of what she is worth to the world.

The poem offers comfort to all who feel they do not take the Majority view.

Poem 436 F621  ‘The Wind _ tapped like a tired Man’
Emily invites us to believe that the Wind pays her a visit. He taps to come in, plays a tune on the cluster of glass pendants of a chandelier, and taps again to leave. But the idea of a real visit by the wind is so bizarre, especially the wind tapping again to leave, that it is perhaps more comfortable to regard the wind as a metaphor, perhaps for the Holy Spirit, or for her conscience, or for the consciousness that we all die.

Poem 437 F6223  ‘Prayer is the little implement’
Unlike poems 502 and 376, which refer to the poet’s own passionate attempts at prayer, this is an impersonal definition of the process of prayer, with a doubt of its efficacy expressed in the line ‘If then He hear.’ But Emily brings the impersonal definition to life by managing to suggest, as Whicher puts it, that prayer is ‘a kind of pea shooter.’
Poem 438 F625  ‘Forget! The lady with the Amulet’
A possible reading of this difficult poem is that the questions of the first two stanzas both expect the answer ‘No’ (as in poem 213 ‘Did the harebell lose her girdle’), and the third stanza is a strong contrast with the first two. If it is also assumed that Sue is both ‘the lady with the Amulet’ and ‘the Bee’ while Emily is ‘her Rose,’ the poem then reads:

Stanza 1: Sue cannot forget that she wore on her breast Emily’s gift of an amulet, as there has been no treason from the giver of that gift.
Stanza 2: Emily, the Rose, has never denied Sue, the Bee.
Stanza 3: But even if Sue, the lady with the amulet and the bee, should die (or her love for Emily die), Emily, as long as rivers run or longer, will do Sue’s will.

Poem 439 F626  ‘Undue Significance a starving man attaches’
Food seems good to the starving man when he has no hope of getting it. But when he has found the relief of food, it then lacks the savour it had when he was starving. Or as Plutarch once put it, ‘the best appetiser is an empty stomach.’

Poem 440 F628  ‘Tis customary as we part’
Emily is giving a trinket to a lover going on a journey. She suitably chooses a curling Clematis tendril, as Clematis is also known as ‘Traveller’s joy.’ Presumably the last three lines need to be expanded to read, ‘Clematis [for you] journeying far presents me with a single Curl of her Electric Hair [to give to you, as my trinket of faith].’

Poem 441 F519  ‘This is my letter to the World’
Richard Sewall takes ‘the World’ that Emily says never wrote to her to be Nature. But Nature, that could hardly be expected to write, did at least tell her its News, so that it seems more likely that ‘the World’ means the people in it, from whom Emily so far has had little response. In consequence Emily has to entrust to the tender judgment of future generations of her countrymen ‘the simple News that Nature told with tender Majesty,’ the simple news being that rebirth in Nature is a sign of our rebirth.

Poem 442 F520  ‘God made a little Gentian’
The purple gentian is a flower that blooms late in autumn. This Tyrian flower (ancient Tyre was famous for its purple dye) does not bloom until the days of the Frosts and the North winds arrive.

In the last line of the poem Emily identifies herself with the gentian. As Judith Farr (G) puts it, she wants to know whether she ‘the late-bloomer associated with the north winds and winter’ will vanquish ‘the summer of the common-place poets.’ Farr also wonders if Emily may have had in mind lines from Tennyson’s *The Princess*, a favourite poem of hers, which read

‘Bright and fierce and fickle is the South
And dark and true and tender is the North.’

Emily again identified herself with the North when in a letter (L368) of 1871 to Thomas Higginson she wrote, ‘If I exceed permission, excuse the bleak simplicity that knew no tutor but the North.’

**Poem 443 F522**  ‘I tie my Hat _ I crease my Shawl’

Emily returns to the theme of poem 419, namely her trauma and her first steps of recovery from it. The mechanical performance of ‘life’s little duties [done] precisely’ and with ‘scrupulous exactness’ has helped her to ‘hold her Senses on’ (lines 1-10, 30-4), since the day when her proper Existence with its Rewards just stopped (lines 11-12, 31). She discovered that when life’s purpose for her was over, she could not just put herself away as something completed (lines 13-16). She still had to go through the ‘sicker Action’ of ‘Miles on Miles of Nought’ (lines 17-18). She had to pretend and cover up her true feelings, not for her own sake, but to stop them startling those who scrutinised her (lines 19-25). She could well have trembled, considering the Bomb which she now held in her Bosom, but instead she kept it steady and continued with life (lines 26-30).

In the middle section of the poem it may help to put full-stops after ‘upon’ (line 16, ‘sicker far’ (line 18), and ‘start them’ (line 25).

Lines 25-9 as printed by Johnson are placed by Franklin as the last 5 lines of Johnson’s poem 712 (F508).

**Poem 444 F524**  ‘It feels a shame to be Alive’

Although Emily could have known nothing at first hand about the Civil War, and indeed admitted in a letter (L280) to Thomas Higginson that ‘War feels to me an
oblique place,’ she was capable of estimating the true value of those whose life was dissolved ‘for Us _ in Battle’s _ horrid Bowl’ (lines 15-16). The survivors may obtain some Renown from what they do with the rest of their lives, but it is ‘the Men who die’ who count as Gods. (In Johnson’s text ‘Man’ in line 18 is a misprint for ‘Men.’)

The whole of stanza 2 is the second thing which Emily envies, in apposition to the ‘Distinguished Dust’ of stanza 1, and it refers to the heroic defence made by a small band of Spartans at Thermopylae in 480 BC against hordes of invading Persians. The Spartans were killed to the last man, buried where they fell, and a stone was raised over them with the inscription, ‘Go tell the Spartans you who read: We took their orders and here lie dead.’ (Herodotus 7:228)

Poem 445 F344 ‘Twas just this time, last year, I died’
Emily imagines a speaker who died as a young girl a year ago, and who was carried in her coffin ‘by the Farms’ when the ears of corn were ripe. She was reluctant to miss the Harvest. She wondered which of her family would miss her least, whether her father would lay a place for her at Thanksgiving and if it would spoil their Christmas that she was now too high to hang up her stocking.

But, saddened by these reflections, she thought instead how perfect it would be when her family joined her in heaven.

Poem 446 F346 ‘I showed her Heights she never saw’
Emily wrote two versions of this poem in 1862. She sent one to Sue, and sewed the other into packet 32. Johnson prints the Sue version, Franklin the packet version. In Johnson’s version there is a dialogue between ‘I’ (first speaker) and ‘she’ (second speaker). In Franklin the dialogue is between ‘he’ (first speaker) and ‘I’ (second speaker). Johnson’s version is discussed here.

Judith Farr and Richard Sewall both believe that the ‘I’ is Emily and the ‘she’ is Sue. Emily is saying that she consistently offered to Sue a caring, passion and an awareness beyond her knowledge, which Sue as consistently refused. It was only when Emily ‘brake her life’ that a light dawned for Sue, which made it difficult for her to say ‘No’ any longer.

Ruth Miller’s view is completely different. She sees the poem as a dialogue between Jesus (the ‘I’) and Emily (the ‘she’). Jesus tenderly and gently invites Emily
to let him take her at death into the heights of heaven. Finally he breaks his life that
this might happen and then Emily cannot refuse his invitation any longer.

As before, the reader is left to choose between interpretations. Perhaps Miller’s
view is more likely. The words ‘I brake my life’ come more naturally from Jesus’ lips
than from Emily’s. Also Miller’s version fits the variant version in Franklin.

Poem 447 F443 ‘Could _ I do more _ for Thee’
This poem, as a teasing joke, may have accompanied a gift of flowers to Samuel
Bowles. Since all Emily can send to him, as the Queen of the hive and of her life, is a
nosegay of flowers, could she do any more for him if he were just a humble Bumble
Bee?

Poem 448 F446 ‘This was a Poet _ It is That’
The pronoun ‘It’ in line 1 shows that Emily set out to speak about poets in general,
both male and female, but in fact the poem gives a brilliant, brief account of her own
poetic practice and achievement. From ordinary things like the flowers in the
dooryard (see poem 134) she distils in her poems such a powerful Attar of truths
about the universe that we wonder we have not seized upon them ourselves before
her. And so prodigal is she as a ‘Discloser of Pictures’ _ 1775 poems full of them _
that we non-poets can live without making them for ourselves. Also she is so unaware
of the exact amount of the riches of her poetry that she would not be harmed if we
took some, especially as we cannot rob her of her true fortune, namely the poetic skill
to be able to distil this ‘amazing sense’ and disclose these pictures.

‘sense’ in line 2 is a pun on ‘scents.’ Emily gives a similar account of her poetic
practice in poem 675.

Poem 449 F448 ‘I died for Beauty _ but was scarce’
Emily’s two speakers in this poem, who equate Beauty with Truth, are following in
the footsteps of Keats and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Keats’ poem On a Grecian
Urn ends with the lines

‘Beauty is truth, truth beauty, _ that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.’

Browning’s A Vision of Poets included the lines

‘These were poets true,
Who died for Beauty, as martyrs do
For Truth _ the ends being scarcely two.’

Roger Lundin suggests that the last two lines of the poem set a limit even to the power of art to endure, but strictly it is only the grave and the lips of the speakers that are covered by moss. The poems themselves still fly free.

Poem 450 F449 ‘Dreams _ are well _ but Waking’s better’
The ‘dreaming’ and the ‘waking’ in this poem perhaps refer to our dreams of heaven, and our waking to find out whether they are true or not.

If we wake ‘at Morn’ (= in heaven), the waking is better than the dreaming. But if we wake ‘at Midnight’ (= hell or annihilation), it would have been better to have gone on dreaming of heaven. Certainly if at death we are met by a ‘Solid Dawn,’ leading to no ordinary day, it will be a sweeter experience than that of the robins, who surmise that day has come and so gladden the trees with their song.

Poem 451 F450 ‘The Outer _ from the Inner’
The reader instantly recognises the truth of this poem. Our outward behaviour reflects our inner mood. If we look in the mirror when we feel good, a smiling face looks back at us. But if we are swamped by sorrow or sin, a much uglier sight confronts us (stanzas 1 and 3). The most we can hope for is that the spokes of our outer wheel may fling a dust in the eyes of others, as, for a while, they ‘spin _ more conspicuous’ (stanza 2). And pretence is difficult. We may not wish others to know our secret life, but the inner is connected by an artery to the outer, so that our ‘Star’s whole Secret’ will be reflected in the lake of our cheek or brow.

Poem 452 F451 ‘The Malay _ took the Pearl’
The simplest way to take this much discussed poem is to connect it with poems 84 and 424, and to suggest that it refers to a later stage in the triangular relationship between Emily, Sue and Austin, when Austin (the Malay) had taken the pearl (Sue), partly because Emily (the Earl) had feared too much the sea of an unsanctified lesbian union with Sue, not thinking herself worthy of it. Austin, on the other hand, just plunged in and took Emily’s Jewel to her married home at the Evergreens, unaware of Emily’s love for his wife, and not caring too much whether he won her or not (lines 7-8, 14-17).
The syntax of lines 9-13 is difficult. Perhaps she is saying, ‘What sort of a lot had I, now that the jewel was borne on the dusky breast of the Malay, when I had not imagined the amber vest of a man as a fit home for my pearl.’

Poem 453 F452  ‘Love _ thou art high’
On one interpretation of poem 446 Emily says she had showed Sue the heights of love she might climb. Here she says they need to do the climb together, for, taking turns, they might climb the high mountain of lesbian love, a mountain as impregnable as the Chimborazo in Ecuador.

Or, changing the metaphor, if there were two on them in the boat on the sea of love, one rowing and one guiding the sails of the yacht, they might together reach the sun of sexual experience.

Then Emily faces facts. Love for her is still behind a veil. She is not one of the few who go through the stages of lesbian love before they die. Yet Bliss, which God says is an Eternity, would be an oddity without this love.

Poem 454 F455  ‘It was given to me by the Gods’
It is not known for certain when Emily first became aware of her skill as a poet, but if the gift given her by the gods in this poem is precisely that poetic skill _ or at least a love of words, which are its tools _ it must have happened when she was still at school in Amherst. From then on, if she heard the word ‘rich’ used in its ordinary sense, she was bold enough to smile, for now she knew that to take the name of ‘poet’ was to obtain a Gold which was far more valuable than the solid Gold Bars of currency.

Poem 455 F680  ‘Triumph _ may be of several kinds’
Like Jane Austen, Emily consistently implies that the daily struggle between good and evil is the most important battle to be fought. Consequently, as the poem declares, the greatest triumphs are moral triumphs: when Faith looks Death in the eye; when a person, unsupported except by God, stands up for the Truth and prevails; when we resist temptation by weighing up the heaven we would be renouncing and the rack in hell we would be gaining, if we gave way to the temptation.

But the greatest moral triumph of all is to pass acquitted from the judgement of ‘Jehovah’s countenance.’
Poem 456 F682  ‘So well that I can live without’
Emily declares her love for her master in hyperbolic terms. She loves him so much that she can live without his actual presence. Her master would even find it difficult to prove that Jesus loved Men more that she loves her master.

Poem 457 F684  ‘Sweet _ safe _ houses’
Emily may be referring to those people, presumably the rich, who, feeling safe in their gay Houses, keep them shut like tombs so that the actual facts of life (= Bare feet) are locked out. The laughter and whispering of these people with their pearls cannot be heard outside in the ordinary world. They try to pretend that their treasures are immune from bold sickness and death in its baldness. Their houses are sealed so tight that an actual funeral passing outside is muffled. If they heard it, they would wonder why anyone should interrupt the ‘Smiling’ of this life by dying. In her third letter to Thomas Higginson Emily uses the phrase ‘Barefoot-Rank’ to mean her situation as it actually is (L265).

Alternatively, as Charles Anderson suggests, Emily may be satirising ‘the professional smoothness of modern funeral parlours with their satin-lined metal caskets, corpses turned into people of ‘Pearl’ by the embalmer’s art, and ‘Muffled Coaches’ that cushion the anguish of the tomb.’

Poem 458 F693  ‘Like Eyes that looked on Wastes’
Judith Farr convincingly suggests that the two women in this poem are Emily and Sue. As they look into each other’s eyes, they are unable to believe that there is anything for them but ‘Infinites of Nought.’ Emily cannot help Sue because the cause of the Misery was the compact between them which Emily’s love for Sue had brought about. Their compact is ‘divine,’ as they truly love each other, but ‘hopeless,’ as their lesbian, adulterous love is doubly impermissible. Neither wishes to be ‘absolved’ from the love by giving it up or to be a ‘queen in love’ without the other. So they ‘reign’ in each other’s hearts, but ‘perish’ in the circumstances surrounding their love.

Poem 459 F694  ‘A Tooth upon Our Peace’
True Peace cannot be disfigured by some biting tooth. So what is the purpose of the biting attacks of evil which we experience? We could not properly know the grace of
heaven, if some previous hell had not enabled it to be vitalised and experienced as different. We cannot reach heaven unless the road to it is rich with signs of sacrifice.

Poem 460 F695 ‘I know where Wells grow _ Droughtless Wells’
In this poem Emily may be responding to the promise of Jesus made to the woman of Samaria, ‘.But whosoever drinketh of the water I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into eternal life.’ *(John 4:14)*

The wells which Emily knows, perhaps symbolising the delights of this life, often leave her feeling thirsty. For although they never dry up and can even be described as encrusted with Emeralds and Diamonds, she is not rich enough to buy the bucket which would enable her always to satisfy her thirst from them.

But she knows that the wells mentioned by Jesus in the Bible must have buckets, as the people who drink their water ‘thirst no more.’ But will Jesus’ wells really satisfy our thirst so that we forget the ‘parching’ of this life? Alas, his waters sound too grand! Maybe her own little well in the garden is ‘dearer to understand’ after all.

Not for the first time Emily prefers earth to heaven.

Poem 461 F185 ‘A Wife _ at Daybreak I shall be’
The reader of this poem is left to puzzle whether Emily intends ‘the East and Victory’ to signify her human fulfilment in her marriage with her lover, or her celestial fulfilment when at death she comes face to face with Jesus in Eternity.

Certainly ‘the angels bustling in the hall’ can be more easily imagined as her attendants to heaven than to a wedding, and in the first line of poem 1573 Emily specifically uses ‘the East’ to mean Paradise. Perhaps fundamentally she is using the transitus from child to bride in marriage as a symbol of the still more important transitus from being a child of this life to being the bride of Christ in heaven.

Poem 462 F697 ‘Why make it doubt _ it hurts it so’
What Emily cannot endure in this poem is not knowing how she has offended her master. It is the doubt which hurts her (in the first line Emily is the ‘it’ which is the object of ‘make’ and ‘hurts’). Guessing makes her sick. If only she knew what it was, she would be brave enough to repeat it to herself on her little bed (perhaps = her deathbed), and even to smile and wryly shake her head at it, for the love that she bears
him. But not knowing how she offended or even if her master remembers her, ‘this is Misery.’

The penultimate line of this poem makes the same complaint as in the second Master letter (L233), which ends with the words ‘nor ever told me why.’ It can be bewildering that Emily refers to master as ‘they’ in lines 5 and 11, as ‘it’ in line 10, and ‘the Vision’ in line 10.

Poem 463 F698  ‘I live with Him _ I see his face’
Emily shows her complete dependence on her lover. In his absence she claims she never stops thinking of him, even for ‘Visitor _ or Sundown,’ and that only death could ever deprive her of such thoughts. But in fact, even though her lover’s claim is invisible as he gave her no wedding ring, she asserts that even death itself will not be able to stop her thinking of him. For she is convinced that a life which has a love like hers in it cannot be stopped by death, whatever sentence is passed on her at the Last Judgement.

Poem 464 F699  ‘The power to be true to You’
As in poem 456 Emily again declares her love for her master in extreme terms. She says in effect, ‘If some Man could deprive me of ‘the power to be true to You,’ so that His Picture and not yours was upon my face, such a Man would have to be greater than the heaven and Jesus. For in fact when you invited me to be true to you, this reduced Jesus’ invitation to a smaller size.’

Poem 465 F591  ‘I heard a Fly buzz _ when I died’
Emily had always been keen to ask witnesses of a death if the dying person had reported a glimpse of the other side (compare poem 470: 15-16). Here she boldly imagines that she has died and writes to tell us what her end was like. The mourners had wept their fill, and were waiting for Death, the King to appear. Emily herself had willed her property and made provision for the disposing of her body. Then, in the solemn stillness, the last thing she heard before her eyes closed in death was the ‘uncertain stumbling Buzz of a Fly.’

Bold as she is, Emily does not risk any imagined description of the world beyond the transitus. She stops short with what she could have experienced at the death bed of another, or could easily have imagined as a possibility, just as in a letter (L142) of
1853 to her brother she had written, ‘the church yesterday was very full, and still _ so still, the buzzing of a fly would have boomed like a cannon.’

Poem 466 F597  ‘Tis little I _ could care for Pearls’
In poem 452 Emily had just lost the pearl that was Sue. In poem 299 she said that Sue, though lost to her, had shown her ‘that there exists _ a Gold.’ So Emily could be saying in this poem that the Sue, the pearl and the gold, is less important to her, now that she enjoys the sea of love with her emperor, Samuel Bowles, who makes her ‘the Prince of Mines’ and crowns her with a ‘continual Diadem.’

Less likely, perhaps, is Ruth Miller’s view that Emily, as in poem 454, is saying that she cares little for the usual riches of life, now that she has realised her poetic skill gives her riches beyond compare.

Poem 467 F599  ‘We do not play on Graves’
Emily imagines herself as a child, explaining why she and her friends ‘do not play on Graves,’ perhaps those in the cemetery adjoining her house on North Pleasant St (see notes on poem 51). They move as far away from them as enemies would, though occasionally looking over their shoulders to reflect how long it will be before they are in adjoining graves. In fact Emily’s bodily remains do lie buried in this cemetery.

Poem 468 F602  ‘The Manner of its Death’
Thomas Johnson explains in his Variorum edition that this poem refers to a certain Englishman called Major John André. Condemned to death by the Americans for being a spy, he exercised the privilege of choosing the manner of his death and chose a soldier’s death by shooting. Emily’s reflection on this is that even when we can no longer choose to live, we still retain a love for our reputation which makes us want to choose how we die. Of course those who are still alive have little concern for how they would wish to die, or for confronting the Miracle of death with chatter about the current styles of dying, and how they are doing it at St James, presumably a church known to Emily. In fact George Washington, the president of the court, did not allow Major André’s choice of death, but had him hanged.

On this reading a full-stop is needed after ‘stipulate’ and the words ‘is this love’ supplied after ‘how small.’
On p.31 of her book *A late beginner* Priscilla Napier reveals that Colonel Andre had been an ancestor of hers.

**Poem 469 F603**  ‘The Red _ Blaze _ is the Morning’
The different times of day give way to the ‘Sparks’ or stars of night. These stars, in the ‘Territory Argent’ of the moon, reveal the extent of the skies that burned in the midday sun but were never yet consumed.

**Poem 470 F605**  ‘I am alive _ I guess’
It seems that Emily in this poem, unlike in poem 465, is attempting some description of life after death. She knows she is still alive for several reasons. Her fingers tingle warm at the ends and are full of ‘Morning Glory’ (the flower used as a symbol for the glories of heaven), while her breath can still be seen on a glass. She is no longer her corpse, laid out in the Parlour for visitors to lean over and ask questions about its transitus. In this new freedom of heaven she does not have her own room marked with her name, as she might have had at boarding school.

She can only conclude how good it is to be twice-born, once in the flesh as a body, and now in the spirit in Jesus, the ‘Thee’ of the last line.

**Poem 471 F609**  ‘A Night _ there lay the Days between’
Emily describes how she spent a sleepless night between two days, all linked together as one time. She had to watch the night pass imperceptibly away, in units as small as ‘Grains upon a shore.’

Lucky are those who have not shared her experience.

**Poem 472 F702 and 705**  ‘I am ashamed _ I hide’
In his Variorum edition Johnson prints the 8 lines beginning ‘Except the Heaven had come so near’ as poem 472 and the other 27 lines beginning ‘I am ashamed _ I hide’ as poem 473. Franklin has the same two separate poems. This seems sensible as the 8 line poem does not fit inside the 27 line poem, as printed by Johnson in *The complete poems*. The 8 line poem describes the loss of an unhoped for grace which had come so near that to see it depart was piteous both in itself and for Emily, whereas the 27 line poem is an outburst of exhilaration that Emily, ‘so late a Dowerless Girl’ (line 3) is to be ‘baptised _ this Day _ A Bride (line 27).’
As for her appearance, she would like advice on what to wear, though she knows she should do her hair old-fashioned, hold up her head like an Earl, sing like a bird and show she has a character of pearl (stanzas 2 and 3).

But also on this bridal day her spirit must match her outward appearance. It needs to be unusual (= ‘quaint’), as white as her dress and quick and gay. She could be proud and unashamed, but paradoxically she will be meek, as she is ‘too proud _ for Pride.’

What has caused this outburst? If the poem is taken literally, she is imagining adorning herself for the unexpected bliss of marriage with her master. But if Ruth Miller’s unorthodox view is right, she is exhilarated by the publication of her poems in the *Springfield Republican* and is adorning herself for her new career as a poet. On either view, it seems more logical for the 8 line poem to follow the 27 line poem, whether it records the loss of the grace or marriage or fame as a poet.

**Poem 474 F708**  ‘They put Us far apart’
Emily takes up the theme of poem 398, that ‘They’ or the moral majority with their codes and customs have thwarted an intense love. Here she declares the uselessness of their attempts.

They may make her and her lover as distinct entities as are Peninsula and Sea, but the two of them can still see each other with the eyes of the imagination. ‘See’ of course in a pun on ‘Sea,’ and the ‘unsown Peninsula’ may be Emily not made love to by her lover. (See line 15 of poem 405.)

Even if ‘they’ took away their eyes, menaced them with guns and put them in dungeons, the souls of Emily and her lover would still communicate ‘through Telegraphic Signs.’

Condemned to death, apparently by crucifixion with their feet nailed, the two of them would accept it ‘with sweet alacrity,’ knowing that they could still ‘see’ the other. They would never forswear their love, even if to do so would win them life.

Neither would notice the moment of death. They would only be aware of the Paradise in the other’s face.

**Poem 475 F710**  ‘Doom is the House without the Door’
This poem could be spoken by anyone beginning a completely new life, a nun entering her nunnery or a prisoner his prison, a woman entering upon marriage or any
of us at death. If Emily applied the poem to herself, the ‘House without the Door’ was perhaps her seclusion from ordinary society and her commitment to a life of writing poetry.

The second stanza recalls an incident in Rumer Godden’s novel In this House of Brede. An enclosed nun, having difficulties with her vocation, climbs the abbey tower from which ‘she could catch a glimpse of the town, of gardens, roofs, walls, windows….a shed, wheelbarrow, a hose, tools, sometimes a perambulator.’

Poem 476 F711 ‘I meant to have but modest needs’
In this poem Emily shows her attitude to a prayer unanswered by God. Remembering, if not verbatim, Jesus’ words, ‘And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive (Matthew 21:22),’ she prayed for just a Content and Heaven, within her income and enabling her to keep even with life (perhaps = with not too many mood swings). But as a Heaven would include Content, she prayed for just a Heaven. Jehovah and the grave Saints merely smiled at her prayer and the Cherubim turned their backs on her. Realising her request had been refused, Emily threw her prayer away, and resolved to be less credulous in future.

The refusal does not turn Emily into a militant atheist. The language of the poem is much too good-natured and humorous for that, especially lines 13-16. As George Whicher suggests, in Emily’s account of the incident it is rather as though God is asking, ‘Could not the victim take the cosmic swindle in good part, and even share the cosmic joke?’ There is the same twinkle in Emily’s eye when she uses ‘Jehovah’ as the name for God in poem 415.

Poem 477 F714 ‘No Man can compass a Despair’
Mercifully we cannot know, when pain or despair begin, how long they will last. We cannot ‘compass’ or realise the full extent of them. Indeed our very ignorance is the Angel that helps us along. We can only live in the moment, unconscious that the sun may be setting on our progress through pain.

Line 8 needs to be expanded to ‘So far from being accurate is the one.’

Poem 478 F763 ‘I had no time to Hate’
Life is too short to do anything properly, but ‘since some Industry must be,’ Emily chooses ‘the little Toil of Love’ rather than Hate or Enmity as the right-sized task for her.

Poem 479 F458 ‘She dealt her pretty words like Blades’
Emily is almost certainly describing the sharp tongue of Sue. Another observer of Sue had once commented, ‘She loved to get her little poniard in.’ Her cutting remarks caused intense pain, although Emily gallantly adds, ‘she never deemed _ she hurt.’ For Emily to have responded with ‘a vulgar grimace,’ though human, would not have been polite and have offended such creatures as Sue. But the pain she caused was so real that all Emily could do was to close her eyes and die quietly _ metaphorical language for the fact that for fifteen years beginning about now Emily never walked along the path to Sue’s house a mere hundred yards away.

Was the simile in line 1 suggested to Emily by the verse epigraph of chapter 6 of Middlemarch, even though George Eliot’s blades are grass?
My lady’s tongue is like the meadow blades That cut you stroking them with idle hand.

Poem 480 F459 “Why do I love” You, Sir?”
Emily cannot say why she loves Samuel Bowles, any more than the grass can explain the effect of the wind upon it. But isn’t it enough that the wind and Bowles know, and isn’t it wisdom for Emily and the grass to be aware that this is how it is?

The Lightning never asked the Eye why ‘it shut _ when he was by,’ for the Eye cannot speak the reason, any more than small people like Emily can speak in words the reason for their love.

But just as the sunrise thrills her because it is the sunrise, so Emily loves Mr Bowles because he is Mr Bowles. Emily can in fact give the best reason of all for her love.

Poem 481 F460 ‘The Himmaleh was known to stoop’
This poem was written on the same sheet as the previous poem, and is again about Samuel Bowles. Now Emily acknowledges with amazed gratitude the distance Mr Bowles has stooped to notice such a creature as her. He is as mighty as the firm-fixed Himalayas, but has had compassion upon a mere Daisy, a Doll whose universe is no
more permanent than the tents of a travelling show, even if its ‘Flags of Snow’ perhaps indicate that she is keeping her chastity for him.

Emily also uses the mountain and daisy contrast in poem 124, and the impermanence of the travelling show in poem 277.

**Poem 482 F461 ‘We Cover thee _ Sweet Face’**

As the ‘Sweet Face’ of a dead person is covered, Emily is realistic enough to acknowledge that the dead person might have tired of those still living more than the living tire of the person now dead. The living will now be thinking constantly of the dead person, ‘fashioning what she is, fathoming what she was’ (poem 1573), and blaming themselves for the ‘scanty love’ they showed her when she was alive.

**Poem 483 F467 ‘A solemn thing within the Soul’**

Emily may have in mind Jesus’ words, ‘The harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels (Matthew13:39),’ for in this poem she describes the solemn ripening of the human soul until it is harvested at death. As we do not live in isolation, any day we may be aware of a more developed soul being gathered from ‘the Maker’s Ladders’ and sent down to the Orchard below for the harvest baskets. Also it is wonderful to feel the Sun (perhaps a pun on Jesus the son, the maker’s assistant) at work on our ripening soul, shifting ‘the stem a little’ to inspect our core. But most solemn of all is the realisation that every day the harvest of our soul moves nearer, and that every day is that ‘Single’ day of harvest for some lives.

**Poem 484 F469 ‘My Garden _ like the Beach’**

Judith Farr (G) suggests that this poem may have accompanied a gift of flowers, such ‘Pearls’ as her garden gives her. Just as the Beach denotes a Sea, so her garden denotes a sea of flowers in summer time.

**Poem 485 F 471 ‘To make One’s Toilette _ after Death’**

‘After’ in line 1 is not a preposition governing ‘Death’ but a conjunction governing ‘has made.’ Emily is saying, ‘It will be difficult enough to make my toilette, after death has cooled me down from caring to please my lover still left alive, but even that is easier than to make my toilette now when my loved one is still alive, but when we
are prevented from consummating our love by the ‘Decalogues’ or Ten Commandments.’

The loved one is Samuel Bowles, who incidentally seems to have appreciated Emily’s figure as well as her hair.

Poem 486 F473 ‘I was the slightest in the house’

Richard Sewall points out that it is difficult to take lines 10-11 as a literal account of Emily’s childhood, since it is known that ‘she lived aloud with the boisterous Austin and the pert Vinnie, and was known as a talker and a tease among her young friends.’ So he is inclined to take the poem as an account of the conditions under which she began to write poetry.

She may have been the ‘slightest in the House’ and in ‘the smallest Room,’ just as she was the ‘least Figure _ on the Road’ in the last line of poem 400, but when night fell she had all she needed to write poems: a lamp, a book, a geranium to make the room cheerful and a basket to catch the Mint or inspiration for her poems that fell from heaven. (Judith Farr thinks Emily may have in mind the shower of gold in which Jupiter visited Danae in the Greek myth.) Also she needed to be quiet, away from the racket in the rest of the house, and not to have to speak about her poems to the prosaic members of her household unless asked. Indeed if she had not been afraid to die, she could even have died unnoticed, like the ‘little figure’ of poem 146, as she knew that her poems would survive her.

The novelist, Rumer Godden, in her autobiography, A Time to Dance, no Time to Weep, says, ‘I know how extremely hard it is for anyone in an author’s family to read their work; there is an innate shrinking, simply because they are too close.’

Poem 487 F474 ‘You love the Lord _ you cannot see’

The ‘Lord’ may be Jesus and the letters she writes to him ‘every day’ may be prayers or, more likely, her poems. She misses him and would delight to see him. Then she remembers that his house is only the step of death away, and that there is a house there for her as well. For had he not promised, ‘In my father’s house are many mansions?’ (John 14:2)

Poem 488 F475 ‘Myself was formed _ a Carpenter’
Emily, who was no Carpenter, is presumably using the word as a metaphor for poet, but it is not obvious who the ‘Builder’ of the poem is. What follows is a guess.

She began writing poems without thought of publication in ‘an unpretending time,’ but one day a newspaperman arrived to say that if her art was ‘sufficiently developed,’ he would hire her, with profits shared, to write poems for his newspaper. But when she considered the real ‘human faces’ in the poems produced in her workshop and the long labour that had gone into their making, she replied to the newspaperman that what she wrote were temples of true poems that would last and not ephemera for newspapers.

Poem 489 F476 ‘We pray _ to Heaven’
Emily attacks the conventional view of heaven which sees it spatially as an actual place to which the dead fly for refuge at the hour of their death. Asking a question in line 6 which expects the answer ‘No,’ Emily scornfully points out that ‘places’ and ‘Geography’ are for this life. The dead have only ‘State _ Endowal _ Focus,’ and are they not ‘Where _ Omnipresence _ fly’ i.e. everywhere?

Poem 490 F1058 ‘To one denied to drink’
Emily returns to the ‘yoked opposites’ of such poems as 313 and 355. Here she suggests that ‘to One denied to drink’ it would be kinder not to talk of water or lead him to it.

Poem 491 F287 ‘While it is alive’
Emily has no doubt of the power of the love she shares with another. As long as her loved one is still alive, nothing can break the Sacrament which holds them together. And even in the grave, it is their love which will have the resurrecting power to make the dust come alive.

Emily does not say who ‘it,’ her loved one, is, but the idea of their love continuing after death is found also in such poems as 246 and 322.

Poem 492 F276 ‘Civilisation _ spurns _ the Leopard’
The scornful vehemence of the opening line is accentuated by the two dashes. Under the metaphor of the poem Emily hides her frustration that her unusual nature is unappreciated by the people among whom she lives. For ‘Civilisation’ stands for the
conventional, newspaper-reading society of Amherst and district with its Signor or
tkeeper (probably Samuel Bowles as editor of the *Springfield Republican*), while the
leopard is Emily herself with her striking, original poetry which was as foreign to
Amherst as an actual leopard would have been. She was certainly bold to believe that
Amherst would appreciate her poems and not frown, but it was her nature to write
them and, had she stopped writing them because they were spurned by civilisation,
the memory of her poetic mission would always have been with her.

**Poem 493 F280**  ‘The World _ stands _ solemner _ to me’
The poem consists of four sections, each introduced by an abstract noun, which
amplify the statement of the first two lines. As follows:

* A *modesty* that she now bears the name of another (lines 3-4).
* A *doubt* if it is fair to wear the ‘pearl’ of his being with her through everything (lines 5-8).
* A *prayer* that she may become more angel like and ‘whiter’ within, in return for his
‘munificence, that chose _ so unadorned _ a Queen’ (lines 9-12).
* A *Gratitude* that her dream, which she had esteemed ‘too beautiful’ ever to take
shape, has come true.

**Poem 494 F277**  ‘Going to Him! Happy letter!’
The ‘Him’ and ‘Her’ versions of this poem were both copied on to a single sheet of
embossed stationery. The ‘Him’ version was found preserved among the papers of
Samuel Bowles. The ‘Her’ version was presumably sent to Sue. The notes are on the
‘Him’ poem.

Emily imagines that the love-letter she has written for Samuel Bowles is a person,
happy indeed to be going to see him, and also capable of receiving her instructions.
These are that the letter is to apologise for her telegraphic style (in fact, a feature of
her letters as well as of her poetry). It is to win his sympathy by describing the
varying emotions of the unpractised writer as she wrote it (‘unpractised writer’ being
perhaps one of the least true statements Emily ever made). The letter is then asked to
tell him something she left out, but she changes her mind, for ‘it would split his Heart,
to know it.’

The letter is asked to say that it got sleepy, and couldn’t understand why Emily
was taking all night over it. Finally he is to tell her lover how carefully she sealed the
letter, and, by his ‘Gesture Coquette’ in refusing to tell her lover where he was hid, to imply that Emily kept the letter tucked in her bodice until it was time to send it.

**Poem 495 F362** ‘It’s thoughts _ and just One Heart’

When this poem was first published in 1935 ‘two’ in line 23 was changed into ‘one’ to make it the same as the ‘one’ in line 1. This reading assumes Emily meant ‘two’ in line 23, and is making a contrast between the ‘One Heart’ of the first four stanzas and the ‘two Heart’ of the last stanza.

Emily lists the needs for contentment of the frugal ‘One Heart,’ presumably an unmarried person: sunshine, two or three friends on a holiday, a book when housework is done, possibly a picture which can be as sustaining as a whole Gallery, flowers to look at, the song of a bird or of the fire when it snows, the view of a modest Dutch-style landscape.

But all the things in this list are ‘luxuries’ if there are ‘two Heart’ at the fireside. They can be almost content with the ‘Heaven’ of just their own company which makes them feel immortal _ or at least it’s a ‘counterfeit heaven’ which they do not wish to be changed for the real thing.

**Poem 496 F364** ‘As far from pity, as complaint’

In this poem the dead are as distant and different from the living as possible. No pity, no complaint, no speech, no revelation reaches them. It is as if we who are alive are just dealing with bones, their former owners outside time and no nearer to the living than the rainbow and the sunset are to children. The dead know nothing of the dance of life and its butterfly blazes of colour.

**Poem 497 F366** ‘He strained my faith’

The ‘He’ in this poem would appear to be Jesus. The answers to the three questions in the first two stanzas are ‘Yes,’ ‘No’ and ‘No,’ as Emily claims that she has met every test set her by Jesus in exemplary fashion, even when he wrung her with anguish without saying why. Indeed, by the last stanza when Emily asks if he doesn’t know her (calling herself ‘John’ perhaps because John was the disciple ‘whom Jesus loved’ (*John* 13:23), Emily seems as Christ-like as Christ.

**Poem 498 F368** ‘I envy Seas, whereon He rides’
Like poem 339 this poem was written while Samuel Bowles was absent in Europe in 1862. Emily envies all things ‘that gaze upon His journey,’ a privilege which to her is forbidden as utterly as Heaven. She may be his ‘Noon’ or utmost bliss, but even the wealth of Pizarro (see poem 73) could not buy her this privilege.

In fact it is safer not to boast about the bliss shared between the Blossom (=Emily) and the Bee (=Samuel), lest she and her angel Gabriel (=Samuel) are dropped from the Noon of bliss into Everlasting Night.

The first line of the poem is reminiscent of Cleopatra’s remark to her attendant Charmian, while her beloved Antony is absent in Rome. Imagining that Antony at that moment might be walking or riding, she exclaims, ‘O happy horse, to bear the weight of Antony!’ (Antony and Cleopatra 1:5:21)

Poem 499 F369  ‘Those fair _ fictitious people’
Emily asks if anybody can say anything about our dead, the women who were our friends, the men now bones like ivory, the boys and girls who are now only pictures on the wall. We can trust that they have inherited a delight and a knowledge which we cannot imagine, and that they still remember us and in transports of joy are waiting for us to join them. From their perspective they are the ones at home, we are the ones in exile, who can only join them by passing through death.

Poem 500 F370  ‘Within my Garden, rides a Bird’
The Bird is the small, brilliantly coloured American humming-bird, so called because of the humming sound made by the rapid vibration of its wings. As Emily spies it in her garden, its vibrating wings look like the whirring spokes of a wheel and sound like the music a mill makes. The bird is gone in a moment from the rose he has sipped to remoter atmospheres, and Emily is left with her dog, Carlo, to ponder whether they positively saw the bird or just imagined it. Carlo apparently points to the ‘just vibrating Blossoms,’ which show that the humming bird was real.

Poem 501 F373  ‘This World is not Conclusion’
Emily honestly reports how she wavers when considering whether another world exists. At times she is certain that it does. It may be as invisible as music, but its
sound is unmistakeable. But then she considers how the greatest brains cannot prove its existence or guess its nature. It remains a riddle. On the other hand martyrs down the centuries have borne contempt and endured crucifixion for their belief that it does exist. Even so her faith wavers. She blushes for shame and plucks at the next ‘twig of Evidence.’ Certainly, confident Hallelujahs thundered from the pulpit are not the sort of narcotics that are able to still the nagging toothache of doubt for Emily.

**Poem 502 F377**  ‘At least _ to pray _ is left _ is left’
Distraught with grief and in utter despair, Emily instinctively turns to prayer. But she is not sure whether Jesus hears her or where he is or whether he will save her with his arm, even though he has allowed this ‘Earthquake in the South’ and ‘Maelstrom in the Sea’ to happen.

Richard Sewall wonders whether the poem refers to Emily’s fear that a draft might involve her brother Austin in the Civil War, for Henry Ward Beecher in a speech at Amherst College in the year of this poem had described the Civil War as ‘the storm in the North and the earthquake in the South.’

**Poem 503 F378**  ‘Better _ than Music! For I _ who heard it’
In a letter (L146) of 1853 to her friend Emily Fowler Ford Emily had said of her friend’s recent marriage, which she had attended, that the actual ceremony ‘seemed to me translation, not any earthly thing, and if a little after you’d ridden on the wind, it would not have surprised me.’

Similarly at the beginning of this poem Emily tells of a ‘translation’ to heaven of her own. She can only describe it in terms of music (lines 21-4), but it was ‘better _ than Music’ and the tunes she knew. Whatever the experience was exactly, it was unrepeatable by any man, as it was sent to her by God, the ‘perfect Mozart.’

It reminded her of children, before they are grown up and leave the story to their Grandparents, telling of the ‘better Melody’ of Eden before Eve strangely surrendered and ate the apple, thus causing the flight of Adam from the paradise which he had no wish to leave. But this tune which ‘translated’ her was emphatically not such a strain as the Church will ever baptise its children to, even in the last days, or sing when a sinner is redeemed.

All Emily can do is to try to keep the experience alive in her mind, humming its tune until eventually it becomes part of the tune sung around the throne of God.
Poem 504 F676  ‘You know that Portrait in the Moon’
In poem 474 Emily had claimed that nothing, not even death, could stop Samuel Bowles and her looking into each other’s faces. Less seriously in this poem she says to Bowles that, although he is absent in Europe, she can see his face night after night, through the pretty conceit that he is the Man in the Moon. Whimsically she pretends that his brow and eyes, a-fog with tears perhaps for her, and cheek are exactly alike those of the Man in the Moon. Only their chins are different.

But, of course, he may look different now, as it is a long time since, like Ishmael, he set off on his wanderings. Ishmael, Abraham’s son by the Egyptian Hagar was sent by his father into the wilderness at the urging of his step-mother, Sarah. (Genesis 21:10.)

Anyway, during his absence, she looks at the moon night after night. If the moon is full, like a silver bowl, she holds the name ‘Bowles’ on her lips. If a crescent, she thinks of him as worn by travelling but still the ‘golden same.’ And if some night the clouds cut him away from her sight completely, she concludes that such a disappearance is easier to bear than the parting which will occur when the film of death puts its glaze on the Holiday of life.

This poem has the same teasing, coquettish, good-humoured tone modulating into seriousness also found in such poems to Bowles as 498, 247 and 223. These notes owe much to Judith Farr’s treatment of the poem.

Poem 505 F348  ‘I would not paint _ a picture’
Although the starting point of the poem is Emily’s statement that she would prefer to appreciate art rather than create it, another important theme is the power of art to lift us into that other world into which she was ‘translated’ in poem 503.

In stanza 1 the artist’s fingers are occasionally celestial in their power to create a picture which for a moment draws us towards heaven by its sumptuous sweetness, but then leaves us in torment and despair because we are not yet there permanently.

In stanza 2 Emily, while listening to the music of a cornet, is lifted balloon-like to the ceiling (‘horizons’ is a variant in her manuscript) and then out and into the heavens on a ‘pontoon’ held up by the ‘pier’ of the metal lip of the cornet.

In stanza 3, while reading poetry, she finds herself being stunned with ‘Bolts of Melody’ as the lines she is reading lift her out of her normal, everyday existence.
Emily was no great artist and only a modest pianist, so her preference for seeing and listening over creating is no surprise in stanzas 1 and 2. But she had already written at least five hundred poems, so her disclaimer in stanza 3 is more puzzling. Perhaps that stanza chiefly celebrates the ‘awful’ (= ‘awe-full’) privilege of being able to write poetry, with the words ‘as may be the case’ modestly left out at the end of the poem.

**Poem 506 F349**  ‘He touched me, so I live to know’
In this poem of tender passion Emily imagines that, having married her master as in poem 493, she arrives at the harbour of exchanged sexual passion, which she had longed for in poems 211, 249 and 368. And, after the passion, she feels different, somehow royal, her brown, freckled ‘Gypsy face’ transfigured, and her feet set free from their wanderings. In fact, if she might always come into this port, she would know a bliss greater even than Rebecca’s, as she travelled towards Jerusalem for her marriage with Isaac (Genesis 24:63-5), or greater than some Persian lady, who, having waited ‘baffled at her shrine’ for her Lord God to show himself, was at last able to lift to her ‘Imperial Sun’ a ‘Crucifixal sign’ to show the anguish she had suffered during her long years of waiting.

Emily’s own ‘Imperial Sun’ was Samuel Bowles, as she showed in poem 106, and for her to lift a ‘Crucifixal sign’ to him may indicate that through her sexual passion she was committing herself to a lifelong and eternal marriage with him, as in their exchange of crucifixes in poem 322, lines 23-4.

**Poem 507 F351**  ‘She sights a Bird _ she chuckles’
These short lines, packed with verbs, bring out the greed and energy of the cat as it stalks the Robin, only to lose its Bliss as the Robin escapes into the sky, seeming to the cat to have a hundred Toes (or ‘wings’ in a variant reading), and leaving its predator earthbound on the sand. Judith Farr gives a delightful reading of this poem.

**Poem 508 F353**  ‘I’m ceded _ I’ve stopped being Theirs’
Emily has been handed over (= ‘ceded’ line 1) and stopped being merely the baptised child of her parents (= ‘Theirs’ line 1). After all, she has long since finished playing with dolls and winding thread on spools for sewing. Her former baptism ‘on [her] Father’s breast’ (line 15) was ‘without the choice’ and amounted to a mere ‘Crescent.’
But now of her own choice and ‘consciously’ she has been baptised ‘unto supremest name’ (line 10), changed from a crescent to her ‘Full’ and crowned with ‘one small Diadem (line 13). In the last stanza the words ‘too small the first……unconscious Queen’ need to be taken as one unit.

Richard Chase sees Emily’s second baptism as being that of marriage, as she chooses her Master as her own husband, but Richard Sewall is probably nearer the truth in suggesting that the ‘supremest name,’ to which she has found herself called, is the name of poet. Of her own free will she has chosen the Crown of a life devoted to poetry.

Poem 509 F354  ‘If anybody’s friend be dead’
When a loved one dies, the sharpest pang is memories of him. You may remember something which seems to have happened only yesterday, but, alas, the dead person is now ‘Centuries’ away. You may try to touch the smile he gave when something you said pleased him, but you ‘dip your fingers in the frost.’ You remember how you ‘chatted close’ with the dead person at a tea party, but the ‘Quick of Woe’ and its agony is that he is now a ‘Grand Thing,’ finished with tea parties and moved beyond the limits of our imagining.

Pablo Neruda in his poem, _So many different lengths of time_, takes a more positive view of our memories of the dead when he says

A man lives for as long as we carry him inside us,
For as long as we carry the harvest of his dreams,
For as long as we ourselves live,
Holding memories in common, a man lives.

Poem 510 F355  ‘It was not Death, for I stood up’
Emily returns to that ‘death-in-life’ experience of poem 341, after which ‘the Feet, mechanical, go round.’ This time she begins to investigate her terror through a series of contradictions. She is not dead, for she stands up. It is not night, for she hears midday bells. It is not Frost, for she is warm, but neither is it Fire for she is cold. And yet it tastes like all of these.

Then abandoning the paradoxes, she says more positively what her ‘death-in-life’ is like. She feels as though she is fitted into a coffin, like bodies she has seen ‘set
orderly, for Burial,’ and she cannot breathe without the key to let her out. It is like Midnight or the first frosts of autumn which stop the ground pulsing with life, but most of all it is like the Chaos when one is completely lost at sea, and there is not even ‘a Report of Land/ to justify [the] Despair’ of ever reaching it.

Poem 511 F536  ‘If you were coming in the Fall’

Like poems 498 and 504 this poem reflects on Samuel Bowles’ absence in Europe in 1862, and like those poems it moves from teasing with a smile to seriousness and a sense of loss. The first stanza is realistic: if he is absent just for the summer, she will no more notice it than a Housewife does a Fly. The second is more fanciful: if he is absent for a year, she will have a separate ball of wool for each month so that she knows exactly where she is in the year. The third stanza is completely outrageous: if he is away for centuries, she will count them on one hand until her fingers drop ‘into Van Dieman’s Land,’ (the earlier name for Tasmania.)The fourth stanza modulates into seriousness: if she was certain of life after death, she would care nothing for what happens in this life, but be content with their marriage in heaven, a prospect which she had also envisaged in poem 322.

Then comes a contrast. The fifth stanza, instead of starting with ‘if’ like the other four stanzas, starts with the sigh of two slow monosyllables ‘but, now,’ as Emily reaches what is causing her pain at the moment. As in poem 462, it is the not knowing that goads and upsets Emily, just like that mischievous, demon-like bee which does not state exactly when it is going to sting.

Poem 512 F360  ‘The Soul has Bandaged moments’

The three sections of this poem, each beginning with the words ‘The Soul,’ swing from depression to mania and back to depression again.

In the depths of the first depression, her soul feels as helpless as a tightly bandaged body. She does not deserve it, but can do nothing about the Fright which attacks the very parts of her body ‘[her] Lover _ hovered _ o’er.’

In her manic swing she goes to the other extreme and ‘dances like a Bomb,’ forgetting that it may explode at any moment, and, like the bee released from its dungeon prison, knows ‘no more/but Noon and Paradise.’
Finally ‘the Horror welcomes her again’ and her soul is retaken by another of those ‘ghastly Frights,’ which are not a usual subject for conversation in polite society.

**Poem 513 F361** ‘Like Flowers, that heard the news of Dews’
In the last stanza of this poem Emily is perhaps imagining the unexpected heaven of the return to her of Samuel Bowles from his travels in Europe, even though she had sometimes thought her worship of him too presumptuous. In the first four stanzas her awaiting his homecoming is likened to Flowers that have heard of Dew, but do not imagine that it is meant for them; to Bees that have heard of the delirious delight of Summer, but cannot imagine Summer will ever bring it to them; to some Arctic Creature, who has been ‘dimly stirred’ by a hint that the Tropics exist, brought to it by ‘some Travelled Bird’ given the job of taking the message; or to the Ear, when it hears the signal of a bright wind arising. Before the signal, the Ear had been at home and content, known to those around it, but now this bright wind will make a severe difference to its homely existence.

**Poem 514 F335** ‘Her smile was shaped like other smiles’
This poem presents a manuscript problem. It is written above Johnson’s poem 353 on the same sheet of paper, and although Johnson prints them as separate poems, Franklin believes they make up one poem. Judith Farr, taking poem 514 as a separate poem, suggests that it was meant for Sue. Emily had believed Sue’s smile to be sincere, but then had been hurt by some act of treachery from Sue.

Ruth Miller also takes them as separate poems but believes that both refer to Emily’s own gallant smile with which she tried to mask the pain inflicted upon her by Samuel Bowles’ attack on women poets such as herself in the *Springfield Republican* (see notes on poem 412). She had been encouraged ‘to sing’ by him printing one of her poems, but then her ‘hold upon the Twig’ was shaken by the bullet of his attack, and her poems scattered ‘like Beads _ among the Bog.’

For Miller both this poem and the opening sentence of the second Master letter (L233) refer to Bowles’ attack on women poets in his newspaper. The letter begins, ‘If you saw a bullet hit a Bird _ and he told you he was’nt shot _ you might weep at his courtesy, but you would certainly doubt his word.’
Poem 515 F653 ‘No Crowd that has occurred’
Emily describes the general resurrection of all the dead for judgement on the Last Day. ‘Circumference,’ their meeting place, is full, as the grave, restricting them no longer, allows their ‘Dust [to] connect and live,’ while features appear on their atoms. All previous multitudes, when compared with this one, are as a star to Suns.

But, in this crowd of unimaginable size, each person is absorbed in the question of whether its own Doom will be heaven or hell. There can be no more significant day for the Universe _ or for the individual.

Poem 516 F654 ‘Beauty _ be not caused _ It Is’
We cannot make Beauty or chase after it. We have to let it come to us. If we try to ‘overtake the Creases/in the Meadow’ made by the wind, God will ensure we fail.

Poem 517 F655 ‘He parts Himself _ like Leaves’
Emily tries to imagine how the Frost sets to work during the night. Beginning with the thought that he is like the leaves that fall from the trees in autumn, she soon becomes so fanciful that she has Frost dangling in mid-air, uncertain whether to go back underground or ‘settle in the Moon.’ In line 8 ‘away upon a Jib’ perhaps means that the frost spreads transversely.

In the end she concludes that we know very little about his Night operations, but the next Day we can see how he possesses the world. His handiwork resembles collections of objects ‘in Cabinets,’ or a white sepulchre or church made out of the Floss or rough silk which envelopes the cocoon of the silk worm.

Poem 518 F611 ‘Her sweet Weight on my Heart a Night’
Emily imagines that one night Sue deigned to come and lie with her at last, Emily having forgotten her inhibitions of poem 452. Perhaps they made love. Emily awoke to have the delight of finding Sue still with her, but her ‘Bride had slipped away.’

Emily wonders if it was all a dream and concludes. ‘Only God knows whether my dream was ‘made solid’ (=actually happened), or indeed whether it was Sue dreaming about me. In fact God sends all experiences, which, as far as they are real, are a story which far exceed what we could have believed might happen.’

Poem 519 F614 ‘Twas warm _ at first _ like Us’
Emily returns to the thought about death she had expressed in poem 194, where she wrote ‘The quiet nonchalance of death/No Daybreak _ can bestir.’ Once the warm, living body has grown cold and straight, it is completely indifferent to those who loved it, and makes no Signal to them, even when lowered into its grave.

**Poem 520 F656  ‘I started Early _ Took my Dog’**

This poem appears in a little volume called *Some Emily Dickinson Poems for Children*, but is only suitable for children as a Grimm’s’ fairy tale is suitable. For, although the Mermaids seem innocent and harmless enough, the Frigates with their hands of rope, taking the little girl to be a Mouse suitable for capture, are much more menacing, and finally the Tide is truly terrifying. It almost completely engulfs the girl, and follows her all the way up the beach until she ‘met the Solid Town,’ when it at last withdraws.

This is not just the description of a walk to the sea with the dog, but some allegory about life, perhaps that man is helpless before the forces of nature, which can at any moment threaten to overwhelm him.

Lines 14-15 perhaps mean that as the dew disappears from the Dandelion’s petals, the Dandelion seems to be eating it.

**Poem 521 F657  ‘Endow the Living _ with the Tears’**

We should weep for the Living, the men and women around our fireside now, rather than for the dead who are ‘Passive Creatures’ beyond our cherishing, for those alive now will themselves, when they experience the Ether of Death, scornfully deny any attempts at cherishing them.

**Poem 522 F634  ‘Had I presumed to hope’**

This closely argued poem can perhaps be unpacked by noting the structural clues provided by ‘Had I presumed to hope’ (line1), ‘Had I presumed to gain’ (line 5), ‘Tis failure’ (line 9) and ‘Tis Honor’ (line13). As follows:

*If* I had presumed to hope for X and failed to get it, I could at least have said, ‘I failed to get something as big as a Giant.’

*If* I had presumed that I would actually gain this remote favour X but failed, the failure would have confirmed that Grace is necessary for X and other such Infinite things.
It was not a failure of hope, as I had no hope. What happened was that Despair and that was confident enough advanced with its ‘faint Terrestrial power’ on my X, which belonged to the ‘Celestial Lists’ of the blessings of heaven.

It was an honour to have lost such a thing as X, for after all true honour can only be ours after the loss of our life in death and our being placed among the ‘sheep.’ Losing X was the gain of a secondary honour.

**Poem 523 F635**  ‘Sweet _ You forgot _ but I remembered’
Emily copied the three stanzas of this poem into packet 5. She later wrote two variant versions of the third stanza only. Franklin prints only the first variant version of the third stanza. These notes refer to the poem as printed in Johnson.

The first line of this poem echoes the first line of poem 203. Both poems may have been intended for Samuel Bowles. This poem seems to say:

The proper sum for our love was two rememberings. Every time you failed to remember, I did one for you as well. Was I wrong to make it up to two every time? You can blame ‘the little Hand’ that put the small additions of its farthings on to the pile, but it would be happy to beg for more farthings for the pile.

If I were rich, I would spend my Guineas on you. For, alas, I know that if I stay poor and can only offer you a ‘Barefoot Vision’ (‘Pleasure’ is a variant for ‘Vision’), ‘You _ Sweet _ Shut me out.’

**Poem 524 F399**  ‘Departed _ to the Judgment’
The solitude of the soul before the awesomeness of death and the last judgment.

**Poem 525 F400**  ‘I think the Hemlock likes to stand’
In poem 442 Emily had hymned ‘the North’ as the bringer of the Gentian, and had associated it with herself. Here she hymns it as the home of the hemlock or fir tree of poem 41. The hemlock likes the awe of the northern Wilderness, an awe which cloys in the desert. The ‘Gnash of Northern winds’ is meat and drink to him. He is unknown to the ‘satin Races’ of warmer lands, but the children and wrestlers of the rivers of Russia exercise underneath his branches.

**Poem 526 F402**  ‘To hear an Oriole sing’
Ruth Miller offers a convincing interpretation of this poem. The golden oriole of poems 31 and 1466 here stands for the poet herself. Her songs, she maintains, remain the same whether heard by a crowd or by no one. And those who do hear them must use their own Ear to judge whether they are common or divine, dingy brown or fair, true poetry (= ‘Rune’) or not.

The listeners she particularly has in mind may be Samuel Bowles, who only ever published two of her poems in his newspaper, or Thomas Higginson, who had suggested in a letter of this year that her poems were ‘wayward’ and lacked order (L271). Emily replies that the ‘Tune’ of her poems is not in ‘the Tree’ (= the versification), but in the listener. Or as she puts it in poem 685, which was part of a letter (L280) to Higginson of the following year:

Not ‘Revelation’ _ tis _ that waits,
But our unfurnished eyes _

**Poem 527 F404** ‘To put this World down, like a Bundle’
Emily places herself among the martyrs who, following Jesus, renounced the World. A paraphrase of her poem could be:
‘To renounce the world may involve the blood of martyrdom as it did when Jesus renounced the world. Jesus’ ‘faint Confederates’ later justified taking the same road by claiming they shared in ‘the Flavours’ of his crucifixion. They also had the prospect of the tenuous threads of Jesus’ resurrected life (= ‘filaments of bloom’), caused initially (= ‘sowed’) by Pilate’s death sentence. These threads would develop into ‘Strong Clusters,’ although they stemmed from the tomb (the tomb in which the crucified Barabbas should have been buried, but in which Jesus was buried in his place). *(Luke 23:13-25)* Every drop of the cup drunk by the martyrs, when they took their Sacrament of death to the world, was clearly marked as Jesus’ brand.’

Emily does not explain how she could see herself as one of these martyrs, but perhaps because she had exchanged the normal world for a closely-managed solitude in which to write her poems. As the ‘Gentile Drinker’ can only be Jesus, Emily seems to have forgotten that he was a Jew.

**Poem 528 F411** ‘Mine _ by the Right of the White Election!’
Jane Donahue Eberwein says that Emily in this poem could be imagining herself as the declared loved one of Samuel Bowles, or as the bride of Christ, or as a woman chosen to be a poet, and concludes that it is impossible to say which is meant, as elsewhere in her poems she describes all three experiences in the language of Election.

It is difficult to see how ‘the Grave’s Repeal’ could fit into her discovery that she is a poet, and somehow the triumphalism seems too excessive for her announcing herself as a bride of Christ, so perhaps the likeliest possibility is Emily imagining herself as the declared loved one of Samuel Bowles. He has chosen her, given her his ‘Royal Seal,’ and all the suffering she may have in the prison of the rest of her life cannot conceal the Sign she has been given. In this life she may only have the ‘Vision’ of his love, as there is a ‘Veto’ on their actual marriage. But when the grave releases them both to heaven, the ‘delirious Charter’ proclaiming her his beloved wife will be confirmed and last for ever.

The prison is called ‘Scarlet’ in line 3 because it may involve the metaphorical drops of her blood. The ‘Scarlet way’ of line 4 of the previous poem was literal.

Poem 529 F582  ‘I’m sorry for the Dead _ Today’

It is natural to pity the dead for what we know they are missing and in this poem Emily pities those dead farmers and their wives who are missing the ‘congenial times’ of the June harvest, and wonders if the ‘Sepulchre/don’t feel a lonesome way.’

The ‘Mower’s Metre’ in line 12 is presumably the rhythmical swish of his scythe. The syntax of lines 12-13 is difficult. Maybe Emily’s dashes show that she intends a full-stop after ‘Metre,’ with ‘Steals’ starting a new sentence which expressed more fully would begin, ‘And then there Steals over me a Trouble lest….’

Poem 530 F583  ‘You cannot put a Fire out’

As you can put a Fire out, and it is obvious that a Flood will not go into a Drawer, it is natural to take Fire and Flood as symbols, perhaps for her poetry. The ‘fire’ of her poetry ignites itself, does not need a fan, lasts through ‘slow’ periods and can never be put out.

The ‘flood’ of her poetry cannot be folded and put away in a drawer (though ironically this is where most of her actual poems ended), because the Winds of her
inspiration, which never stop blowing, would release the flood, and the floor would soon find itself wet.

**Poem 531 F584** ‘We dream _ it is good we are dreaming’
In this bizarre poem Emily announces that she is having a dream in which she is being murdered. As it is only the Drama of a dream, the murderer can kill her and shriek as he does so, as men only actually ‘die _ externally.’

But you never know. She may not be dreaming. So she and the murderer will tussle cautiously and with eyes open, lest it prove to be not a fantasy after all, and to her surprise a livid bruise proves fatal as she cools to ‘Shafts of Granite’ in her coffin, with her name, age and an inscription all that is left to mark her life. It is ‘prudenter’ to be actually dreaming.

‘A phrase in Egyptian’ is strange, and a variant reading ‘a Latin inscription’ is something more likely to have been found on an Amherst tomb.

**Poem 532 F570** ‘I tried to think a lonelier thing’
What could be a lonelier thing than any she had ever seen? An act of contrition done in complete ‘Polar’ solitude, with nobody, not even God, aware of it? Or the Omen in the Bone’ that our death is near? And in these two imagined solitudes is there any help for us at all?

Emily could only find ‘a Haggard Comfort’ in the thought that perhaps there existed somewhere a doppelganger or mirror image of herself, like the ‘Tim’ of poem 196. And she imagines that she plucked at the partition between them, horrific though this was, as the thought grew that they might at least each pity the other, even if ‘Of Heavenly Love _ forgot.’

**Poem 533 F571** ‘Two Butterflies went out at Noon’
Emily returned to this 1862 poem in 1878 and wrote a second uncompleted version with many variants, which is reproduced by Johnson in his Variorum edition. In this earlier version two Butterflies waltzed out at Noon, the zenith of their lives. Alas they ‘stepped straight through the Firmament’ (or ‘Circumference’ in the later version), ‘rested on a Beam’ for a moment, but then were carried away on a ‘shining Sea,’ and Emily has never heard a word about them since then.
This poem and its later version are perhaps too playful in tone to be an allegory of the brevity of human life and suddenness of death, although ‘Circumference’ is sometimes used by Emily for the boundary between this world and a next, and the subsequent lack of news of the butterflies does suggest Shakespeare’s ‘undiscovered country from whose bourn/No traveller returns’ (*Hamlet* 3:1:79). Also a butterfly dies at noon in poem 541.

**Poem 534 580** ‘We see _ comparatively’
Emily begins with the common thought that mountains can turn to molehills overnight before puzzling the reader in the last two stanzas. If we assume that ‘our Giants,’ like the Himalayas bearing Giants of poem 252, are carrying our mountains for us, perhaps these stanzas mean that God is kind to give us both the anguish of the mountains and the welcome loss of them to his Giants. For if our ‘Striding Spirits’ had never had to try to carry the mountains for ourselves, we might find it unexciting to wake in the morning, having to carry nothing bigger than a Gnat while the Giants were in front of us carrying our mountains.

This reading makes some sense of Emily’s marginal variants of ‘shrinking/wincing natures’ for ‘Striding Spirits’ of line 13.

**Poem 535 F587** ‘She’s happy with a new Content’
Although Austin had married Sue six years before this poem on 1 July 1856, this poem reads like a description of Sue in the period just after her marriage. If she ever weeps at all now, it is because heaven has given one ‘so meek’ the blissful fate of ministering to Austin as his wife and being the leading hostess in Amherst society.

As the general opinion of Sue was that she was anything but ‘meek,’ Emily may be allowing any chagrin she feels about the marriage to peep out in this one word.

**Poem 536 F588** ‘The Heart asks Pleasure _ first’
In just eight lines Emily goes through the stages of the descent from a state of pleasure (‘blessing’ is a marginal variant) to its complete opposite, the privilege (‘liberty/luxury’ are variants) of dying. The ‘Inquisitor’ seems to be the power that is testing her.

**Poem 537 F631** ‘Me prove it now _ Whoever doubt’
In this poem Emily weirdly imagines that, since she has not been able to convince her master of her love for him during her lifetime, she might be able to do so by drowning herself in the river.

In the hectic opening stanza she appears to be saying, ‘I am going to prove my love now. Whoever doubts my love (should watch), as I am stopping to prove it now. My scruples against suicide should make haste (to disappear), as there are not too many obvious opportunities for killing oneself, (but I have one now) as I step into this river.’

In the rest of the poem line 8 is a wish. In the third stanza her hands stretch to meet her lover, and in the last stanza she asks her lover to remember that her eyes were alive with love for him, when the waters finally covered them.

Poem 538 F658 ‘Tis true _ They shut me in the Cold’
It is clear that Emily is asking the Lord to forgive those who ‘shut her in the cold,’ even as she forgives them. They could not know what she was feeling. The harm was short. She does not want her stating the fact of her exclusion to count as blame against her beloved ones and to stop them entering Paradise on Judgement day.

But it is less clear to whom ‘They’ refers. Perhaps Sue and Austin and their circle are more likely to be meant than her parents. If so, ‘the Harm They did _ was short’ may be a generous estimate.

Poem 539 F659 ‘The Province of the Saved’
Death and the Grave we cannot understand, but it is the job of him who has saved himself in times of Dissolution and Despair to save others by teaching them that despair is not the same as death but can be lived through.

This poem follows the previous one in packet 17, so Emily by this juxtaposition may be hinting that she managed to endure the ‘dissolution’ of being ‘shut in the cold.’

Poem 540 F660 ‘I took my Power in my Hand’
In poem 1290 Emily addresses directly a person named as ‘Goliah’ (a common misspelling for ‘Goliath’). Judith Farr (G) believes that the Goliah of both poems is Sue. To Emily Sue appeared a formidable, gigantic figure, wife of her brother and mistress of the social world of Amherst. All Emily had to pit against Sue’s world was
the knowledge of her own poetic power. When it came to a contest, Emily reports that she was defeated. Her poetry had not dented Sue’s authority. That was too large, just as she was too small.

For David’s pebble killing Goliath see 1Samuel ch.17.

Poem 541 F661  ‘Some such Butterfly be seen’
‘Sweet’ in line 3 and ‘Your’ in line 6 probably show that this poem was written for her master, and could be a lament for the shortness of his love for her. His love has been like a butterfly ‘on Brazilian Pampas,’ whose sweet licence closed at noon and no later. He has squeezed out (= ‘express’) and plucked the spice from her, but now has passed on and is as foreign to her as the stars are in the morning.

Poem 542 F662  ‘I had no Cause to be awake’
In this strange poem Emily’s dearest have gone to sleep in death, so that Morning politely does not wake them but passes ‘their Curtains by.’ But Emily asks that, when she oversleeps (?in death), Morning will knock and remind her that she once preferred the ‘Ample Peace’ of those in heaven to the Sunrise of this world, as it was like the Sabbath but without the church. If Morning does that, after a brief struggle she will be with her dearest in heaven, wearing her white gown and armed with a prayer.

Poem 543 F663  ‘I fear a Man of frugal speech’
Emily fears that still waters may run deep.

Poem 544 F665  ‘The Martyr Poets _ did not tell’
In talking of ‘Martyr Poets’ Emily seems to have in mind the lines of Elizabeth Barrett Browning quoted in the notes on poem 449. ‘These were poets true/who died for Beauty, as martyrs do/for Truth _ the ends being scarcely two.’

Such martyrs do not speak in conversation about their sufferings, any more than ‘Martyr Painters’ do. ‘Their Pang’ goes straight into their poems and their pictures. They do this so that, at least when they are dead, some others may be encouraged to find peace for their own suffering in the works of the Poets and the Painters.

Poem 545 F646  ‘Tis One by One _ the Father counts’
In this poem the relationship of God the Father with men is likened to that of a teacher with a class of very young children. In elementary school or in life we count first a few individual numbers or people, then in groups of ten with gaps between the tens, until finally, learning fast, we can take in crowds of numbers or people.

In the school of life our equipment may not be of the best, and darkness may sometimes descend on us and distract us, but at least we know that God, the ‘Eternal Rule’ regards us all alike, with teacher and least able pupil on a level, and gives each separate urchin of us something to work at which is suitable for his hand.

Poem 546 F647  ‘To fill a Gap’
This poem claims that desire wants its original object and is not transferable to something else. This thought is echoed in a letter (L262) which Emily sent to Mrs Mary Bowles in the year of the poem and just after Samuel Bowles’ departure for Europe. The letter begins, ‘Dear Mary, When the Best is gone _ I know that other things are not of consequence _ The Heart wants what it wants _ or else it does not care.’ So probably the poem was prompted by Samuel Bowles’ departure as well, whether or not Emily was conscious of the sexual implications of ‘Gap’ and ‘Insert the Thing.’

Poem 547 F648  ‘I’ve seen a Dying Eye’
Emily tells how at death-beds she has been repeatedly disappointed in the failure of the dying person to communicate to the living the blessing of some clue to the nature of the life beyond. A friend of mine who might have satisfied Emily told me that his mother on her death-bed said, ‘I have seen the link.’

Poem 548 F650  ‘Death is potential to that Man’
Death’s power over a dying person affects his friend and God. Of these two God remembers the longest, for the friend is part of that whole cycle in which human beings are ‘dissolved _ of God.’ The marginal variant of ‘subsequent’ for ‘integral’ is perhaps easier to understand.

Poem 549 F652  ‘That I did always love’
Yet once more Emily assures her Master of her love for him. Till she loved him, she
never lived enough. As love is life and life immortal, she will always love him. If he
does not believe her, all she has left is suffering.

Poem 550 F666 I cross till I am weary’
In this poem, as in poem 695, Emily vividly describes the vistas of life and thought
which have to be traversed before at death we arrive at our hoped for goal of heaven
and eternity. But does such a goal actually exist? The question at the end of the poem
shows that nobody knows, Emily herself included. Richard Sewall points out that
Emily’s question corresponds to the qualifying ‘And if’ in this extract from a sermon
by Emily’s dear friend, Charles Wadsworth: ‘Far away over the desert, up where the
mountains are piercing the skies, shine the palaces of immortality! And if we attain to
them in triumph at all, these deserts must be traversed, these stormy waters crossed,
these mountains ascended!’

Stanzas 3 and 4 are difficult. She could be saying, ‘Not even the boundless desert
brings my steps to a standstill. It hinders my march towards heaven in the West only
as an enemy’s salute would hinder me as I hurried to rest (i.e. not at all. A friend’s
salute she would have to return.) There would be no merit in reaching the goal if there
was not a faint doubt that I would do so, and if there were not distant competitors like
the desert to make my failure possible.’

Poem 551 F668 ‘There is a Shame of Nobleness’
This poem is a crescendo of self-abnegation. A noble nature feels shame when
suddenly loaded with riches. A ‘finer shame’ is felt when ecstasy enters our life. A
brave man feels the best shame when people acknowledge his bravery.

But there is yet another shame beyond the Grave. For when on judgement day
Jesus includes us among the sheep and says to us, ‘Come, ye Blessed of my father,
inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world (Matthew
25:34),’ we shall feel ashamed because of knowing that we do not deserve it.

Poem 552 F669 ‘An ignorance a Sunset’
The ‘Sunset’ of this poem perhaps stands for the sunset of our own life at death. We
do not know where our sun goes when in its revolution it decays at sunset, nor do we
know its colour. The amber glow of that time, in which God inspects us inferior
humans, may exhilarate us or sink us. And when the sunset light makes one final victorious configuration, ‘we start,’ as we shall start when we discover that we are immortal after all.

**Poem 553 F670**  ‘One Crucifixion is recorded _ only’
Only the crucifixion of Jesus took place before a crowd of strangers and was recorded in history, but in fact there are as many Calvaries as there are persons _ or peninsulas. We do not need to go on a crusade to Judea to find Gethsemane, as we can find it in our own heart (= ‘a Province _ in the Being’s Centre’). Our Lord on the cross bore witness to the fact that all life suffers, but we all know of newer and nearer crucifixions than his.

As Emily showed in poem 225, the important thing about the Crucifixion for her was not that Jesus thereby atoned for our sins, but that he shared our suffering. Her view had not changed by 1884, for in a late letter (L392) to Mrs Henry Hills she writes, ‘When Jesus tells us about his Father, we distrust him. When he shows us his Home, we turn away, but when he confides to us that he is “acquainted with Grief,” we listen, for that also is an Acquaintance of our own.’

**Poem 554 F548**  ‘The Black Berry _ wears a Thorn in his side’
The blackberry is braver than us. He suffers his thorn silently while offering his fruit to all, and asks no sympathy, but ‘a little further reaches instead.’ We human beings, on the other hand, ‘tell a hurt to cool it.’ Emily herself found it easier to bear her thorns if she wrote about them in her letters and poems, even if in some poems she told the truth so slant that the hurt was partly concealed. In her third letter (L265) to Thomas Higginson she told him of ‘a palsy, here _ the Verses just relieve.’

Line 11, in which the blackberry ‘reaches further’ is appropriately the longest line of the stanza.

**Poem 555 F561**  ‘Trust in the Unexpected’
Emily instances four men who successfully followed the advice of her first line. Captain Kidd found the gold of poem 11 in an unexpected place. The philosopher, to his surprise, found the stone which transmutes base metals into gold. Columbus left his native Genoa and unexpectedly discovered America. And Thomas, the disciple of Jesus, unexpectedly saw his risen Lord on the occasion when Jesus said to him,
‘Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen me, and yet have believed.’ (John 20.29)

Poem 556 F563 ‘The Brain, within its Groove’
The brain, when once turned out of its groove by the swerving of a splinter can never be put back. It would be easier to make the flood water return on its course, after it had powerfully scooped up barriers and flattened mills. Presumably Emily has in mind an incurable mental disturbance such as some types of strokes.

Poem 557 F564 ‘She hideth Her the last’
The ‘She’ in this poem is perhaps the Sun in her daily course. We can no more imitate her life than we could make the perfect Julep or honey of the bee out of our own Julep of sugar and mint flavourings.

Poem 558 F566 ‘But little Carmine hath her face’
The ‘She’ in this poem is presumably the tulip, who in poem 25 had been described as putting on her ‘carmine suit.’ The emerald gown is her stem. She shows the love she has by her beauty, and this love awakens Emily’s love for the tulip (‘enable’ is a variant for ‘exhibit’).

Poem 559 F567 ‘It knew no Medicine’
The ‘It’ of this poem appears to be literal or metaphorical death. If the death described by Emily is taken as literal death, lines 1-11 are a recognisable description of this, but lines 12-16 are more awkward. They would appear to say that a dying person was encouraged by a momentary opening of the door to paradise, but then sickened by something he saw.

Ruth Miller, taking the poem metaphorically, suggests that the ‘death’ is Emily’s own disappointment at realising that Samuel Bowles, having encouraged her by printing her poem in the Springfield Republican, showed no further interest in or appreciation of her poetry. Her resultant prostration is not physical sickness or pain, but it has removed the dimples from her cheeks and such beauty as her face had, and replaced them by the greyish pallor seen on the face of a plaster cast of a statue. But she then generously asks, ‘Was Samuel Bowles to blame if momentarily he showed her the paradise of publication so that she had the temerity to believe in its
continuance, only to be sickened by the neglect which she ‘ever afterward’
experienced?’

On this reading the poem is akin to poem 396.

Poem 560 F568 ‘It knew no lapse nor Diminution’
The second stanza of this poem, with the first four words slightly changed to ‘I did
not deem that’ and with the whole stanza written out as prose, begins the first letter
(L280) Emily wrote to Thomas Higginson after reading in the *Springfield Republican*
that he was leading troops in the Civil War in South Carolina. The letter, dated
*February 1863*, continues, ‘I should have liked to see you, before you became
improbable. War feels to me an oblique place _ Should there be other Summers,
would you perhaps come? I found you were gone by accident.’

The letter clearly shows that Emily was disappointed in her hope of a visit from
Higginson in the summer of 1862. The ‘It’ of this poem is presumably the summer of
1862 together with her hopes, and Emily is saying in effect, ‘The summer, with my
hopes of a visit from you, burned on with no diminution until its final ending. All that
time I presumed that the planetary forces which produce summer were not making
your visit to Amherst (= ‘an Exchange of Territory’) impossible, but giving it the
chance to happen.’

Poem 561 F550 ‘I measure every Grief I meet’
Emily is acquainted with suffering, but in this poem, instead of revealing the cause of
her own pain, she thinks how it compares with the characteristics of the sufferings of
the people she sees around her.

*Lines 13-16:* Some succeed at length in renewing their smile, but their smile is like the
light of a lamp which has almost run out of oil.

*Lines 17-24:* Does time bring ‘any Balm,’ or does the pain just get larger, the further
the sufferer gets from the love which he lost? She asks the same question in poem
686.

*Line 25:* ‘many = ‘of many sorts’

*Lines 31-2:* An example of such ‘banishment’ would be Emily’s own lack of contact
with Sue over fifteen years (see notes on poem 479).

*Line 36:* ‘Calvary’ = all the crucifixions she observes around her in Amherst, not
specifically Jesus’ crucifixion. See poem 553.
Poem 562 F551  ‘Conjecturing a Climate’
To imagine a climate of unbroken sunshine adds poignancy to a New England winter. As the people shiver, they imagine a fictitious country of sunshine to make more bearable the actual cold, which is not removed by their actual degree of longitude or eased by their particular latitude.

Poem 563 F674  ‘I could not prove the Years had feet’
This poem could apply to anyone embarking on a new stage of life. If Emily intended it to refer to her own life, it could refer to the ‘vaster claims’ upon her, once she had dedicated herself to poetry.

Poem 564 F525  ‘My period had come for Prayer’
Emily has doubts about a petitionary prayer she made when in trouble. There seemed to be missing the fundamental feature of a Creator God who heard it. For as she tried to ascend in her imagination to where God might be, all she found was uninhabited ‘vast Prairies of Air’ and no face of any personal God. Awed by the silence, she ‘worshipped [but] did not pray.’

As Jane Eberwein Donahue points out, in fact worship is as much a part of prayer as petition, and Emily worships God’s creation in poem after poem.

Poem 565 F527  ‘One Anguish _ in a Crowd’
In lines 1-8 Emily admits that the anguish of one Doe attacked by hounds sounds little compared with the host of an army being attacked by whole ‘Legions of Alarm,’ but reminds us that the swarm is made up of single, small units.

Having established the importance of ‘the small,’ she makes the additional point in lines 9-16 that a single leech or sliver or leakage (a variant reading for ‘Bung out _ of’) can begin in our bodies an unstoppable process leading to ultimate destruction.

Poem 566 F529  ‘A Dying Tiger _ moaned for Drink’
In this powerful fantasy Emily imagines she is too late to save a dying tiger with the water she had found in a desert, just as in poem 132 she had brought ‘an unaccustomed wine’ too late to save a dying friend. All she can see is that on the retina of his mighty eyeballs as he died was a vision of the water and of herself.
Sometimes no person can be blamed for a disaster, but only circumstances.

**Poem 567 F530** ‘He gave away his Life’

Jesus on the cross gave away his life as ‘a trifle,’ but to his disciples, then and since, his death was ‘a Gigantic Sum.’ His disciples had imagined they could keep him on earth, so that it burst their hearts when Jesus slipped through the bounds of earth to be ‘on the Heavens unrolled,’ just as the bird in poem 328 had ‘unrolled his feathers/and rowed him softer home.’

We disciples, left behind to mourn, decay gradually like all earth’s Blossoms, while Jesus chose the maturity of heaven. We disciples were still at the sowing stage while Jesus, ripening, omitted the bud stage, and, when we next turned to look, ‘broke _ perfect _ from the Pod’ in his mature state.

The ‘we’ in the last two stanzas are primarily Jesus actual first disciples.

**Poem 568 F531** ‘We learned the Whole of Love’

The ‘we’ in this poem could be Emily and Sue. Emily seems to be saying that in their early years they learned about love from books, but that, when they met and looked into each other’s eyes, they realised how limited had been the revelation given to them by books. So as ignorant children, though on a subject ‘diviner’ than children’s concerns, they tried to tell each other what love was. But, alas, neither of them knew what it was, the subject being so vast and the wisdom required so large.

In fact neither of them did understand what love was and their relationship failed. Sue found Emily’s need for love too overwhelming, and Emily could not appreciate where the true centres of Sue’s concerns lay.

**Poem 569 F533** ‘I reckon _ when I count at all’

Richard Sewall calls this poem ‘her clearest, most composed statement of the function of the poet.’

A poet like herself has the Sun, the Summer and the Heaven of God as her subjects. But in a way poets are all we need as in their poems they include the other three. The summer of the poet transcends time for ‘it lasts a solid Year.’ The sun of the poet transcends nature, as the actual East would ‘deem extravagant’ the poet’s sun.
And even if in actual fact ‘the Further Heaven’ is as beautiful as the revivalist preachers disclose to those who put their trust in them, the grace of believing in their dreams is not easily obtained, so that for what we know of heaven it is best to go to the poets.

**Poem 570 F537**  ‘I could die _ to know’

Through her window early in the morning Emily looks out at the everyday activities going on. The newspaper boy knocks on the door. Carts go by. The coal wagon rattles down the street. But the ‘trifling knowledge’ which she ‘could die _ to know’ is what her loved one is doing at that moment, for, while she is dreaming indoors, he ‘possibly, this moment’ is arriving at the Square to begin work.

Emily is like Cleopatra, when she says to her maid,

Where think’st thou he is now? Stands he, or sits he?
Or does he walk? Or is he on his horse? (Antony and Cleopatra 1:5:18ff)

Line 6 perhaps means that Emily feels so isolated that even the smallest fly using her window pane as a document to crawl over would be welcome. The houses in line 7 are perhaps barns on either side of the house proper.

**Poem 571 F538**  ‘Must be a Woe’

As in poem 135 or poem 313: 19-24 Emily pronounces upon the power of opposites. Here she proclaims that awareness of beauty is keenest after a loss. Then the eye can take delight in even such a difficult subject as a stalactite. The lesser the woe, the lesser the subsequent bliss. The greater the price of the suffering, the greater the subsequent grace. Jesus was willing ‘to pay _ a Cross’ that we might believe that the extreme of suffering is followed by the extreme of joy.

**Poem 572 F539**  ‘Delight _ becomes pictorial’

When in pain, all we can do is to picture the future delight of health. The pictured health, as being impossible at that moment, might be fairer than the actual health when it arrives.

Similarly a mountain in the distance may seem to be surrounded by glorious Amber. But, as we get nearer, the Amber turns out to be only ‘the Skies’ after all.
Poem 573 F541  ‘The Test of Love _ is Death’
The test of our love is whether we are willing to die for it, for example soldiers in a war. After all, ‘God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son’ (John 3:16) to die on the Cross for us. So what Jesus has done as the ‘Largest Lover,’ we, his human followers, can try to copy.

If our ‘Patience’ and ability to endure suffering is smaller because of our smaller share in the Godhead, and if our bravery sometimes lets us down ‘through fainter Nerve,’ we can ask God to accept the ‘Most’ we can do and overlook the ‘Dust’ of our human shortcomings. Jesus’ death on the Cross asks that the last and least of his followers should try to follow his example.

Poem 574 F288  ‘My first well Day _ since many ill’
Some illness befell Emily in the spring-time when nature was ‘a’blossom.’ Since then she has been wrestling ‘with pain,’ but now at the end of summer she asks for the first time to go outside ‘and see the things in Pod.’

In her absence summer has replaced some flowers with others, swollen the nut, tied pods to seeds, brought colour to the garden, and everywhere left rich threads to mark her presence before departing in the ‘Haze’ of autumn (see line 4 of poem 131). In other words, the garden has gained during Emily’s absence, just as you might say to a child that to die could be a gain, for tomorrow might hold rainbows ‘the Sepulchre, could hide.’ (‘die’ is a marginal variant for ‘fade.’)

In the last stanza Emily wonders whether she herself, like her garden, may not have gained rather than lost during her time of illness indoors, for, on her theory of opposites, the Sun is greater, if you measure it, having first measured the Grave.

Emily also used the last stanza of this poem in a letter (L275) sent to Samuel Bowles in November 1862. She tries to persuade him to take a rest before returning to work, and ends the letter, ‘Do not yet work…….besides _ there is an idleness _ more Tonic than Toil.

The loss by Sickness _ was it loss _
Or that Etherial Gain _
You earned by measuring the Grave _
Then _ measuring the Sun.’
Poem 575 F544  “Heaven” has different Signs _ to me’
In this poem Emily is positive that the various glories of Nature ‘remind us of the place/that Men call “Paradise,”’ but, even so, she cannot as yet find any evidence for how we ourselves shall be adorned for that ‘Superior Grace’ of a fairer Paradise.

Poem 576 F546  I prayed, at first, a little Girl’
Emily stopped her childhood prayers as soon as she could imagine how God himself must feel when he had to attend to Emily, fixing her gaze on him with prayers about her little daily problems, and complaining that parts of his plan baffled her.

Of course, she has often thought since then that her childhood God could have kept her safe in Danger, if she had continued praying. Indeed, he might have held her steady until she found a ‘Balance’ that lasted, unlike her present precarious one.

A marginal variant for ‘mingled side’ (line 12) is ‘underside,’ and George Whicher suggests that this variant reading may echo a quaint phrase of Sir Thomas Browne, ‘We are ignorant of the back-parts or lower side of His Divinity.’ (Religio Medici: Part 1Section 13)

Poem 577 F431  ‘If I may have it, when it’s dead’
As in such poems as 322 and 474 Emily’s ultimate consolation for the loss of her Lover of line 9 is her assurance that they will be reunited after death. To paraphrase:

I will be content if ‘it’ (= your spirit) belongs to me when it is dead, even if I cannot weigh the Bliss of that until your spirit has been locked in the Grave, for which I have the key (1-8).

When we are reunited after death, we will say that our lives were death, and that death is each other (9-13).

I will tell you how cold I felt at the loss of you, and how I grew tired, making signs to you that you would be able to notice me after death (14-21).

I will tell you how I kept a smile for when, reunited after death, we looked back ‘for Play’ at the Cavalry of our separation (21-5).

Forgive me if my eagerness to see you causes my death to be delayed. Forgive me if the thought of stroking the frost of your body after death ‘outvisions Paradise’ (26-9).
**Poem 578 F438** ‘The Body grows without’
The Spirit/Soul can always hide and shelter within the Temple of the Body (‘closet’ is a variant for ‘Temple’). If Emily here is stoically saying that we do not have to show our inner feelings unless we want to, she is making the opposite point to poem 451.

**Poem 579 F439** ‘I had been hungry, all the Years’
This poem makes at greater length the point of poem 439, namely that ‘Spices fly/ In the Receipt _/ It was the Distance _/ Was Savory _.’ The metaphor of the poem could apply to a number of different experiences, for example becoming literally rich after years of poverty, or finally being admitted to some club or institution after years of waiting. Emily, in her usual manner, does not say how the metaphor applies to herself. Paula Bennett suggests that it may have a sexual reference. Emily imagines what it would be like, after years of the crumb of fantasy in isolation, to have ‘the ample Bread’ of a physical relationship in marriage with a husband. She concludes that it might soon lead to satiety, a not unsurprising conclusion for a person who in a later letter (L364) to Sue was to say ‘The stimulus of Loss makes most Possession mean,’ and who in poem 1430 was to declare that ‘the banquet of Abstemiousness/defaces that of Wine.’

Alternatively, the ‘Plenty’ could be the publication of her poem in the *Springfield Republican*. She had always desired this, but found the whole experience of dealing with a newspaper editor a dismal affair.

**Poem 580 F426** ‘I gave myself to him’
Emily in this poem is perhaps putting the case for and against marriage. In the lifelong contract of marriage with its requirement of a daily interchange of love she might prove worse than her husband expected, and the vision each had of the other might be dimmed. On the other hand, goods cannot be tested until they are bought, at least the risk is mutual, and some have found marriage a gain. Such partners recognise each night what they owe to the other, and have paid the debt by the following noon.

Alternatively the ‘He’ of the poem might be taken to be Jesus, as suggested by Ruth Miller.

**Poem 581 F436** ‘I found the words to every thought’
Emily in her definition poems has found words for all her thoughts except for her ideas of ‘immortality.’ That she has found impossible to explain in words to other people. But no wonder! How could an artist depict the Sun for races who have only known the Dark? And anyway can the blaze of the sunset be adequately caught by the cochineal red of the artist’s palette or the noontide sky by his mazarin blue?

**Poem 582 F414** ‘Inconceivably solemn!’
Things gay by nature can be inconceivably solemn and pierce our hearts when they press their images upon us at close hand. The flags and music of parades of soldiers cheer us from a distance. But when they come near, no ‘true Eye’ can look at the flags without a lump in his throat, or hear the drums without wincing in his delight.

**Poem 583 F419** ‘A Toad, can die of Light’
Human beings cannot boast of the fact that they die, as even Earls share that particular ‘supremacy’ with a toad, midge or gnat. What we do differently is how we live.
Forget the flask or cask of the dead body. Just measure the actual Rhine, the wine it contained when alive. The question we need to ask is ‘What sort of wine do I have in my cask?’
Emily also pursues this theme in poems 422 and 990. She had used ‘Rhine’ as a synonym for ‘wine’ in poem 383.

**Poem 584 F421** ‘It ceased to hurt me, though so slow’
As in poem 574, Emily records some recovery from the anguish that had come upon her in 1862. In this poem she stresses the gradualness of the process. She cannot date her recovery (line 5), or trace what caused it (line 13), for the grief had been as constant as the dress she had worn as a child. Indeed she had hung that dress on a peg at night, but the grief had never left her, but stayed as close as the clips which women press round the edges of cushions to keep their shape.

All she knows is that something has ‘benumbed the Track’ her thoughts went down in their anguish (line 4), and that instead of ‘Wilderness’ it is ‘almost Peace.’

**Poem 585 F383** ‘I like to see it lap the Miles’
Emily’s father was the driving force behind the new railroad from Amherst to Belchertown, the opening of which was celebrated on 9 June 1853. As Amherst
station was just across the road from the bottom of the Dickinson garden, Emily had ample opportunity to see and hear the new trains, like the one described in this poem.

Lines 8-10 describe a track which in places shaves or pares the quarry workings on either side of it.

As American railways did not have, and still do not have, level-crossing gates, trains signified their approach by the ‘horrid _ hooting stanza’ of line 12.

In lines 14-17 Emily is comparing the train to a horse, and so says that it neighs as loudly as ‘Boanerges,’ a Greek word which means literally ‘Mighty shouter.’ Jesus gave this name to the brothers James and John. (Mark 3:17)

Emily refers to the new railway in letters of 1853 to her brother, Austin. In the first (L123) she says, ‘While I write, the whistle is playing, and the cars just coming in. It gives us all new life, every time it plays. How you will love to hear it, when you come home again!’ In the second (L127) she describes the Celebration Day, when a trainload of celebrants came over from New London, Connecticut. She writes that, ‘The New London Day passed off grandly _ so all the people said _ it was pretty hot and dusty, but nobody cared for that. Father was as usual, Chief Marshal of the day, and went marching around the town with New London at his heels like some old Roman General, upon a Triumph day…they all said it was fine. I spose it was _ I sat in Prof Tyler’s woods and saw the train move off, and then ran home again for fear somebody would see me.’ Emily takes a normal pleasure in the new railway, but avoids the crowds on Celebration day.

Charles Anderson’s reading of this poem brings out its wit and comedy.

Poem 586 F392  ‘We talked as girls do’
Emily imagines a close friend, perhaps at school, with whom she had long talks about every subject except death. When they parted, they promised to write to each other, but, alas, her friend died the very next day.

Line 6 is a compressed version of ‘As if we were disposers,’ and line 10 of ‘As we would be eventually.’

Poem 587 F393  ‘Empty, my Heart, of Thee’
Emily once more describes her love for her master in hyperbolic terms. She says to him, ‘My heart has you as its single artery, and without you it is extinct. The sea has many billows, but my heart and its single artery have only one Baltic, namely you,
and if you, let’s playfully suppose, remove yourself, there is hardly any me left. No root, no tree. No you, no me. If the heavens are one day stripped of you, Eternity will have had her pocket picked of my greatest valuable.’

Poem 588 F394 ‘I cried at Pity _ not at Pain’
The speaker of this poem has been enduring a long period of pain, but worse than the pain was hearing a woman, perhaps in some gathering, say ‘Poor Child’ and realising that the words applied to her. She had just about got used to the pain of being deprived of ‘the Health and Laughter’ which other people possess, and if she knew who the woman was who had pitted her, she would stop her ears when that woman came her way again, so that her renewed pity might not renew the speaker’s pain.

Emily might be merely approving of the stoicism of her speaker, or the poem might refer to herself. If it refers to herself, it is as unlikely as poem 486 to refer to her deprived childhood, and Ruth Miller and Richard Sewall both suggest that the pain of the poem may be that caused by the hostile article of Samuel Bowles in the Springfield Republican, and that ‘the Woman’ stands for her friends who showed her sympathy after the article had shattered her. It is true that the rich people’s parcel which children like Emily can only vainly long for, as it contains Gold, could refer to the enthusiastic reception that Samuel Bowles gave to the verses of popular women poets, but the last two stanzas do not fit easily with the theory that ‘the Woman’ stands for her friends.

Poem 589 F617 ‘The Night was wide, and furnished scant’
Outside it is an unpleasant winter’s night with nobody abroad but ‘a belated dog,’ but inside the housewife feels a gentle content in checking the blinds, drawing her chair nearer to the fire, and saying to her husband on the Sofa opposite that a night of sleet with him is pleasanter than a May day without him.

In this poem and in lines 23-8 of poem 495, Emily imagines as an actuality what in line 4 of poem 366 she calls only a ‘might have been.’ The last three lines use as few words as possible, but intelligibly. In Johnson’s edition ‘he heard’ in line 11 is a misprint for ‘be heard.’

Poem 590 F619 ‘Did you ever stand in a Cavern’s Mouth’
Emily asks the reader if he has experienced two sorts of terror. In the first two stanzas she asks if he has ever stood in a cave a long way out of the sun, thinking he was alone, and then has fled as if pursued by some Goblin horror. If he has, he knows what Loneliness looks like.

In the last two stanzas she asks if he has ever stood so close to death that all there was between him and the yellow explosion from the Cannon was the question ‘to die [or not to die],’ which came to his ears as distinctly as the demonic drumbeats of a Satyr (‘distinct’ is a marginal variant for ‘cool’). If the reader remembers that he was once in this situation _ and was saved, it seems more likely that he did once ‘look in a Cannon’s face’ than that he did not.

Poem 591 F622  ‘To interrupt His Yellow Plan’
Emily makes an amused comparison between the Sun and ourselves. Nothing ever deflects the sun in his majestic course, as he carries out his task of ‘stimulating the Earth and magnetising the Sea,’ but any passers-by, perhaps some Martians, would think that we humans were the busier _ just as the smallest but busy Bee emits a buzz so thunderous that these same Martians might think a bomb was exploding. But the Martians would over-rate us and the bee.

Line 11 perhaps means ‘and makes sure that the stars in the heavens follow their usual courses,’ and in this line ‘from blame’ is a marginal variant for ‘in place.’

Poem 592 F624  ‘What care the Dead, for Chanticleer’
This poem is divided into three sections, each of two stanzas. Each section is introduced by a question varying only in its last word, though the first line of all is followed by a second question to strengthen the opening.

The dead have no care for Day. It would be very late before our Sunrise disturbed their sleeping faces. Purple morning falls as coolly and blankly on them as on a wall built yesterday.

The dead have no care for Summer. Even at its hottest at the solstice the Summer cannot melt the snow before the Gate of their grave. Any bird that knew a tune that could send a thrill through their fastened ears would be honoured of men.

The dead have no care for Winter. They are frozen as much in June as in January. Indeed the dead caring for Winter would be as easy as spices being produced for men
by the South wind depositing her scented breeze in a Stone, and putting another stone on top to keep it warm!

Poem 593 F627 ‘I think I was enchanted’
This is Emily’s third poem written as a tribute to Elizabeth Barrett Browning, whose death on 30 June 1861 had affected her so deeply. The other two poems are 312 and 363.

The sequence of thought in this poem is clear. When Emily first read Mrs Browning, the enchantment she experienced was a ‘Conversion of the Mind’ and a ‘Divine Insanity’ (lines 22 and 25), which caused her to see that everything in Nature was greater than she had imagined (lines 9-19). She was so illumined by the poems that she lost track of the physical world (lines 5-8). If she should ever find herself in danger of becoming ‘Sane’ again, all she has to do is to take Mrs Browning’s ‘Tomes of Solid Witchcraft’ off the shelf. The magician herself may be asleep in death, but her magical poems, like the Deity himself, have an element which is permanent (lines 25-32).

What is less clear in the poem is the nature of Emily’s conversion. Although she warns us that it is something ‘witnessed _ not explained’ (line 24), she does offer the clue that it caused her to see things as grander, with the homeliest day so adorned that it could be regarded as that great Jewish Jubilee which in fact was only celebrated once every fifty years to mark the emancipation of the Jews from their slavery in Egypt (lines 17-20). If stanzas 3-5 are taken literally, she is saying that her reading of Mrs Browning enabled her to see that her usual subjects of bees, butterflies, the tunes of nature and the very passage of the days were not as low-scale as she had always imagined. But Paula Bennett and Helen McNeil believe that these stanzas are a metaphor for Emily’s realisation that a female American poet like herself need not accept her ‘small size’ any more than her British counterpart, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, had done.

Poem 594 F629 ‘The Battle fought between the Soul’
News of Civil War battles between men would have been reaching Amherst all the time. Indeed poem 596 refers to such a battle. But Emily boldly states that greater even than the battles of the Civil War are the battles which the human Soul fights on its own. No news of these battles ever gets out. They are unrecorded by History. But
as certainly as the sunrise scatters the ‘legions of the Night,’ the interior battles of the soul are being fought to completion.

Poem 595 F507  ‘Like Mighty Foot Lights _ burned the Red’
When one day the sunset showed her ‘far Theatricals of Day’ to the trees, with her redness glowing at their bases like footlights, Emily imagined that amid the applauding Universe she detected the figure of God by his ‘Royal Dress.’

As Jane Donahue Eberwein points out, although Emily struggled to find God on the other side of the ‘circumference’ which limits this world, she did sometimes feel his presence on this side of it.

Poem 596 F518  ‘When I was small, a Woman died’
Thomas Johnson in his variorum edition tells us that on 21 October 1861 an Amherst soldier called Francis H. Dickinson was killed at the battle of Balls’ Bluff, Virginia on the Potomac river near the Maryland border. He was the first Amherst man to die in a Civil War battle.

Emily imagines the killed soldier ascending to heaven ‘to look at’ his mother, who had died some years before. She also imagines how for the mother in heaven the seasons must have turned slowly, until ‘Bullets clipt’ the angle between life and death, and her son passed over quickly.

We do not know if the ‘imperial conduct’ of heaven allows its inhabitants to feel pride, but Emily feels pride as she pictures the meeting of mother and son, and she is confident that such bravery is at least applauded in heaven.

Poem 597 F521  ‘It always felt to me _ a wrong’
Emily has always felt that Moses, who after all had led the Israelites out of Egypt, was at the end of his life unfairly treated by God. For although God allowed him to ascend Mt. Nebo from the plains of Moab and to see the promised land of Canaan from its summit, he then announced to him ‘but thou shall not go over thither,’ and in fact Moses died and was buried in the land of Moab. (Deuteronomy 34:1-6)

Even if there was no such person as Moses and his story is only a Romance, Emily feels that God’s tantalisation of Moses, like some big boy bullying a smaller, was a sharper injury than the ‘cleaner’ deaths of Stephen or Paul. (Stephen was stoned to death by the Jews (Acts 7:58), and tradition said that Paul was beheaded in Rome.)
No doubt God in his treatment of Moses was punishing Israel for some sin, but Emily, if she had been God, would have kept the tribes of Israel out of Canaan and ushered Moses into the broad lands which he above all was entitled to see however ‘little’ consequence his actually entering Canaan may have had.

As in such poems as 357 and 415 Emily is quite willing to take up cudgels against God, but the reader may wonder why she empathises so strongly with Moses. If she felt, consciously or unconsciously, that she, like Moses, was the victim of unmerited deprivation, we can only guess what deprivation she had in mind, possibly the fact that Sue and Samuel Bowles had shown her the promised lands of love and publication, but not really allowed her to enter.

**Poem 598 F514** ‘Three times _ we parted _ Breath _ and I’
Three times Emily nearly drowned. Three times her breath refused to leave her body, but stirred it back to life while the waters strove to keep it. Three times the billows tossed her up and caught her, and pushed further away a distant sail, although Emily would have liked to behold a human thing when she died, but then her breath grew stronger than the waves and the winds, and she ‘stood up _ and lived.’

Emily was no sailor, so the poem is a metaphor, but whether it refers to an actual near-death experience like poem 160, or to her escape from the terror of the year of 1862, or, as Judith Farr thinks, to her escape from drowning in the sea of unrequited love, is left to the reader to decide.

**Poem 599 F515** ‘There is a pain _ so utter’
When the Abyss opens up before our feet, whether caused as in this poem by pain or by the thought of our extinction or by madness, the solid substance of our usual life vanishes. But the pain puts us in a trance so that we can move across the abyss, with our eyes shut and trusting to memory, for to look upon the abyss with open eyes is to drop into it.

**Poem 600 F516** ‘It troubled me as once I was’
Emily mentions a problem which she thought of as a child: if an atom could fall from the sky, what kept the heavens from falling down on her, as she could see no bolt keeping them in place. Perhaps the Giants (those of poem 534?) knew the answer, but
she herself would have to keep that problem, with other larger ones set by life, until it became solvable after death.

It may be childish to imagine heaven above the earth and hell below, but it is not childish to believe that, as Norman Talbot puts it, ‘Our life in this limited world …is the life of a child yet to grow up’ and that we may get the answers later. Or, as Emily herself put it in poem 65, this world is an alphabet, ‘by which Children slow/to sublimer Recitation/ are prepared to go.’

**Poem 601 F517  ‘A still _ Volcano – Life’**

This is the second of Emily’s six poems about volcanoes (see Johnson’s index for the others). It describes the life of a smouldering volcano which at the moment does no more than give a sight of itself when it flickers in the night. It keeps its earthquake possibilities so hidden that only citizens of Naples, with their experience of Vesuvius, could suspect it might erupt. Northern natures cannot understand the significance of the volcano’s smouldering lips, which at any moment may open and then shut – and destroy cities in the process.

Wendy Barker suggests that in this poem, like the later volcano poem 1677, Emily is describing herself. On the surface she looks quiet and innocent, but only let her poeticise in her room at night time and she turns the conventional world upside down with her verses. The northern citizens of Amherst are blind to the volcanic possibilities inside her.

**Poem 602 F510  ‘Of Brussels _ it was not’**

Brussels and Kidderminster were famous lace-making centres, so the subject of this riddle poem must be something which looked like an expanse of lace. As it can be bought for nothing in the local woods, and is unrolled by the winds and is a dull brown in colour, it must be a carpet of pine needles, which drop off the trees when ‘Sere.’ When the sun shines on these needles, which may be found among the pine trees themselves or on the pond, the composition of sunshine and needles is as fine as any square of lace from Brussels or Kidderminster.

**Poem 603 F511  ‘He found my Being _ set it up**

Ruth Miller takes the ‘He’ of the poem to be Jesus. Jesus has found Emily and put his mark upon her. He has told her to be faithful to him until the East (= her rebirth at
death), when he will come to take her home to Heaven in his carriage, just as he does in poem 1053.

Judith Farr, on the other hand, sees the poem as Emily’s protest against the arrogant way in which she is being treated by her male lover, Samuel Bowles. Having carved his name on her as he might on a trophy which he has won, he has told her to be faithful to their love (the East) while he goes about his business. He will come again with an ‘equipage of amber’ to take her home.

Farr’s reading is perhaps preferable. Miller’s picture of Jesus finding Emily, and then being totally absent from her until he comes to fetch her at death seems unorthodox theology even for Emily. And the fact that yellow was Samuel Bowles’ favourite colour may explain why the equipage was of amber.

Poem 604 F512 ‘Unto my Books _ so good to turn’
The range of authors read by Emily was not abnormally wide. Indeed she calls her library ‘small’ in line 8. But her intense pleasure in reading is well shown by a letter on the subject (quoted by Sewall on p. 669) written to her friend, Joseph Lyman. She tells him how, when the doctor finally removed the restriction which for a long time had been placed on her reading, ‘my blood bounded……..Shakespeare was the first’ and as ‘I devoured the luscious pages, I thought I should tear the leaves out as I turned them.’ As Sewall comments, ‘few poets have ever confessed so voracious a passion.’

Her fondness for books in this poem is quieter, but still unmistakeable. To turn to her books at the end of a day’s housework half makes up for the pain of hours without them. Just as guests who have to wait for their dinner are cheered by smells of cooking from the kitchen, so Emily’s day is ‘spiced’ by the thought that books are only a few hours away. And when she does begin reading at the day’s end, the ‘Holiday’ within excludes the ‘Wilderness’ and ‘Night’ outside and the distant footfall of men who have not yet reached similar refreshment. Books for her, unlike people, both promise pleasure and deliver satisfaction.

Poem 605 F513 ‘The Spider holds a Silver Ball’
Even if we have only destroyed a spider’s web, like the Housewife in line 11, and never actually watched a spider making his web, we instantly accept this poem as a brilliantly true picture of the making and destruction of his web. It is then natural to go on to wonder if Emily in some sense sees herself as the spider. It could be, as some
scholars have suggested, that Emily is expressing her fears that the tapestries of her poems, woven secretly in her room, may be destroyed by unsympathetic editors in her lifetime or after her death. Or perhaps, as Paula Bennett suggests, Emily is being ambivalent about the value of her poems. At one time she can see them as ‘Continents of Light’ and as ‘sophistries’ (a marginal variant for ‘Boundaries’ in line 12). At another time she can regard them as insubstantial and as destroyable as a spider’s web.

Poem 606 F523  ‘The Trees like Tassels _ hit _ and swung’
Emily’s poem feels as long and lazy as the summer day it describes, from the branches of trees being gently hit and swung by the breeze and small creatures singing in the distance whole psalm-books of tunes to a bird charming a snake with its silver song and flowers bursting into bloom.

But, Emily concludes, a summer’s day is too rich to mention all the details of it. Even a superb painting of a summer day by a famous artist like Anthony van Dyck would seem ‘mean’ when compared with an actual summer’s day. As Emily had declared in poem 291, even the greatest painters cannot rival nature’s sunsets.

Since Van Dyck painted almost all portraits, he is being used in this poem to stand for all artists. The last stanza becomes clearer if the reader supplies at the end of line 26 the words [an actual summer day is] before reading the last two lines.

Poem 607 F337  ‘Of nearness to her sundered Things’
Emily speaks of those times when our dead loved ones (= ‘sundered Things’ in line 1) rise so clearly before our eyes that it is their usual ‘Dimness’ which ‘looks the Oddity.’ At those times they wear just the clothes they wore in life, though now they are ‘long buttoned in the Mold.’ Even more amazingly, it is the dead at those moments who appear as ‘bright Knots of Apparitions’ and winged and who are in mourning for us to join them in their brightness.

Lines 11 and 12 are clearer if their order is reversed. Poem 445 also ends with a dead person waiting for his living friends to join him.

Poem 608 F345  ‘Afraid! Of whom am I afraid’
Within this tight, orderly poem Emily sings a song of fearless faith. She is no more afraid of death than of her father’s door-keeper (whether she means her real father or
her father in Heaven). She is not afraid of life, whether Deity has set her in one existence or in two. And if there is a second existence, she is as likely to fear that Resurrection and disparage that Crown as the East is likely to fear to trust the Morning!

Poem 609 F440 ‘I Years had been from Home’

This poem has the abrupt fluctuations of a nightmare. First the speaker tells of her fear to enter her old home after a long absence lest an unknown face should ask what she wants and she would have to reply ‘Is my old life still here?’

But then her ‘Awe’ is overcome by the thought that formerly she was not afraid to enter, but had held her ‘Consternation’ in check and ‘never winced.’ So she at last puts her hand on the latch, though carefully and still fearing a possible trap.

But the next moment she lifts her fingers from the latch as cautiously as if it were made of glass, holds her ears, and flees gasping ‘like a Thief.’

If this poem refers to Emily’s own life, it may be her imagining what it might be like to visit Sue at the Evergreens after a long period of staying away. When Sue answered the doorbell, would Emily have to conclude that her face was ‘a Face I never saw before’?

Poem 610 F441 ‘You’ll find _ it when you try to die’

To die will be easier if we then remember our dearest dead. Their place may have been ‘somewhat filled’ by ‘newer Toys,’ but these were always second best, and at our death ‘the former love _ distincter grows’ and shows the new Toys as tawdry by comparison.

Poem 611 F442 ‘I see thee better _ in the Dark’

When Samuel Bowles finally returned from Europe in 1862, Emily could not summon up the courage to see him, but stayed in her room. In this poem she perhaps tries to console herself by arguing that absence and the dark are as powerful stimulants to love as the light of the loved one’s presence. Her love for him shines more brightly in the dark (1-4), and is a lamp which can nullify years of separation (5-8). It is so powerful that it will even bring a glow to the grave (9-12). When the two of them, even in the dark of absence, feel such a surpassing love for each other that its Sun is always at the Meridian, what need do they have of Day?
Poem 612 F444  ‘It would have starved a Gnat’
Emily’s starvation in this poem is described in extremest terms. She was not given enough food to keep a Gnat alive, despite her irremovable necessity for it. Indeed a Gnat could seek its own dinner and even commit suicide, but Emily could do neither.

Such extreme starvation, like her hunger in poem 579, must be psychological, a metaphor either for her hunger for love and affection, or for her need for someone who would understand and appreciate her poetry, and thus encourage her to believe that she was doing the right thing to devote her life to the making of poems.

Poem 613 F445  ‘They shut me up in Prose’
It was no use Emily’s parents trying to punish her as a child by shutting her in the closet, because her brain could soar aloft in imaginative flights, just as easily as a bird, absurdly lodged in a Pound, could fly free. Indeed, as Emily was later to say to her young niece when similarly punished, ‘Matty, child, no one could ever punish a Dickinson by shutting her up alone.’ (Bianchi, Emily Dickinson Face to face, pp. 65-6)

But when Emily grew up, she claims that her parents now ‘shut her up in Prose,’ just as they had shut the small child in the closet. This ‘Prose’ could be her parents’ expectations that their daughter would live the conventional Amherst life of marriage, social obligations and household duties, for such a life would have severely limited her time for poetry. As it was, she never escaped the household duties, even if she evaded marriage and society. Or perhaps her parents’ conversation, opinions and interests were such that she felt enveloped in surroundings of Prose. But, whatever Prose was a symbol for, Emily stresses how easy it was for her mind to soar aloft in poetic composition above the Prose of her life.

At the end of the poem such words as ‘to do, in order to be free’ need to be supplied. Emily returns to the contrast between poetry and prose in poem 657.

Poem 614 F447  ‘In falling Timbers buried’
As in poem 566 the speaker had brought a drink of water just too late to save a tiger from death, so in this poem the anguished diggers reached a man buried alive only to find him ‘dying _ Then.’ Their labours had been fruitless, like many things on this
‘Baffling Earth.’ Their only thanks was the thought that their failure had allowed him ‘the Grace _ of Death.’

In stanza 2 the repeated ‘Could’ is short for ‘if only He/They could’ and ‘but’ is to be supplied before ‘Horrid.’

**Poem 615 F453**  ‘Our journey had advanced’

The speaker and some others have almost arrived at the place called Eternity, the end of this life’s road. They are suddenly frightened and reluctant to move through ‘the Forests of the Dead’ (= the circumference or limit of this world) to the unknown Cities ahead, but retreat is impossible. And then they see ‘God _ at every Gate’ of Eternity, and a White Flag flying, perhaps to welcome those who will be clothed in white or to show Eternity’s surrender to the apprehensive pilgrims.

**Poem 616 F454**  ‘I rose _ because He sank’

As in poem 190, Emily seems to imagine being given the opportunity of yielding to her forceful lover. In this poem she managed to quell his desires, presumably by persuading him that such intimacy would be wrong, as he was already married (lines 1-4). She ‘cheered [her] fainting Prince’ and removed the film from his disappointed eyes with chants and hymns of Christian virtue (lines 5-7). As he recovered from this rebuff, she said that the Balm for both of them was the thought that, once they had passed through ‘the low Arch of the Flesh’ to the Grave and then to the worlds above, there God and his Saints (=Emperors) would reunite them, if they stayed true to one another (lines 12-19). So, using the power given her by Christian doctrine (= ‘Thews of Hymn’) and her own inner strength, she ‘lifted Him’ (lines 20-1).

As in such poems as 322, 474 and 577 Emily’s main consolation for a love not reaching fruition in this life is the postponement of this to eternity

**Poem 617 F681**  ‘Don’t put up my Thread and Needle’

If this poem is correctly dated to 1862, it is prophetic of the eye trouble which afflicted Emily for a long period in 1863-4. As she says in a letter (L290) to Thomas Higginson of June 1864, ‘I was ill in September, and since April, in Boston, for a Physician’s care,’ and in fact she stayed with her cousins in Boston until November 1864.
Whatever the date of the poem, we can imagine her some winter evening finding that she is too ill and her sight too ‘crooked’ to sew properly, but asking her sister Vinnie not to put away her work materials, as she intends to start sewing again when the birds begin singing in the spring and ‘when my mind _ is plain.’ Till then, Vinnie is to let the needle stay where she left it, and just bring the sewing she was working on as close to her as possible, so that, when she is having her daytime invalid sleep, she can at least dream that she is still sewing.

Helen McNeil notes that the description in stanza 3 of the fine sewing which Emily will do when she is better could also be applied to her poems. For they too are usually miniature in size, with their meanings knotted together so that the skill in joining them is invisible, and with their ‘tucks’ of compression and ellipse. If this is so, it must be assumed that Emily’s eye trouble has also prevented her from writing out her poems, but that she is sure that, when she is well again, she will be capable of producing poems which ‘a Queen’s endeavor/would not blush to own.’ Till then, Vinnie is not to take her notebook and pen away.

**Poem 618 F683** ‘At leisure is the Soul’
Emily repeats her prescription of poem 443 for the Soul that ‘gets a Staggering Blow.’ There she had said that such a soul needs to perform ‘life’s little duties’ with ‘scrupulous exactness,’ if it is to hold itself together.

‘But’ in line 6 equals ‘if only.’ In line 8 ‘Vacant,’ a marginal variant, seems preferable to her original idea of ‘noisy.’

**Poem 619 F685** ‘Glee _ The great storm is over’
There has been a shipwreck in which four were saved but forty were drowned. Emily asks how the story of this shipwreck will be told some winter evening? We have to imagine that between lines 10 and 11 the story teller has only mentioned the four that were saved, so that the children ask, ‘Did none of the forty ever come back?’

The storyteller is silent about the forty, so that a softness overspreads the story. Only the sea tells the truth that it still has the forty drowned in its depths.

**Poem 620 F686** ‘It makes no difference abroad’
Emily repeats the thought of the last two stanzas of poem 348, namely that Nature is incapable of sympathising with the sorrows of human beings. Nature continues her
seasonal and daily round whatever Calvaries we are enduring. The bee takes no notice when a heretic is sentenced to death and burnt at the stake by the Inquisition: the only thing which makes him unhappy is ‘separation from His Rose.’

‘Slam’ in line 6 is an odd verb to apply to a brook. Perhaps even the noise of a brook sounds like slamming to those whose nerves are on edge. Emily noted ‘brag’ as a possible alternative to ‘slam.’

Poem 621 F687  ‘I asked no other thing’

In a letter (L230) to her cousins the previous year, after saying that she has carried out a request they had made, she adds “Is there nothing else,” as the clerk says?

The same question asked in this poem by the Mighty Merchant has more serious connotations. For the merchant is presumably God, who tells Emily that he is out of stock of the only thing she wants, the unobtainable Brazil, for which she is willing to pay everything. But, even though the context is more serious, Emily is still able to view the situation with an amused, ironic detachment, much as she had viewed God’s non cooperation in poem 49. Now God is a village shopkeeper who twirls a button on his coat without bothering to look at her.

We can only guess what was the ‘Brazil,’ which God could not supply. Perhaps an assurance of immortality.

Poem 622 F688  ‘To know just how he suffered _ would be dear’

Emily was a true Puritan in her intense curiosity about a person’s dying. When her friend, Benjamin Newton, died in 1854, she wrote a letter (L153) to his Pastor, whom she had never met, to ask, ‘Please Sir, to tell me if he was willing to die, and if you think him at Home. I should love so much to know certainly, that he was today in Heaven.’

She shows the same curiosity about the death in this poem. Did the dying person say that Dying was what he had always thought it would be? Were his last thoughts of the home he was leaving or of God or of what people distant from his deathbed would say when they heard the news? What best name did he speak the last? Did he know that he would not stop being conscious, but would grow in Consciousness, as earthly love blended into the ‘love too best to be’ on his entering Eternity?
If the dead person is someone real and not merely imagined, his identity remains a mystery. He would have to be someone well known to Emily for her to be able to understand his last wishes, just from how his sigh was accented (lines 13-15).

Poem 623 F689  ‘It was too late for Man’
This poem, placed by Emily in the same packet as poem 621, shows how, like Shakespeare, she was never bound by one viewpoint, but was always alive to other possibilities. In poem 621 she had found God uncooperative, but in this poem she firmly claims that when things get too bad to be dealt with by our own earthly resources and God has not yet intervened to help us, we can always turn in prayer to ‘our Old Neighbour _ God.’

But, even though the two poems differ about human estimates of the worth of God’s help, their familiar tone is much the same.

Poem 624 F690  ‘Forever _ is composed of Nows’
Judith Farr helpfully associates this poem with Emily’s words in a letter (L786) to her cousins of 1882, ‘I cannot tell how Eternity seems. It sweeps around me like a sea, while I do my work.’ In other words, as St John repeatedly says in his gospel, Eternity begins in this life. Every day, while we go about our work, we can receive flashes of ‘Forever.’ Eternity’s only differences from the flashes is its size (Infiniteness) and the ‘Latitude [of its] Home’ or base. But if we add up all the flashes from the years of our life, so that there are no pauses between them or any discussion of them or any marking of special days, then the sum total of the flashes of our years would be as infinite as the years of our Lord in heaven. ( ‘as infinite’ is a marginal variant for ‘no different’ in line 11.)

Poem 625 F691  ‘Twas a long Parting _ but the time’
In this poem the reunion of Emily and her beloved master in Heaven after a long absence, foretold by her in poems 322 and 616, actually takes place _ in her imagination. They meet ‘before the Judgment Seat of God,’ never to be parted gain. To gaze in to each other’s eyes is a ‘Heaven of Heavens’ (cf. the last stanza of poem 474). There is no limit to this life in heaven, for they are ‘born infiniter _ now.’ They wear new clothes, but this new life depends on the love they behold in each other’s
eyes. Their union in heaven is unlike any wedding on earth, for it is held in Paradise, with Cherubim and Seraphim sitting unobtrusively at the back.

Any reader of this poem is likely to agree with George Whicher’s verdict that ‘it runs clear for two stanzas and then clogs into a veritable log-jam of cryptic phrases.’ To make a break in the sense after ‘the new’ at the end of line 10 perhaps partly helps to clear the log-jam.

**Poem 626 F692  ‘Only God _ detect the Sorrow’**

Only God knows our sorrows and he does not trumpet them to the world, for ‘The Jehovahs _ are no Babblers,’ and do not indulge in gossip. Jesus may have disclosed our sorrow to God, but Jesus can be relied on equally not to blab. And if either of them pass on the news to the Holy Spirit, his Honor is just as sure as that of the Father and the Son.

The Trinity has respect for men.

**Poem 627 F696  ‘The Tint I cannot take _ is best’**

Sometimes we get glimpses of another world which leave us ‘with a Discontent’ for this one. They are authoritative, but ‘too exquisite to tell’ (9-12). We may get these glimpses from the non-obvious tints of nature, the colours which are ‘too remote’ to show in a gaudy bazaar at a guinea a time (1-4), or from the clouds (5-8), or from the landscape in spring when it seems to be repressing some secret which is eager to burst forth from it (13-16), or from full summer (17), or from the snow whose carpet covers some mystery so as to hide it from the squirrels (18-20).

But these intimations are no more than glimmers. They remain essentially ‘grasless’ until our eyes, cheated in this life, close in the grave with the arrogant expectation of seeing the whole picture at last.

Helen McNeil suggest that Emily calls the clouds ‘Cleopatra’s Company’ because Antony was defeated by Octavian at Actium after Cleopatra’s ships had fled, a fine swaggering array but as insubstantial and as useless as clouds in the actual battle. Also Antony himself, in defeat, feels as illusory and shapeless as ‘a cloud that’s dragonish/ a vapour sometime like a bear or lion.’ (*Antony and Cleopatra* 4:14:3-4)

The marginal variant for line 16, ‘Columns _ in the Breast’ is less strange than ‘Chariots _ in the Vest.’
Poem 628 F589  ‘They called me to the Window, for’
This is a more elaborate sunset poem than poems 265 and 266, although the ‘ships of cloud’ metaphor is common to all three. In this poem Emily, when called to the window, sees the ‘Sapphire Farm’ of the sky with what looked like a herd of cattle feeding on a hill. But the hill was so insubstantial (= ‘vain’) that it changed into gigantic ships on a sea. Then the ships too disappeared, and Emily could see neither farm, nor herd, nor sea.

Poem 629 F593  ‘I watched the Moon around the House’
Richard Sewall acutely comments on this poem, ‘No cliché is more weary than the moon, and yet every detail is new, every image precisely realised.’ Emily looks at the moon like a Lady inspecting a stranger through her lorgnette. But the moon is more curious than any stranger for she gives no account of herself. She stations herself in the sky like a guillotined head or a stemless flower, upheld by currents even finer than the motions of a philosopher’s brain. She has no employment, and, unlike us, has no concern about whether there is a life after death or not. Freed from all else, she merely shines in the sky.

But then, as Emily looks, the moon vaults behind a cloud, and, when Emily next sees her, she is above the cloud and sailing too high through the blue of the sky for Emily to follow her.

Emily describes a moon which is as indifferent to men’s concerns as the whole of nature had been in poem 620. Had she ever seen H.M.S. Pinafore she would have agreed with Little Buttecup’s comment on Captain Corcoran’s song of appeal to the moon at the beginning of Act 2, ‘How sweetly he carols forth his melody to the unconscious moon.’

Poem 630 F595  ‘The Lightning playeth _ all the while’
When yellow lightning flickers noiselessly above our heads, we ignore this news item. It is only when ‘he singeth’ the ‘short _ sepulchral Bass’ of his thunder that we are alarmed, and take care to wear gloves to insulate us from the lightning.

If this poem is a metaphor, Emily is perhaps suggesting that we are quite capable of ignoring God, while He merely ‘playeth _ all the while…..above our Head,’ and only take notice of him when his thunder presages some disaster.
Poem 631 F596  ‘Ourselves were wed one summer _ dear’
The first line seems to show Emily imagining herself speaking to a husband she had
married ‘one summer.’ But line 15 shows that Emily is speaking to another woman.
They were both wed one summer, but not to each other.

Judith Farr (G) suggests that the woman addressed is Sue. On this interpretation
Emily will be saying:
‘We were both wed in the summer of 1856. Your vision was realised when you
married Austin in June [in fact on 1 July]. The girlhood of your little lifetime no
longer satisfied you, nor did mine satisfy me.

Your marriage to Austin left me in the dark, but then Samuel Bowles arrived
carrying for me the light which was a sign of love. But our love could not lead to
marriage, as he was married to Mary, so my future and your future were different.
Your cottage faced the sun of a happy married life, with its garden a profusion of
flowers, while my ‘bleaker’ friendship with Mr Bowles resembled a cottage
surrounded by the sea and the North, with a garden where frosts spoiled the flowers.

We both became queens in that summer of 1856, but you were the one crowned
as an actual bride.’

Emily also refers to Samuel Bowles bringing light in line 4 of poem 47.

Poem 632 F598  ‘The Brain _ is wider than the Sky’
Emily hymns the power of the brain. It is wider than the sky, because it can contain
the sky, and people as well. It is deeper than the sea, because it can absorb the sight of
the blue sea, as sponges absorb buckets of water. The brain is even the equal of God,
for if you were to weigh them, you would find them no more different than ‘syllable’
is from ‘sound.’ In other words, if the brain can take in all the gifts of God, how can
God be any greater?

Anyone doubting that syllable is exactly the same as sound should try saying
any syllable aloud. ‘Heft’ is an old word meaning ‘to lift in order to weigh.’

Poem 633 F601  ‘When Bells stop ringing _ Church _ begins’
Just as when church bells stop ringing, they leave us with the positive knowledge that
the service is beginning, so, when the cogs of our brain finally stop, we shall have
arrived at the Circumference or after-life, the ultimate goal of the small wheels of our brain.

‘Circumference,’ often used by Emily for the boundary between this world and the next, is here rather the next world itself. The ‘cogs of reason’ also appear in poem 1717.

**Poem 634 F604** ‘You’ll know her _ by her Foot’

At first Emily seems to be inviting the reader to guess the identity of the ‘Quaint Creature’ of this poem, as she had done with the clover of poem 380, only to reveal in the last two lines that all along she has been describing the robin, that New England bird of poem 285.

She describes the robin from the foot upwards. The smallest possible yellow hand would make more of a mark on the sand than the robin’s foot. Her leg has no button! Her vest is orange brown (rather than red, as is commonly thought). Her cap has no brim or band to hold it in place. Her April song is such that you only wish the robin’s tune in your ear would keep the actual robin quiet for a moment, while you digest the tune’s beauty.

**Poem 635 F607** ‘I think the longest Hour of all’

Emily is possibly describing an occasion when the Cars (= the railway carriages) have arrived at the station, and the Dickinson household is waiting for some important visitor to arrive from the station in the Coach (= a light, horse-drawn carriage). The seconds pass with agonising slowness, but the ‘slowest instant _ ends,’ and ‘as the Pendulum begins to count,’ the household assembles in the hall, with hearts crowded with anticipation. But Emily, who wanted to give the visitor a welcome of love as much as anybody else, at the last moment picks up her violin of welcome and ‘further North _ removes’ (= scuttles upstairs to her bedroom).

If the poem does mean something like this, it is hard not to take the expected visitor to be Samuel Bowles on his return from a long period of absence in Europe (early April to 16 November, 1862).

**Poem 636 F700** ‘The Way I read a Letter’s _ this’

No doubt Emily read all her letters in this intense way, but the last stanza would suit a reply to her ‘double’ letter of poem 494. She checks she has locked the door so that
her transport of joy in reading the letter may be safely realised. She even takes a last look around to make sure there is no disturbing mouse not previously removed. And then she reads how infinitely important she is to her beloved correspondent, and sighs for the lack of the Heaven of his/her actual presence.

In line 14 Emily seems to acknowledge her common practice of not identifying the people in her poems.

Poem 637 F701  ‘The Child’s faith is new’
At first a child believes without doubts or scruples that life is a paradise and acts upon this principle. He believes in the world, and thinks that even Caesar’s dominion is small compared to his. He is completely weak, but completely powerful.

But ‘bye and bye’ he realises that he was wrong in thinking that prickly things were pretty. The truth is that he is surrounded by men, not kings.

Richard Sewall says of this poem, ‘She knows how innocence ends, but for two stanzas she glories in it. How the poem could have come out of a blighted childhood is hard to see.’

Poem 638 F703  ‘To my small Hearth His fire came’
Judith Farr believes that this poem, like lines 4-8 of poem 631, refers to the entry of Emily’s master, Samuel Bowles, into her life. For just as Prometheus in Greek myth brought back fire to the hearths of men after Zeus had removed it, so her master brought the light of his fire to her ‘small Hearth.’ For Emily Night was converted into permanent Noon and Nature was all Day, seeing that his fire was not ‘enrolled’ in her life for a ‘Summer brief,’ and with a limit when it would decay.

Farr also notes how the legal terms ‘impanelled’ and ‘brief’ in line 5 with its double meaning came naturally to a poet whose father and brother were lawyers. In the first line Emily, as often, stresses her smallness.

Poem 639 F704  ‘My Portion is Defeat _ today’
This poem could have been spoken by an American Civil War general on the evening of a defeat in battle, or by any general in any war.

His soldiers are singing ‘less Paeans’ (originally hymns of thanks to Apollo), and are reduced to an existence which is a ‘something slower’ and more difficult to deal with than Victory Balls.
So many of his men have bones stripped of flesh or are stained with blood. Many lie so straight in death that they will never ‘stoop again.’ In the casualty wards are piles of moaning wounded, young lads with blank eyes muttering ‘scrap of Prayer’, while on the faces of the dead ‘Death’s surprise’ is as clear as if stamped in stone.

How different is Victory to the winner and to the dead loser, who would have died happier as a winner.

**Poem 640 F706  ‘I cannot love with You’**

Apart from the Valentine of poem 3, this poem to her beloved master is Emily’s longest poem. It is set out like a good sermon with three main headings and a conclusion.

Heading 1: ‘I cannot live with You’ (line 1)
Heading 2: ‘I could not die _ with You’ (line 17)
Heading 3: ‘Nor could I rise_ with You’ (line 21)
Conclusion: ‘So We must meet apart’ (line 45)

A paraphrase of the poem might be:

Section 1: To live with you would be a true life of love, but such a life has been locked away out of sight by the Sexton as though it were ‘His Porcelain’ (= the church, represented by the sexton, regards the true life of love as only happening between married persons). Our adulterous liaison would be regarded by the church as a broken thing, just like a housewife regards a broken cup as something to be thrown away and be replaced by quality Sevres china.

Section 2: I could not die at the same time as you, as one of us must wait to close the other’s eyes. At the same time such waiting would be hard. You could not do it, and I would find it impossible to look upon you dead and not be dead myself.

Section 3: But we have to steel ourselves to do it, because we cannot rise together either. If we did that, your face would outshine the face of Jesus, and his Grace would just ‘glow plain _ and foreign’ unless you ‘shone closer by.

Also, we would probably be separated at the Last Judgment, for you tried to ‘serve Heaven’ (= do the right thing and not commit adultery), whereas you so saturated my sight that I had no more eyes for such a sordid excellence as Paradise (= I didn’t care whether I did the right thing or not).
If you were judged a lost soul, I too would feel lost, even though I had been judged the best in Heaven. And if you were saved for Heaven, and I condemned to Hell, just being separated from you would be a Hell in itself.

Conclusion: So we can only meet apart in our minds (as at the beginning of poem 474), and the Door ajar between us now is not just the door of my room but is Oceans, Prayer, Despair.

**Poem 641 F707  ‘Size circumscribes _ it has no room’**
Emily pictures a giant of such a size that he totally fills his living room. If his limbs are to be stretched out at ease, there is no room for furniture or even a Gnat. He is so big that he does not even notice Gnats or Flies, or worry about the criticisms of other people.

Jane Donahue Eberwein suggests that Emily’s picture of a giant, whose ‘Size circumscribes,’ may imply that there are advantages in being as small as herself. But on the other hand being a giant means you can ignore ‘Calumnies –or Flies.’

**Poem 642 F709  ‘Me from Myself _ to banish’**
As in poem 753, Emily is both a soul or conscience or consciousness and a person. The two of them are constantly at war. If only she had the art to banish and set free the person (= Me) from the soul (= Myself), her person would be a fortress impregnable against all the demands made on her by the hearts of other people. (‘To foreign Heart’ is a marginal variant for line 4.) But, as she cannot do that, and as she is constantly being nagged at by her soul (= Myself), she will never have peace unless she subjugates the Consciousness of her soul. But as person and soul are ‘mutual Monarch,’ the person can only subjugate or satisfy the soul by abdication of ‘Me _ of Me’ (= the abdication of the person as far as the soul is concerned).

**Poem 643 F712  ‘I could suffice for Him, I knew’**
Ruth Miller gives a helpful reading of this poem. Emily is saying, ‘My beloved master and I knew we were sufficient for each other if we joined forces, but while we were still ‘Hesitating Fractions’ and not yet joined into a whole, we thought of Infinity. My lover suddenly asked, ‘Would I be the whole of your love?’ and I could not get out the syllable ‘Yes.’ For such a love would involve me giving up Nature and giving up ‘God.’
We stood there for a long time as the sun set and the stars passed over, before I spoke my decision. It was even less audible than the answer of the sea to the moon when adjusting her tides to the moon’s motion, but it was the same answer.’

Emily does not say clearly what her answer was. Miller believes that she whispered, ‘No. I am part of nature and I have to choose to love nature as well, in preference to you if need be.’ This interpretation would be in line with ‘My syllable rebelled.’ But perhaps Emily pondered the matter so long that she changed her mind and in fact whispered, ‘Yes. I am your sea. You are my moon. I adjust my tides to your motion. I choose you to be the whole of my love.’

Poem 644 F713 ‘You left me _ Sire _ two Legacies’
Emily’s master, now absent, has left behind a legacy of love which would content even God. But he has also left behind a legacy of pain which is as wide as the sea between Eternity and Time or as the sea which now exists between the two of them. Emily does not shirk acknowledging both the love and the pain, just like Ilia at the beginning of the third act of Mozart’s opera *Idomeneo*.

Poem 645 F756 ‘Bereavement in their death to feel’
Jane Donahue Eberwein suggests that this may be another poem referring to the death of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, like poems 312, 363 and 595. When Emily hears of Mrs Browning’s death, she is not mourning for a stranger, but for someone she had a soul ‘kinsmanship’ with when she read her poems. Mrs Browning’s ‘vitality’ may only have been present to Emily’s ‘Thought,’ but, when she heard that Mrs Browning had become immortal through death, she was paralysed, for such a ‘Presence’ had left this world that it was almost as though Emily’s own soul had fled.

Poem 646 F757 ‘I think to Live _ may be a Bliss’
It would not be impossible to read this poem as Emily’s thinking what her life might be like if she at last turned to Christ (= ‘Thee’ in the last line), but the poem perhaps makes more complete sense if, as Judith Farr suggests, we take the ‘Thee’ to be that beloved master whom Emily could not marry. She would then be saying:

‘I think to live with you would be a bliss if we dared to try it ( ‘allowed’ is a significant variant for ‘who dare’ in line 2). Each day would be counted as a special day like a Saint’s day, and it would be easier to feel like a king than a commoner. I
would never start apprehensively through hearing some bad news, but my life would
be ‘Certainties of Sun.’

I have imagined this life so often that it seems more real than the reality of your
absence. How bountiful would be that dream, if it came true and all my past life were
some mistake, now put right by you coming to live with me.’

Line 15 may have been suggested by the opening of *Macbeth*, where, after the
Weird Sisters’ prophecies to Macbeth, his companion says,

Why do you start, and seem to fear
Things that do sound so fair? *(1:3:51-2)*

But any elucidation of this poem pales into insignificance before the sustained,
majestic sweep of its language.

**Poem 647 F758**  ‘A little Road _ not made of Man’
Perhaps the poet is looking at the sky, and imagines that she sees there a road which
may lead to Heaven. This road is not made by man. As it is in the sky, it can only be
travelled over by ‘Cart of Butterfly’ or ‘Thill of Bee’ (*‘thill’* being the name for the
shaft attaching the carriage to the creature that draws it). Emily does not know
whether there is the Town of Heaven at the end of this road, only that she at the
moment is not being carried along it.

‘Thill’ reappears in the first line of poem 1254.

**Poem 648 F762**  ‘Promise This _ When You be Dying’
In poem 622 Emily had eagerly asked for details of some unnamed person’s deathbed.
In this poem she asks her beloved to promise that he will have herself summoned to
*his* deathbed as the chief mourner.

She wants to be the one who hears his last sigh and closes his eyes, though with
her lips and not with the coins put on the eyes of the dead.

She wants to stay when all else have gone, to see if she can restore him to life.
She would pour herself out in weeping for him, so that he would see her praising him
by pouring out her life’s bliss for him, just as he had poured out his lifeblood in
death’s bliss.
She wants to be the one who guards his narrow grave, persuading the sun, dew and grass to give it preferential treatment.

She wants to be the one who prays to Mary, if there be such a Madonna and if she would take notice of such an infidel as herself.

She wants to follow him closely through death to her own heaven with him. For has she not been mostly denied his presence in their lifetimes?

Line 12 is a compressed version of ‘for Life of Mine to restore.’

Poem 649 F759  ‘Her Sweet turn to leave the Homestead’

Normally a girl’s ‘Sweet turn to leave the Homestead’ would come through marriage, but the girl of this poem has left home on ‘the Darker Way’ to death.

There were carriages and guests, but it was as far from being a Holiday, as the sea is from being able to ‘caper over’ the curls of its previous breakers. There were more kinsmen present than kneel to salute a bride at a wedding, and in fact some carefully made garland of white flowers for a bride’s brow would have been fitter for the feet of the dead girl (‘fitter for the feet’ is a marginal variant in line 13 for ‘fitter feet’). Any suitor for her hand must now first ask her Father on High. Then, if he wants to know the girl’s own answer, seeing that all we know about her movements is that she is in the distance, he too must pass the ‘Crystal Angle’ between this life and Paradise.

Poem 650 F760  ‘Pain _ has an Element of Blank’

Pain is all consuming. It absorbs the past, because it cannot remember a time when it was not. And it absorbs the future, for it thinks that the Infinite time of the future will be nothing but future pain engendered by past pain. ( ‘Infinite’ = the time of its ending is unknown.’)

Richard Sewall points out that Emily, having towards the end of her life fallen in love with Judge Otis. P. Lord, describes ‘love’ in a letter (L750) to him in the same way as she describes ‘pain’ in this poem. She writes, ‘Tenderness has not a Date _ it comes _ and overwhelms. The time before it was _ was naught, so why establish it? And all the time to come it is, which abrogates the time.’

Poem 651 F761  ‘So much Summer’

The syntactical structure of this poem is not immediately obvious, but perhaps Emily is saying, ‘In return for me showing the Lady with the Guinea so much illegitimate
summer, would the very small bestowing of a smile seem too extravagant a reward
from her to me, if I were to tell her that a very small crumb, no bigger than what
would fit a robin’s larder, would be enough.’

Emily does not say who the Lady with the Guinea was, but the illegitimacy of
their summer together may show that she was married.

Poem 652 F456  ‘A Prison gets to be a friend’
Emily describes some ‘prison’ which she knows well. By now a ‘Kinsmanship’ exists
between the prison’s face and her own. She feels grateful for her appointed food and
the beams of her cell, and by now can derive a ‘Geometric Joy’ from walking up and
down on its familiar planks, even if the joy is not as keen as ‘plashing in the Pools’ of
childhood. She knows those times when the key is turned in the lock and her prison
‘activities’ are interrupted by the warder’s entrance (1-19).

The features of her cell, as escapeless as those of her own face, are now more
familiar to her than ‘the Cheek of Liberty.’ She has slowly given up hope of escape,
which is too steep above her head, and become content with her imprisonment. She
has avoided thoughts of Liberty as a dream which cannot be fulfilled in this life. Only
heaven might possibly set her free (20-32).

Emily’s prison could be the prison of her restricted daily routine in the
Homestead, alluded to in poem 613, or perhaps it is the prison of adulthood. The gap
between her present life and her childhood liberty is now too wide for any dream to
cross.

Whatever her prison, her contentment with it is a feature she may have borrowed
from a favourite poem, Byron’s The Prisoner of Chillon. When she was later confined
to her cousins’ house in Boston while undergoing eye treatment, she wrote in a letter
(L293) to her sister, ‘You remember the Prisoner of Chillon did not know Liberty
when it came, and asked to go back to Jail.’

Poem 653 F462  ‘Of Being is a Bird’
In this poem Emily’s fertile brain comes up with the idea that a bird in its being is
most like to a piece of down that floats through the heavens, though for complete
similarity the down would have ‘to emit a Tune _ for [the] Ecstasy’ of being a piece
of down.
Poem 654 F463  ‘A long _ long Sleep _ A famous _ Sleep’

Those who sleep in death are characterised by their complete immobility and independence. At ‘Morn’ they do not stretch a limb or open an eyelid, whoever calls them. And their centuries of idleness on their banks of stone far surpass the idleness of the dreamer on a bank of grass who raises himself to see if it is Noon.

Line 1 is one of the poet’s slowest lines.

Poem 655 F464  ‘Without this _ there is nought’

The ‘this’ of stanza 1 is the same as the ‘Whole’ of stanza 2, which, as it includes in itself all the various riches of the world as ‘Seams _ include the Ball,’ is presumably none other than God himself or Heaven. If Emily were to gain the Whole, she would need several hearts to give adequate thanks, although the gain would stay the same for each heart.

Poem 656 F465  ‘The name _ of it _ is ‘Autumn’

The red colours of autumn which brings death to the year are described in terms used of the blood which flows from the wounded and the dying on a battlefield. The red veins and arteries of trees can be seen on hill and roadside with their ‘Great Globules’ of crimson. And when the winds shake the leaves from the trees, down falls the ‘Scarlet Rain,’ sprinkling the Bonnets of passers-by and forming pools.

Finally Autumn departs upon the ‘Vermilion Wheels’ of her carriage, and disappears into the distance like Rose petals. Winter awaits.

Poem 657 F466  ‘I dwell in Possibility’

In stanza 1 Emily claims that Poetry is fairer than Prose because it is a house of Possibility. Prose restricts and imprisons and symbolises the dogmatic opinions and orthodox religious views of such as Emily’s father. The house of Poetry, on the other hand, with its more numerous windows and superior doors, allows in the questionings and the consideration of other possibilities that we see in Emily’s poems. She spoke the truth when she once said in a letter (L65) to her brother Austin, ‘Father’s real life and mine sometimes come into collision.’

In stanza 2 she claims that the house of Poetry in which she lives hides her from hostile, uncomprehending eyes as would an impregnable forest, but at the same time allows her spirit to soar to the gables of the sky in speculation.
In stanza 3 she says that her only visitors are those fairest muses or angels who inspire her poetry, while her own occupation is to spread wide her imprisoned, female hands and to gather and then describe in her poems intimations of paradise.

Emily had spoken of her angelic visitors in poem 298, which begins

 Alone, I cannot be _  
 For Hosts _ do visit me.

**Poem 658 F468** ‘Whole Gulfs _ of Red, and Fleets _ of Red’

In this sunset poem the red shapes of the sunset are imagined as being people who have been appointed to appear in the West as their own ‘specific Ground’ in ‘Authorised Arrays.’ Like actors in a play, they appear at their due time, and, having played their part, bow and disappear.

**Poem 659 F470** ‘That first Day, when you praised Me, Sweet’

It was a red-letter day for Emily when her loved one praised her. That was a jewel that glowed, even when placed between the gold of her previous life, a minor matter now, and the vaster gold of the riches of the world.

Judith Farr takes the loved one in this poem to be Sue, but Rebecca Paterson takes her to be Kate Anthon. The praise that began at the time of this poem may be continued in poem 738.

**Poem 660 F472** ‘Tis good _ the looking back of Grief’

Emily’s advice for dealing with a Woe is to remember a past day which seemed the funeral ‘of All Conceived Joy,’ and to realise how gradually the grass grew over the gravestone of that Grief and summer returned. Even if today’s Woe seems as much bigger than the past Grief as is the Sea than one ‘Unremembered Drop,’ they are both water and will depart and disappear in the same way.

**Poem 661 F1056** ‘Could I but ride indefinite’

As in poem 652, Emily finds herself in a prison, but the whimsical, comic tone of most of this poem is different from the seriousness of poem 652, even if the prison is still the too definite and fixed routine of her life at home. She wants to be as free as the Meadow Bee, settling now here now there, or better still to run away altogether
with no Policeman figure in pursuit. She wants to row in ‘Nowhere’ all day, and anchor outside the bar of the harbour, unlike her wish in poem 249.

The comedy reaches its height in the picture of the frightened Policeman jumping over whole peninsulas in his efforts to escape from the diminutive Emily, but ‘marry whom I may’ in line 6 touches a sore spot, and the comedy disappears in the last two lines.

Poem 662 F1057 ‘Embarrassment of one another’
Just as embarrassment limits our revelations to one another, so God is embarrassed and cautious about revealing things to us out loud. Divinity dwells still and silent ‘under seal.’

Poem 663 F274 ‘Again _ his voice is at the door’
Emily imagines a reunion with her beloved master. It seems to take place some time after their realisation that marriage was impossible. She feels the old excitement as she hears his voice at the front door. He has not seen her in ‘this [new] life’ of their separation in which her looks have faded, so she takes a flower to make up for her face which might not please his eye (1-8).

She crosses the Hall with confused steps, passes through the door into the parlour where he has been told to wait, and looks upon the face which means the whole world to her. Their talk is apparently quite random, but under the surface each is sounding shyly how deep the other had gone during the separation (9-16).

Leaving Carlo at home, they go for a walk accompanied by the moon, but, when the moon goes behind clouds, they are alone _ except that on the walk they are in heaven, so no more alone than an angel on entering heaven or than all those ‘veiled faces’ that are already there (17-24).

The reunion meant so much to Emily that she would give her lifeblood ‘to live that hour _ again,’ her only stipulation being that her loved one should count the drops and be aware of the price she was paying as her blood stained the ground.

Ruth Miller gives a detailed account of the complexity and power of this poem, but Richard Sewall is not convinced by her suggestion that the ‘He’ of the last stanza is God.

Poem 664 F279 ‘Of all the Souls that stand create’
The poem is made up of one short sentence (lines 1-2), and one long sentence (lines 3-12). The long sentence itself is made up of a long ‘when’ clause (lines 3-10) and a brief main clause (lines 11-12).

The Soul that Emily has selected in lines 1-2 could well be Sue, as Emily had made the same claim about her in poem 270. In lines 3-12 she declares that when this life is over for them and they stand at the Last Judgment, she will proudly point to Sue as the one vital creature she chose in preference to all the other ‘clods of earth’ that surrounded her at Amherst.

Lines 3-10 brilliantly picture the Last Judgment. Body (= that which was) and Spirit (= that which is) are now separated, as our brief life is finished like sand running through our fingers. There is no hiding place for the Spirit as the ‘Mists _ are carved away.’ The saved show their ‘royal Front.’

**Poem 665 F286  ‘Dropped into the Ether Acre’**

This poem with its startling beginning is a surreal fantasy about death. Clothed in the earth of the grave, we shall be dropped into the domain of the Ether. The ‘Bonnet’ and the ‘Brooch’ perhaps symbolise the soul we shall have for ever. We shall journey through Down to meet the Earl who is God, but we take with us the ‘pearl of great price,’ *(Matthew 13:46)* and only blonde horses, a silver coach and a diamond whip are good enough for this momentous journey.

*(1863. Emily is thirty three. She writes 142 poems)*

**Poem 666 F752  ‘Ah, Teneriffe!’**

Judith Farr (G) tells how this poem ‘penciled, folded in a little packet with “Sue” on top,’ can still be seen in the collection of Dicksoniana at Harvard. Emily also included another copy of the poem in packet 18. Johnson prints the poem as sent to Sue, Franklin the packet version.

The peak of Teneriffe, in geography a dormant volcano on the largest Canary island, in the poem stands for Sue herself. (The Dickinson family thought the ‘Vesuvius at home’ of poem 1705 was intended for Sue.) Just as the mountain of Teneriffe is heedless of the purple sunset displays of nature that take place before her day by day and indeed retreats from them, so Sue is heedless of Emily’s adoration which blazes a hundred yards away unnoticed. Sue is still and unmoved, made of
steel, covered in unmeltable ice, with granite thighs that do not open in welcome, not
even aware that she and Emily are parted. All Emily can do is to go on kneeling in
adoration, and wait for Sue to notice her once more.

In the packet version the sexual overtones of line 7 are toned down to ‘Eye of
Granite _ and Ear of Steel.’ ‘Teneriffe’ is a four syllable word.

**Poem 667 F787** ‘Bloom upon the Mountain _ stated’
Judith Farr reminds us that Emily from her bedroom was ‘in daily communion with
sunrise and sunset as they coloured the Pelham hills,’ and Emily seems to be writing
this particular sunset poem while actually watching a sunset: in line 13 ‘While I state’
presumably means ‘While I am writing [this poem].’ The poem develops as follows:

Emily states or notes down that the sunset on the mountain is like the
efflorescence or blooming of a flower, which bursts forth, develops and dies, though
the sunset is an unlisted flower and not saddled with any name (1-4).

If she could sow the seed of the flower sunset in the lines of her poem, her regal
sunset of purple would enrich us all day long, and there would be no need to travel
away from Amherst to see a tropical twilight (5-8).

No one knows who comes to the mountain to till the soil for the sunset to bloom,
or who should have the fame for the efflorescence and fading of the sunset (9-12).

All she can say is that while she is writing the poem, the petals of the sunset fill
the whole sky before dying away in rest, and that the mountain itself gives no
indication that he has been moved by the experience (13-20).

As in poems 307 and 308 Emily may be favourably comparing her poem about a
sunset with an actual sunset.

**Poem 668 F721** “Nature” is what we see’
The structure of this poem is clearer when printed as three stanzas of four lines each:
then ‘Nature’ appears as the first word in each stanza.

First Emily looks at Nature as she might look at a painting, and guesses that it is
a foretaste of Heaven. Then she listens to the sounds of Nature as a music lover and
guesses that it is emblematic of the harmony of the spheres. Finally she admits that,
although she knows what Nature is, she cannot unpack this deeply-held belief any
further. As George Whicher puts it, ‘the Puritan conception of nature as a visible
manifestation of God was so ingrained in her….that she took it for granted.’
Poem 669 F590  ‘No Romance sold unto’
No novel bought in a bookshop enthrals us as much as the story of our own life, for a novel has to be diluted to plausibility. As Aristotle said, one of the tasks of the playwright is to make impossibilities believable. But if we were to reduce our own story to what was believable, it would no longer be true.

Rebecca Paterson points out that Emily’s own biographers have sometimes been tempted to ‘dilute to Plausibility’ her life.

Poem 670 F407  ‘One need not be a Chamber _ to be Haunted’
You do not need to be a Chamber to be haunted by ghosts, as your own Brain has Corridors full of them. Indeed it is safer to meet an ‘External Ghost,’ even to be chased by the stones of a ruined abbey, than in solitude to be confronted by your own self with its memories of past sins and its knowledge of its own inadequacies. An ‘Assassin hid in our Apartment’ is much less alarming than our interior self. We may borrow a revolver and bolt the door against external enemies, while forgetting that we are shut in with that more than superior spectre, our own diseased mind.

Richard Sewall thinks that this poem may have been suggested to Emily by Thomas a Kempis’ sentence in her copy of his *Imitation of Christ*, ‘Wheresoever thou goest, thou carriest thyself with thee, and shalt ever find thyself.’ Emily herself said in a letter (L399) to her friend, Mrs Holland, ‘The Giant in the Human Heart was never met outside.’

Poem 671 F744  ‘She dwelleth in the Ground’
We are saved from guessing the name of the flower in this riddle poem, because Fanny Norcross, Emily’s cousin, noted on her copy of the poem that Emily had sent it to her ‘with a crocus,’ and the crocus does indeed dwell and live her life in that ground where the daffodils are biding their time before they appear next.

The crocus has Heaven as her mother city, and the Universe is the Maid which attends upon her coming. It belongs to the Firmament to bring her grace, hue, fairness and renown into being, but it belongs to Emily to pick and gather her for her cousin.

This explanation of the poem is derived from Judith Farr’s book, *The Gardens of Emily Dickinson.* In her earlier book, *The Passion of Emily Dickinson,* she takes the ‘She’ of the poem to be a buried woman.
Poem 672 F638  ‘The Future _ never spoke’
Emily personifies the Future. Not even in the sign language of the deaf and dumb
does he give a syllable of information about himself. The totally unexpected just
happens, say the death of a young child. What ‘Preparation _ Escape _ or Substitute’
can there be for that? The Future has no concern for whether he brings bane or
blessing, but simply does what Fate tells him to do.

The dumbness of the Future is what, for example, makes marriage a lottery, or,
in Karl Popper’s language, makes ‘piecemeal social engineering’ preferable to
Utopian blueprints.

Poem 673 F285  ‘The Love a Life can show Below’
Emily believes that human affection (line 1) or Music (line 7) or nature (lines 8-12)
can all be filaments or minute fibres ‘of that diviner thing’ which is Heaven or God
(lines 2-3). But they are all no more than transient glimmers of the world beyond. God
is nearly glimpsed at Noon but then dies away or faints. He has smitten the tinder of
the sun into a blaze, giving us a chance to believe, but then he ‘hinders Gabriel’s
wing,’ stopping him from giving us the whole truth about heaven in this life. Music
only hints. Summer mixes the pain of uncertainty with the beauty which foreshadows
heaven. Sunrise may ‘enamour’ but sunset may be ‘harrowing.’

This diviner thing invites us (to believe), appals us (with the prospect), endows us
(with hope), flits and glimmers (as being transient), proves (for a moment) but then
dissolves. Finally, in the last two lines, Emily suggests that it can get such a grip on us
that we momentarily glimpse Paradise.

Poem 674 F592  ‘The Soul that hath a Guest’
Let us suppose that Emily is at home reading *Antony and Cleopatra*, and so can say
that she has Shakespeare as a Guest. She does not need to go into Amherst for
company, as she has a ‘Diviner Crowd at Home.’ Anyway it would be discourteous of
her to leave home when she is being visited by ‘the Emperor of Men.’

Poem 675 F772  ‘Essential Oils _ are wrung’
On the surface the first stanza accurately states that the ‘attar of roses’ perfume can
only be produced from rose petals by the sun making the rose grow and the petals
then being screwed down in a press to distil the perfume. But Emily has already told us in poem 448 that the poet too can be said to distil an attar as he makes his poems, so that we may take the ‘Essential Oils’ produced as being poems as well as perfume. They also need both the sunshine of inspiration and the hard labour of distillation.

Similarly on the surface the second stanza says that although ordinary roses in the garden decay, the rose which has been turned into a sachet of attar oil in some Lady’s drawer may still smell of summer even when the Lady herself lies buried in the endless rosemary of remembrance. But this process is also a true forecast of what can happen to perfectly distilled poems, including Emily’s. Indeed she literally stored her poems away in a drawer for Lavinia to find after her death, but they will go on making summer long after the poet herself is dead.

This poem may have been suggested by Thomas Higginson’s precept that ‘Literature is an attar of roses, one distilled drop from a million blossoms,’ contained in his Letter to a Young Contributor of April 1862.

Poem 676 F878 ‘Least Bee that brew’
As in poem 486, Emily again sides with the small. The smallest bee with the smallest amount of honey is still contentedly used by summer to make up the Amber Quantity of honey for that year.

Poem 677 F876 ‘To be alive _ is Power’
As in poem 632 Emily had declared that the human ‘brain is just the weight of God,’ so in this poem she declares that existence in this life is ‘omnipotence _ Enough’ without the addition of any eternal life. To be alive and competent to will the good is to have the power of a God. If such is our Finitude, how can the ‘Maker _ of Ourselves’ be an advance on that?

Emily held this view consistently. A note (L347) to Sue of 1870 consisted of just the sentence, ‘Oh Matchless Earth _ We underrate the chance to dwell in Thee.’ And poem 1408 written in 1877 begins

The Fact that Earth is Heaven
Whether Heaven is Heaven or not.
Poem 678 F482  ‘Wolfe demanded during dying’
On 12 September 1759 James Wolfe, the English general, defeated Montcalm, his French counterpart, in the crucial battle for Quebec. Wolfe died at the end of the battle itself, and Montcalm died the next morning. Montcalm finds more consolation in defeat than does the defeated general in poem 639 by saying to himself, ‘My own surrender to death is sweet, because it takes the sting out of my surrender of liberty.’

Like poem 675, this poem may owe something to Letter to a Young Contributor, for in it Higginson wrote, ‘General Wolfe, on the eve of battle, said of Gray’s Elegy, “Gentlemen, I would rather have written that poem than taken Quebec.’

Poem 679 F773  ‘Conscious am I in my Chamber’
Emily is alone in her Chamber with a presence. He has no shape, neither does he speak, so she does not know his identity through sight or hearing. The intuition that he is there is more courteous than offering him a seat. All he allows her is the sense of his presence.

If either were to speak to the other, the genuineness of the encounter would somehow be invalidated, but to weary of his presence would be odder than a particle of space with his ‘Vast Society’ knowing Monotony. Whether he visits and stays with others or not, she does not know. But her instinct is that her visitor is ‘Immortality,’ or God.

Poem 680 F724  ‘Each Life converges to some Centre’
We all have a Centre or a Goal, whether we mention it to others or not. We scarcely dare think of it, for it is too fair a prospect to be spoilt by the presumption that it will happen. Instead we must adore this heaven with caution as it is so ‘Brittle,’ and must regard its achievement as hopeless as touching the Rainbow. Even so we are not to give up. The more distant the goal, the surer must be our perseverance. After all the sky seemed immensely high to ‘the Saints’ slow diligence.’ And if we do not reach our goal in this life, we can try again in Eternity.

It is natural to wonder what Emily regarded as her own Goal. ‘Fame from writing poems’ comes to mind, but this goal hardly fits the last stanza, so perhaps more likely is the goal of absence of fear or of complete love or complete belief.
Thomas Johnson in his Variorum Edition tells us that Emily also sent just the last stanza of this poem as a note to Sue and signed it ‘Springfield.’ As the Bowles family lived in Springfield, it may be, as Johnson suggests, that Emily is light-heartedly imagining Mr Bowles replying to some invitation from Sue by saying, ‘Sorry, we can’t come to your party. But ask us again in heaven.’

**Poem 681 F862**  ‘Soil of Flint, if steady tilled’
The copy of this poem which Emily sent to Sue consists of just the four lines printed by Johnson. The copy in packet 30 has an additional four lines at the beginning of the poem. They are printed by Franklin and read

On the Bleakness of my Lot  
Bloom I strove to raise _  
Late _ my Garden of a Rock  
Yielded Grape _ and Maise.

Both lengths of poem express the same thought, that hard work can fructify the bleakest allotment, just as the Libyan Sun can fructify a palm seed, even in the desert.

**Poem 682 F888**  ‘Twould ease _ a Butterfly’
Emily, speaking to herself, says that, as she is not a Blossom, she is not able to ‘ease _ a Butterfly [or] elate _ a Bee.’ But, given the choice, she would rather be the moment of the blossom than the seeming eternity of the bee’s existence, provided that she faded or died ‘unto Divinity,’ and provided that her short ‘Dying _ Lifetime’ was ample with or full of those heightened moments, such as the one she now gets from looking just momentarily at the Eye in the centre of a flower.

The phrase ‘Dying _ Lifetime’ may encapsulate the idea that everything begins to die from the moment of its birth.

**Poem 683 F579**  ‘The Soul unto itself’
Emily imagines that the Soul is made up of a ‘Chooser’ and a ‘Judge.’ The Judge is a ‘friend’ of the Chooser or a ‘spy’ causing agony to him, depending on whether the Chooser makes good or bad choices.
If the Chooser is secure against condemnation from the Judge, it need fear no treason from anywhere else. The Chooser should ‘stand in Awe’ only of the Judge, ‘its Sovereign.’

In a letter (L942) of 1884 to her niece Martha, Emily wrote, ‘Be true to yourself, Mattie…….and I shall be prouder of you than I am, which would be unbecoming.’

**Poem 684 F499  ‘Best Gains _ must have the Losses’ Test’**

In the summer of 1862 Emily had not received the expected visit of her mentor, Thomas Higginson. In a letter to him the following winter she includes this two line fragment of verse, which tells him that the gain of his company is best shown to be a gain by the fact that she lost it for the summer of 1862. She softens the implied criticism of Higginson in the actual letter by pretending that she spoke the two lines to her dog Carlo, and that her ‘Shaggy Ally assented (L280).’

Poem 560 was also based on the beginning of this letter to Higginson, and poem 683 was enclosed with the letter.

**Poem 685 F500  ‘Not “Revelation” _ tis _ that waits’**

A later paragraph of this same letter to Higginson also includes poem 685. She writes, ‘I was thinking, today, _ as I noticed, that the “Supernatural,” was only the Natural, disclosed _

Not “Revelation” _ tis _ that waits,
But our unfurnished eyes _

In other words, if only our eyes were skilful enough, we would see the supernatural in the natural. As Blake puts it, ‘If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear as it is, infinite.’ Or as Elizabeth Barrett Browning writes in her poem *Aurora Leigh*

Earth’s crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God;
But only he who sees, takes off his shoes –
The rest sit round and pick blackberries.
Poem 686 F861  ‘They say that “Time assuages”

Emily characteristically wonders if a commonly held belief, in this poem the belief that ‘Time is a great healer,’ is true after all, and, having concluded that it is not, adds the point that if Time were a Remedy, it would prove that there had been no Malady in the first place.

Emily, also characteristically, does not say what malady was teaching her this lesson at the time of writing the poem, but three years later she quoted the second stanza in a letter (L319) to Thomas Higginson to show him that she was still suffering from the death of her dog, Carlo, six months after it had happened.

Laurence Whistler’s description of his wife, Jill, in his memoir The Initials in the Heart is reminiscent of Emily’s attitude. He writes, ‘Strong opinions she had, and expressed them with zeal, but as like as not would break off with “Well, I don’t know…,” having instantly seen how an opposite case could be argued. Her mind was open.’

Poem 687 F196  ‘I’ll send the feather from my Hat!’

This poem was the whole of a letter signed ‘Emily’ and addressed ‘Mr Bowles.’ She was hoping that the feather from her hat, enclosed with the letter, would cause her sovereign master to relent from some unspecified harsh treatment of her, just as the parents of a long dead child can have their adamantine shell of absence of grief cracked open by the sight of some trinket which belonged to their infant.

As in poem 682 Emily uses ‘faded’ as a synonym for ‘dead.’

Poem 688 F193  ‘“Speech” _ is a prank of Parliament’

This poem comes in a letter of early 1862 sent to Samuel Bowles. The letter (L252) begins, ‘I cant thank you any more _ you are thoughtful so many times, you grieve me always _ now. The old words are numb _ and there a’nt any new ones….When you come to Amherst….I will tell you about the picture _ if I can, I will _’ and then follows the poem to end the letter.

The combination of prose and poem seems to say that, although Emily has thanked Samuel Bowles often in the past, she now cannot find new words for the present situation and is numb. He has caused her such heaviness of heart that it stops her from the ordinary, easy automatic reactions of speech and tears. Her only answer is silence, as Ruth Miller says, ‘a quaint response for one so skilled in the verbal art.’
The nature of the picture mentioned by Emily remains a mystery.

Poem 689 F284  ‘The Zeroes _ taught us _ Phosphorus’

Franklin prints the version of this poem contained in packet 22, whereas Johnson prints the copy of this poem which Emily sent to Samuel Bowles. In line 3 Franklin has ‘handling’ for ‘playing,’ in line 5 ‘to equal Ought’ for ‘to balance Odd,’ and in line 6 ‘Eclipses _ Suns _ imply’ for ‘If White _ a Red _ must be.’ These changes hardly affect the meaning of the poem.

On the back of the copy sent to Samuel Bowles Emily added the words, ‘I couldn’t let Austin’s note go _ without a word _ Emily.’ Jane Donahue Eberwein helpfully explains that Bowles had started referring to Emily as ‘the Queen Recluse’ and that in a letter to Austin he had jokingly inquired about the musical entertainments his sister enjoyed in heaven and expressing sympathy for her achievement in overcoming the world. Emily responds by sending Bowles this poem, adding that she couldn’t let Bowles’ note to Austin go without a reply.

In the poem itself she reminds him of an often expressed view of hers that experiences are known from their opposites: highly inflammable phosphorus from zero temperatures, fire from ice, dry tinder from its power when ignited, red from white and vitality from paralysis. The sting of this is in the tail, for by the claim that vitality is learnt from paralysis, she is presumably implying that her reclusiveness and her present paralysis from socialising is in fact teaching her about vitality and the things that matter in life.

Poem 690 F195  ‘Victory comes late’

In this poem Emily is saying, ‘If victory comes too late, we are too frozen to appreciate its taste. We only wanted a drop, but God had spread his table so high we could barely reach it. We were not asking for ‘the Eagle’s Golden Breakfast,’ as this would have choked us. A crumb or a cherry would have been enough for us Robins with our little mouths. We just wanted God to keep his promise to sparrows, who know what it is to go hungry for a little Love.’ (Matthew 6:26 and 10:29)

Emily originally sent this poem as a complete letter (L257) to Samuel Bowles, so it seems likely that in it she is referring to their relationship. Bowles is the ‘God’ of the poem, and Emily is complaining that she has not received from him the crumb of comfort which she longed for. Whether the crumb she wanted was a crumb of love
and affection or a crumb of true appreciation of her poems is not clear. It may have been both.

The Harvard editors of Emily’s letters suggest that the poem may refer to Frazer Stearns’ death in the Civil War on 14 March 1862 (see the notes on poem 426), and quote Samuel Bowles’ words in a letter to Austin, ‘The news [of Stearns’ death] took away all the remaining life. I did not care for victory, for anything now.’ But it is difficult to see what the ‘drop’ and the ‘crumb’ could refer to on this reading of the poem.

Poem 691 F272 ‘Would you like summer? Taste of ours’
This poem concludes a letter (L229) written to Samuel Bowles in February 1861 when he was ill. In the letter Emily tells her friend that she and Sue and Vinnie so often discuss his illness, and adds, ‘We pray for your new health _ the prayer that goes not down _ when they shut the church _ We offer you our cups _ stintless _ as to the Bee _ the Lily, her new liquors.’ These words are then immediately followed by the poem.

On the surface the poem seems to be saying that Emily, Sue and Vinnie have such love for him that they could be a storehouse for all his wants and a panacea for all his troubles. They just need to know what he wants from them most (line 9).

But Sewall suggests that underneath the surface Emily is referring more narrowly to herself, and is offering him for his cure not so much literal spices or berries or down as her own poems, which can be as life-giving as the items which symbolise them. She has certainly written enough poems about death to know of a ‘fairy medicine,’ if there is one.

Poem 692 715 ‘The Sun kept setting _ setting _ still’
In a bold flight of the imagination Emily gives us the words which a person on the point of dying might have said to herself. To paraphrase the person’s words: ‘I could feel my Sun setting, although in the outside world it was still Noon. The Dew of Dusk was only upon my face and not upon the Grass. My feet were drowsing in death, though my fingers were still alive. I seemed to make no sound. I could still see the familiar light of day, but I know I am dying and I am not afraid.’

Emily imagines what dying might be like, but refrains from guessing what might be beyond that boundary.
Poem 693 F716 ‘Shells from the Coast mistaking’

Judith Farr links this poem with poem 39, the ‘shells’ like the ‘birdlings’ in poem 39 being Emily’s old school friends with whom she mistakenly thought she was fully in love. Then in later life she found herself playing host to Sue, the ‘pearl’ of poem 452 and the ‘pearl of great price’ of which St Matthew speaks (13:46). When she murmured to Sue that it was too late now for school-girl crushes, the pearl replied, ‘Let me show you what true love is like.’

Ruth Miller, on the other hand, links the poem with poem 320 ‘We play at Paste/till qualified, for Pearl,’ and interprets the ‘shells’ as being Emily’s earlier, sometimes sentimental poems and the ‘pearl’ as her more mature writing style. But the details of the second stanza seem to sit less happily with this interpretation.

Poem 694 F717 ‘The Heaven vests for each’

This poem seems to describe the power of a summer’s day to give us a foretaste of heaven. Sir Walter Scott in his Journal entry for 18July 1827 records his experience of this when he writes, ‘My nerves have for these two or three last days been susceptible of an acute excitemt from the slightest causes; the beauty of the evening, the sighing of the summer breeze brings the tears into my eyes.’ Emily’s poem says in effect:

For each of us the Heaven clothes itself in that smaller glory of a summer day which we bashfully crave ‘the grace to worship.’ (1-4)

We persistently ask to see such glory, but, when it comes upon us, we half shrink from it and want to wait until the ‘faint’ and unabiding ‘Tabernacles’ of this life have become ‘full Eternity.’ (5-8)

The appearance of this glory can happen in a second, if our prayer that we may see it is successful. It is as quick as would be a star, in answer to our prayer, coming to this earth of despair. (9-12)

And yet this summer day glory is such a common act of mercy on the part of God that we almost cease to be afraid. It enables all of us to adore him. (13-16)

Poem 695 F720 ‘As if the Sea should part’

As in poem 550, Emily describes our groping towards Eternity as an endless series of recessions. Brita Lindberg-Seyested points out how the structure of the poem, eight
lines of exploration in an ‘as if’ clause followed by one line of conclusion, mirrors the meaning of the poem.

Poem 696 F725  ‘Their Height in Heaven comforts not’
Ruth Miller sees the ‘acid verse’ of this poem as Emily taking the opposite view from Thomas Browne who asserted in his *Religio Medici*, ‘I believe…that the souls of men know neither contrary nor corruption…that the souls of the faithful, as they leave earth, take possession of heaven.’

But to Emily this glory of the faithful is no comfort, because she cannot see it. We would have been better off, she claims, if we had been left with just this imperfect life. (1-4)

It is all ‘Supposition’ and ‘Perhaps’ across the ‘Frontier’ of death. This leaves us feeling insecure. (5-8)

This world’s wealth may be smaller, but I had counted it and experienced it until it pleased me with my narrow vision’ better than the ‘larger values’ of some possible heaven. For, however true that show or display of a heaven may be, the evidence for it is such that we can only timidly say ‘I don’t know.’ (9-16)

Poem 697 F726  ‘I could bring You Jewels _ had I a mind to’
This poem was probably sent to Sue and was accompanied by a meadow flower known as a ‘jewelweed.’ Typically Emily thinks that this ‘little Blaze’ from an Amherst meadow will be a better gift for Sue than the jewels and perfumes and berries from exotic places which she has already had in abundance. Nothing can match this yellow flower on its emerald green stalk. A better present could not even be found for Bobadillo himself.

Francisco de Bobadillo was the Spanish governor of St Domingo, who had Columbus arrested and sent back to Spain. In Trollope’s novel *The Belton Estate* Capt. Aylmer says scornfully to Clara with reference to a rival, ‘You like men to swear at you, and to swagger like Bobadils and to misbehave themselves.’

Poem 698 F727  ‘Life _ is what we make it’
Emily often expressed doubts about God, but in this poem she shows the same unwavering trust in Jesus that she had shown in poems 225 and 241.
We do make Life by our own choices, but Death for men is unknowable. However Jesus himself, trusting no stranger who could betray us by lying, became acquainted with death as the ‘Tender Pioneer’ and gave us his own endorsement that we could pass through it safely to Paradise. As Emily puts it in poem 1433, ‘God sent his son to test the Plank [= the bridge between this life and the next] /and he pronounced it firm.’

**Poem 699 F728**  ‘The Judge is like the Owl’

Emily’s lawyer father had no doubt remarked that a judge was as wise as an owl, and so Emily concludes it would be appropriate to have an owl nesting on the premises. It so happens that, on going to the barn the other day (which was just a few yards from the house), she had noticed a yellow piece of timber in which an oak-nesting owl might build. The only price the owl would have to pay for his house would be a midnight tune, chosen by himself.

**Poem 700 F730**  ‘You’ve seen Balloons set _ Haven’t You’

We have all seen a balloon set out and ascend, as graceful as a swan, on its unearthly, diamond mission. It floats on a yellow sea, seemingly lord and master of the air. It wavers occasionally, but, as long as it ascends, the crowd applauds. Then it goes out of control, catches in a tree, punctures and ‘tumbles in the Sea.’ The crowd returns home, disappointed.

As Jane Donahue Eberwein suggests, the balloon punctured by the tree could symbolise those people who try to soar above this life and gain a glimpse of eternity, but whose efforts to do so are invariably frustrated by one of the brute facts of the world (see also poem 1215). And other people may be as callously indifferent to their attempts as were the ‘Clerks in [their] Counting Rooms’ to the fate of the balloon (lines 19-20).

**Poem 701 F731**  ‘A Thought went up my mind today’

Emily records a common mental phenomenon, although for her the ‘Thought’ may have been the idea for a poem. If so the whole mental experience becomes another poem!

**Poem 702 F732**  ‘A first Mute Coming’
Chapter 19 of *Genesis* tells how Lot insistently offered hospitality to two young men who did not tell him they were angels. On the next day, when Lord destroyed the towns of Sodom and Gomorrah for their sins, the angels led Lot by hand out of the city, telling him not to look back. Lot obeyed the angels and reached safety but his wife ‘looked back and she turned into a pillar of salt (*Genesis* 19:20).’

‘A first Mute Coming/In the Stranger’s House’ presumably refers to the angels visiting Lot for the first time, but not immediately revealing their identity. ‘A first fair Going/When the Bells rejoice’ may then refer to Lot being guided by angels for the first time and led from his house to safety, when the towns were destroyed. Finally the second stanza says that only Lot gained from his first experience of receiving a benefit from the angels in return for his hospitality, because only he had the faith to obey their instructions.

In the second stanza the words ‘for Lot’ go primarily with the two lines that precede them.

**Poem 703 F733**  ‘Out of sight? What of that?
Heaven may seem ‘Out of sight’ but the bird reaches it, oblivious of any danger.
Similarly we ourselves should try to find it in this life. Even if we fail, that is better than just debating whether it exists.

Our greatest reason for seeking in hope is that earth and heaven are a continuum, not two completely different places. Blue is the same blue in both of them, amber the same amber and dew the same dew. It’s just that heaven and earth bashfully hide from each other, being too shy to show themselves.

**Poem 704 F734**  ‘No matter _ now _ Sweet’
In this poem Emily is probably talking to an unresponsive Sue. While Emily remains ‘that dull Girl,’ Sue’s coldness towards Emily may not matter to Sue. But when Emily becomes an ‘Earl’ with crests and eagles and ermine, Sue may regret not giving the dull girl the word or smile which she no longer needs as an Earl.

Emily’s envisaged change of status and gender in this poem seems more teasing than serious, but she may have in mind that some recognition of her ability as a poet would make her an Earl. She had also seen herself as an Earl in relation to Sue in poem 452, but without any gain to herself from that position.
Poem 705 F775  ‘Suspense _ is Hostiller _ than Death’

To be in suspense about whether there is a heaven or not is more hostile than Death itself. Death is a complete change but at least it is final, whereas the suspense continually renews itself. Time and again our certainty that death is ‘Annihilation [is] plated fresh with [strong hopes of] Immortality.’

‘Plated’ implies ‘being given a strong cover of.’

Poem 707 F777  ‘Life, and Death, and Giants’

Ruth Miller unravels this gnomic poem as follows: Emily pessimistically regards the seemingly gigantic occurrences of Life and Death as minor and insignificant, merely material for being ground up in the ‘Hopper of the Mill.’ We are like a ‘Beetle at the Candle,’ so that our death is never far away, and our life’s fame is played on the tinny, insubstantial instrument of the Fife. The Beetle and the Fife between them proclaim that what happens is accidental and without cause. There is no grand message.

Poem 707 F779  ‘The Grace _ Myself _ might not obtain’

A friend has withheld some ‘Grace’ from Emily, so the poet sends her a flower together with this poem. As Emily feels so close to flowers that she can claim to inhabit them, and as the flower’s face is only Emily’s face reflected, perhaps the friend will confer upon the flower the grace she withheld from Emily.

Poem 708 F784  ‘I sometimes drop it, for a Quick’

The ‘it’ in line 1 is the ‘Woe so monstrous’ of line 4. Emily does not say what the woe was. Ruth Miller suggests it may have been the anguish she felt at her failure to get sufficient recognition and acknowledgement for her poems.

She sometimes drops her anguish and returns to the ‘Quick’ or life. At least she thinks what delight it would be to be alive again, however mad it may be to regard this as a possibility. Nobody would need to know it had happened (1-4).

The woe is so bad that, if she did she not have the respite of these thoughts, her death would seem too distant an event (5-8).

‘Delirium diverts’ the man about to be executed, but Emily is not delirious. Sailors, about to be drowned and ‘close on Paradise,’ are asleep in their hammocks and do not have the agony of knowing that the line thrown to save them had severed on ‘a Reef _ crawled easy from the Sea.’ They do not know the ‘Stroke [of death]
until [they’re] past the Pain.’ But Emily is fully conscious and knows only too well how easily she could have been saved from her ‘monstrous Woe’ by Samuel Bowles or Thomas Higginson, if they had shown awareness of her unique poetic skill.

**Poem 709 F788** ‘Publication _ is the Auction’

Emily was consistently opposed to the ‘Publication’ of her poems. When Thomas Higginson had suggested in the previous year that she might publish them, in her letter (L265) of reply she said, ‘I smile when you suggest that I delay “to publish,” _ that being [as] foreign to my thought, as Firmament to Fin –.’ In other words, if published, she would not only be a fish out of water, but a fish in the sky.

To make this refusal harmonise with poem 708, it has to be assumed either that Emily saw publication of her poems as something completely different from recognition of their true worth by a few experts, or that she dealt psychologically with the absence of such recognition by a refusal to publish.

Anyway in this poem she roundly declares that only poverty might possibly justify publishing her poems and putting her Mind up for Auction. But in fact even if she were poor and wrote her poems in a ‘Garret’ rather than in her comfortable, spacious bedroom, she would still prefer to go to God with the ‘snow’ of her artistic skill and her integrity pure white rather than sully it by selling it for money.

The thoughts of her poems were given her by God. She is the ‘Corporeal’ steward of his gift. She will not demean her ‘Human Spirit’ by putting a price on his gift of her poems. It would even be less bad to parcel up God’s gift of *Air* and sell it, or to become a merchant of his heavenly *Grace*!

**Poem 710 F765** ‘The Sunrise runs for Both’

The ‘Both’ in this poem are presumably a pair of lovers. If they are in fact Emily and Samuel Bowles, the poem may refer to the time of Bowles’ absence in Europe. The lovers still both experience the same sequence of day and night, but for Emily the sequence happens five hours later.

As the day unwinds, eventually ‘One Breadth’ of daytime covers the two of them, remote though they are from each other (1-6).

Night lights the wicks of her lamps for both of them, however great the distance between, and eventually both see the Aurora Borealis in the violet-coloured sky (7-12).
Midnight clasps the homes of both Europe and America in her ‘Dusky Arms,’ and for a time both Emily and Samuel lie upon her, but Samuel is deeply asleep ‘upon Her Bosom’ while Emily has only just reached ‘Her Hem’ (13-18).

Poem 711 F770  ‘Strong Draughts of Their Refreshing Minds’
In her unusually solitary life Emily placed a great reliance upon books. In poem 593 she had said how it was an ‘Antidote to turn/to [the] Tomes of solid witchcraft [of Mrs Browning],’ and in this poem she describes how, once she has imbibed ‘Strong Draughts’ from her favourite authors such as George Eliot (see poem 1562), her mind is ‘elastic’ enough to carry their ‘Sealed Wine’ through her desert periods, as if she had the ability of a Camel to carry her own drink inside her. The Mind of a great author, with its deep, Hermetic secrets and thoughts, is a ‘powerful Stimulus.’

Emily also described the ‘Strong Draughts’ of books in poem 1587, which begins

He ate and drank the precious words
His spirit grew robust.

Poem 712 F479  ‘Because I could not stop for Death’
This poem is usually taken to be Emily speaking from beyond the grave ‘Centuries’ after her death (21-4), saying how Death one day bore her away in his Carriage in very leisurely fashion (1-8), giving her opportunity to review her life (9-12) before at sunset, as she shivered in her thin clothes, arriving at her burial ground (13-20).

But for Emily to imagine writing a poem about her death centuries after the event seems strange, and Ruth Miller and Richard Sewall boldly take a completely different view of the poem. For them the Day on which Emily ‘first surmised the Horses’ Heads/were toward Eternity (23-4)’ was the day quite early in her life on which it struck her that her mission was to devote her life to writing poems about death and immortality. She had not realised this before, but one day Death and Immortality gave her a ride in their carriage and leisurely and politely brought her to understand that the subject for her poems was the truth that all the events of life should be seen in the light of Death and Immortality (1-12). Emily grew chill at the immensity of the task and her own slim equipment (13-16). Before leaving her, the Carriage ‘paused’ before a low grave, symbolising the death which all must die and which she must write about (17-20). That seems a very long time ago now, but even so the interval ‘feels shorter’
than the minutes and hours of that momentous day on which she was first convinced of her mission in life.

But one feels that if Emily had intended the poem to mean this, she should have made it clearer. Perhaps a less extreme alternative to the conventional view is the suggestion that the ‘Day/I first surmised the Horses’ heads/were toward Eternity’ was the day on which it struck Emily for the first time that her life would inevitably culminate in Death and Immortality. She spent all day thinking of this, of how the various stages of life would end on this earth in ‘a Swelling of the Ground.’ On this interpretation the thin clothes of stanza 4 symbolise the thinness of her resources for facing death.

Or both alternatives to the conventional view could be combined.

Poem 713 F481 ‘Fame of Myself, to justify’
If an artist knows herself that her work is good, all other applause is an unnecessary burning of incense to that divine artist. But if the artist herself knows that her work is poor, even universal praise for the work will bring her no true honour. As John Adams, the second president of the United States, wrote to a friend at the start of his career, ‘While conscience claps, let the world hiss! [But] if conscience disapproves, the loudest applauses of the world are of little values.’

As so far it was only Sue who had shown any inkling of the worth of Emily’s poems, perhaps Emily was trying to bolster herself up with such proud, austere advice.

Poem 714 F490 ‘Rests at Night’
Some of us die appropriately at Night, but others die less appropriately at Noon, while Nature and the Sun are still going on.

Poem 715 F491 ‘The World _ feels Dusty’
Honours and Flags mean nothing to a dying man. He just longs for a friend to give him a drink of water or to cool him with a fan. Emily prays that she may perform this Ministry for her friend. She does not name the friend, but, as in the similar poem 648, he may be Samuel Bowles.
Hybla, a mountain in Sicily, was in Classical times, famous for its thyme and sweet-scented flowers, and Thessaly famous for its magic. ‘Thessaly’ may be included in the poem for its sound rather than its associations.

**Poem 716 F495  ‘The Day undressed _ Herself’**

The Day undresses herself for bed like a woman, but the garments she lays aside are the gold and purple of sunset, clothes which are exactly the same age as the world. Indeed the Day is so old that even ‘the newest Star’ has had time to become as ‘wrinkled’ and travel-worn as Day herself.

As Nature is ‘the Maker’s girl’ (poem 873), the Day, a huge part of Nature, does not pray to God or fear his Heaven, and finally, as the lady of the West, retires ‘without a care’ as the last flickers of her sunset are seen all over the world.

For ‘Ditories’ see the notes on poem 401.

**Poem 717 F496  ‘The Beggar Lad _ dies early’**

‘The Beggar Lad _ dies early.’ The cold and his trudging from place to place and the indifference of the World have been too much for him. But now he is standing among the redeemed in heaven, his earthly travails forgotten and his hands lifted, not for pence, but in adoration to Jesus, the Lord of beggars.

‘Cambric,’ that fine white linen, encapsulates in one striking word how the world seemed to the beggar lad.

**Poem 718 F881  ‘I meant to find Her when I came’**

As in such poems as 58 and 205, Emily reveals here how important it was for her to be at the death bed of a friend and not to miss her crossing over to eternity. In this poem Death has arrived before Emily, who has missed the chance to tell her friend how she had longed to be with her at just that time.

All Emily can do now that her friend is dead is to wander up and down thinking of her. She could only rest from this if some ‘Hurricane’ were to sweep away her memories of the dead person and herself along with them.

This poem was originally written in 1863, but around 1878 Emily considered some possible changes to it. Johnson prints the 1863 poem, while Franklin incorporates four of her changes. They are

‘Discomfit’ for ‘Surrender’ (line 4)
‘this specific time’ for ‘just this single time’ (line 6)
‘fled’ for ‘past’ (line 8)
‘Abode’ for ‘Repose’ (line 9).

Poem 719 F883 ‘A South Wind _ has a pathos’
Emily was a girl of the north (see poem 442 and notes) and it was the southern latitudes that were foreign and exotic to her (see such poems as 180 and 697). So a South Wind actually arriving at Amherst had the pathos of the strange individual voice of an Emigrant landing in one’s country, but, like the wind, all the more attractive for being foreign and from afar.

Poem 720 F742 ‘No Prisoner be’
This poem could mean that no one is a prisoner if Jesus, who is ‘Liberty Himself’ abides with him, or that no one is a prisoner if his mind in that prison is at Liberty, as Emily had claimed in poem 613.

Poem 721 F743 ‘Behind Me _ dips Eternity’
Scholars disagree on the meaning of this poem. Judith Farr claims that the poem has ‘an energy, suavity, vehemence and exultation that result in true majesty.’ She reads the poem optimistically as follows;

Emily is conscious that there was an Eternity behind her before she was born and that Immortality lies before her. Her present life is ‘the Term between.’ Her death will be a drifting away and a dissolving before the West of Immortality receives her and she enters the Kingdom of Heaven. As in the Nicene Creed, this kingdom shall have no end (= is ‘pauseless), its Prince, Jesus, is the only-begotten son of God (= ‘Son of None), begotten of his Father before all worlds (= ‘Dateless Dynasty’), and God of God (= Himself _ Himself diversify_ in Duplicate divine).

So the miracles of Eternity and Immortality are behind and before her.
Meanwhile she is on the perilous voyage of life, on a ‘Crescent of the Sea’ between the two, with midnight to the north and south and ‘Maelstrom _ in the Sky.’

Roger Lundin and Richard Sewall on the other hand see the poem as deeply pessimistic. They stress the words ‘they say’ at the end of line7, and believe they indicate that the heaven of lines 7-12, described so negatively by Emily, is for her
‘nothing but speculation and fantasy,’ and that the last three lines of the poem ‘contemplate the possibility of blank nothingness’ as the reality of human destiny.

No doubt readers will read the poem in the light of their own beliefs.

**Poem 722 F745**  ‘Sweet Mountains _ Ye tell me no lie’
The ‘Sweet Mountains’ are the Pelham Hills, to which Emily lifts her eyes at the end of the day (lines 10-12), like a Nun lifting her eyes to her ‘strong Madonna.’ When she has been wayward or pretended or failed them in some way, they always turn on her ‘their far _ slow _ Violet Gaze’ of understanding and forgiveness.

The poem brings to mind the words of the Psalmist, ‘I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.’ (*Psalm 121:1*). Line 6 is suitably one of Emily’s slowest lines.

A letter (L1000) to her nephew Ned, written a year before she died, contained the words, ‘Your intimacy with the Mountains I heartily endorse.’

**Poem 723 F746**  ‘It tossed _ and tossed’
A white-hulled little brig sinks beneath the waves as it gropes in vain for the Morn of land. The Ocean closes over it, ‘too smooth _ too blue’ to show any concern for the ship that has disappeared. The repetitions in lines 1,3, and 5 emphasise the brig’s helplessness.

The little brig perhaps stands for the human soul, tossed in the storm of death and groping towards the Morn of eternity. Once it has disappeared from sight, it is largely forgotten by the world which continues to live its smooth, blue life.

On this reading ‘Crew and You’ in line 10 will be body and soul.

**Poem 724 F747**  ‘It’s easy to invent a life’
For God it is equally easy to ‘Gambol’ and create a life as it is to bring that life to an end. After all, if he granted eternity to all the lives he has spontaneously created, a thrifty God would soon have too many lives to look after. The ‘Perished Patterns’ of humanity may grumble, but God goes his own way, creating here a Sun and not creating a Man there, just as he likes.

Emily herself murmured about God’s ‘Perturbless Plan’ when in 1872 she said in a letter (L371 and poem 1205) written to Thomas Higginson on the death of his brother, ‘Except for [Heaven’s] marauding Hand, it had been Heaven below.’
‘Gambol’ is perhaps intended to make the reader think of ‘Gamble,’ and ‘Sun’ of ‘Son.’

Poem 725 F749 ‘Where Thou art _ that _ is Home’

This poem has a tightly organised structure. ‘Where Thou art’ is described in five lines, and then ‘What thou dost’ in five lines. In the contrasting last stanza ‘Where thou art not’ and ‘What thou dost not’ get two lines each.

The ‘Thou’ of the poem is probably Samuel Bowles. He was often on his travels, and Emily tells him that she does not mind where he is as long as she may join him. The place may be luxurious (= Cashmere) and of some quality (= Degree) or it may be low-class (= Shame) and involve suffering (= Cavalry). It does not matter.

Nor does it matter how he treats her. As in poem 366 any kind of bondage or imprisonment or judgement will be for her a sacrament of sweet content, as long as they are imposed by him and she is with him.

If he is not there, it ‘is Woe,’ even though the air is full of the scent of spices. If she experiences nothing done to her by him, she feels despair, even though the archangel Gabriel were to praise her for something she had done herself.

After Bowles’ death in 1878, Emily in a letter (L726) to his wife called their little daughter Bowles’ ‘Cashmere confederate.’ In poem 64 the coming of spring makes the whole world ‘Cashmere.’

Poem 726 F750 ‘We thirst at first _ tis Nature’s Act’

From birth we know what it is to be thirsty and our last act at death may be to ask for a drink of water. This temporal need foreshadows our thirst for that metaphorical water ‘termed Immortality.’

As in line 6 of poem 721, Heaven for Emily was ‘in the West.’

Poem 727 F751 ‘Precious to Me _ She still shall be’

The ‘She’ of the poem is almost certainly Sue. Although it is seven years since Emily’s relationship with Sue was altered by Sue’s marriage to Austin, Sue and that relationship are still precious to Emily, even if Sue seems to have forgotten that Emily wears a white dress and has red hair. As Judith Farr comments, ‘for Emily no passion ever died.’
All Emily dares to do now is to send Sue this poem together with a Buttercup, a Tress of the Meadows. She understands that the empire of the ‘Whole’ number, which is Sue’s marriage to Austin, ‘obscures the Part,’ which was Sue’s relationship with Emily, even if that part once appeased Sue’s heart. Poignantly she adds that Sue now regards her just as the ‘dazzled Bee’ regards some ‘Milliner’s flower’ when confronted by ‘Summer’s Everlasting Dower.’

A mental full stop is needed at the end of line 11, and ‘remembered’ in line 12 agrees with ‘fraction’ in line 10.

Poem 728 F754 ‘Let Us play Yesterday’
Like poem 299 this poem describes how the arrival of Sue awoke Emily to a new life and to riches she had not known before. Emily says to Sue in effect:

Let’s imagine the time before your arrival when ‘You _ and Eternity’ were not part of my life. I did feel a hunger and thirst for something different, and tried to appease them by studying language and numbers. But in my dreams I would see the colours of morning, the reds of sexuality. I was still imprisoned in my egg, but you came and broke (= troubled) the ellipse of my shell, and I, a fledgling Bird, fell out from it. (1-16)

I forgot my manacles, as the newly freed always do. Liberty, my last thought at night and my first at wakening, would never be as common as it was to me then. (17-24)

And now? I cannot return to my previous Bonds, any more that the Lark can ‘resume the Shell’ once it has known the easier freedom of the sky. Now that I have tasted the freedom of your love, my prison would ‘sorer grate’ if I was doomed anew to it. I can only pray to the God of everything not to take my liberty from me. (25-36)

In her second letter (L261) to Thomas Higginson, written in April 1862, Emily had said, ‘For several years, my Lexicon – was my only companion.’

Poem 729 F755 ‘Alter! When the Hills do’
The ‘Sir’ in line 7 suggests that this poem is another ringing affirmation of Emily’s unquenchable love for Samuel Bowles. To the questions implied in ‘Alter!’ and ‘Falter!’ and ‘Surfeit!’ she gives the answer ‘Never’ as emphatically as she can.

The last two lines, expressed more fully, would be ‘Just as the daffodil will never have surfeit of the dew, so I, Sir, will never have surfeit of you.’

Emily had similarly protested she would never alter in poem 268.
Poem 730 F850  ‘Defrauded I a Butterfly’
This couplet was presumably sent with a flower to some friend. For her friend, Emily has robbed ‘a Butterfly/the lawful Heir’ of its flower.

Poem 731 F851  “I want” _ it pleaded _ All its life’
At a death bed Emily reflects that the dying person has said ‘I want’ throughout his life, and she sees that his last request of human Skill is ‘I want’ – perhaps for a sip of water as in poem 726. Even in the act of dying he sighs his life away with his lips placed in a “Please” for Eternity.

In line 3, despite the word order, ‘it’ is the subject of ‘entreated’ with ‘Skill’ the object.

Poem 732 F857  ‘She rose to His Requirement _ dropt’
Emily examines the conventionally successful marriage of her day. In it ‘She,’ the wife, ‘dropt her Playthings,’ and rose to her husband’s requirements, presumably both domestic and sexual. If in marriage her life had less of ‘Amplitude, or Awe’ or if the ‘first Prospective’ of her marital hopes suffered disappointment, or if she wore away the Gold of her talent in unremitting housework, these things were never mentioned and were known only to her husband. In the same way only the Sea knows how many fathoms deep abide the ‘Pearl, and Weed,’ developed in its waters.

Emily may not have a particular wife in mind. If she does, Paula Bennett suggests that she may be referring to her own mother.

In line 5 ‘ought’ means ‘anything.’ The woman presumably had more amplitude and awe when she was unmarried and a catch for the young men. The Pearl symbolises her talents and the Weed the housework in which they are enmeshed.

In line 1 the word ‘dropt’ is emphasised by being outside the metre, and the ‘w’ alliteration in lines 3 and 4 is perhaps scathingly ironical.

Poem 733 F718  ‘The Spirit is the Conscious Ear’
When we introspect and consider whether something is right or wrong, the only ear which gives us an audible answer and is of use in these cases is the ear of the Spirit.
For other purposes, such as hearing actual sounds, there hangs outside the Castle of
the Spirit our smaller real ear.

Emily no doubt enjoyed the word play of Ear/Hear/Here at the ends of the lines.
The last word of the poem is really short for ‘Ear which Hears.’

Poem 734 F719  ‘If He were living _ dare I ask’
Emily was at first afraid to ask if a man who was dear to her had died. To those who
knew the truth she just cautiously mentioned that there had been many years of
changes since she had last seen him, and also adroitly turned to the ‘adjoining lives’
of his friends, whenever she suspected she was about to hear that the one dear to her
was in his grave.

But suddenly she forced herself to ask outright if the loved one was dead, and on
hearing that he “was buried,” could only herself exclaim “Buried! He!” And in the
last line, in the only present tense verb in the poem, she then confides in the reader
that she is completely in the grave with her dead beloved, much as Mark Antony tells
the crowd at Julius Caesar’s funeral that

My hear is in the coffin there with Caesar,
And I must pause till it come back to me. (3:2:107-8)

Poem 735 F722  ‘Upon Concluded Lives’
The dead themselves with their ‘Concluded Lives’ are in the joy of heaven, and the
only ‘cool’ element in their dying is the thoughts and ‘Calculations’ of those who are
still alive and mourn them. These mourners (= ‘Ears the Dying Side’) may have the
sweet belief that the dead hear the ‘bells’ of heaven, but this is laceratingly mixed
with the sight of the pall covering the coffin with its dead body. As the living on their
roads through life salute and say goodbye to the dead, it is ‘Coronal’ or triumph for
the dead person, but ‘funeral’ for those who mourn him.

Poem 736 F723  ‘Have any like Myself’
This is the first of five poems about Emily’s favourite month of March. The others are
1213, 1320, 1404 and 1669. March was important to Emily as it was the month of
rebirth and new beginnings in nature, symbolising our rebirth into eternal life. Poem
1404 begins, ‘March is the Month of Expectation,’ and in a letter (L976) of March
1885 to her friend, Helen Hunt Jackson, she asks, ‘Who could be ill in March, that Month of proclamation?’

This poem, with its clear structure of three sections each beginning with ‘Have any like Myself,’ takes up these ideas.

Have any like herself seen the ‘New Houses on the Hill,’ and ‘possibly a Church?’

Have any like herself wondered who lives in these houses which are so near to the sky that God is their nearest neighbour?

Have any like herself concluded that her ‘Villages’ and ‘possibly a Steeple’ are only visible in March, and so avoided the spot for the rest of the year to preserve the ‘Charm secure?’ (Marginal variants for ‘Charm secure’ are ‘Vision sure/clear.’)

The buildings are not real houses, but symbolise the thoughts about the kingdom of God in heaven, which come more clearly into Emily’s mind during March than in any other month. It is in that month of rebirth and expectation that she seems to see foreshadowed in nature the houses of the new Jerusalem, inhabited by the dead in Paradise, who are so close to God that they could invite Heaven along ‘For Show, or Company.’ But she does not get this vision from nature so clearly in the remaining months of the year, so she does not try to force it then, but preserves the ‘Charm secure’ of her March vision.

But she would like to know if any have shared this vision.

Poem 737 F735 ‘The Moon was but a Chin of Gold’

This is Emily’s fourth poem about the moon. In 429 she said that she herself was as obedient to her beloved master was the sea to the moon. In 504 she had daringly compared her beloved to the Man in the Moon, and in 629 she had described the moon as coldly indifferent to man and his concerns.

This poem is a hymn to the brilliance of the moon, in which the moon is consistently described as a person. Her Cheek, for example, has the light blue, yellow and white colours of the precious stone known as a Beryl. Her Eye is the nearest thing Emily has ever seen to ‘the Summer Dew’ (perhaps barely discernible). What a smile she could confer upon a Friend, if she so wished! She goes visiting to ‘the remotest Star.’ She wears a bonnet, shoe and belt with trinkets of Stars, and she appears to be dressed in the ‘Dimities’ or clothes of the dark-blue sky.

Poem 738 F736 ‘You said that I “was Great” _ one Day’
Emily is so in love with her beloved master because he has praised her for being ‘Great,’ that she is willing to become anything, just so long as it pleases him. Should she become actually great, like Stag or Rhinoceros, or as small as Mouse or Wren? And should she act like a Queen or like a Page? She can be that, or nothing, or anything else at all. He just has to let her know, as ‘it’s dull to guess.’

Emily’s master will have been dull of soul if this teasing poem did not bring a smile to his face.

She seems to have invented ‘Stipulus’ in line 17, but then to have had doubts about it, as ‘reservation’ is written in as a marginal variant. Poem 659 may refer to the same occasion as this poem.

Poem 739 F736  ‘I many times thought Peace had come’

In one powerful metaphor Emily describes an experience which all men go through for different reasons. She had occasion to use line 4 of herself in the year after this poem, because in September 1864, towards the end of a miserable summer spent in Boston with her cousins having eye treatment, she begins a letter (L294) to Sue with ‘At Centre of the Sea’ as a kind of heading to the letter before saying, ‘It would be best to see you _ it would be good to see the Grass, and hear the Wind blow the wide way in the Orchard.’

Franklin prints the original version of the last line, ‘Or any Harbor be.’ Johnson prints her marginal variant, ‘Before the Harbor be.’ Both mean the same, but the variant is clearer.

Poem 740 F774  ‘You taught me Waiting with Myself’

It is not clear how this poem breaks up into units, but on the assumption that it breaks up into units of 2,1,4 and 5 lines, it might be paraphrased:

You taught me how to wait, and that I have done (1-2).
You taught me the bravery I needed to bear my Fate of being alone (3).
I have also learned that death as extinction could be a barrier to our companionship, just as bitter a barrier as life had been before it (4-7).
But I might yet come to understand that the Heaven you know is a reality, so that you will not be ashamed of me when I stand before Christ on judgement day (8-12). (the further Hand’ is presumably Christ’s right hand, and we are meant to think of the
parable of the sheep and the goats, in which Christ declares that ‘he will set the sheep on his right hand (Matthew 25:33).’

Also uncertain in this poem is the identity of the ‘You’ being addressed. Judith Farr takes the ‘You’ to be Emily’s beloved master, Samuel Bowles, who had indeed taught her how to wait and endure her fate of non-marriage with him. But the implication that Bowles knows Heaven while Emily is still faced with the task of understanding it does not ring true, so that Ruth Miller could be nearer the truth in suggesting that the ‘You’ of the poem is God, for of him she can sensibly say ‘the Heaven you know.’ And the whole poem, as a prayer addressed to God, would then mean, ‘Dear God, you have taught me that I cannot know you fully in this life, and that death, if it is the end, would also be a bar to that knowledge. But I have to realise that there is a heaven in which you will not be ashamed to know me fully, as I shall be stationed among the sheep, having faithfully carried out the task you entrusted to me of writing poems.’

Miller also points out that this poem immediately follows poem 679 in packet 12, and that in poem 679 Emily’s visitor is Immortality.

Poem 741 F776  ‘Drama’s Vitallest Expression is the Common Day’
The ‘Common Day,’ in which the sun rises and sets, is where the ‘Vitallest Drama’ is found, because it is the drama which is ‘enacted in the Human heart’ and not the drama enacted in the theatre which is that ‘Vitallest Drama.’ Indeed this human heart drama is often ‘best enacted’ when no audience of other people is present at all. Even if Shakespeare had not written his plays about them, the real Hamlet and the real Romeo and Juliet would still have had their real life dramas.

The thought of this poem is reminiscent of poem 669.

Poem 742 F778  ‘Four Trees _ upon a solitary Acre’
Four isolated trees in a group maintain themselves ‘without Design or Order.’ Their only unchanging neighbours are the Sun, the Wind and God, though, in return for the acre giving them a ‘Place,’ they give him the return that his trees provide shadow and are noticed occasionally by Passer by, by Squirrel or by Boy.

And that is all that can be said about them. If they play some further part in the general scheme of Nature, we do not know what it is.
Emily seems to imply that there are objects in nature, such as the four trees, which are not obvious evidence for the argument that the existence of God can be shown by pointing to the design apparent in the world.

**Poem 743 F780**  ‘The Birds reported from the South’
At the beginning of summer Emily is in mourning. For whom or for what she is in mourning is left unstated. Consequently she is deaf to the spicy news of the coming of summer brought to her by Birds from the South, and equally deaf to the timid appeal of the first Flowers. Even the grace and the ‘best Array’ of summer at its full are unnoticed by Emily, for her Heart is too dead for her Eye to be stimulated. It is only at the end of summer, when the summer too is in mourning for her Dead flowers that Emily notices her and finds herself in wordless sympathy with summer.

The silence between Emily and summer is reminiscent of the silence between Emily and the Presence in her Chamber in lines 4 and 11-12 of poem 679.

The phrase ‘to stimulate the Eye’ in line 11 is perhaps a compressed version of ‘as far as the stimulation of her eye is concerned,’ its grammar being similar to the article + infinitive idiom of classical Greek.

**Poem 744 F781**  ‘Remorse is Memory awake’
This is a definition poem of an abstract idea, like poems 705 and 745. Indeed all three poems come from packet 12, and their opening lines are syntactically similar.

Remorse awakes our Memory so that we find some of our shameful past acts entering the window and door of our mind, the persons involved in them being ‘all astir.’ Then remorse ‘lights with a match’ these acts so that we see them more clearly and are forced to believe that we did them. This Remorse, which is in fact the equal or Adequate of Hell, cannot be cured even by God, for it is his institution. Like the continual resurgence of Suspense in poem 705 it will never end.

Emily here is at odds with the orthodox Christian doctrine that ‘Christ died for our sins’ (*I Corinthians 15:3*).

Richard Sewall thinks that the remorse which was cureless for Emily was the mistake in judgement that both she and her brother had made about Sue. In Sewall’s words, ‘At the centre of [her] being must have been the gnawing realisation of an early mistake in judgement, hers as well as Austin’s; a youthful affinity that came to nothing; the lifelong suffering to which that mistake had condemned her brother; and
the tension and the anxiety it had brought them all……the tragedy only a hedge away had to be, and was, lived through.’

Poem 745 F782 ‘Renunciation _ is a piercing Virtue’
Renunciation hurts, for example that virtuous letting go of the presence of a person now for the expectation of communion with that person later (perhaps in heaven). Emily has had just the sunrise of the relationship, but now she has to ‘put out her eyes’ lest [the whole] Day of the experience should ‘outvie [God, who is] Day’s Great Progenitor.’

She chooses against what she wants for herself in order to have a clear conscience on the day of judgement, for, when she does this, the ‘larger function [of morality makes] appear smaller [the besottedness] that Covered [her] Vision _ Here.’

Emily had renounced her two great loves, the first for Sue, the second for Samuel Bowles. If the ‘Expectation’ of line 3 refers to a possible meeting in heaven, it is more likely that she has Bowles in mind in this poem.

Poem 746 F783 ‘Never for Society’
The renunciation described in the previous poem, whether it was of Sue or of Bowles or even of normal society, will have increased her loneliness. In this poem she puts a brave face on the loneliness by claiming that she will never lack Society if she cultivates the acquaintance of her own self. Of the men she knows even the wiser sort ‘may weary [her],’ but her inner Man has never found that she is weary of him. Indeed her inner self entertains her better that ballads or hymns sung by others. Nor do you need to be introduced to him.

This poem recalls Emily alone in her chamber with God in poem 679.

Poem 747 F785 ‘It dropped so low _ in my Regard’
Emily blames her complete misjudgement of ‘it’ less on fate than on her own initial lack of perception of the true nature of ‘it.’ She had put ‘it’ on her shelf of silver objects, only to find later that it was not silver all through but only coated or plated with silver. Again the ‘it’ could refer to Sue or Samuel Bowles despite the impersonal pronoun, but it is perhaps more likely that in this poem it refers to the hopes of the publication of her poems which she once had. She now realises that publication is only a ‘Plated Ware’ compared with the ‘Silver Shelf’ on which her poems lie.
Poem 748 F786  ‘Autumn _ overlooked my Knitting’
Emily finds herself in a competition of colours with Autumn. When Autumn catches
sight of her knitting her poems of many colours, he boasts that his dyes are brighter
than the scarlet plumage of a Flamingo. Emily is willing to look at his dyes, but does
not seem to have need of them. Indeed she can give good reasons for the colours she
has been using already, the red of cochineal because it was like Autumn, and a darker
colour on the border because it was like herself. In the words of Ruth Miller, ‘Emily
compares her poems of many colours to the natural phenomena of Autumn. And she
is not bested by Nature.’ Perhaps the ‘Dusker’ colour means that she has a wider
range.

Poem 749 F789  ‘All but Death, can be adjusted’
Death itself is the exception to the law that all things can be adjusted and changed for
the better, whether larger scale things like Dynasties, Systems and Citadels, or smaller
scale things like personal lives so far wasted.

Any mourner is immediately hit by the truth of this poem. Aeschylus had
expressed it before Emily in his play Agamemnon.

Poem 750 F790  ‘Growth of Man _ like Growth of Nature’
Ruth Miller suggests that in this poem Emily is speaking of her own growth as a poet.
Even if she feels it endorsed by God’s ‘Atmosphere and Sun,’ it happens and stirs
within her when she is alone living a ‘Silent Life.’ Only she can achieve this growth,
through constant effort, patience to keep going and patience in the face of hostility,
and keeping intact her belief that it is worthwhile. Somewhere outside there may be
‘the Department of its Audience,’ but the actual writing of the poems is ‘assisted by
no Countenance.’

Most of this applies equally to the attempt to write these notes.

Poem 751 F791  ‘My Worthiness is all my Doubt’
As Emily placed this poem immediately after poem 750 in packet 12, it may, like its
predecessor, refer to Emily’s poetry. If this is so, she will be saying:
‘Lowly as I am, I have been called by God to write poems about him and his truth. God deserves and needs the best, and my chief worry is whether I am good enough (1-8).

But, then, God cannot rest his weight on anything higher than himself (as that does not exist), and so has to stoop to such as me to do his work for him (9-12). This being so, although I am undivine and unworthy, I am content to be one of his Elect, persuading my Soul to receive the Sacrament from him, just as if I were in church (13-16).’

Alternatively, Judith Farr suggests that the ‘Him’ of the poem may be Emily’s beloved Master, but this suggestion seems to fit less well with lines 9-16, even if Emily is capable of referring to her master as ‘Deity.’

‘Content’ in line 14 is likely to be an adjective rather than a noun, as the metre requires a stress on its second syllable.

Poem 752 F792 ‘So the Eyes accost _ and sunder’
Generally in a crowd of people Emily’s eyes rest on unknown others only to forget them immediately, but occasionally someone is ‘stamped forever’ on her mind, even though no words are exchanged.

Similarly, her Countenance may exchange a wordless glance with God in his ‘Neighbouring Horizon,’ and, although God’s face may be ‘gone _ as soon as known,’ it too is ‘stamped forever’ on her mind.

Ruth Miller points out that lines 4-8 of this poem (the last poem in packet 12) recall lines 3-4 of poem 679 (the first poem in packet 12).

Poem 753 F793 ‘My Soul _ accused me _ and I quailed’
As in poem 713, Emily says that her own approval of herself is the crucial test. If her own soul accuses her, it is as though tongues as hard as Diamonds revile her, but if the whole world accuses her while her soul is her friend, she smiles. If her soul shows her its favour, then she can disdain anything that men may say or time may bring, but it would be lighter to bear ‘a finger of Enamelled Fire’ than the disdain of her own soul.

Poem 754 F764 ‘My Life had stood _ a Loaded Gun’
Emily surprises her readers by making the speaker of this poem ‘a Loaded Gun.’ What the Gun says is fairly clear, but the debate about what his words mean when applied to Emily’s own life is not yet concluded. The Gun seems to say:

‘I had stood in corners, loaded but unfired, until my Owner passed by, identified me as his gun and picked me up (1-4).

And now the two of us, Owner and Gun, go hunting, and the mountains re-echo the crack of my shot (5-8).

And when I smile with a successful shot, the valley where we hunt glows with a ‘cordial light’ just like the pleasure a volcano feels after it has erupted (9-12).

At night I stand by my Master’s head, which is better than sharing his pillow (13-16). His enemies are my enemies. Those killed by the yellow flash of my shot, after his thumb has pressed the trigger, do not stir any more (17-20).

I, the Gun, may seem to live longer than my Owner, but this is not really so, for I only have the power to kill, whereas my Owner has the power to die (and so enter immortality, where) ‘he longer must [live’] than I.’

As a speech given to a Gun, the words make perfect sense. But uncertainty descends when the reader considers how the speech might apply to Emily’s own life. Some readers like Judith Farr take Emily to be the Gun and the Owner to be her beloved Master. For them Emily is imagining what it would be like to be carried off by her master as his bride or even mistress. Instead of standing unused in a corner, she would be brought out into the ‘Sovereign Woods’ of heterosexual relationship, and would ‘go off’ whenever he touched her. Day and night they would be together, sharing delight and with enemies in common.

Emily does seem to refer to her master in these terms in poem 1028 where she says

‘Twas my one Glory _
Let it be
Remembered
I was owned of Thee _

but the picture of Emily on guard in lines 13-16 does not ring as true as the abasement of poem 366, and it is hard to discern any meaning in the last stanza on this interpretation.
Helen McNeil and Ruth Miller, on the other hand, take the loaded but unfired gun to stand for Emily as potential poet, and the Owner to stand for the person who awakes this potentiality and persuades her to roam free in the ‘Sovereign Woods’ of creative activity, whether this person is God himself or a human preceptor such as Samuel Bowles or Thomas Higginson. On this view ‘I speak for Him’ in line 7 could refer to Emily writing a poem, and ‘do I smile’ in line 9 might refer to a successful poem, and the common enemies of lines 17–20 might even refer to the lady poets of the Springfield Republican,’ but lines 13–16 and 21–24 are no easier to understand than on Farr’s interpretation.

Poem 755 F766  ‘No Bobolink _ reverse his Singing’
The Bobolink does not stop singing, even when the farmer cuts down his favourite tree and so robs him of his ‘Best Horizon’ and ‘Spacious Future,’ since for the Bobolink music is his ‘only Anodyne.’

The brave Bobolink could be Emily herself, who, after some loss (perhaps of Sue), continues to soothe her soul with the music of her poems.

Poem 756 F767  ‘One Blessing had I than the rest’
One day Emily received as a Blessing a vision which was so much ‘larger’ than other visions she had received that she stopped gauging or measuring or pondering. This perfect Bliss which fulfilled her dreams and prayers and for a moment paralysed her was presumably a glimpse of the other world, the ‘supremest [amount]’ which can be given us on this earth. She was as content to say, ‘Well, that’s it,’ as if ‘Despair’ had been her lot.

While the vision lasted, the ‘ruddier Blue’ of ‘the Heaven above’ obscured ‘the Heaven below’ of this earth. The Latitudes or extents of this life ‘leant over’ as they were completely filled by the Heaven above. The vision even eliminated the day of Judgement as part of the heaven above.

So perfect was this vision that Emily no longer speculates why the bliss of such visions happens so rarely, why the Floods of Paradise are only served to us in occasional bowls.

Poem 757 F768  ‘The Mountains _ grow unnoticed’
‘The Mountains’ of this poem are probably the Pelham hills, which Emily could see from her bedroom window. Although she personifies the hills as ‘purple figures,’ in the first stanza she emphasises how their growth is unlike the growth of men, before in the second stanza implying that even ‘Their Eternal Faces’ are transformed and warmed by the fellowship of the sun’s rays at sunset.

Poem 758 F769 ‘These _ saw Visions’
Ruth Miller gives two detailed pages to a reading of this poem. A woman speaks to herself as she prepares the corpse of a young girl for burial. She must latch softly the eyes which have seen visions of heaven, and, in the cheeks of the dead girl, slowly smooth the dimples which one smoothed themselves. She quickly bends to kiss the mouth which in life had so often said goodbye to her. She places in position the hands she had stroked during the girl’s last illness, hands which are now a cool, cold satin that no merchant could grade by giving it a number. Then she arranges the fingers of the dead girl which at the Noon of her death are not so proudly active as in the Aurora or dawn of her life.

Finally she must adjust the feet, which in Paradise will not need stocking or shoe but only pearls as she walks barefoot on the jasper floor in the palace of heaven.

Poem 759 F480 ‘He fought like those Who’ve nought to lose’
Emily will have read of the mounting numbers of Civil War dead, and in this poem she tells of one soldier who survived because of his ‘Greediness to die’ as ‘he gave himself’ (a variant reading for ‘bestowed himself’ in line 2) to the musket balls of the enemy, while all around him his less foolhardy comrades were dying ‘like the Flakes/when Gusts reverse the Snow.’

Poem 760 F483 ‘Most she touched me by her muteness’
Jane Donahue Eberwein comments on the poet’s tendency to express ‘her sympathy for beings below her in the natural order,’ and here Emily gives a crumb to a starving bird, the ‘Winged Beggar’ of line 17. She cannot withstand the bird’s mute appeal, even if the crumb were her ‘whole possession.’ Emily then supposes the bird has taken the crumb ‘on High’ without thanking her, when suddenly the sky is filled with the bird’s song of praise ‘to her Benefactor.’
Poem 761 F484  ‘From Blank to Blank’
Emily reverts to the time of horror explored in such poems as 280 and 341, with ‘I pushed Mechanic feet’ (line 3) reminding the reader of line 5 of poem 341, ‘The Feet, mechanical, go round.’ Her helplessness is so complete that in the end she feels it is ‘lighter’ (‘firmer’ is a variant) to stay in the Blindness of the horror than to open her eyes and try to find a way out of it.

The endless recession of ends to be encountered before she is well again is reminiscent of the ever receding Eternity of poems 550 and 695. Her ‘Threadless Way’ is perhaps meant to contrast her fate with that of Theseus, who in classical myth did have a thread for finding his way out of the Minotaur’s labyrinth.

Poem 762 F485  ‘The Whole of it came not at once’
Just as cat plays with a mouse and gives it a moment’s hope before killing it, so someone has wounded Emily with ‘a Thrust,’ but then has restored her to life by bestowing some ‘Bliss to cauterise’ the wound. Emily, however, would have preferred to die once (the ‘award’ for all life) than half dying and rallying for a ‘totaller’ eclipse (‘totaller’ is a variant reading for ‘consciouer’ in line 12).

Emily leaves the reader to guess whether or not she is referring to a Cat and Mouse game played with her by Sue or Samuel Bowles.

Poem 763 F486  ‘He told a homely tale’
The ‘He’ of this poem is another urchin like the ‘Beggar Lad’ of poem 717 who ‘dies early,’ but this urchin is rescued by the speaker, who is keeping him alive in the faint chance that he has a mother, father or brothers in some earthly or heavenly community who have missed him. The speaker is moved by the lad’s tears, by the scars on his face from his early years and by the thought that the only kiss the urchin has known is the kiss of a snowflake, which he shared with a robin.

Poem 764 F487  ‘Presentiment _ is that long Shadow _ on the Lawn’
In an unusually long line fitting the sense Emily begins her definition of ‘Presentiment.’ The definition fits countless circumstances, for example a son being startled by the awareness that his aged mother is at last about to die. The Sun of life is helpless before the advent of Darkness, the king of death with ‘presentiment’ as his heralds.
Poem 765 F488  ‘You constituted Time’
If the ‘You’ in the poem is Sue, as Judith Farr believes, Emily is acknowledging that her love for Sue was so great that she believed that Sue, in fact a creature of Time, revealed Eternity to her. But then God, the Absolute Deity of Eternity, removed Sue away from her, so that Emily might slowly adjust her idolatry to its proper object, namely God himself.

Poem 766 F489  ‘My Faith is larger than the Hills’
Emily’s ‘Faith’ in this poem may include both her perception of the order of nature and her description of this nature in her poetry.
When ‘the Hills decay’ by being shrouded in darkness after sunset, it is Emily’s larger faith which drives the purple wheel of the sun around the earth to its dawn starting point. Once she has got him there, he can then operate on his own (1-8).
But if owing to her lack of faith the Sun’s Yellow feet should miss its starting point, the birds and flowers would not come to life, and the bells of Paradise be silenced (9-12).
So Emily dare not cease to write poems about the natural order in which she believes, for fear that the Firmament itself should fail, were the rivet of her poetry to be removed (13-16).

If this interpretation is correct, the poem is making one of the grandest claims she ever made for her poetry _ that the revolution of the sun depends on it!

Poem 767 F492  ‘To offer brave assistance’
To help people living on their own, when you know them but have not been able to prevent them living on their own, is human. But to help ‘a Nameless Man,’ from whom nobody else has earned the benediction of a thank-you, this requires the ‘Ample Sinew’ of God.

Poem 768 F493  ‘When I hoped, I recollect’
Each of the eight-line sections of this poem is introduced as dealing with a different emotion: ‘hope’ is introduced in line 1, ‘fear’ in line 9, and ‘despair’ in line 17.
The day hope arose in her heart, Emily was standing at the west-facing window of her first floor bedroom. It was a cold winter day, but it was her hope and not her shawl that kept her warm (1-8).

The day that she felt fear and icicles were frozen on her heart was unsuitably a day of high summer when only Emily ‘was still’ (9-16).

The day she despaired she will never forget. It is no more likely that she would forget it than Nature would ever forget to follow the setting Sun with Night and to cut off the Sun’s face and put out her eye with darkness. Nature would hesitate to do this before she will ever hesitate to forget (17-24).

The movement of this poem is the typical movement of Emily in love: hope passing to fear, and fear passing to despair as another lost love is placed in her ‘box of phantoms (L177).’ Also typical is her failing to name the person who caused the hope. It may have been the reading of a letter that sparked the hope (see line 5 of poem 636), but if the person was with her in the room, according to the social mores of the day it must have been a woman, Sue perhaps or Kate Anthon.

**Poem 769 F497**  ‘One and One _ are One’
A pupil doing arithmetic at school knows that One and another One are added together and make two. The problem is finished. The answer is certain. But when a person is deliberating (‘inner’ choosing is a marginal variant for ‘minor’ choosing) what is added to the One that is Life, it is either everlasting life or death. There is no certainty. Even so, the soul could not take in other possibilities besides these two.

**Poem 770 F498**  ‘I lived on Dread’
Living in ‘Dread’ and ‘Fear’ at least provides a ‘Stimulus’ and a ‘Spur _ upon the Soul’ in dangerous situations, when other sorts of impetus are numb. Living in fear may stir the soul to go safely where, without fear, there would only be despair.

**Poem 771 F870**  ‘None can experience stint’
Emily returns to the ‘yoked opposites’ theme of such poems as 167 and 689. Nobody can feel stinted or deprived by his experience unless he has known Bounty first. For a poor man to be truly indigent, he has to have known Wealth first.

**Poem 772 F871**  ‘The hallowing of Pain’
Hallowing our pain and seeing it as something holy leaves us feeling exhausted, as does the effort to believe that there is a Heaven for us to hallow. For a sick person has to hallow his pain right up to its very end and not stop striving to do so in the middle of the pain, if he is to receive spiritual benefit. Similarly, we have to believe in a Heaven which is God’s holy place for all our lives, if we are to enter all its glories.

Poem 773 F872  ‘Deprived of other Banquet’
Emily’s strategy for survival in deprivation is to rely upon herself, gradually building up a sufficiency which is almost enough for a robin’s famine as well. She and the robin are fellow pilgrims on the journey through life, and can even reserve from their table a berry for charity.

Emily does not identify the Banquet of which she was deprived. She had also been ‘hungry, all the Years’ in poem 579, but the possible sexual references in that poem do not seem to apply here. Perhaps she refers here to being deprived of normal society and then building up her inner resources in writing poems, but with a berry left over to share with the occasional visitor or the people to whom she wrote letters.

Poem 774 F783  ‘It is a lonesome Glee’
To hear, when on your own, the song of an unseen bird carried to you on the wind through the skies, is to feel your mind being sanctified.

Poem 775 F783  ‘If Blame be my side _ forfeit Me’
The word ‘Belief’ in line 4 suggests that Emily is pleading with Jesus. She says: If I am to blame, give me up, but do not decree that I am to give you up. For how could I forfeit you, when the very command “Forfeit Jesus” would be to exile me from ‘Belief _ and Home.’

In line 4 ‘exile’ is a marginal variant for ‘sentence.’

Poem 776 F875  ‘The Color of a Queen, is this’
This is one of only three poems in the packets of the poems to which Emily herself gave a title, the others being poem 36 and poem 161. Emily maintains that the regal colour of purple can be seen at sunset together with amber, at noon together with the light blue, yellow and white of beryl, and at night, when the Aurora Borealis suddenly blazes, the witchcraft of nature uses purple as ‘a Rank _ for Iodine.’
Poem 777 F877 ‘The Loneliness One dare not sound’
As she had shown in poem 670, Emily’s greatest fear was not of external forces or enemies, but of forces within her soul. In this poem she examines loneliness. No longer is it the possible friend of poem 405. Now she dare not examine it or see it for what it is. Instead it is locked away and ‘skirted in the dark,’ with all consciousness of it suspended. It is up to the owner of the soul whether he shines a light on his loneliness or, like Emily in this poem, seals it off for fear that she should perish from a scrutiny of it.

I once heard a psychiatrist say that the two basic methods of dealing with trouble were examining it or burying it, and that both methods were of equal value.

Poem 778 F879 ‘This that would greet _ an hour ago’
The ‘this’ of the poem is a person who has only just died, but who ‘is quaintest Distance _ now.’ Not even a ‘Guest from Paradise’ could cause the corpse to glow or bow. Not even a summons from the Noon could cause it to smile or grow warm. If you were to be asked to match the ‘solid calm’ of the corpse or the reticence of its silvered flesh, you could not do it.

Similarly in poem 53 Emily had said of the dead that ‘Courtiers quaint in kingdoms/
Our departed are.’

Poem 779 F880 ‘The Service without Hope’
A work, which will be rewarded when finished, provides for its worker both the ‘impetus of Gain _/and impetus of Goal.’ But for a person to continue working diligently with no hope of the work ever being finished is the tenderest Service, simply because it is not a set ‘stint’ with an ‘end.’ (‘end’ is a marginal variant for ‘stint.’

Ruth Miller suggests that Emily is referring to the writing of her own poetry in this poem. In reading it, breaks need to be made after ‘stint’ in line 4 and ‘Goal’ in line 6.

Poem 780 F882 ‘The Truth _ is stirless’
Emily imagines ‘Truth’ as a motionless or ‘stirless’ upright. Consequently, when other things begin to move which had seemed just as steadfast such as Cedars, Oaks and Mountains, truth is the best thing to have confidence in. Without any prop, it keeps upright both itself and the man who puts his trust in her.

**Poem 781 F884** ‘To wait an Hour _ is long’

Emily probably had her beloved master, Samuel Bowles, in mind when she wrote this quatrain. If she knew he was coming in an hour, the minutes would pass slowly. But if she knew that their relationship would resume in the eternity of heaven, it would be a short time to wait for that.

**Poem 782 F885** ‘There is an arid Pleasure’

For Emily an arid Pleasure is as different from Joy as is Frost from Dew. As Judith Farr (G) points out, ‘Dew is condensed moisture that revivifies (= rejoices) flowers, while Frost is abhorred by flowers because it kills them.’ Once ‘curdled’ (= spoilt by the frost) the flowers with the finest honey are no use to the Bee.

Poem 391 also records the killing powers of the frost.

**Poem 783 F504** ‘The Birds begun at Four o’clock’

Emily still seems to be awaking early, despite the protest sent to her father in poem 13 (L198), but at least in summer time she hears two hours of birdsong. This miracle seems to come from infinity as it is ‘numerous as space,’ but to be as familiar to her as the passing of the day as it is ‘neighbouring as noon.’ No one else hears it, except the occasional workman hurrying to get to work on time. But no glimpse of infinity, even one as extensive as two hours of birdsong, lasts for ever, and the miracle, having fulfilled its purpose, is forgotten as the ordinary Day takes over and ‘controlled the World.’

**Poem 784 F886** ‘Bereaved of all, I went abroad’

Emily has lost a loved one, by death or desertion, and finds that all her strategies for forgetting this loss fail. When she goes abroad to the Peninsula of a new life, she finds that her loved one’s ‘grave’ has got there first. She does find somewhere to stay while still trying to recover herself, but the pillow on her bed is the same ‘grave.’ She cannot lose it either in crowds or alone on the seashore. Even sleeping tablets are in
vain. The actual grave may have been finished, but the spade and the digging of it cannot be forgotten.

Poem 785 F505  ‘They have a little Odor _ that to me’
Judith Farr (G) suggests that the ‘they’ of the poem are some of Emily’s Oriental lilies. When she inhales their perfume, it is as intoxicating as the metre of a poem, indeed as poetry itself (‘poesy’ is a marginal variant for ‘melody’). And as such lilies ‘yield a rush of perfume just before they wither and become scentless,’ this perfume reminds her of a Poet Laureate producing some of his best poems just before he dies.

Farr suggests that Emily may have Tennyson in mind. He had been England’s Poet Laureate since 1850, and his *Maud* and *Idylls of the King* were popular in New England.

Poem 786 F887  ‘Severer Service of myself’
As in poem 784 Emily is unable to deal with the death of a loved one. Even when Nature has finished the work of the Day and her wheels cease to run, Emily’s wheels begin turning in the darkness as she tries to tire herself out, so that her nervous system may grow weary and clog the vitality of her sleeplessness. She just wants the ‘dull comfort’ of those other mourners who have been able to put away the ‘Head’ whose ‘Hair’ they knew so well and to ‘forget the color of the Day’ when the dead person was alive. But all her strategies to outwit ‘the Darkness’ merely confirm the Midnight of that darkness in her ‘Consciousness.’ The only remedy is to die herself.

Poem 787 F889  ‘Such is the Force of Happiness’
The happy man can ‘lift a Ton.’ But the unhappy man cannot lend a ‘Sinew’ to lift anything, as the ‘slow capabilities’ of his ‘Consciousness’ mean that lifting just himself is too big a task.

Poem 788 F739  ‘Joy to have merited the Pain’
In this poem Emily seems to imagine the joy of being united with her beloved Master in heaven. Her Master has died first. She says:
For me it was nothing but joy to have been awarded the pain of my last illness and the release from it in death, and to have ‘perished [separated from you] every step’ on the road to Paradise (1-4).
Forgive me for looking upon your heavenly face with my ‘old fashioned [earthly] Eyes.’ In fact they are better for doing that than any new eyes ‘bought in Paradise’ could be, because on earth I saw you with them and it was upon them that you gazed, and now in heaven these earthly eyes are my ‘Hazel Witnesses’ that it is really you, for they tell me that your ‘features are the same’ (4-12).

You were with me on earth so fleetingly, like the dawn summoned back into keeping by the morning, and our separation has been ‘so infinite’ (13-16).

I remember that our love was as high as the hills, and that its depth was marked on my Soul like a flood-mark on white wagon wheels (17-20).

Our love haunted my memory until my last Decade ended. And now that it has become actualised after all the haunting, it should last at least for Eternity (21-4).

**Poem 789 F740**  ‘On a Columnar Self’

In a crisis Emily knows she can rely on herself, a column firmly fixed on a base of granite. Nor can anything disturb her Conviction that her role in life is to record moments of vision in her poems. As in poem 753 it is not the opinions of others that matter, but what her own soul tells her is the truth. Her own unsupported self gives her a sufficient ‘Crowd’ of helpers, a sufficient sense of what is right, and a sufficient sense of belonging to that Assembly of believers who are ‘not far off from [the] furthest Spirit [that is] God.’

Had Emily used full-stops, she would perhaps have used them after ‘Extremity’ at the end of line 3 and after ‘Base’ at the end of line 7. In the last stanza ‘Ourself’ is taken as the subject of ‘suffice,’ and the word ‘for’ is supplied before ‘Rectitude’ and ‘that Assembly.’

**Poem 790 F741**  ‘Nature _ the Gentlest Mother is’

Emily’s poem of Nature as ‘Gentlest Mother’ needs no explanation, except the suggestion that breaks in the sense come after lines 3, 8, 11 and 16, and the guess that lines 9-11 mean that Nature’s conversation on a summer afternoon with all the beautiful things of her household assembled around her is of the fairest.

**Poem 791 F748**  ‘God gave a Loaf to every Bird’

The sense of this poem is clearer than is its application to Emily. She says:
I cannot eat the Crumb given me by God as it is my only luxury. It is enough for me to prove that it has been given to me by owning it and touching it (1-6).
I am too happy with my Sparrow’s crumb to covet the Loaves of others (7-8).
Indeed if there were to be a general Famine so that all the other birds did not have their loaves, I would be in the happy position of not missing their loaves made of ears of corn, as I would still have my crumb, to me a Board of Plenty and a Garner fair, and I would then outdo the rich Indiaman and Earl, who in times of plenty had enjoyed the most (9-16).

The application of this poem to herself remains unclear because Emily as usual, in the words of Richard Sewall, ‘leaves out the specifics.’ But it is tempting to guess at it. Perhaps other birds have normal social, church-going lives. Emily instead has been given the crumb of the highest poetic skill. Although she may be starving (as in poem 579) for that social life, she cannot consume her crumb, so that it is used up and no longer exists. But in a time of famine when her acquaintances were getting nothing out of their normal social lives, Emily with her personal crumb of poetic skill preserved would be ‘Sovereign of them all.’

Or perhaps, as Paula Bennett suggests of both this poem and poem 579, Emily is saying that other humans may have the loaf of marriage, while she has only the crumb of sexual fantasy in isolation – just as Cherubino says in Act 1 of The Marriage of Figaro that if no woman will listen to his love song, ‘parlo d’amor con me.’ But then in a time of famine when the marriages around her are all undergoing strain and lovemaking has ceased, Emily will still have her crumb which makes her ‘Sovereign of them all.’

Poem 792 F187 ‘Through the strait pass of suffering’
This poem ends a letter (L251) sent to Samuel Bowles. The letter begins:

Dear friend

If you doubted my Snow _ for a moment _ you never will _ again _ I know _

Because I could not say it _ I fixed it in the Verse _ for you to read _ when your thought wavers, for such a foot as mine _

Then follows the poem. Bowles has been concerned for Emily, doubting her ‘Snow’ and not at all sure that she is able to pass safely through her current suffering. In the
poem she reassures him by describing those martyrs of history who passed safely through suffering and implying that she too has done so. She and they have ‘steady trod’ through suffering (‘steady’ is a variant for ‘even’ in line 2), with convulsions playing around them as harmlessly as a Meteor around the bonded constituents of a planet. With faith in God and everlasting loyalty to him, they have marched towards him as undeviatingly as the Needle of the compass seeks the North.

In poem 709 her ‘snow’ was her personal integrity in choosing not to publish her poems. Bowles may have doubted her ability to abide by this decision. She reassures him that she has passed through any disappointment caused by this decision by keeping her eyes fixed on God and faithfully using the poetic gift which he has given her.

But at the end of poem 275 her ‘snow’ refers to the chastity which she is keeping intact for Bowles, so alternatively she may be reassuring him that she, like the martyrs, will be able to pass safely through the suffering of celibacy and be his bride in heaven, with the convulsions of sexual passion playing harmlessly around her.

Poem 793 F753 ‘Grief is a Mouse’

Seventeen years before this poem, when grief-stricken at the death of Sophia Holland, Emily in a letter (L11) to Abiah Root had said, ‘I told no-one the cause of my grief, though it was gnawing at my heart-strings.’ Her attitude to grief in this poem remains the same now:

It should be as hidden as a mouse nibbling away behind the wooden panelling of the Wainscot (1-4).

But the grieving person can be as easily startled as a Thief, and if he senses that others are talking about the cause of his grief, he will prick his ear to hear some mention of ‘that Vast Dark’ of the happening which ‘swept His Being _ back’ from the shore of normal living (5-8).

Grief like a juggler keeps playing, for, if he were to flinch, someone’s eye might detect the actual number of his bruises. Grief is also a Gourmand, greedily devouring the whole of a person’s life, and his family and friends should allow the griever this luxury (9-12).

You can burn Grief in the Public Square before he will tell, though his Ashes might then possibly speak. If they refuse, we will never know what the grief was, as you cannot put a pile of ashes on the Rack (13-16).
Poem 794 F846  ‘A Drop fell on the Apple Tree’
Emily describes a brief summer shower, whose ‘Fete’ ended when a ‘single flag’ of clear sky showed in the east (lines 15-16).
Line 9 perhaps means that the Dust which had been hoisted up into piles on the roads (see line 7 of poem 824) was smoothed back into flatness by the rain.
In lines 13-14 the breezes associated with the shower of falling raindrops bring back noise into life after the stillness of the preceding heat, like Lutes that had been laid aside but are now part of the Glee.

Poem 795 F847  ‘Her final Summer was it’
Emily admits that she and others have made a mistake. When they noticed that their friend was busier than ever during the summer, they thought that her vitality had been renewed. But when at the summer’s end the friend died and all that was left to see of her was her tomb of Carrara marble, it became clear that her ‘tenderer industriousness’ had been directed at doing the things she most needed to do before she died.

Poem 796 F848  ‘Who Giants know, with lesser Men’
If we spend our days listening to giants like Bach, we shall be ill at ease at a pop concert, whereas the gnat of a pop fan, who is unconscious of Bach and his fellow giants, will thoroughly be home at the concert.

Poem 797 F849  ‘By my window have I for Scenery’
Emily believes that the pine tree which she can see through her first floor bedroom window can be regarded as an ‘apprehension of infinity (23-4).’ She says:
Birds and farmers can think it a pine if they want to, but to me it is a sea of branches upon a stem (1-4).
This sea of branches has no harbour or ‘Line’ of ships, but flocks of jays split up as they fly past it, and squirrels use its boughs to climb higher (5-8).
This sea does have as its ‘Inlands’ the Earth and the Sun, and if it has any Commerce, that must be of Spice, such is the pine’s sweet odour (9-12).
When the wind makes music within the branches of the pine, as I am only a ‘Dumb’
human being, I cannot positively affirm that this is of God, as no definition exists of
his ‘Melody’ (13-16).
But the pine’s music does suggest to our faith that it is of God. And this seeming
presence of God together with our faith in it do suggest to our eyes that, when our
sight is put away at death, we shall meet immortality with the conviction that we have
met it somewhere before (17-21).
So my pine is not just a scientific fact to be studied by fellows of the Royal Society
(founded in 1662 to advance science). It is an apprehension of the Royal Infinity, one
of God’s introductions to immortality, and ‘to be hallowed _ accordingly(22-5).’

Poem 798 F853 ‘She staked her Feathers _ Gained an Arc’
This description of a bird attempting to fly for the first time and who stakes her
feathers on being able to make progress through the air could also describe Emily’s
own poetical career. Despite scant encouragement from Bowles and Higginson, she
embarked on writing poems in her own way and soon rose above the earth-bound
opinions of her acquaintances. And now she sails serenely on, as much at home
among the pantheon of great poets as she was as a little girl in Amherst.

Poem 799 F854 ‘Despair’s advantage is achieved’
Just as we cannot know the savours of foods unless we eat them with our own
mouths, so we cannot know what advantage there might be in despair or what help we
might get in a reverse, or the worth of suffering or death until we have experienced
for ourselves despair, reverse, suffering and death. ‘Until Ourselves are struck,’ we
cannot know the feeling of affliction.

Poem 800 F855 ‘Two – were immortal twice’
Emily is perhaps remembering the early love between herself and Sue. Through it
they seemed to know Eternity twice (in Time as well as after death), and to be able to
guess the nature of Paradise from its Comparative, their love.

Poem 801 F586 ‘I play at Riches – to appease’
The ‘Gold’ of line 2 could stand for Sue’s love. Emily had described this love as ‘Gold’ in line 26 of poem 299, and as a ‘Jewel’ in poem 245. If this is so, the poem might be paraphrased:

I play in my imagination at loving Sue in order to appease my clamouring desire for her. This imagining kept me from sinfully stealing physical love from her, when I had the desire and the opportunity, and could have shown myself to be an independent human being, not caring what people thought (1-8).

But whenever I feel that my fate of abstinence from physical love is becoming unbearable, I consider what that relationship would be like, and I come to the unusual conclusion that I can better value this richness by abstaining from it than by possessing it (9-16).

Should I ever in the ‘long – uneven term’ of life gain the Mine of this love, I shall be the fitter to possess it because of the preceding Want. Indeed the unsatisfied desire is so ‘enlightening’ that I do not know which is the ‘wholly beautiful,’ whether the unsatisfied or the satisfied desire (17-24)

This poem is another variation on Emily’s common theme that anticipation is better than fulfilment.

Poem 802 F858  ‘Time feels so vast that were it not’
This Time of life on earth feels so vast and rich within its Circumference that I fear I would not consider anything else, were it not for thoughts of Eternity, even though such behaviour would be to exclude the very God who by the stages of our growth is preparing us for the ‘vision of His diameters,’ which will one day slash across our finite world.

Poem 803 F859  ‘Who Court obtain within Himself’
As in poems 713, 753 and 789 Emily maintains that our chief task is self esteem. If we feel that we have a ‘Court’ within ourselves, we shall see other people as all being kings, whereas if we see few such kings in the world around us, the cause will be our own interior poverty. Similarly, if Fate has made us ‘kings’ within ourselves, no man can depose us, while if our interior ‘Court’ is in chaos, no man can ‘add [to it] a Crown’ from outside.

Poem 804 F860  ‘No Notice gave she, but a Change’
A woman died quietly with just a sigh, not conscious of the summer day on earth or of the extreme coldness of death. A shrinking violet in life, she was not abashed by the village people around her death-bed, but met ‘the gaze [of death] direct.’ And when she was buried, with just the mound of her grave hindering her return to life from ‘the Everlasting Spring,’ she refused our imploring invitation to return, just as if she had never known us.

Poem 805 F863  ‘This Bauble was preferred of Bees’
Judith Farr believes that the ‘Bauble’ of this poem is Sue. She was ‘preferred’ and ‘admired’ by the ‘bees’ and ‘butterflies’ of Amherst society, and even the bird that was Emily regarded her as good and ‘Heavenly’ – at a ‘Hopeless Distance.’ If only ‘Noon’ could have made this Bauble in lasting enamel, she could have been a whole Summer to a score of people who thought her the best thing in the world, instead of just the Bauble of a moment.

Poem 806 F864  ‘A Plated Life – diversified’
In poem 747 Emily decided that ‘Plated Wares’ did not suit her ‘Silver Shelf,’ and there seems to be a similar contrast in this poem. Our normal, ordinary ‘Plated Life’ is most likely to show that it possesses particles of Gold and Silver Ore when we are in pain, and when we struggle to find the power to proclaim that we are of value even though ‘Annihilation pile whole Chaoses’ upon us.

Poem 807 F865  ‘Expectation – is Contentment’
As in poem 801 Emily argues that anticipation brings contentment, but fulfilment brings satiety and the conviction that ‘Pleasure’ needs a dash of the ‘Austere.’ For ‘Good without alarm is too established’ and leads to complacency, whereas ‘danger – deepens [the] Sum’ of our pleasure.

Poem 808 F940  ‘So set its Sun in Thee’
In lines of an abba pattern Emily expresses the depths of her devotion ( with ‘so’ in lines 1 and 4 being short for ‘as long as.’) No day is dark if she thinks of her loved one at its setting. No distance is too great if only she can see ships which one day may touch her loved one’s shore.
But to whom is this devotion addressed? Thomas Johnson says that a copy of this poem was sent to Sue, but the ‘Distance’ of line 3 would better fit Samuel Bowles during his absence in Europe.

(1864)  Emily is 34 and writes 173 poems.

Poem 809 F951  ‘Unable are the loved to die’
Emily claims that our Loved ones do not die, for our love for them is a God which keeps them immortal, and then, more extravagantly, that we the Lovers will not die either, since, because of our Love, the ‘Vitality’ of our mortal life at death will be transformed into the ‘Divinity’ of eternity.

Again this poem may have been meant for Samuel Bowles, such extravagant language being common in her poems to him. Alternatively Thomas Johnson says that when Emily sent the first stanza only to Sue, this may have been on the occasion of the death of Sue’s sister, Harriet Cutler in March 1865.

Poem 810 F956  ‘Her Grace is all she has’
This poem could refer to Emily’s own poetry. It is her only Grace, but she advertises it so little, that it takes skill to discover it, and another skill to be able to praise it as good poetry.

Poem 811 F798  ‘The Veins of other Flowers’
Nature herself does not have the leisure to provide labels for the organised mass of her creations, permanent though she is. It is we transient mortals who have to classify and ‘conjugate her skill.’ To one lot of flowers the veins of other flowers are just ‘Scarlet Flowers.’ One lot has no comprehension of the life cycle of the rest.

Poem 812 F962  ‘A Light exists in Spring’
As in poem 736 and the last stanza of poem 74 Emily describes those early days of spring when for a moment the spiritual world is so revealed in the light and colour of the natural world that ‘it almost speaks to you’ (line 12). But the epiphany is brief, and, as the Horizons and Noons of the natural world repeat themselves, it silently vanishes, and we feel a sense of loss and violation ‘as [if] Trade had suddenly encroached/ upon a Sacrament.’
In a later letter (L807) of 1883 to James Clark Emily refers to ‘that sweet Physician, an approaching Spring.’

Poem 813 F1090 ‘This quiet Dust was Gentlemen and Ladies’
The second stanza is a more complex version of the first stanza. ‘This Passive Place’ of the grave of the dead was once their ‘Summer’s nimble mansion.’ It is in this same place that flowers, bees and people both live the ‘Circuit’ of their lives and then cease to be. (‘an Oriental Circuit’ perhaps means ‘a life beginning at birth.’)

Poem 814 F1110 ‘One day is there of the Series’
Emily is not happy about celebrating Thanksgiving Day. She is neither a venerable Patriarch nor an unthinking Pussy (a variant reads ‘neither Ancestor nor Urchin’), and from her possibly blinkered (= ‘hooded’) position between the two it seems that the day is celebrated automatically without much thought (= ‘Reflex Holiday’).

For it could only be a day of proper Thanksgiving if the company sitting down to the meal had not suffered a ‘Subtraction’ or loss by death, if where once there had been a ‘room’ with a full complement there was not now an empty ‘Acre’ with only the names or ‘captions’ of the dead on the backs of chairs, if the company did not have to mention some child who had died young and whose ‘small Pebble’ had once ‘wrinkled [the] Sea’ in a game of ducks and drakes.

Poem 815 F819 ‘The Luxury to apprehend’
As for the luxury of contact with you, just to look on you once would be for me the luxury of an Epicurean feast, whatever other difference your actual Presence made. I would scarcely remember to grow hungry for any further food (1-8).

As for the luxury of meditating about you, to have been able ‘to banquet on thy Countenance’ would then give a ‘sumptuousness’ to those ‘plainer days, when I am certain that the only Crumb on my Table [of love] will be my memory of looking upon you (9-16).

Emily as usual does not say which loved one she has in mind, and as usual values imagination above actuality. In a late letter (L819) of 1883 to Thomas Higginson she still claims that ‘Emblem is immeasurable – that is why it is better than Fulfilment, which can be drained.’
Poem 816 F966  ‘A Death blow is a Life blow to Some’
Judith Farr suggests that the ‘Death blow’ Emily has in mind is the death of her love
relationship with Sue, for this was also a ‘Life blow’ in that it turned her to writing
poetry as a healing balm. She did not come alive as a poet until the relationship had
died. If she had lived (= the relationship had not died), she would have died to poetry.
But the relationship did die, and when it died, Vitality (= her life as a poet) began.

Lines 3 and 4 would be easier to understand if there was a comma after ‘had died’
in line 3, and in fact there is such a comma in some copies of the poem.

Poem 817 F818  ‘Given in Marriage unto Thee’
Human betrothal, caused by the will of two people to marry, will dissolve at death.
But only she who has a ring as the Bride of Christ, or rather as the Bride of the
Trinity, will ‘conquer mortality.’

As Jane Eberwein Donahue points out, in this poem Emily describes her ever
shifting relationship with God in terms which are more Catholic than Calvinist.

Poem 818 F816  ‘I could not drink it, Sweet’
In Emily’s copy of this poem sent to Sue, ‘Sweet’ at the end of the first line is
replaced by ‘Sue.’ She seems to be saying:
‘Even though I was so thirsty that the thought of drinking the water was cooler than
the actual drinking, I could not drink until you had drunk first.’

Whatever ‘the water’ may stand for, the poem is an extravagant statement of her
devotion to Sue.

Poem 819 F799  ‘All I may, if small’
As so often, Emily sides with the small creatures of the world. If she is small and has
little, she can give all of it, and the gift, for being total, will look larger. By contrast,
to give away a whole World but keep back one Star would seem economical. True
‘Munificence’ is to give the ‘Utmost.’ To give less than everything, even though that
‘less’ may be larger than the small person’s total, is poor compared with true
munificence.

Emily may have in mind Jesus’ words about the widow’s two mites, ‘Verily I say
unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into
the treasury: For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.’ *(Mark 12:43-4)*

**Poem 820 F1113** ‘All Circumstances are the Frame’

God’s face is established in all features of the natural world. All latitudes make up his ‘Sufficient Continent.’ He causes the Light. The Dark comes because his will is to rest from flooding the world with light.

But at the same time he is ‘a Force illegible’ and his purpose unknowable. He does not make it clear whether we who exist will [continue to] serve [him at death] or set [in extinction].

**Poem 821 F807** ‘Away from Home are some and I’

Thomas Johnson suggests that ‘the poem may have been inspired in a moment of longing for home, shortly after Emily arrived in Cambridge, a district of Boston, in late April 1864 for eye treatment.’ She seems to say:

‘Other people as well as myself are away from home. To some it may seem easy to be an emigrant in a ‘Metropolis of Homes’ like Boston. But for me it is as difficult to get used to it, as it is for parents to get used to their children whose feet have taken them away from home while their faces remain in the memory.’

**Poem 822 F817** ‘This Consciousness that is aware’

The same Consciousness or Soul which is aware of things in this life will be the part of us which passes from this life to the ‘most profound’ experiment of death. Only the soul itself will know how adequate it is to meet this challenge. The soul, the ‘columnar Self’ of poem 789, will face this adventure almost completely on its own, in fact attended only by the nature or character or ‘identity’ which it has formed by its choices in its lifetime.

For easier understanding of the poem ‘experience’ and ‘between’ should be reversed mentally on line 6, and ‘other’ supplied after ‘none’ at the end of line 11.

**Poem 823 F972** ‘Not what We did, shall be the test’

It is to be hoped that Emily’s intuition in this poem is correct. After ‘would’ at the end of line 3 ‘have done’ or ‘have wanted to do’ needs to be supplied.
Poem 824 F796  ‘The Wind begun to knead the Grass’
Both versions of this poem were written in 1864. Emily seems to have attempted to make the thunderstorm more awesome in the second version by rewriting the first stanza so that the word ‘Menace’ is repeated and the female dough kneaders changed into a violent male figure, and by changing ‘head’ and ‘toe’ in lines 11-12 into the scarier ‘Beak’ and ‘Claw.’

But in both versions all is well at the end, for even when ‘the Waters wrecked the Sky,’ her ‘Father’s House’ stood firm against the tempest, which did no more damage than ‘just Quartering a Tree.’ Also the storm is domesticated by anthropomorphistic touches such as the leaves unhooking themselves from trees as women do their corsets or the birds putting up the bars to their nests like the Dominie at the end of poem 318. Altogether Emily’s thunderstorm is more reminiscent of the thunderstorm in the last movement of Haydn’s symphony Le Soir than the storm in Beethoven’s Pastoral symphony.

Poem 825 F898  ‘An Hour is a Sea’
When Sue was staying with her sister, Martha Smith, in New York, Emily concluded a short letter (L312) to her with this poem. She led up to the poem with the words, ‘[I] turn my thoughts [to you] without a Whip – so well they follow you.’

An hour’s absence from Sue and a few others feels as big as the sea to Emily, and she longs to reach the harbour of their presence. An hour had also felt long in poem 781. The harbour is reminiscent of the last two lines of poem 249 and the last lines of poems 368 and 506.

Poem 826 F812  ‘Love reckons by itself – alone’
Love and the Sun are equally unexplainable to those who have never felt their blaze. They are as large as and like themselves. Nothing can be compared with them.

In orthodox punctuation this two-sentence poem would have a full-stop after “As large as I.” Emily also used the impossibility of explaining the Sun ‘to Races – nurtured in the Dark’ in poem 581.

Poem 827 F820  ‘The Only News I know’
In the summer of 1864 Emily was immured in her cousins’ house in Cambridge, Boston undergoing eye treatment. She there received a letter from Thomas Higginson,
saying that he had been wounded in the Civil War. The first stanza of this poem forms part of her letter of reply (L290) to Higginson. She leads up to the stanza as follows:

‘I was ill since September, and since April, in Boston, for a Physician’s care – He does not let me go, yet I work in my Prison, and make Guests for myself –

Carlo [my dog] did not come, because that he would die, in Jail, and the Mountains, I could not hold now, so I brought but the Gods –

I wish to see you more than before I failed – Will you tell me your health?
I am surprised and anxious, since receiving your note.’

Then follows the stanza, saying that her Only News is her ideas for poems recording her intuitions of immortality, ‘Bulletins’ being the apt word for the compressed, telegraphic language of those poems. And she follows the stanza with the words, ‘Can you render [= read] my Pencil? The Physician has taken away my Pen.’

She could have appropriately sent him the next two stanzas as well (her only theatre is dramas of eternity in her mind, she meets only God and the only street she goes down is the street of life), but Higginson might have been too serious to have appreciated the dash of bravado in the last sentence, in which she says that if, when she has traversed life and gets to heaven, she finds ‘Other News’ or ‘Admirabler Show,’ she’ll let him know.

Poem 828 F501 ‘The Robin is the One’
In poem 285 Emily chose the robin as the emblematic New England bird. In poem 634 she described the robin’s physical characteristics. This poem ends with a robin’s more metaphysical attributes. In line 3 the ‘express Reports’ are that spring is coming.

Poem 829 F804 ‘Ample make this Bed’
Emily herself titled a copy of this poem ‘Country Burial.’ The mourners are to make the spacious bed of this grave ‘with Awe,’ because in it the dead man awaits the day of Judgment, which, for the good at least, will dawn ‘Excellent and Fair.’ They are to make the bed properly, and to keep away the daily ‘yellow noise’ of this world’s sunrise.

Poem 830 F815 ‘To this World she returned’
A friend of Emily’s called Mrs Gertrude Vanderbilt had been critically wounded by a pistol shot. Summoned to her back door by cries of distress, she had accidentally
received a shot intended for her maid by her maid’s crazed lover. Upon her recovery, she received this poem from Emily as a welcome back to this world of health.

Thankfully she has now returned to this world, if with a ‘tinge’ of the other. In fact for a time she was like a newly growing violet that cannot at first be certain whether it belongs to the dust of the sod from which it came or to the daylight of the skies to which it is reaching as a Bride.

In lines 6-7 ‘that’ refers back to a violet, while ‘Himself’ refers back to the sod. In a letter (L203) of March 1859 to Mrs Anthon Emily had written of ‘the new violet sucking her way among the sods.’ In poem 392 it was the Lily that passes ‘through the Dark Sod.’

Poem 831 F946  ‘Dying! To be afraid of thee’
This poem, like the previous one, was also sent to Mrs Vanderbilt after her narrow escape from death, but some two years later. Emily perhaps puts the words of the poem into the mouth of Mrs Vanderbilt, and says on her behalf:
‘When I thought I was dying, I was afraid of death only because I would be leaving you exposed to the loss of our love. I was shy, not for myself, but at the thought that death’s ‘Batteries’ were divorcing me from you. As I faced death, I fought a battle between the certainty that leaving my love for you would be bad and the uncertainty whether that love would receive any fulfilment or compensation after death.’

Poem 832 F814  ‘Soto! Explore thyself!’
This poem, a copy of which was sent to Austin, might be Emily in general terms saying, like the Delphic oracle, ‘Know thyself,’ or it might more particularly refer to her resolve to explore a new poetic world undiscovered by any of her contemporaries.

‘Soto’ is Don Fernandes de Soto, one of the sixteenth century Spanish explorers of New Mexico who went in search of the fabulous ‘Seven Cities of Gold.’ Line 4 means that no outside person has had any intention of settling inside this continent.

Poem 833 F273  ‘Perhaps you think me stooping’
Ruth Miller suggests that this poem sent to Samuel Bowles may have been triggered by Bowles’ ‘letter to an unidentified recipient,’ (referred to in the note on poem 277), the last sentence of which reads, ‘There is no call for any of us to humble ourselves before each other.’ If this is so, Emily in reply justifies her own ‘stooping’ by
claiming that Christ himself did just that when he died for us. A Christian receiving the Sacrament does not ‘commemorate [Christ’s] dishonour,’ but the fact that Christ, who loves us, was so infused with love that he bent ‘as low as death’ for us, before rising in glory on Easter Day to be ‘redignified, above.’ (‘re-royalised’ is a variant reading.)

Poem 834 F949 ‘Before He comes we weigh the Time!’
Emily sent this poem to Samuel Bowles, perhaps when he was absent in Europe. Before his return, the time is both heavy with his absence and light with his imminent return. When he departs, all she feels is the weight of Emptiness. Emily had also used ‘Freight’ for a mental burden in poem 688, another poem sent to Bowles.

Poem 835 F803 ‘Nature and God – I neither knew’
Ruth Miller connects this poem sent to Samuel Bowles with poem 643, in which Emily imagines that she has been forced to choose between her love for Samuel Bowles and her adherence to the cause of Nature and of God, and finds that she can only give an ambiguous reply.

If this connection is genuine, Emily in this poem gives him a further explanation of the power of Nature and God over her, and is perhaps saying:
‘I never knew Nature and God [but only had intuitions about them]. But I was startled to find that they both knew me [and that I was destined to be their poet]: in fact they knew me as well as Executors know an estate for which they are doing probate. But neither told the world that I was to be a poet. This secret was as secret as the planet Uranus until Herschel discovered it or as the affair of Mercury (whether messenger god or planet).’

Poem 836 F795 ‘Truth – is as old as God’
In this poem Emily as emphatically identifies Truth with God, as in poem 449 she had identified it with Beauty. Truth can only disappear when God does, and that day will never come.
Emily suitably sent this poem to the serenely pious Dr Holland, attached to letter 175 according to Mabel Loomis Todd in her 1894 edition of Emily Dickinson’s letters.

Poem 837 F813 ‘How well I knew her not’
This poem is a whole letter sent to Emily’s friend, Maria Whitney, whose sister Sarah had died 9 July 1864 at Plymouth, Connecticut.

It seems that Emily had heard a lot about the sister from Maria but had never met her. She had always looked forward to the ‘Bounty’ of meeting the sister, but now it is the pain of the loss which has come to live ‘Next Door’ to Emily.

Poem 838 F939 ‘Impossibility, like Wine’
In poem 657 Emily had claimed ‘I dwell in Possibility.’ Here she pushes her thought onwards to the exhilaration of ‘Impossibility.’ In this poem ‘Possibility’ is flavourless, unless its ‘Dram’ has a drop of the merest Chance added to it. Then possibility will have ‘Enchantment’ as an ingredient, as certainly as the ‘Doom’ of death awaits all men.

In Anthony Trollope’s novel, The Belton Estate, the young hero William Belton similarly regards the impossibility of winning the hand of Clara Amedroz as an intoxicating challenge.

Poem 839 F942 ‘Always mine!’
Emily could be addressing Jesus or God, either on a day of commitment to one of them or imagining the day of her death. Her permanent unity with their Light is as certain as the ‘rotation of the Seasons.’ God’s Grace has been given to thousands before her, but each reception of his Grace is as unique and ‘first’ as is the dawn of each new day in the purple skies of the ancient East.

Poem 840 F943 ‘I cannot buy it – tis not sold’
The mysterious ‘it’ of the poem must be a person if Emily can ‘look it in the Eye’ and ask if he or she really meant to leave her, and then ‘turn [her] Face away’ when she hears that the answer is ‘Yes.’

The ‘it’ could refer to Samuel Bowles or to Sue, like the lost Jewel of poem 245. Alternatively it could refer to a vision of God and an encounter with him. But whether the ‘it’ is human or divine, Emily would travel anywhere to find ‘it’ again.

Poem 841 F944 ‘A Moth the hue of this’
It could be that Emily in her room sees a moth fluttering around a candle flame, and thinks how amazing it is that a moth of the same colour flutters around candles in
faraway Brazil. The world of nature is so marvellous that our brightest apprehension of it is pale by comparison, though we can say that Nature, like a girl, is fond of small, beautiful things.

In poem 541 Emily referred to the butterflies of Brazil.

**Poem 842 F945** ‘Good to hide, and hear em hunt!’
Ruth Miller suggests that in this poem Emily may be thinking of her own poetry. At first she thinks it is good to hear critics hunting for outstanding new poets, but to remain in hiding herself, even though she knows she is a fox of just that colour. But then she thinks it might be better to be found, for she as poet (= the fox) has a lot to say which is important for critics to read (= fits the hound).

It is good to know her poems are of high quality and not to publish them, but it might be best to tell them to the world – if only she can find one or two ears ‘not too dull’ to understand them.

**Poem 843 F947** ‘I made slow Riches but my Gain’
The ‘slow Riches’ are probably Emily’s poems. In describing their making she contrasts ‘every Night’ with ‘All Days.’ She writes slowly but persistently and ‘every Night’ adds a few more lines to their sum. During ‘All [the] Days’ she merely composes fresh lines in her head, so she does not add to her riches in the same way. The daytime gain is ‘perceiveless’ and can be inferred better from the fact that she has fresh lines to write each night than from seeing the daytime growing happening.

**Poem 844 F948** ‘Spring is the Period’
As she shows in such poems as 65 and 1404, spring with its resurrection of life is for Emily the time when a man is most likely to walk in a garden and meet God, even if God is present in the other seasons as well.

**Poem 845 F919** ‘Be Mine the Doom’
Thomas Johnson says that these lines were ‘evidently written to accompany the gift of a flower.’ Presumably the flower is speaking to the recipient and says in effect: ‘My life has met its end (=Doom). But at least I have the fame of knowing that I perished at the hand of Emily Dickinson, famous poet.’
Poem 846 F950  ‘Twice had Summer her fair verdure’
Two years of Nature’s seasons have gone by, but her ‘wandering Bird’ is still hungry for just ‘a Berry.’ It is tempting to imagine that the wandering bird is Emily herself, and that her hunger is caused by the absence or silence of Sue or Samuel Bowles.

Poem 847 F952  ‘Finite – to fail, but infinite to Venture’
Failure is part of our ‘finite’ human nature – but we can try again an ‘infinite’ number of times. As Samuel Beckett said, ‘Fail again. Fail better.’ But we must also face the fact that success is rare. Only one ship reaches safety and ‘struts the shore.’ The others go down and are no longer part of navies nodding at anchor. Any golfer could vouch for the truth of the first line.

Poem 848 F953  ‘Just as He spoke it from his Hands’
Roger Lundin takes the ‘He’ of the poem to be God. But it would be a pessimistic view of God which pictured him as content with his world just as he had designed it and not then bothered whether ‘it perish or endure.’ So perhaps more likely is Ruth Miller’s idea that Emily is describing her own spontaneous and intuitive manner of writing poetry, and the ‘He’ is herself. Certainly Thomas Higginson in his Letter to a Young Contributor, published in the Atlantic Monthly of April 1862 had recommended the absolute necessity of constant revision, and had cited approvingly Ariosto’s sixteen revisions of a single stanza. So the poem may be a riposte to this advice. Emily, as we have seen, did read over her poems and think of variant words, but fundamentally she wants her poems to ‘perish or endure’ just as they came from her hands when her skill first wrote them down. ‘Whatso’er’ fate awaits her poems if ever they are published, she is content if they are an ornament to her ‘absent character.’

Poem 849 F954  ‘The good Will of a Flower’
This poem is an unusual gardening tip from Emily. If you want your flowers to grow, you must first present them with a printed certificate testifying to your inner purity.

Poem 850 F955  ‘I sing to use the Waiting’
Emily is waiting for her beloved in order to go on a journey with him. All she has to do is tie on her bonnet and shut the house door, so she will sing to pass the time of
waiting. But this is no ordinary journey. Their destination is ‘the Day [?of Judgment or a better life]’ and as they travel together they will ‘tell each other how they sang ‘to keep the Dark [times of this life] away.’

In her second letter (L261) to Thomas Higginson Emily described how in times of terror she had made poems ‘to Keep the Dark away.’ In her own words to him in the letter, ‘I had a terror – since September – I could tell to none – and so I sing, as the Boy does by the Burying Ground – because I am afraid.’

Poem 851 F957  ‘When the Astronomer stops seeking’

Emily declares in hyperbolic language to a loved one that she at least will never have ‘to ask what treason means.’ She would only have to do that if three impossible things happened, if astronomers found the lost Pleiad, if the British Lady Franklin stopped the search for her husband lost in the Arctic, and if the Sailor gave up trusting his compass.

It is possible that this poem is connected with poems 23 and 1410, as ‘treason’ or ‘traitor’ appears in all three poems, and the ‘lost Pleiad’ in the first two. If this is a genuine connection, Kate Anthon, who is named in 1410, will also be the ‘traitor’ of 23 and the person whose ‘treason’ is said to be impossible in 851. Since in poem 23 Emily’s calling her a ‘traitor’ was done in a teasing, tongue-in-cheek fashion, it is only in poem 1410 that Kate’s treason has become a reality.

Poem 852 F959  ‘Apology for Her’

These lines may have been attached to a single flower sent to a friend by Emily. This flower is the ‘Her’ of the poem. Emily, the Bee, apologises for sending just a single flower. But the flower is so beautiful that without speaking she is sufficient apology for Emily sending just one flower.

Some scholars believe that the ‘Bee’ of poem 213 also refers to Emily.

Poem 853 F961  ‘When One has given up One’s life’

After a great renunciation has been made, the rest of life seems so unimportant that the letting go of it is as easy as the Day departing from the West each evening. Day has as little regret for the mountain peaks that were the last things visible, as the cataract or waterfall has for the iodine-coloured water which cascades down it second by second.
Emily leaves the reader to guess what it was that she renounced.

Poem 854 F963 ‘Banish Air from Air’
This is Emily’s language at its most fragmented and condensed. She appears to be saying: ‘You cannot stop molecules of air or light waves from merging however you try to separate them. Cubes or shaped pellets will inevitably ‘fit’ the holes from which they come. Films cannot cancel the shapes beneath them. The odours of, for example, spring, cannot but ‘return whole.’ If the blonde flame is put under the water in a kettle, from what seems like ‘your impotence’ inevitably there ‘Flits Steam.’

Jane Eberwein Donahue, who helpfully elucidates this poem, suggests that it refers to Emily composing her poems. Once she has found the words that go together, they ‘fit’ and cannot be separated or cancelled. ‘And just as steam results from compression of water subjected to intense heat, so poems result from pressure on language in the cauldron of imagination.’

Poem 855 F1091 ‘To own the Art within the Soul’
Emily has chosen the solitary life of the soul over the social life of the company of other people. But silently to entertain her soul with the Festival of her Art is to possess an ‘Estate perpetual or a reduceless Mine,’ however ‘unfurnished’ with other people may be the circumstances of her life.

As Jane Eberwein Donahue comments, ‘her deprivation was the enabling condition of her art.’ Emily had also used the pun on the word ‘Mine’ in line 23 of poem 299.

Poem 856 F1092 ‘There is a finished feeling’
At a graveside we realise that our future life without the dead person will have more vacancy for leisure within it, but at the same time will be a huge wilderness. We also have a sharper insight into our own mortality and the ‘Eternal function’ for our souls after death (or, perhaps, into the ‘Eternal function’ of our own mortality).

Poem 857 F1059 ‘Uncertain lease – develops lustre’
To hold a thing upon an ‘uncertain lease’ has its own splendour as time goes by. To have an ‘uncertain grasp’ of a thing enables us to appreciate what whole possession
would be. But usually we prefer to know more quickly whether we possess the thing or not, because then, if successful, we have the prize of actually inheriting the tenure.

It is possible that the ‘thing’ Emily has in mind is Samuel Bowles returning her love for him.

**Poem 858 F1061** ‘This Chasm, Sweet, upon my life’

Emily tells her beloved Sue that she feels their love has gone wrong and that the ‘Chasm’ of its death awaits them as inevitably as day follows sunrise. If Sue disagrees, Emily can only say that their fate is that they are lying in the tomb of that chasm already. For Emily that chasm can only be closed if one of them dies. And as every day the chasm gets more ‘turbulent,’ Emily is tempted to ‘stitch [the chasm] up’ with her own ‘remaining Breath.’ She would not miss the breath, and it would be a death for the chasm. So she is carrying around with her this huge chasm which will be her burial place, until the day when she dies and brings the suffering to an end.

**Poem 859 F903** ‘A doubt if it be us’

In extreme anguish the possibility that it might not be us suffering enables us to go on living while the possibility, as it were, ‘suspends [our] lives.

**Poem 860 F904** ‘Absence disembodies – so does Death’

Absence and Death remove from our sight the bodies of our loved ones. But the superstition that our dead are immortal helps, and our love may be greater when our loved ones are out of sight. For when we put our tenderness for them to the test of their presence, it may decrease. As Emily put it in a letter (L318) of 1866 to her friend Mrs Holland, ‘When you had gone the love came. I supposed it would. The supper of the heart is when the guest is gone.’

**Poem 861 F905** ‘Split the Lark – and you’ll find the Music’

As no one would conceivably split a real Lark to find its music, Emily’s Lark must be a symbol, perhaps for herself as a poet. Perhaps also the ‘Sceptic Thomas’ of line 7 is primarily the critic Thomas Higginson, even if he is making the same experiment as his predecessor, Thomas the disciple of Jesus. *(John 20:24-5)* As was pointed out in the notes to poem 326, Higginson’s appreciation of Emily’s new kind of poetry was limited, and he may have wondered whether it was ‘music’ at all. If these suggestions
are correct, the poem will be an exasperated, ironical outburst at Higginson’s failure to appreciate the new music of the poems which she sings. She says in effect: ‘You don’t consider my poems music! If you were to split me open (\(=\) read all my poems), you would find me packed with music, and you would lose gush after gush of music reserved for you. And after that scarlet experiment, sceptic Thomas, you wouldn’t be able to doubt that your bird was a true poet, just as Thomas in the gospels couldn’t any longer doubt that Jesus as truly alive, once he had plunged his hand into his side.’

The mysterious lines 3-4 may be saying that so far in the summer of her life she has sent only a few poems to Higginson, specially selected for him to read when he gets tired of ‘Lutes’ (= traditional poets).

**Poem 862 F506** ‘Light is sufficient to itself’
Light is not given you to compensate you for some service of yours. It comes freely to all who want to see, and its glow means as much to the squirrel in the Himalayas as it does to you.

**Poem 863 F906** ‘The Distance was between Us’
Judith Farr thinks Emily intended this poem for Sue. As Sue lives just two hundred yards away, the distance between them is not of land or sea. It is ‘the Will’ that keeps people apart, not an intervening ‘Equator.’

**Poem 864 F810** ‘The Robin for the Crumb’
The words ‘of thanks’ need to be supplied after ‘no syllable.’ Emily is making the same point as in poem 760.

**Poem 865 F1111** ‘He outstripped Time with but a Bout’
The ‘He’ of this poem is perhaps the Devil. Having ‘outstripped Time..Stars and Sun,’ he challenged God himself. Ever since then the two of them have had a running battle, the larger Glory of God’s world being just a big enough ring for the lesser glory of the Devil to do battle in.

**Poem 866 F968** ‘Fame is the tint that Scholars leave’
Emily may include herself as a poet among these Scholars. If she is a real poet, fame will be the tint left behind as her sun sets in death. The Iris or purple of true fame is not like the purple of sunset in the west that ‘disappears as it comes.’

Poem 867 F969 ‘Escaping backward to perceive’
When we are tossed helplessly on the sea of life’s fears, unable to escape its waves backwards or forwards, retreating upwards no more than a billow’s height, and finding our feet slip from under us as we retreat downwards, all we can do is to turn to God.

Poem 868 F908 ‘They ask but our Delight’
This poem adds another gardening tip to that of poem 849. If we do but delight in our flowers and give them just a smile which costs so little, they will open their faces in full bloom for us.

Poem 869 F909 ‘Because the Bee may blameless hum’
If Emily is the ‘Maid’ who speaks this poem, the ‘Thee’ is most likely to be Sue. Seeing that a bee or flowers or robins can be close to Sue without fear, Emily is willing to become a bee, flower or robin, so that she may enjoy the same closeness in order to worship Sue. Ironically, in a letter (L185) of 1856 to Mrs Holland, Emily is glad that Mrs Holland is not a rose, bee or robin, as all these depart after a time.

   In line 5 ‘thine’ is perhaps short for ‘the flowers of thy face,’ and in line 7 ‘nor Robins’ short for ‘nor are Robins afraid.’ A full-stop is needed at the end of line 8, and ‘crypts’ in the same line is an apt word for ‘nests,’ as it literally means ‘hidden places.’

Poem 870 F910 ‘Finding is the first Act’
In the first four lines Emily seems to be accepting as fact the legend of the ‘Golden Fleece.’ The legend tells how the royal family of the town of Iolchis near Ephesus in Asia Minor had lost their golden fleece to Aeetes, king of Colchis on the Black Sea. Pelias, who had usurped the throne of Iolchis, sent Jason, the rightful heir, to recover the fleece from Aeetes, hoping that he would be killed on the expedition. But then, in the crescendo of the last four lines, Emily declares that this legend is just a myth with no basis in fact at all.
Emily gives no explanation of this negative parable but she had similarly deconstructed the biblical Moses in the second stanza of poem 597, and it could be that the story of Jason in this poem stands for the stories in the Bible. She had ‘found’ these stories at her father’s knee, lost them as she grew up, and when later she went on a quest to regain them discovered that they were wholly a sham.

**Poem 871 F1063** ‘The Sun and Moon must make their haste’
If Emily in the last poem attacked the Bible, as she was later to do in poem 1545, in this poem she celebrates both the power and the love of the Lord.

The Sun, Moon and Stars of this world must make haste and be ‘express’ in showing their power, since in the next world of Paradise it is only the light of the Eye of the Lord which burns, while the four poles of earth fade away. But the Lord is also a loving God, for his light in Paradise burns as a welcoming candle for the poor, the maimed and those far from him who have hunted for the daylight of his presence.

Judith Farr (G) gives a helpful appreciation of this poem.

**Poem 872 F1064** ‘As the starved Maelstrom laps the Navies’
This poem surprises the reader. The destructive force of the Maelstrom (line 1), the Vulture (lines 2-3) and the man-eating Tiger (lines 4-12) are suddenly compared with the ‘finer Famine’ of Emily herself. The maelstrom laps up whole navies, the vulture rips up flocks of sheep, the tiger goes hungry until he can taste the blood of a man, but when Emily is hungry, she can satisfy her hunger with ‘but a Berry of Domingo/And a Torrid Eye.’

Paula Bennett believes that the poem contrasts the sexual appetites of men and women. Men are voracious and completely destructive, while Emily as a woman is content with the Berry of her clitoris being stimulated by a female companion with a ‘Torrid Eye.’ Alternatively the contrast may be between the non-human hungers of maelstrom, vulture and tiger and the finer hungers of human beings, with Emily as their representative.

**Poem 873 F1065** ‘Ribbons of the Year’
The ‘Maker’s Girl’ is Nature. No one can accuse her of Vanity, for she wears the beautiful clothes of each season of the year only once before flinging them aside, as if they were no finer than ‘a faded Bead or a Wrinkled Pearl.’
Poem 874 F923  ‘They won’t frown always – some sweet Day’
The little girl of the poem has had ice piled on her teasing and lisping by a hostile ‘they’ and apparently sent to her bedroom, after vainly saying, ‘Please don’t send me away.’ But ‘some sweet Day’ they will miss her teasing, remember how cold she looked and call her back.

If the little girl is Emily herself, the hostile ‘they’ are more likely to be Sue and Kate Anthon rather than her own parents.

Poem 875 F926  ‘I stepped from Plank to Plank’
The cautious progress of this poem may, like poems 584 and 761, refer to Emily’s gradual management of the terror which had overcome her in 1863. Or, like poem 1770, it may refer to her trusting in experience rather than doctrine on her whole journey through life. Or, as Paula Bennett believes, it may refer to her making her way from the writing of one poem to the next, at one moment feeling the ‘Stars about [her] Head,’ but at other times feeling that the whole process might be engulfed in the sea of despair and come to an end.

Poem 876 F852  ‘It was a Grave, yet bore no Stone’
Emily imagines meeting a person who, after the agony of some ‘death in life’ experience, has a grave within her soul. The person was too numbed to tell Emily what had caused her ‘grave’ or even whether she was a countrywoman of Emily’s or a foreigner. Emily’s curiosity would not be satisfied until the ‘resurrection’ of the person herself from her grave of despair. And as she could only guess the cause of the grave, she could not help positively by sowing a rose or negatively by taking away a briar.

Poem 877 F920  ‘Each Scar I’ll keep for Him’
Emily will keep the Scars of the wounds caused by her Master’s absence to show him when he returns as being costlier than Gems. But if he were to count from Emily’s telling the tears she shed in his absence, his own tears would so exceed their number that Emily will ‘miss sum’ or lessen the number of her own tears to lessen her loved one’s grief.
Poem 878 F922 ‘The Sun is gay or stark’
Instead of saying that the weather affects our mood, Emily argues that our mood affects the weather. If we are merry, the sun seems merrier still. But if we are so unhappy that we want to die or at least want that day to come to an end which the sun had made too bright, then his pleasure in shining has no positive effect on us at all, but merely ‘magnifies [the] Freight’ of our woe.

Emily had used ‘freight’ for woe in poems 688 and 834.

Poem 879 F927 ‘Each Second is the last’
A man who is about to fall into the sea from the fragment of his shattered ship to which he is clinging, thinks that each second may be his last, as he measures the short distance between himself and unconsciousness in the sea. How much worse for him to drown having had a chance to escape than to have perished with the vessel before having that chance!

Poem 880 F928 ‘The Bird must sing to earn the Crumb’
Emily, like the Bird, has sung to her lady, but not been given the ‘Crumb of Breakfast’ of the Lady’s presence. Emily does not want just to be stored in the drawer of her Lady’s memory like attar of roses, for what is memory compared with the actual presence of the Lady!

The lady may be Sue or Kate Anthon. The attar of roses simile appeared in poem 675.

Poem 881 F929 ‘I’ve none to tell me to but Thee’
Emily imagines that she is writing to her only loved one. The tie between them was broken when the loved one passed beyond Emily’s boundary to some foreign shore from which Emily’s letters are unanswered.

If it was Emily who had gone abroad and her loved one still at home told her that she was desperately seeking some response from Emily, Emily would pursue this admission until she reached the lips from which the admission had come.

In 1864, when this poem was written, it was Emily, staying in Boston, who in fact was absent from Sue, so this poem was perhaps intended for Kate Anthon, then absent in Europe.
Poem 882 F1114  ‘A Shade upon the mind there passes’
Like the two previous poems this one desires the presence of an absent loved one. A shade passes across Emily’s mind when she remembers that there is a loved one who is ‘too numb to notice [her].’

Poem 883 F930  ‘The Poets light but Lamps’
On a winter’s evening it was normally Emily herself who lit the lamps in the Dickinson household by ‘stimulating’ or lighting their wicks. In this poem the lamps that she lights each evening become the poems which poets write. The poets themselves are extinguished by death, but even after death their poems can light up for new readers (= have their wicks stimulated), provided that the poems inherently possess a light as vital as the Sun’s, so that each new age like a Lens radiates ever outwards that vital light.

This poem would be easier to grasp if orthodox punctuation had been used. The reading above takes it to be one sentence of one line and a second sentence of seven lines, with ‘but’ being supplied before ‘the Wicks.’

Poem 884 F931  ‘An Everywhere of Silver’
Emily imagines that it is the beaches or ropes of sand that stop the silver sea from effacing the land.

Poem 885 F932  ‘Our little Kinsmen- after Rain’
Emily could not fathom out the purpose of ‘our little kinsmen,’ the angle worms, until one day she saw a bird eating a worm for breakfast, and went indoors again with the modest value she had placed on an angle worm enlarged. She wonders if God similarly may have had a higher opinion of the worm that was Emily when he saw her fulfilling some purpose.

The teasing, playful note of this poem is the same as that of an earlier letter (L193) to Samuel Bowles in which she recorded, ‘Our Pastor says we are a “Worm.” How is that reconciled? “Vain – sinful Worm” is possibly of another species.’

Poem 886 F934  ‘These tested Our Horizon’
The ‘These’ of this poem are the dead, who at the moment of death ‘tested our Horizon’ to see if there was anything beyond, and then disappeared just as a bird
vanishes out of our sight before it reaches the latitude it is aiming for. We reflect on their lives with unending delight, but it remains a toss-up whether we are to join them or not.

Emily had used ‘horizon’ for the boundary between earth and heaven in her second Master letter (L233) when she wrote, ‘and you have felt the horizon hav’nt you – and did the sea – never come so close as to make you dance?’

Poem 887 F1094  ‘We outgrow love, like other things’
Emily here acknowledges the truth that eventually we put our loves away in the Drawer, and if we later open the Drawer they seem so old-fashioned. She had used the same metaphor in her letter (L177) to Sue of January 1855 when she said, ‘If it is finished, tell me, and I will raise the lid to my box of Phantoms, and lay one more love in.’

Poem 888 F1095  ‘When I have seen the Sun emerge’
When Emily considers the miracle of the sun which without clamour or kudos gives us a new day for our deeds, the earth and its inhabitants seem no more than a drum beaten by little boys as they march up and down.

Poem 889 F1067  ‘Crisis is a Hair’
The crisis of death with its judgment (‘judgment’ is the original meaning of ‘crisis’) is ever only a hairsbreadth away. Our forces are ever creeping towards it, and once past it they ebb away. If this hairsbreadth crisis comes to us in sleep, all we can do is hold our breath, not knowing whether our scales are going to come down on the side of life or of death. If we push against the boundary between the two for an instant with just an atom’s force, of if the circle of our life hesitates when on the circumference of this world, it may be just enough to jolt the hand which moves the hair which is the only thing between us and eternity.

Poem 890 F794  ‘From Us she wandered now a Year’
It is the first anniversary of the death of some beloved woman. The mourners do not know where she is staying now, ignorant of whether it is the wilderness of the grave or the Ethereal Zone of heaven. They only know the day on which they took the mystery of her death into their lives.
Thomas Johnson suggests that the dead woman may be Lamira Norcross, the young wife of Emily’s mother’s youngest brother. If so, the ‘us’ of the poem may include Emily’s cousins, Louise and Frances Norcross, nieces of Lamira Norcross.

**Poem 891 F912** ‘To my quick ear the Leaves – conferred’
Emily presents herself as cowering in fear lest the Leaves or the Bushes or the flowers which are ‘Nature’s sentinels’ should reveal her hiding place. Even if she were to hide in a Cave, its walls would tell that she was there.

The reader can only guess why Emily fears exposure by Creation of what she is. Jane Donahue Eberwein suggests that she may be cowering, not in horror of what she has done, but in horror of what she knew her hidden rages might cause her to do. After all in poem 379 she had spoken of ‘a Bliss like Murder –/ Omnipotent – Acute.’

**Poem 892 F1069** ‘Who occupies this House?’
Emily might be composing this poem as she wanders through the Amherst graveyard where she herself lies buried today. She stops before the house or grave of a stranger. There is no friendly dog to welcome her to the house, but she can at least read the owner’s name and age from his tombstone inscription. If she were building a house, it would be in a livelier place! After an account of the origin and development of the graveyard, she reflects that dead people whom she knew are now more or less as unknown to her as is this stranger.

**Poem 893 F916** Drab habitation of whom?
Emily sent these lines with a cocoon to her three year old nephew Ned Dickinson, the son of Austin and Sue. Ned may have enjoyed the sound of the exact rhymes of lines 1 and 2 and lines 5 and 6, but his possible understanding of Emily’s vocabulary is more debatable.

**Poem 894 F1076** Of Consciousness, her awful Mate’
As in poem 822 Emily states that the Soul and Consciousness are indissolubly linked. It would be as easy for the soul to get rid of consciousness as it would be to hide consciousness ‘behind the Eyes of God.’ For God always sees first the deepest hid, is not bothered by crowds, and has triples lenses to spot any escapee.
Poem 895 F1077  ‘A Cloud withdrew from the Sky’
Emily seems to have caught a glimpse of a cloud before it ‘withdrew from the Sky’ and was lost to her. No doubt there are glories which are superior to that of a cloud, but even a cloud can be a sign from God, and had she fixed it firmer in her memory, she would be able to recall it now. She resolves in future never to pass such angels as clouds with merely ‘a glance and a Bow’ until she is firmly in heaven herself.

For Emily angels ‘begin the morning in every human life (L824)’ and ‘pilot [us] along (poem 477).’ She had used ‘Hermetic’ to describe the mind in poem 711.

The Japanese, so it is said, used to end the working day with a ‘cloud watching party’ at one another’s houses.

Poem 896 F1078  ‘Of Silken Speech and Specious Shoe’
The bee’s hum may seem like ‘Silken Speech’ to the flower and the shoe shape of his body look attractive. But he is a fickle traitor, continually transferring his attentions to the Grace of the newest flower. His Troth is plighted for no longer than a breeze, and he is continually putting up the bans for marriage and as continually divorcing his partners.

Poem 897 F1079  ‘How fortunate the Grave’
Death, the first Suitor never to plead his cause in vain, is certain to get hold of all of us eventually.

Poem 898 F1080  ‘How happy I was if I could forget’
This poem seems clearer if the first line is taken as a separate sentence and as expressing the wish ‘If only I could forget how happy I was!’
To remember the sadness she felt when her relationship with someone she had loved ended is easy, but to remember the Bloom of that relationship, which had made her ‘almost bold,’ is devastating, just like a little child losing her way and dying of the cold. November is perhaps the time when the relationship ended, or when it was at its height.

Poem 899 F1073  ‘Herein a Blossom lies’
Emily is perhaps speaking of a dear one or Blossom who is lying in her grave, with her Sepulchre between her and heaven. If she crosses over to heaven, she will become
such a blossom as will ‘overcome the Bee’ with delight. If she stays there, she is ‘but a Rind’ and no blossom at all.

Poem 900 F1074 ‘What did They do since I saw Them?’
Emily imagines some of her dead revisiting the earth. There are so many questions she is eager to put to them that, if only she could ‘snatch their Faces’ and their lips speak, she would not let them start for the sky until all her questions had been answered. She would not care if they were homesick for Eternity and patiently waiting to leave. Not even if God and the Just in heaven boldly offered her a reward for her visitors, would she ‘restore [her] Booty.’

Poem 901 F809 ‘Sweet, to have had them lost’
Emily’s variant version, printed by Franklin, beginning ‘Good to have had them lost’ and with an exclamation mark at the end of line 2, shows that ‘Sweet’ is not a person addressed, as it was in the first line of poem 858. Also in Johnson’s text ‘and’ in line 6 is a misprint for ‘are.’ The poem is made up of units of 2+3+4 lines, so that full-stops are needed after ‘saved’ (line2) and ‘hand’ (line5).

One good thing about losing our loved ones through death is that we know they are saved, and the closer their death to ours, the closer they will stand to us in heaven.

Most precious are the dead. Next precious are those who nearly died and were thought lost, but who were restored to life through thinking of those they were leaving behind.

Poem 902 F823 ‘The first Day that I was a Life’
‘A Life’ in this poem perhaps stands for life with dear friends. The day which began these friendships was ‘still’ but ‘full’ and on it Emily began the experiment of seeing whether such ‘tenderer’ friendships were possible. The day which ended the friendships was stiller but empty and completely final.

She cannot tell whether she prefers the beginning or the ending of the friendships, but to find which her friends preferred she has only to ask her memory.

The plurals ‘Men’ and ‘they’ perhaps refer to Sue and her circle of friends.

Poem 903 F80 ‘I die myself within my flower’
These lines accompanied a flower sent to a friend. As Emily herself is ‘inside’ the flower, when the flower dies and is thrown out from the vase, the friend may surprisingly feel the absence of both the flower and Emily.

**Poem 904 F828** ‘Had I not This, or This, I said’

Emily has the following dialogue with an unspecified ‘This’:

Emily: *(in a moment of prosperity)* If I did not have ‘This,’ my life would be inadequate.

This: *(in a moment of reverse)* You do not have me now, but you are busy enough. So do you really need me?

Emily: In times of reverse all I had was the need for you. The hunger does not finish when the food vanishes. But I am careful and pick up all the chances to stay busy and sane, since to feed and dwell upon my past prosperity would ‘enfeeble the Advance’ into any future prosperity.

‘This’ possibly refers to her love relationship with Sue or Samuel Bowles.

**Poem 905 F829** ‘Between My Country – and the Others’

Emily is perhaps saying that she has put a sea of distance between her ‘Country’ of the ‘Homestead’ and those other people who are her friends, but that the flowers which she sends to her friends keep her in touch with them.

**Poem 906 F830** ‘The Admirations – and Contempts – of time’

For Emily this world and the next are two stages in one existence, and one aspect of this is that the ‘Admirations’ and ‘Contempts’ which we form in this life are judged most accurately through the ‘Open Tomb’ of death. From this high vantage point we reorganise the estimates we have made on earth. For then the light of that world throws light on this, as our finite selves are ‘furnished with the Infinite’ in a ‘Compound Vision’ and a ‘Convex – and Concave Witness’ of both worlds to the truth.

Emily does not make it clear whether it is our own ‘Dying’ which enables us to see this life differently or whether it is the deaths of other people which enable us to reorganise our estimates of them.

**Poem 907 F831** ‘Till Death – is narrow Loving’
Emily claims that little love is needed to love a person while that person is still alive. The smallest or ‘scantest’ heart can manage to love you until you die. But what really does show love is when you miss a dead person so much that in your abject destitution you imitate the dead until, with your resemblance to him perfect, you can abdicate the delights of this world to follow him.

‘Exhibit Love – somewhat’ is an ironical way of saying ‘exhibits extreme love.’

The whole of lines 5-11 is the grammatical subject of the last line of the poem.

Poem 908 F832 ‘Tis Sunrise – Little Maid – Hast Thou’

The ‘Little Maid’ of this poem could just about be taken to be a person whom Emily or the speaker visits three times on the day of her death, with lines 7-8 referring to her jobs in the garden for that day. But it is more likely that, as in poem 17, the ‘Little Maid’ is a flower in Emily’s garden. At sunrise she is still closed fast and not opening to meet the sun. At noon the flower still droops, instead of being a fit partner for a lily or the quarry for a bee. At nightfall Emily realises the flower is completely dead and will not see another morning. If Emily had only been told that death was imminent, she might have been able to help the flower.

Poem 909 F837 ‘I make his Crescent fill or lack’

Emily imagines that she is the sun and her beloved master the moon. For two stanzas she has the mastery. The moon does everything ‘at [her] command.’ But in the final stanza she asserts that their powers are equal and complementary, with neither knowing who controls the other.

Poem 910 F899 ‘Experience is the Angled Road’

As in poems 875 and 1770 Emily values Experience highly and puts it above any axioms which the Mind may adhere to. Paradoxically the mind often has to choose the course suggested by experience, even if it leads in quite the opposite direction from the mind’s previously held axiom. Man is a complex piece of work and is often forced to choose the painful course suggested by experience rather than the comfortable course suggested by some axiom of the mind, all this being somehow predestined or ‘preappointed.’ For example Emily’s mind holds to the axiom that Samuel Bowles loves her, but experience shows her the painful truth that he does not love her as she
loves him. Experience takes a person from the straight road of the axiom down its own ‘Angled Road.’

Poem 911 F902 ‘Too little way the House must lie’
The house that ‘holds in undisputed Lease/a white inhabitant,’ or in other words the grave, is too near to all of us. The right to keep away from it is too narrow, the chance of getting there too imminent. We all have to emigrate and lose our neighbour once.

Poem 912 F971 ‘Peace is a fiction of our Faith’
That we shall have peace after death is a fiction invented by our faith. We may believe that the bells of a winter night tolling for a dead neighbour are bearing him out of their sound to heaven. But in fact he never alights or gets off there.

Poem 913 F975 ‘And this of all my Hopes’
‘All my hopes’ may be those invested in a love relationship which has now ended in silence. It blazed up in all its colours, but soon withered and died – another love for Emily to put away in her ‘box of phantoms (L177).’ The last two lines suggest that Emily knew this was going to happen.

Poem 914 F977 ‘I cannot be ashamed’
I am not ashamed to go on loving you in your absence, because any bashfulness or modesty I feel in this situation is reversed by the magnitude of your love. On the other hand I do not feel pride in loving you in your absence, because that absence gives me such a height to climb to maintain our love that I need Alpine equipment and the tools for dealing with snow.

The genitive ‘of Snow’ perhaps means ‘in respect of snow.’

Poem 915 F978 ‘Faith is the Pierless Bridge’
Emily hits upon an apt metaphor for Faith. It is the unseen bridge without piers which holds the Soul in arms of steel and links this world to the next. This bridge joins ‘behind the Veil’ on to what, when the bridge ends, is for ‘Our far, vacillating Feet/ a first Necessity.’

To read the poem in this way ‘is’ has to be supplied at the beginning of line 10.
Poem 916 F979  ‘His Feet are shod with Gauze’
Having described the Bee in extravagant terms, as if it were made of precious metals, Emily feels envy for its life of visiting Clovers in the Noon sunshine, and ceaselessly humming whether it is extracting pollen or pausing between flowers.

Poem 917 F980  ‘Love – is anterior to Life’
Love is timeless. It exists before our birth and continues after our death. It was the beginning of Creation and is that which explains why the earth and its inhabitants exist.

Poem 918 F981  ‘Only a Shrine, but Mine’
In poem 722 Emily described herself as a ‘wayward nun’ who worshipped her familiar hills as her ‘strong Madonnas.’ But in this poem she appears to be an orthodox nun worshipping the Virgin Mary herself. She has lit a candle at her private shrine and makes her prayer to the Virgin, and the end of the prayer shows that the Madonna is no more exempt from Emily’s gentle teasing than was God in such poems as 415. For Emily, having begun her requests with the words ‘Grant me’ (line 11), then breaks off, explaining why she has done so in the last line.

Poem 919 F982  ‘If I can stop one Heart from breaking’
Emily succeeded in helping people in the ways mentioned in these lines by writing her poems. For example, when her cousins’ father died in 1863 she wrote (L278) to them saying, ‘Let Emily sing for you, because she cannot pray.’ In another letter (L281) a few months later she said to them, ‘I shall heal you quicker than [the doctor]. You need the balsam word.’ In poem 691 she offered the ‘balsam word’ of her poems to Samuel Bowles to ‘cool [his] Pain.’

Poem 920 F845  ‘We can but follow to the Sun’
Judith Farr (G), in her helpful reading of this poem, points out that Emily establishes a similarity between the extent of a day (stanza 1) and the extent of a person’s life (stanza 2). In the first stanza the speaker finds herself ‘a Sphere behind’ the setting sun, because she cannot see the sun once it has gone beneath the rim of the earth. In the second stanza she is likewise a ‘Sphere behind’ the ‘Dust’ that was once a living
person, because she cannot follow him any further than the ‘Earthen Door’ of his grave. Once the Panels of his coffin are reversed and closed, he is no more seen.

**Poem 921 F184 ‘If it had no pencil’**

One day in 1863 Emily wrote these lines on a slip of paper, pinned it together around the stub of a pencil, and sent it across to Samuel Bowles who was visiting Sue and Austin at the Evergreens. Throughout the poem ‘it’ replaces the more usual ‘you.’ The Daisy, as in poem 106, is Emily herself.

On the surface Emily is saying, ‘If you have no pencil to reply to this note – and to the many notes I have sent you – you could always use this pencil. And if you have no words to write, you could draw a picture of me, your daisy, with it.’

But the poem has a bantering, sexual undertone. As Judith Farr says, ‘To be ‘plucked’ is to be ‘taken’ and such a symbol as a pencil stub is inherently phallic,’ although it was only in Emily’s imagination that she was once ‘taken’ by Samuel Bowles.

**Poem 922 F938 ‘Those who have been in the Grave the longest’**

Those long dead and today’s dead are equally remote from the practices of our world, as Death is totally ‘other.’ Some bold people (like Emily herself) have at least attempted to discover at deathbeds what death involves and to go a little way down that road, but without success because death is the adventure into a white blankness, from which, once achieved, no communication back to this world is possible.

**Poem 923 F941 ‘How the Waters closed above Him’**

A boy by accident or by his own hand drowns to death.

When Emily, writing to Mrs Holland in 1883 (L833), happened to use the word ‘Waters,’ she broke off to say, ‘What a beautiful Word “Waters” is!’

**Poem 924 F840 ‘Love – is that later Thing than Death’**

As in poem 917, Love is again described as timeless. Lines 5-6 on their own might suggest that Love in this poem is concentrated in the person of Jesus, but Jesus is hardly ‘an inferior Guard’ to God (line 9) or ‘smaller’ than God (line 12), so perhaps Emily has in mind the Love that is concentrated in each man’s guardian angel, as in poem 895.
Our Angel confirms or strengthens us at our birth, usurps or takes us over as his particular charge, goes through the grave before us, looks after us through the ‘little interval’ of purgatory and finally ‘deposits [us] with God.’ In heaven our Angel hovers over us as ‘an inferior Guard’ in case just once we need the ‘smaller’ guard of the angel rather than the ‘Large’ protection of God.

Poem 925 F841 ‘Struck, was I, not yet by Lightning’
The first three stanzas of this poem dramatically express the shock of the onset of love by each starting with a powerful past participle, ‘Struck,’ ‘Maimed,’ ‘Robbed.’ The fourth stanza is quieter, before the last two stanzas build up to a description of the deepest possible love in the last two lines. Emily says in effect:
I was not struck by lightning, as lightning lets us see what he does to life (1-4).
I was not maimed by slingshot of boy or by huntsman, so who was my enemy (5-8)?
I was not robbed by any bandit, but the Mansion of my virginity was torn, as the sun of my virgin life was withdrawn from recognition and set for ever (9-12).
Nor was I feared as a foe by even the smallest creature (13-16).
No, ‘the Cause that slew Me’ was the man that I love the most, and now, as often ‘as I die’ in orgasm, I recognise his beloved face like a Sun looking down on me (17-20).
The Sun of his face, like Nature’s sun, may be best at its Setting. And just as Nature’s sun is not witnessed as rising until dawn, so our love will only be infinite after we set in death and rise to the ‘infinite Aurora in the other’s eyes.’ (21-4)

As Judith Farr says of Emily, ‘her attitude toward passion is complex, and her vision of love-making specific.’ Poem 625 also contains the prospect of the lovers gazing into each other’s eyes in heaven.

Poem 926 F842 ‘Patience – has a quiet Outer’
Patience may wear a smile on the outside, but inside there is a quivering as the soul, as futilely as an insect, escapes from one ‘Infinite’ only to dash himself more fruitlessly against the other ‘Infinite.’ Emily does not identify the two ‘Infinites’ but perhaps they are the ‘enduring’ and the ‘frustration.’ For example, Emily, waiting for Samuel Bowles to declare his love, bounces between the enduring and the frustration.

Poem 927 F958 ‘Absent Place – an April Day’
In the snow drifts of winter an April Day with its daffodils is an ‘absent place’ and a ‘homesick curiosity.’ And to the man with a snowdrift on his mind in addition to the snowdrift outside, the daffodils, when they come, are a double delight.

Poem 928 F960  ‘The Heart has narrow Banks’
The heart may seem to be beating as calmly and unremittingly as the sea breaking monotonously on the shore, but its banks are too narrow to protect it against an hurricane bisecting it from outside. The least push from outside or questioning of its actions convulses its ‘insufficient Area.’

Poem 929 F965  ‘How far is it to Heaven?’
Emily seems to have in mind the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matthew25:31-46). At death the sheep will go to Heaven on Christ’s right hand and the goats to Hell on his left. This we have been told. But there has never been any discovery of the geography of heaven or of the topography of hell. The sepulchre prevents us knowing how bad or how far left hell is.

Poem 930 F811  ‘There is a June when Corn is cut’
As corn is not cut and roses not in seed in the real June, the June of line 1 should be in inverted commas as it refers to the later Indian summer which seems to bring June back to us. (Emily makes the same point less allusively in poem 1422.) This Indian summer is as brief and unexpected as would be a person returning from the grave ‘a single Noon,’ looking as ruddy as in life.

But however ‘tender’ an Indian summer on earth may be, the prospect of its beauty is soon challenged by frost, and when we at last experience the ‘Summer of the Just’ in heaven, it may seem so ‘infinite’ that we prefer it to our second Indian summers on earth. It is the real second summer.

Judith Farr (G) helpfully unravels the complex weave of this poem.

Poem 931 F1060  ‘Noon – is the Hinge of Day’
Emily jots down the thought that the Day is like a door. Noon is its hinge. Morning is its sill or threshold with the East forcing it to become ajar. Evening is when the door has a richness of tissue colours. (‘Tissue’ was originally a rich kind of cloth, but the variant reading of ‘folding’ is easier.)
Poem 932 F1062 ‘My best acquaintances are those’

Line 3 presumably could have been punctuated ‘The Stars that stated “Come to Town.”

If these Stars are the real stars in the sky, their town will be Heaven. They are her ‘best Acquaintances’ because they are the signs of heaven. She has not yet responded to their call, but her reverent attitude to their world is ‘sufficient courtesy.’

Her ‘best Acquaintances’ can hardly be her favourite authors from the past who invite her to read their books, as she does reply to their call – unless they are inviting her to join them in heaven.

Poem 933 F967 ‘Two Travellers perishing in Snow’

Two travellers freezing to death comforted each other by saying that they would one day meet in heaven those they were leaving behind. But then their situation grew too bad for words to be used, as the wind blew in huge gusts across the snow which God’s morning sun had reddened. They died.

The days went by without any news of their deaths reaching their families, until Mystery herself grew impatient and those who had been left behind were led away from their homes and joined the snow victims in heaven.

Poem 934 F907 ‘That is solemn we have ended’

All endings have a solemnity, whether a play or children’s games in the attic or eventually leaving our understood world for a ‘better still to be explained.’ As in poems 929 and 935 Emily cannot penetrate the country beyond death.

Poem 935 F1066 ‘Death leaves Us homesick, who behind’

We are completely cut off from the dead, ignorant of their concerns and able only to go seeking them in ‘all their former Places.’

Poem 936 F866 ‘This Dust, and its Feature’

This dead body and its face, whose identity we can vouch for today, will in its future life be unidentifiable by us.
This dead man’s mind and its capacity will then be too small for the ‘enlarged comparison’ between this world and the next which its inspection of heaven will give it. This world and its inhabitants will be too over and done with for the distant scrutiny of the dead man’s attention, absorbed as he is in the world of heaven.

Poem 937 F867  ‘I felt a Cleaving in my Mind’
As in the similar poem 280 Emily is silent about the cause of her anguish and concerned only to try to describe it. Here it is as though her brain is split in two and she is unable to join the two halves of thought into a coherent sequence. When she tries to do so, they unravel out of sound or reach ‘like Balls [of string] upon a Floor.’ (‘reach’ is a variant reading for ‘sound.’)

Ruth Miller suggests that what Emily cannot fit together is her initial encouragement as a poet from Samuel Bowles and his later seeming reprimand of such poets as herself in an article in the *Springfield Republican*. This is perhaps more likely than Richard Chase’s view that the cause of her anguish is her inability to join together traditional theology and her own unorthodox beliefs.

Poem 938 F868  ‘Fairer through Fading – as the Day’
Things can be fairer at their ‘Fading’ or dying. When the fading day is still half in the sunshine which hinders her setting and haunts [us with memories] but is inevitably perishing, then for a teasing moment the day ‘rallies Her Glow, like a dying Friend,’ before her perfect complete fading, which increases the darkness.

Poem 939 F869  ‘What I see not, I better see’
In, for example, poem 801 Emily wonders whether anticipation might not be better than fulfilment. Here, as in poem 1578, she claims that the subsequent memory of the fulfilment has advantages over the actuality. For the memory of a beloved person, unlike the actual seeing of him, need never shut down. Indeed she often in a dream sees a beloved person as clearly as in life and does him ‘distinguished Grace’ before the waking and the daylight ‘mar [his] perfectness.’

Shortly after her mother’s death in November 1882 Emily in a letter (L792) to Mrs Holland wrote, ‘Memory is a strange Bell – Jubilee and Knell.’ In this poem memory is all jubilee.
Poem 940 F924  ‘On that dear Frame the Years had worn’
Emily seems to be looking down on a dead body. The years had worn the frame of that body, yet to look down on it was as precious as to look on the house in which we were born. Indeed it was more than precious. It was fair beyond conceiving, as if, miraculously, hands from the grave should put themselves in our hands, ‘denying that they died.’ If this reading is right, Emily might suitably have spoken the poem over her own mother, when she died in November 1882.

Poem 941 F925  ‘The Lady feeds Her little Bird’
The ‘Bird,’ ‘Lady’ and ‘Crumb’ of poem 880 reappear. Again, Emily the bird is so desperate for the presence of Sue or Kate the Lady that she meekly accepts the ‘rarer intervals’ of receiving a crumb, and even when ‘crumbless and afar’ still adores the Lady.

   In line 5 ‘Her’ is ‘Herself-Emily.’

Poem 942 F921  ‘Snow beneath whose chilly softness’
It is the first winter after the death of a friend. Emily asks the ‘austere’ or grudging snow to give this new neighbour in the cemetery a thicker blanket than to those acclimatised to spending the winter in graves under the snow.

   ‘Russian’ is a puzzling alternative reading for ‘Austere.’

Poem 943 F890  ‘A Coffin – is a small Domain’
The thought of the first stanza, that a small Coffin contains a ‘Citizen of Paradise,’ is amplified in the following stanzas. The restricted grave is ampler than the whole world to him upon whom a ‘single Friend,’ by burying him, has bestowed the boundless, unguessable and endless ‘circumference’ of eternity.

Poem 944 F891  ‘I learned – at least – what Home could be’
Emily begins poem 366 by saying that if only she had married her beloved master, this is what their married life might have been like. In this poem she makes the reader believe that this home life with her master has actually happened, until she admits in the last stanza that this poem too is only a picture of what that life might have been like. To paraphrase the poem:
Had I not learnt the ‘Way’ of married life with my master, which drowns me with the sweetness of its memories, I would have been ignorant of the nature of its covenant, and awkward at singing its hymn together (1-8).

I could have only guessed at mornings in the garden with just the birds interrupting our love talk, our different male and female tasks, our afternoons and our twilight walks to help some poorer neighbours before our return home at nightfall to the ‘new – diviner – care’ [of being in bed together], an experience which made the next morning ‘Transmuted – Vivider’(9-26).

But this is only how it seems to me our home life might have been like, for the actual home does not exist, although I am as affected by imagining how it might be as I am by a setting sun which includes within it the promise of dawn (27-31).

Jane Donahue Eberwein gives a helpful reading of this poem.

Poem 945 F1112  ‘This is a Blossom of the Brain’

The ‘Blossom of the Brain’ of line 1 is one of her poems. She does not know whether chance or design lodged its ‘italic’ or emphatic seed in her. All she can say about its growth inside her it is that it is the work of the Holy Spirit, as swift as a rivulet and as impossible to confine as the wind.

If the flower is found when fully grown, a few of the wise will take it to their hearts and hope for other such flowers. But if it is lost and remains unknown, it is as though God who inspired the poem is himself in his coffin, with the ‘closing Soul’ of the failed poet placed on his breast as one of the flowers that ‘our Lord’ came to save.

Judith Farr (G), in a helpful reading of this poem, points out that it was Victorian custom to place a flower on the breast of a corpse. It is to be hoped that Thomas Higginson, with his stress on constant revising in the shaping of a poem, read this account of how a poem came into being for Emily.

Poem 946 F1115  ‘It is an honourable thought’

Horace had proudly claimed that his poems would outlast the pyramids. Emily’s ‘honourable Thought’ that it is our ‘immortal Place’ in eternity which will outlast pyramids and kingdoms is lighter in tone. For she merely lifts her hat to this stunning idea and compares the disappearance of kingdoms to the disappearance of Russets, the last apple of the year, from orchards.
Poem 947 F933 ‘Of Tolling Bell I ask the cause?’
Emily suggests that the ‘Good News’ of a soul going to heaven should be announced, not by the sadness of a Tolling Bell, but by the ringing of a peal of bells.

Poem 948 F1093 ‘Twas Crisis – All the length had passed
In poem 889 Emily spoke of a ‘Hair’ separating ‘Life’ from ‘Eternity’ for a person on his deathbed. In this poem it is an ‘instant’ or ‘second’ which will give a person at the ‘Crisis’ point of his illness either ‘the privilege to live’ or sign the warrant for his body to be reported or carried away through the Grave to eternity. At this crisis the Muscles would not obey the commands of the Will, and the Spirit could not make the ‘Adamant’ of the once responsive body feel anything at all. The crucial Second shot the arrow of death, and the next second ‘a Soul escaped the House [of his body] unseen.’

Poem 949 F1068 ‘Under the Light, yet under’
In an ABAB stanza scheme Emily reiterates the distance between the dead and the living. The bodies of the dead are still ‘under the Light’ of the sun, but they are also under the ground. The souls of the dead are further than the stretch of a Giant’s arm or the distance a day’s sunshine could reach if the day was as long as an year. The souls of the dead are ‘over the Light’ as our eyes look at the sky, but they are also beyond things out of our sight such as ‘the Arc of the Bird’ of the upward whoosh of a Comet, and we cannot add cubits to our stature so as to reach them (Matthew6:27). The dead are too far away for a ‘Guess’ or a ‘Riddle’ to find them. If only the living and the dead were on the rim of the same disc!

Emily also uses the mysterious ‘Cubit’ when considering space travel in poem 240.

Poem 950 F1116 ‘The Sunset stopped on Cottages’
As in poem 878 Emily states that the powerful sun makes no important difference to our lives. The same sunset stopped on cottages where people had died that day, and on cottages where babies had been born that Morning. It was not the Sun’s treasons but Life’s that had caused the deaths of those who had gone west that day.
‘supercilious’ is derived from the Latin ‘supercilium,’ which literally means ‘eyebrow.’
Poem 951 F911  ‘As Frost is best conceived’
We infer that we have suffered ‘affliction’ from its ‘subsequent effect,’ just as we infer a serious frost from the subsequent failure of our garden plants to recover. In line 2 ‘scanning’ is Emily’s alternative suggestion for ‘force.’

Poem 952 F913  ‘A Man may make a Remark’
Emily warns us of the power of the spoken word. A ‘Remark’ may seem ‘a quiet’ thing but in the ‘dormant nature’ of its hearer it may ignite a ‘Spark’ which leads to a fire, in the same way as fire can be produced from unlit ‘Charcoal,’ if a match is put to it. Later, in poem 1261, Emily describes the power of ‘A Word dropped careless on a Page.’

In line 5 Franklin prints ‘divide’ as in packet 82, whereas Johnson prints the marginal variant ‘deport.’ Presumably ‘deport’ means ‘behave in our speech,’ while ‘divide’ perhaps means ‘separate the non-inflamatory from the inflamatory.’

Poem 953 F914  ‘A door just opened on a street’
The speaker of this poem suffers a double loss. She had already suffered an unspecified loss, when, walking down a street, an open door which momentarily had a ‘Width of Warmth disclosed’ is the next instant shut. Of the two losses it is the contrast of the momentarily open door with her own isolation which most informs or gives shape to her misery.

Poem 954 F1070  ‘The Chemical conviction’
When Emily’s ‘Trust’ in an after life is ‘fractured’ because of some ‘Disaster,’ it is enabled or restored by ‘the Chemical conviction/that Nought be lost,’ and she thinks to herself, ‘If after death I shall see the faces of the atoms, how much more likely am I to see those dear friends who departed from me when they died.’

Emily at college had studied the writings of Edward Hitchcock, who in his Elementary Geology claimed that even atoms had faces, and in his The Religion of Geology argued that no particle of matter was ever lost but only changed its form.

In Kevin Crossley-Holland’s novel Arthur King of the Middle Road the rustic heroine, Gatty, shows a similar moral conviction when she says, ‘It’s true! It is. Best things don’t never get lost.’
Poem 955 F1071 ‘The Hollows round His eager Eyes’
This lad never complained and made no parade of his misery, but it was stamped in italics on his face for all who passed by to read. This unknown urchin resembles the urchins of poems 717 and 763, but, unlike them, he is ‘unhelped’ and with no salvation in sight.

Poem 956 F915 ‘What shall I do when the Summer troubles’
In poem 348 Emily, weighed down by some unspecified woe, dreaded the coming of spring and summer. She has a similar dread of summer and autumn in this poem, but this time she reveals in line 12 that its cause is ‘Thou from Here, so far.’ All she can do is to conclude ruefully that she would be all right if she were a robin as a robin’s ‘Goods’ or nestlings have wings and so can fly back to their mother, whereas Emily does not fly and so wants to know why has she been given a perennial love for a man who is ‘far from her’ in distant lands.

Ruth Miller wonders if lines 3-4, with the eggs hatching into birds and flying off singing from nests in the maple trees, is Emily giving a poetry writing lesson to the poet of A Tender Lay. This poem was printed in the Springfield Republican of 2 July 1857 and began:

Be gentle to the new laid egg,
    For eggs are brilliant things;
They cannot fly until they’re hatched,
    And have a pair of wings.

Poem 957 F917 ‘As One does Sickness over’
The man who has escaped from extreme sickness or danger and returned to that ‘blessed Health,’ in which he no longer has to weigh up the chances of him coming through alive, tends to go over the sickness or the danger to ensure himself that it really did happen.

Poem 958 F918 ‘We met as Sparks – Diverging Flints’
Emily seems to imagine herself and perhaps Kate Anthon as two ‘Flints.’ When they met, their colliding Flints produced ‘Sparks’ and at the impact were ‘sent various –
scattered ways.’ When they parted it was as though the ‘Central Flint’ of their relationship was axed in two, and ever afterwards they had to keep going by remembering the ‘Light’ of their relationship before the ‘Dark’ of its ending. They might have stayed as separate flints until that day, ‘but for that single Spark.’

**Poem 959 F1072**  ‘A loss of something ever felt I’

Emily’s first recollection or memory of loss was that she had lost something but did not know what it was. She was too young for anyone to see that she was mourning, although she was in fact lamenting that she was ‘the only Prince cast out’ of ‘a Dominion.’ Today she is older and has more common sense because of her ‘session’ or period in the world (though common sense is also ‘fainter’ than that earliest bliss), but she still looks for the ‘Palaces’ she has left, though she suspects that she may be looking ‘oppositely’ or in the wrong direction for this ‘Kingdom of Heaven.’

Emily does not say what it was she lost. If we stress ‘the first that I could recollect’ and ‘too young’ and ‘among the children,’” it looks as though a very young Emily soon felt she lost the total love of her parents. But if we stress ‘bemoaning a Dominion/itself the only Prince cast out’ and ‘the Kingdom of Heaven,’” it looks as though she may be referring to her adolescence when she was the only one in a group of pious friends who could not accept Christ as Saviour (L11 and L13).

But, whichever she has in mind, her conclusion is the same, namely that she will not find her lost heaven by looking back or ‘oppositely,’’ but by staying in the present and facing its truth. So, on the first interpretation, she has to live with the less than perfect love that she now gets from her parents, or, on the second, she as an individual will never get to heaven by the traditional faith of her adolescent friends but only through her own way of questioning and the imagination.

In line 12 ‘Delinquent’ meaning ‘left behind’ is a bold, ungrammatical use.

**Poem 960 F1075**  ‘As plan for Noon and plan for Night’

With our ‘Foot upon the Earth’ our ‘plan [is] for Noon’ and we strive for a long life and ‘achievement.’ But when our ‘Foot [is] upon the Grave,’ our ‘plan [is] for Night,’” and we are concerned only with the ‘conclusion’ of our lives, assisted, if faintly, by Love.

**Poem 961 F821**  ‘Wert thou but ill – that I might show thee’
Emily wishes that her beloved master were in need of her help. To paraphrase:
If only you were ill, I could show you tireless nursing, even if you gave no indication
that you knew it was me (1-4).
If only you were a stranger in a hostile land and asked at my door for food and drink
and nothing more, that would content me (5-8).
If you were the accused and I the judge who convicted and sentenced you in my
ermine, I would not follow you for half your sentence, just to share your infamy, but
for the whole of it (9-12).
If you were in death’s narrow cottage, I would be content if you allowed me to be in
attendance upon you (13-16).
I would perform any service for you, whether you asked me to die or live. For I did
‘die’ before I saw and met you, and to ‘live’ is no trouble because life for me means
love of you (17-20).

In poem 1743 Emily envisages laying ‘the marble tea’ for her beloved master in
the grave.

Trollope, in ch. 51 of his novel The way we live now, gives similar sentiments to
the American Mrs Hurdle with regard to her loved one. ‘Had she found him ruined
and penniless, she would have delighted to share with him all that she possessed. Had
she found him a cripple, or blind or miserably struck with some disease, she would
have stayed by him and nursed him. Even had he been disgraced, she would have fled
with time to some far-off country and have pardoned all his faults.’

Poem 962 F822 ‘Midsummer, was it, when They died’
Emily writes of people who died or ‘leaned into Perfectness/through Haze of Burial,’
at Midsummer, the season of ‘Consummated Bloom.’

The ‘Haze of Burial’ was what obscured them from her eyes.

Poem 963 F824 ‘A nearness to Tremendousness’
Emily analyses ‘Agony/Affliction.’ It is the gateway to ‘Tremendousness’ or awe, the
feeling that something crucially important is happening. It is also unlimited in the
space it occupies in the sufferer’s life, its only location being non-location.

In poem 571 Emily had described ‘Woe’ as one of the mainsprings of her art, so
for her as a poet it perhaps had its advantages over ‘Contentment’ and its law-abiding
‘quiet Suburb.’
Poem 964 F825  “Unto Me?” I do not know you’
This dialogue between Emily and Jesus, in which he gradually removes all the obstacles on her path to him and Paradise, is similar to George Herbert’s dialogue poem which begins:
Love bid me welcome; yet my soul drew back,
    Guiltie of dust and sinne.
Ruth Miller suggests that the first line is a reply to Isaiah’s claim that ‘Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given.’ (Isaiah 9:6). Jesus’ final clinching words may reflect his statement to his disciples that ‘Whoever shall humble himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.’ (Matthew 18:4)
A Phaeton is a carriage, so called after Phaeton, son of Phoebus Apollo, who one day drove his father’s Chariot of the Sun with unlucky results.

Poem 965 F826  ‘Denial – is the only fact’
Emily is perhaps describing her rejection by Sue. It fills her life. Her own will and wishes had no effect on the day when Sue rejected her and ‘the Heaven died’ and Earth’s ‘common round [was] without Delight.’ It was no comfort to Emily that Sue said that breaking up their ‘Home’ or relationship was the wise thing to do.

Poem 966 F827  ‘All forgot for recollecting’
Emily tells her beloved master that she has no regrets in giving up everybody and everything for him and dropping her pebble into his ‘bolder Sea,’ once he had come as ‘a Stranger’ into her life. Nobody can estimate the ‘esteem’ or content, unknown before, which he has given her. If he were to ask if she regretted it, she would answer, ‘No, for I’ve got you.’ (In line 15 ‘ask’ is a variant for ‘prove.’)
Rebecca Patterson points out that Emily has likened herself to Desdemona in Shakespeare’s Othello, when it was reported to her father that:
    ‘Your daughter…hath made a gross revolt,
Tying her duty, beauty, wit and fortunes
In an extravagant and wheeling stranger
Of here and everywhere.’ (Othello1:1:131-5).
In poem 643 Emily had hesitated whether to choose her lover or Nature, but in this poem there is no hesitation, for in line 10 ‘Nature [is] – altered small.’
Poem 967 F833  ‘Pain – expands the time’
Emily develops the thought of poem 650. In that poem and the first stanza of this poem she states that Pain so ‘expands the Time’ that it is all the past and all the future. In this poem she adds the paradox that Pain also ‘contracts the Time,’ because, to the person wounded by pain, the instant of the ‘shot’ that caused it is the only instant that matters, and ‘Gamuts of Eternities/are as they were not.’

At a recent funeral a speaker said, ‘During the last week of Alan’s life, time was compressed and stretched in equal measure.’

Poem 968 F834  ‘Fitter to see Him, I may be’
George Whicher suggests that these difficult stanzas may be just the first draft of a poem never completed. He paraphrases it along these lines:
I may be fitter to see him for the hindrance of the long wait. By that time I may so have grown in grace and acquired new traits that he will think me fairest of the earth. If this is so, I shall be half sorry that I was first chosen when I was imperfect. (1-8)
I have had plenty of time in which to anticipate his delight and surprise when he again looks upon my face. He will see that the grace he left behind is so much less than the grace I have now that he will need assurance that it is the same person. (9-14)
But I must not grow so new and fair that, when I first go to his door, he does not recognise me and asks me the whereabouts of myself. That, however, will not happen for love will so array me that he will perfectly know me. (15-22)
And so, assuming that he does realise that the ‘other truth’ which was my old self is now built upon an ‘excellenter youth’ of new graces, it will be indeed sweet that, because of the years of his absence with their grief and loss, I have achieved the beauty that reward him best and which makes no more demands of him. (23-8)

Scholars disagree on the identity of the ‘Him’ of the poem. Jane Donahue Eberwein believes that Emily is describing her relationship with Jesus, but George Whicher thinks that she has in mind her beloved master. If Whicher is right, it will be a poem similar to 474 or 625, with renunciation of her loved one on earth being followed by her growth in grace and so leading to a more complete meeting in heaven.

Poem 969 F835  ‘He who in himself believes
For example, if Emily believes that she is a poet, she cannot fall victim to the lie that she is not, for her belief rests upon her constant efforts and comes from deep inside her. She cannot lose this belief, even if her every second effort is a failure, for the failure will have been caused by some vicarious, shameful happening, for example her guilty feeling that she should have been doing the housework while she was writing the poem, and not by her inability as a poet.

Poem 970 F836 ‘Color – Caste – Denomination’
Emily declares that in death, as in sleep, all men are equal, whatever their colour or beliefs. Death is not concerned whether his victim is a Circassian from Turkey or someone else. Whether his victims are a white or dark ‘Chrysalis’ in this life, after he has hidden them away, they emerge as equal butterflies. Death knows well what we ‘deem unplausible,’ namely that all men are equal.

Ruth Miller notes that this is the only poem in which Emily makes a social comment on the Civil War. In line 4 ‘are’ = ‘exist.’

Poem 971 F838 ‘Robbed by Death – but that was easy’
Like poem 705 this poem says that the suspense of not knowing whether there is a life after death is worse than death itself. To paraphrase:
When I was robbed of a dear one by death, I was at least able to hold a light of hope to his dying eye (1-3).
When I was robbed of a dear one who went to fight for the defences of his country’s liberty, I could at least think that my brave beloved had a hint of glory in prospect (3-8).
Indeed to be deprived of a friend by the specific danger of distant battle or by death is sheer ‘Bounty’ compared to the calamity of the vagueness of the suspense over life after death (9-12).
For the chances of immortality or annihilation are so evenly balanced that only a hair separates them, and we seesaw in suspense between them, trying to split the hair so as to come firmly down on one side or the other (13-16).

Poem 972 F839 ‘Unfulfilled to Observation’
At sunset when we are fronted ‘with Night,’ we cannot see that the sun is embellishing ‘New Horizons,’ but by faith we believe that the sun has undergone a ‘Revolution in Locality.’

Perhaps, by analogy, in the dark night of the soul, we can only have faith that the sun will rise again.

**Poem 973 F900**  ‘Twas awkward, but it fitted me’
Emily’s old fashioned heart had not learned how to change but was steadfast and as unchanging in its movements as the returning sun or migrating birds. But tonight it has been knocked out of its groove by the death of a dear one, something which was left out of the terms when she took out the lease on such a heart.

**Poem 974 F901**  ‘The Soul’s distinct connection’
It is sudden danger or calamity which best reveals the soul’s connection with immortality, just as a flash of lightning reveals tracts of countryside unsuspected but for the click of its sudden flash.

Emily used this simile again when in a letter (L641) of 1880 to Thomas Higginson she wrote, ‘These sudden intimacies with Immortality, are expanse – not Peace – as Lightning at our feet, instills a Foreign Landscape.’

**Poem 975 F970**  ‘The Mountain sat upon the Plain’
For Emily the everlasting mountains, such as the ones she called her ‘strong Madonnas’ in poem 722, were enormous presences.

**Poem 976 F973**  ‘Death is a Dialogue between’
The Dust of Death scorns the Spirit’s ‘Trust’ in immortality by saying that it will soon be under the ground. But the Spirit, by taking off his ‘Overcoat of Clay,’ shows that the buried part of him is only his overcoat.

**Poem 977 F976**  ‘Besides this May’
As in poem 24, Emily speculates that besides the Mays of this world there is another foreign ‘seraphic May’ of eternal life. Our dead know this May, and it is a ‘sweet Wonder’ that our ordinary neighbour keeps company there with the saints.
Poem 978 F843  ‘It bloomed and dropt, a Single Noon’
Judith Farr (G) convincingly suggests that the ‘single Flower’ of this poem is the *Hemerocallis* or ‘Day-Lily,’ whose flower lasts for one day only, often dropping in the noonday heat, and is then replaced by another flower the following day. To paraphrase using this clue:
Walking through my garden one day I took no particular notice of the flower on my *Hemerocallis*, as I thought there would be another ‘another Noon’ (1-5).
But the next day the whole clump of *Hemerocallis* had vanished, although I was looking in the same spot and the rest of my garden was unblemished (6-10).
It was my own irretrievable mistake for not lingering the day before (11-12).
Since then many flowers have come and gone in my garden but I have never found one to equal that ‘single Flower of the Earth.’ I quite failed to realise that, in passing it by, Great Nature’s infinite face was passing me by (13-20).

Emily seems to use her failure to pay proper attention to this one flower as a symbol for human failure to notice the gifts of nature.

Poem 979 F844  ‘This Merit hath the worst’
When Fate has done her worst and fired her last shot, then we can ‘pause and breathe,’ as no more resistance can be asked of us, and we will be as unattractive to Fate as an unresisting Deer to a Hound.

Poem 980 F896  ‘Purple – is fashionable twice’
‘This season of the year’ is presumably spring. When she described the coming of spring in poem 140 Emily wrote that a ‘Tyrian light’ the village fills, ancient Tyre being famous for its purple dye. She also said in the same poem that spring was the season of ‘a purple finger [of the violet] on the slope.’

Poem 980 F801  ‘As Sleigh Bells seem in summer’
Those who become ‘distant in an instant’ are probably those who die, but the same would be true of any people well known to us who disappear from our lives, for example our university teachers.

Poem 981 F738  ‘No other can reduce’
This stanza, gloomily stating that ‘No Other [thing] can reduce/our mortal Consequence’ like knowing that soon we shall not exist,’ was in the original version of the poem the first of a pair of stanzas of eight lines each. The second stanza triumphantly proclaimed that ‘No other [thing] can exalt/our mortal Consequence’ like the belief that we shall exist again. Emily’s final version, two years later, omitted the second stanza.

In lines 5-8 of the first stanza she is perhaps saying that if our fate after death is non-contemplation of ‘contemporaneous Nought,’ the only competition or argument against this view is that at least God may have us in his mind and recollect what we did in our lives.

1865  (Emily is thirty-five. She writes 84 poems)

Poem 983 F1016  ‘Ideas are the Fairy Oil’
For example, my ‘Ideal’ may be to act kindly towards objectionable Mr X when I next see him. But as the axle of life turns and I encounter Mr X again, I find that, when my Eye actually experiences Mr X, it rejects the oil of my Ideal and I cannot behave kindly towards him.

Poem 984 F192  ‘Tis Anguish grander than Delight’
Emily seems to have in mind that ‘last day’ when we shall all rise from our graves and see again numbers of our friends who were ‘smitten’ by death in our life time, and whom we questioned if we should see again. As we rise from the dead, our ‘cerements’ or grave-clothes will drop off, and clad only in ‘Miracle’ we shall go up to heaven two by two, just as the animals went into Noah’s ark. (Genesis: 6)

Poem 985 F995  ‘The Missing All’
As Jane Donahue Eberwein points out, Emily ironically presents her loss of all the usual good things of life like marriage and society as so ingrained that she does not even look up from her work for minor losses like the world going off its hinge or the ‘Sun’s extinction.’

Poem 986 F1096  ‘A narrow Fellow in the Grass’
In a letter (L316) of 1866 to Thomas Higginson Emily enclosed a clipping of this poem of ‘The Snake’ from the 17 February issue of the *Springfield Weekly Republican* and said about it, ‘Lest you meet my Snake and suppose I deceive, it was robbed of me….I had told you I did not print.’ In other words Emily is saying that someone, probably Sue, sent the poem to the paper without her knowledge or consent, and that she herself has been true to her decision, previously reported to Higginson, not to publish her poems.

In the same letter she also says that she was ‘defeated too of the third line by the punctuation. The third and the fourth [lines] were one.’ The paper had printed a comma after ‘did you not,’ thus making the third line a unit, whereas Emily intended ‘did you not His notice sudden is’ to be the unit, with ‘did you not’ meaning ‘if you did not.’

Samuel Bowles, the editor of the paper, typically did not comment on Emily’s poetic skill in this description of the snake with its unexpected comparisons, but merely wondered, ‘How did that girl know a boggy field wasn’t good for corn?’

Line 10 ‘a Boy’: Emily also refers to herself as ‘a boy’ in poems 389 and 1487, but if this is felt to be awkward in this poem, it can be supposed that she is not the speaker.

Lines 12-16: the minimal punctuation in these lines helps to show the speed of the snake’s disappearance.

Line 24 ‘Zero’: the Zero temperature of freezing horror.

Poem 987 F1098 ‘The Leaves like Women interchange’
Emily compares the rustling of leaves on a tree to the murmuring gossip of women. Not unexpectedly she shows scornful contempt for the ‘exclusive Confidence’ and ‘portentous inference’ of women’s gossip, with their promises to keep secrets being nothing more than an unbreakable compact to spread the stories around. For Emily truth was to be found in thought and writing, not in chatter and discussion.

Poem 988 F797 ‘The Definition of Beauty is’
Heaven is responsible for our inability to define Beauty. She has freed us from the labour of Analysis by making Beauty identical with itself, that is, things which we recognise when we see them without being able to define them or say what they are. Emily had said the same about Melody in lines 15-16 of Poem 797:
The Definition of Melody – is
That Definition is none –
She would not have agreed with Socrates who used to argue that we could not understand ‘courage’ or ‘piety’ etc., unless we could give precise definitions of these concepts.

Poem 989 F1120 ‘Gratitude – is not the mention’
Emily unexpectedly argues that true gratitude is not the saying a thank-you for a tenderness, but a silent appreciation so deep within us that it cannot be reached by the plumb-line of speech.

After all, when an actual plumb-line fails to reach the sea’s bottom, that does not show that there is no sea, but rather that the bottom is too deep to be reached.

Poem 990 F937 ‘Not all die early, dying young’
Jane Donahue Eberwein says that the lives Emily held in contempt were ‘those that had not been lived intensely, those that failed of growth and force.’ So in this poem a boy who has lived to the full dies more ‘whole statured’ than an eighty-year old who has done nothing. It is the ‘Act not [the] Period’ or the length of life that counts. For lovers of music Schubert or Mozart come to mind as examples.

Emily sent this poem to Dr Holland, perhaps because his house had recently lost a young friend, or because she wished to show him, as a contributing editor of the Springfield Republican, the superiority of her death poem over the usual effusions printed in his paper.

Poem 991 F897 ‘She sped as Petals of a Rose’
Emily sent a copy of this poem to Sue on the death of her niece, also called Susan, at two years of age. To her family the child had been as aristocratic and important as a Rose, but also as frail and unable to withstand the Wind of illness. Now she has sped to Eternity, to find there some ‘indemnity’ or compensation for the ‘Default’ of nature. She was so small it was ‘as [though] Cricket or as Bee’ had died, but the loss of her was as big as the Andes to those that loved her.

Judith Farr (G), in a deeply-felt appreciation of this poem, remarks on the poignancy of the last line in a society where the rate of infant mortality was terrifyingly high.
Poem 992  ‘The Dust behind I strove to join’
This is an unpublished variant of the second stanza of poem 937, and is not printed separately by Franklin.

Poem 993 F771  ‘We miss Her, not because We see’
Someone has died. It is not the absence of her from Emily’s eye that causes distress, but the thought that she is dead and their friendship no more. If she was merely out of Emily’s sight, that would no more affect her as an impairment of her society than do the flights of the stars affect her when she is asleep below, for she knows that ‘their superior Eyes,’ and perhaps also the eyes of the dead person, ‘Include Us – as they go’ through the heavens.

Poem 994 F806  ‘Partake as doth the Bee’
Emily’s cousin, Perez Dickinson Cowan, recorded in his diary for 26 April 1864 that he had received from Emily a very fine bouquet together with this commandment-poem. Its scent is to be experienced ‘abstemiously,’ as the roses it contains are ‘an Estate in Sicily,’ or, in other words, something as grand and special as can be imagined. Richard Sewall comments that Emily could sometimes be wary of excess of the good, for example stating in poem 252 that, ‘the least push of Joy/breaks up my feet/and I tip – drunken.’

Poem 995 F1014  ‘This was in the White of the Year’
This poem comes at the end of a short letter (L307) of March 1865 to her cousin, Louise Norcross. The letter begins, ‘Brother [Austin] has visited, and the night is falling, so I must close with a little hymn.’ The poem seems to say: These March daisies were as difficult to foresee in ‘the White of the Year’ or winter, as those snow drifts were difficult to foresee in ‘the Green’ of summer. When we are without something such as daisies or snow drifts, looking back to the last lot is best, or, even if it is just ‘before’ we are to have them again, maybe looking back to the last lot is almost more satisfying than the expectation of the next lot.

Perhaps Louise was meant to think that Emily has meetings with her in mind as well as daisies and snow drifts.
Poem 996 F503  ‘We’ll pass without the parting’
Mabel Loomis Todd says that, ‘On the occasion of Mrs Maria Avery Howard’s departure from Amherst after a visit, Emily’s good-by was embodied in the lines [of this poem], accompanied by an oleander blossom tied with black ribbon.’

Emily tells Mrs Howard that she will not actually say goodbye to her, as that would be a Certificate that she had actually left Amherst. By this means, thinking she could still find her where she left her if she tried, she will not miss the death of the departure of Mrs Howard so much.

Poem 997 F1010  ‘Crumbling is not an instant’s Act’
Emily draws a distinction between ‘Crumbling,’ the first word of the poem, and ‘Crash,’ the penultimate word. The slow process of ‘Crumbling’ suitably takes up 11 lines of the poem, while the ‘instant’s Act’ of a ‘Crash’ is done in the one word ‘slipping.’ ‘Crumbling,’ for example of the body in old age, is not a ‘fundamental pause’ or a once and for all stop, but ‘slow ruin’ which is ‘formal’ or contained in the very shape of the body, and ‘consecutive’ with one decay leading inevitably to the next, so that it looks like ‘Devil’s work.’

Poem 998 F1012  ‘Best things dwell out of Sight’
‘The pearl [in the oyster or the pearl of true love] – the Just [action] – our Thought [of what is good]’ cannot be seen. Most of our ‘Best Things’ are not ‘public’ or common, but, although they are ‘rare,’ they are real and allowable.

We may see their outside case or ‘burr,’ the ‘capsule’ in which the wind-swift mind operates, but where does the germ of the germ in that capsule come from?

Socrates would have agreed that most best things ‘shun the Public Air.’ When he was in prison in Athens, facing an unjust death sentence, and his friends said that everybody was saying that he should escape from prison, Socrates’ reply was, ‘Take no notice of what the many say.’

Poem 999 F1013  ‘Superfluous were the Sun’
Someone appears to have argued that if there were no ‘Excellence’ in the world, there would be no point in the Sun running its course each day. Emily replies, ‘As a matter of fact there is no true excellence in the world, for every day, although in our Despair we may just about decide to meet Love and do his bidding, we always hesitate if Love
asks us where we are to meet. Even so, anonymous failures though we are, we live our finite, periodic lives under the dateless Fame of the Sun.’

**Poem 1000 F1015** ‘The Fingers of the Light’
This seems merely a delightful dialogue poem between ‘the Fingers of the Light’ and ‘the Town’ of Amherst. Despite the stress on ‘Light’ as the final word in the poem, it hardly seems to qualify as Emily’s version of God saying ‘Let there be light’ in his creation of the world, as Judith Farr (G) suggests.

‘But swear’ in line 7 goes with line 8. The first two lines of the last stanza depict the squatting, croaking frog.

**Poem 1001 F1001** ‘The Stimulus, beyond the Grave’
The thought that Emily will see her beloved’s face ‘beyond the Grave’ supports her daily like a dram of spirits. As Romeo and Juliet sing in the finale of Act 1 of Bellini’s opera *I Capuleti e I Montecchi,* ‘If all hope of seeing each other in life is taken from us……at least we shall meet in heaven.’

**Poem 1002 F1002** ‘Aurora is the effort’
As in poem 290 the Aurora Borealis is given a religious interpretation. Here it is a likeness for us of ‘the unconsciousness of Perfectness’ of God’s ‘Celestial Face.’

**Poem 1003 F1003** ‘Dying at my music!’
In this rather orgasmic poem Emily perhaps imagines that the effort of producing the music of a poem is overcoming her. Although the inspiration is bubbling up and has burst through the windows of her soul, she needs to be held until she has finished the eight lines of the poem. Once it is complete, she can slow down and leave behind the inkpots of composition and the ‘Sun’ of inspiration.

On this reading ‘Burst’ is a past participle like ‘left,’ and not an imperative like ‘Hold.’ The mysterious ‘Bubble! Bubble!’ also appears in poem 238.

**Poem 1004 F1004** ‘There is no Silence in the Earth’
Suppose we feel silently in our hearts that there is no God. If we uttered that thought, it would ‘discourage Nature’ from showing herself to be God’s handiwork and would ‘haunt the World’ with its sense of loss and sadness.
**Poem 1005 F1005** ‘Bind me – I still can sing’
Emily proclaims to her lover that she can overcome all deprivation. If bound, she can still sing of her love. If banished, her ‘mandolin’ still strikes the true song of love within her. Even if slain, she can rise to Paradise chanting her beloved’s name.

**Poem 1006 F1006** ‘The first We knew of Him was Death’
Scholars interpret this poem differently. Ruth Miller supposes that the ‘Him’ is Jesus. If his Death by crucifixion had not shown him to be complete selfless love, the Renown of his resurrection would not have happened. But Jane Donahue Eberwein thinks that the ‘Him’ refers to any poet, including Emily herself, who only becomes famous after death, as it is only then that people realise that such poetry does not deserve to die. As Leyda records Emily saying, ‘When I die, they’ll have to remember me.’

**Poem 1007 F1007** ‘Falsehood of Thee could I suppose’
Ruth Miller again thinks that the ‘Thee’ is God or Jesus. It was Emily’s faith in God which enabled her to build the ‘Cedar Citadel’ of her poems.

‘Sill’ is the foundation of a wall, as in poem 931, and not a window sill. For ‘Cedar’ used of her poetry see poem 657.

**Poem 1008 F1008** ‘How still the Bells in Steeples stand’
A ‘bell’ poem like poem 947. This one well depicts the sudden burst of the ringing of church bells upon our ears. In line 2 Emily fancifully supposes that the bells are moved by air from below rather than by the ropes of ringers.

**Poem 1009 F1009** ‘I was a Phoebe – nothing more’
Emily gives her own estimate of herself as a poet. Amid the greater songbirds or poets she has been only a tiny peewit or Phoebe, unknown to fame but also uncriticised. But even if she has been ‘nothing more’ than a Phoebe, she tenaciously asserts that she has been ‘nothing less’ than such a songbird.

Lines 3-4 refer to her practice of using words already written by others as a starting point for her own poems, for example using the words of Isaiah, ‘Unto us a
son is born’ for poem 964, or Thomas Browne’s assertion that we can be forgetful of past evils as a starting point for poem 433.

Poem 1010 F1018  ‘Up Life’s Hill with my little Bundle’
Even if her journey from ‘Homelessness to Home’ has turned out more difficult than she expected, she will never blame the ‘Heart that proposed it’ or her own heart for accepting it.

Emily perhaps has in mind her journey as a poet with her ‘little Bundle’ of poems. In order to devote herself to the ‘home’ of writing poems, she has had to endure the ‘homelessness’ of the lack of husband and children. She will never blame those whose words encouraged her to begin her practice of poetry.

Alternatively the poem might refer to her pilgrimage through the ‘homelessness’ of this life to her final home in heaven.

Poem 1011 F1019  ‘She rose as high as His Occasion’
Emily perhaps refers to the death of a young wife. She had risen to meet the ‘Occasion’ of all her husband’s needs, like the wife of poem 732, but then had ‘sought the Dust’ or died. It was the shortness of time for which she had worn the badge or Crest of exemplary wife that made her lying in her grave a still lower thing for her husband.

‘Westminster’ is a puzzle. There is a Westminster in Vermont, and Emily may have known someone from there.

Poem 1012 F1021  ‘Which is best? Heaven’
Emily cannot help thinking that the heaven on earth or the ‘Bird within the Hand’ is superior to the ‘heaven to come,’ as the ‘heaven to come’ has attached to it that ‘Old Codicil’ that it may not exist. Also, if she prefers the ‘heaven to come,’ and it does not exist, it will be ‘too late to choose again.’

For similar comparisons between the two worlds see poems 79 and 696.

Poem 1013 F1023  ‘Too scanty twas to die for you’
Dying for her beloved master would be too small a thing for Emily, as death, once you are past it, is a mere trifle. She can do the ‘costlier’ thing of living for him, for his absence from her involves her in many deaths ‘without the Respite to be dead.’
In line 2 Emily perhaps refers to Alcestis, who in Euripides’ play was willing to die for her husband Admetus, or to the willingness of the Spartans to die at Thermopylae in 480 BC (see poem 1554).

Poem 1014 F1024 ‘Did We abolish Frost’
As in poems 878 and 950 Emily argues that our moods affect the outside world. They can make winter a summer, or summer a winter. But if we do one year feel so happy during winter that we seem ‘to abolish Frost,’ that will not abolish the following summer as well.

Poem 1015 F1025 ‘Were it but Me that gained the Height’
Emily vainly wishes that she might gain ‘the Height’ of poetic fame, while ‘They,’ the lady poets published in the *Springfield Republican,* failed to do so. But this is as pointless as those who are actually dying playing at what they will do if they live.

Poem 1016 F1026 ‘The Hills in Purple syllables’
Emily imagines the purple ‘submarine’ clouds of sunset as ‘little Groups of Continents’ coming home from school. The stationary mountains tell them what has happened that day. She called such clouds ‘merchantmen’ in poem 266.

Poem 1017 F1027 ‘To die – without the Dying’
‘To die’ = to part from her beloved. ‘The Life’ = the life of that love. In poem 1194 she says that to live without her beloved is to be ‘dated with the dead.’

Poem 1018 F1028 ‘Who saw no Sunrise cannot say’
If we did not see the Sunrise one day, we could not say what it was like, for when we only guess what something looks like, that means that we do not have the ability to see it. And the unwitnessed Sunrise, ‘the Emigrant of Light,’ is afflicted for us on the day when we can only hold it in our mind and bless it, but do not actually look it in the Eye.

Perhaps the Sun in this poem, as in poem 106, is Samuel Bowles, and Emily is describing what a day on which she does not see him is like.

Poem 1019 F1030 ‘My Season’s furthest Flower’
This poem perhaps accompanied the gift of that flower which was the sole remaining flower in Emily’s garden – ‘a Grace without a Friend.’ Poem 442 would suggest that the flower may have been a gentian.

**Poem 1020 F1031**  ‘Trudging to Eden, looking backward’

In chapter 14 of his novel *David Copperfield* Charles Dickens tells how things only begin to go right for the very young David when he runs away to the house of his aunt, Miss Betsy Trotwood. She takes him in as part of her family and renames him Trotwood Copperfield.

In this poem Emily imagines that on life’s journey she meets a little boy who tells her his name is Trotwood. She wonders if he is Miss Betsy’s (= the Lady’s) Trotwood. If he is, Miss Betsy may be comforted to know that he ‘didn’t look afraid’ and made many ‘smiling new’ friends.

*David Copperfield* was one of Emily’s favourite books.

**Poem 1021 F1032**  ‘Far from Love the Heavenly Father’

Jane Donahue Eberwein points out that this poem could well be a picture of ‘the Heavenly Father’ guiding David Copperfield through his first ten years of much isolation, hunger and homelessness ‘to the Native Land’ of his aunt’s house.

**Poem 1022 F1033**  ‘I knew that I had gained’

The chill of some ‘Rigor’ has improved, not through getting less, but through Emily’s disciplined endurance of it, her only consolation being that another ‘in other Continent’ was suffering equally.

If we want to refer the poem to her own life, the ‘another’ could be Kate Anthon, who was absent in Europe at this time.

**Poem 1023 F1034**  ‘It rises – passes – on our South’

Emily describes the daily journey of the sun in just four lines. If the poem could be dated to after 1868, ‘the Spires’ might be those of the First Congregational Church, built in 1867-8 and visible from her bedroom window. Poems 228 and 318 were longer poems of the sun’s progress.

**Poem 1024 F1035**  ‘So large my Will’
‘My Will’ for love and fulfilment in this life is so large that the little I achieve embarrasses me like a gentle criticism. This little is an affront to God, who finds our whole world small, and an affront to me who knows that he has given us the gift of all things including immortality. For when we get to heaven, earth will then seem ‘a scanty Toy,’ hardly worth the buying.

Poem 1025 F1036 ‘The Products of my Farm are these’
Although the Dickinson property was a small farm with barn, orchard, vegetable garden and meadow, Emily’s task was looking after the flowers, so ‘The Products of my Farm’ may be the flowers she grew. They were enough for her to be able to send some to her neighbours. In winter time she brought her ‘Acres’ inside the house and cultivated flowers in her conservatory.

Just as in poem 95 her ‘nosegays’ had seemed to be a symbol for her poems, so here ‘the Products of my Farm’ may be or include her poems.

Poem 1026 F1037 ‘The Dying need but little, Dear’
The ‘Dear’ being addressed may be Sue or Samuel Bowles. When Emily herself lies dying, she will only need a few simple things – and the Certainty that her beloved will see the Rainbow in black and white when she is gone! The tone of the poem is abruptly heightened by the extravagant wish of the last two lines.

Lines 3-4 describe a wall’s surface being broken up by a vase of flowers for the person looking at it from her bed.

Poem 1027 F1039 ‘My Heart upon a little Plate’
This poem perhaps went with the gift of an apricot on a plate to Sue. Emily is so in love with Sue that she can wish that her heart was ‘a Berry or a Bun’ upon a plate ‘her Palate to delight.’ May today’s apricot give her similar delight.

Poem 1028 F1040 ‘Twas my one Glory’
The ‘Thee’ of the poem is her beloved master. ‘Owned’ is reminiscent of the ‘Owner’ of the ‘Loaded Gun’ of poem 754.

Poem 1029 F1041 ‘Nor Mountain hinder Me’
Nothing can stop Emily loving her beloved master and coming to him, at least in her mind. Even the Baltic sea or the Cordillera mountains couldn’t stop her.

Emily, perhaps coincidentally, had used Cordillera in poem 268, another poem proclaiming her all-consuming, unchanging love for her master.

**Poem 1030 F1082** ‘That Such have died enable Us’
Emily does not say who the ‘Such’ are, or whether we can die ‘tranquiller’ because they died so well or because we shall meet them the other side. They lived lives so full of love that it is impossible to imagine such love being cut short at death.

Emily herself might well be classified among these ‘Such.’

**Poem 1031 F1084** ‘Fate slew Him, but He did not drop’
Emily describes the Stoic ideal of the good man. He endures unmoved everything that Fate can throw at him, and in the end Fate herself ‘acknowledged Him a Man.’

Aristotle takes a different view, arguing that a ‘good’ state of being is a fragile thing and hugely dependent on luck.

**Poem 1032 F1085** ‘Who is the East?’
The East is the Yellow Man who carries in the Sun, and the West is the Purple Man who lets him out again. Each becomes the other.

**Poem 1033 F988** ‘Said Death to Passion’
Death, who had lost his argument with the spirit in poem 976, here loses his debate with Passion. On the assumption that the East stands for sexual passion as in poem 461 and the West is the west of Eternity as in poem 721, Death may appear to have won the argument by removing Passion’s beloved from this earth, but Passion, like the Sun, ‘resituates’ himself at death in the west of eternity and is reunited with his beloved.

**Poem 1034 F990** ‘His Bill an Auger is’
The woodpecker.

**Poem 1035 F983** ‘Bee! I’m expecting you’
The reader supposes that it is Emily who is expecting the return of the bee now that summer is beginning, so the last stanza is a delicious surprise. In her middle thirties Emily is still capable of writing a frisky, jeu d’esprit poem like the earlier poem 112.

**Poem 1036 F984**  ‘Satisfaction is the Agent’

Emily has wondered in other poems such as 801 and 807 whether anticipation and want might not be better than the moment of possession, which, as in sex, can go past ‘the instant we achieve the Joy.’ And in this poem Want or lack is even that Commissar who is entrusted with the task of turning our thoughts to the possibility of possessing the infinity of immortality. To be contented and long for immortality is an anomaly.

**Poem 1037 F985**  ‘Here, where the Daisies fit my Head’

Johnson prints these three stanzas as one poem, but Franklin prints them as two separate poems, of one stanza and two stanzas. If they are taken as separate poems, in the first Emily seems to be imagining herself in her grave, and in the second to be suggesting that she and her flowers that are her poems make up one person, whether they stay at home or go abroad. Where she herself would be welcome, her flowers/poems will be welcome too.

Rebecca Paterson, taking the three stanzas as one poem, has a different view. She suggests that, just as in poem 51 Emily had imagined herself buried beside Sue, she here imagines herself buried beside Kate Anthon, her ‘Flower.’ Death will not be an enemy of either. The two of them will still be one Bloom, whether ‘departed’ in death or ‘at Home [in this life].’

**Poem 1038 F987**  ‘Her little Parasol to lift’

This poem accompanied the gift of a ‘morning glory’ flower. As this flower opens out in the morning and fades and closes in the afternoon, Emily can describe it as lifting its Parasol open and then letting it down closed.

Emily, imitating the flower, has to live out the summer of the rest of her life, but she will be content if then, when she emerges from the ‘Nature’s Drawer’ which is her grave and opens in heaven, she is as ‘blemishless’ and uncreased as the flower of the morning glory when it opens.
Poem 1039 F996  ‘I heard, as if I had no Ear’
At a time when Emily was deaf and blind to spiritual things and not properly herself inside her body, she was visited by the Spirit. During this experience she heard the ‘Vital Word’ that there is life after death. Her eyes were filled with the ‘Light’ of immortality, which just ‘fitted them.’ Some ‘Might’ or power set the ‘kernel’ of the immortality expecting spirit inside her body. The spirit reminded her body that he had been there before, and Time went out to tell to Eternity the good news that there was another believer in him.

In line 16 ‘unto’ is a variant reading for ‘and met.’

Poem 1040 F997  ‘Not so the infinite Relations – below’
Heaven will be different from earth with everything in Infinity being related and joined together. Below on earth ‘Adhesion’ is forfeited through our mistakes and becomes ‘Division.’ But ‘On High’ in heaven ‘Affliction’ is only speculated about, and ‘Woe’ something we only knew on earth.

Poem 1041 F998  ‘Somewhat, to hope for’
Emily neatly sums up two truths about the human condition.

Poem 1042 F999  ‘Spring comes on the World’
For Emily the returning spring is colourless, until her beloved master comes, just as the flowers in her garden ‘stand negative’ until fertilised by the humming bee, their lover.

Poem 1043 F1000  ‘Lest this be Heaven indeed’
When life is going well and seems a ‘heaven on earth,’ some ‘obstacle’ always arises to stop us believing that this life is real ‘Heaven.’ As Emily had said in poem 393, ‘Did our Best Moment last – twould supersede the Heaven.’ Or as Lucretius said about life from his atheistic viewpoint, ‘surgit amari aliquid’ = ‘something bitter is always turning up.’

Poem 1044 F993  ‘A Sickness of this World it most occasions’
When ‘Best Men die,’ we mostly feel sick of ‘this World.’ We want to be with them in their ‘far[-off] condition.’ But chiefly we feel indifferent to this world as something
foreign, seeing that our best men have contentedly forsaken it ‘for [eternal life with] Deity.’

**Poem 1045 F1086  ‘Nature rarer uses Yellow’**

Richard Sewall remarks how in Emily’s poems ‘The familiar, in one or two deft strokes, is shown in odd and revealing light, as in this bit about the colour Yellow. “Selectly,” of course, is the magic word that tops this tiny “stairway of surprise.”

Emily also reveals a truth about ourselves, for how few can manage anything more than some scanty select words to those we love.

**Poem 1046 F1088  ‘I’ve dropped my Brain – My Soul is numb’**

I have become as lifeless as a cold, marble statue (1-6).

Only yesterday I was a ‘Breathing Woman,’ living in a Paradise, not dumb, indeed quite likely to caper in a dance or sing like a bird (7-12).

Who ‘chiselled ‘all my tune’ into Carrara marble (13-14)?

Whatever it was, witchcraft or even death, I’m still going to strain towards Being, even if it’s centuries away, and each obstacle takes a decade to get over (15-20).

As always, Emily does not say what turned her into stone, but is intent instead on analysing what it feels like. Lines 11-12 aptly describe Emily herself in her gay, high-spirited youth.

**Poem 1047 F1089  ‘The Opening and the Close’**

The birth and death of a human being is like that of a ‘Bloom upon a stalk.’ Both start from a seed, develop into a bud, and are completed by the decay of death. Or they may differ in that the flower finishes at death, whereas the human being has a life after death – if this is the case.

**Poem 1048 F1118  ‘Reportless Subjects, to the Quick’**

Emily is perhaps describing her own poems. To those who are quick of understanding the subjects of her poems continually have meaning, though they are as foreign as Danish to everybody else. The measures of her poems are a stimulus to the receptive ear, but to others are something as fabulous and unreal as an ‘Oriental Tale’ from *The Arabian Nights.*
‘Reportless,’ as in poem 1382, means ‘of which it is difficult to give a cut and dried account.’

Poem 1049 F1119  ‘Pain has but one Acquaintance’
Pain and Death are a close partnership. Pain comes just before Death, who then ‘tenderly assists’ Pain before vanishing with the dead person.

Poem 1050 F936  ‘As willing lid o’er weary eye’
In lines 1-2 the end of the day is likened to a person closing his eyes in sleep. In lines 3-4 the sunset is likened to the Balcony of a house, with all the rest of the house shrouded in darkness.

Poem 1051 F1122  ‘I cannot meet the Spring unmoved’
As in such poems as 65 and 844, Emily here describes the special effect Spring has on her. It both hurries to its end and lingers. It gives promise that all is ‘fair.’ The magic in the spring competes with the magical elation in her heart, though, as spring departs, she is sad that she had not noticed its magic more.

Poem 1052 F800  ‘I never saw a Moor’
In this poem at least Emily is as certain of heaven as if she had given in her ‘Checks’ or railway tickets to the conductor at the end of life’s journey and had arrived there. She is perhaps also suggesting that the artist does not need to have experienced something to make use of it in his art.

Thomas Johnson explains that ‘Checks’ was a colloquial word for railway tickets. Early editors of the poems changed the word to ‘Chart.’

Poem 1053 F573  ‘It was a quiet way’
Judith Farr points out in her reading of this poem that lines 1-5 on their own might be taken as describing a successful seduction of Emily by her lover, but that the rest of the poem makes it clear that she is in fact imaging herself being taken up to heaven by Jesus from the ‘mortal noise’ of this world, just like in poem 712. It was as swift as if she were being taken up to heaven by the ‘Chariot’ that had taken Elijah up to heaven (2 Kings 2:11). The journey seemed long as the ‘Wheels’ kept turning. The world dropped away from beneath her feet as if she were on a balloon trip. Then the gulf of
this life was left completely behind and she arrived at the new Continents of Eternity, where the Sunrise and Dawn of resurrection replaced the ordinary Nights and Morns that she had known.

Emily is bold enough to put next to each other the simile suggesting her journey was like Elijah’s ascent in a chariot of fire and the simile suggesting that it was as if she were leaning from one of the balloons used for experimental flights in the early decades of her life.

Poem 1054 F1011 ‘Not to discover weakness is’
Strength may come as much from our ignorance of our weakness and our knowledge that others have faith in us as from our own ‘Pyramidal Nerve.’ After all a clock face, even of the highest class, is quite unconscious of the complexity and anxiety of its inner workings.

In lines 7-8 ‘consummate’ is a variant reading for ‘unconscious,’ and ‘anxious’ for ‘skilful.’

Poem 1055 F1017 ‘The Soul should always stand ajar’
The soul should always keep its door ajar, in case ‘Heaven’ comes visiting, but then departs again before the soul has slid back the bolt upon its door so that its ‘accomplished Guest’ might enter. In line 6 ‘upon’ is a variant for ‘unto.’

The ‘accomplished Guest’ from Heaven may be Jesus or God, or Emily may have in mind those angelic visitors who bring her poetic inspiration in poems 298 and 657. For both the soul is to be ready.

Emily may have in mind Jesus’ words, ‘Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come’ (Matthew 24:42), or the command to the people of Israel in the Old Testament that their ‘gates shall be open continually [so that] the glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee’ (Isaiah 60:11-13).

Poem 1056 F1020 ‘There is a Zone whose even Years’
This poem describes the timelessness of Heaven. It has no solstice, no coming or going of the months or seasons but is one ‘perpetual Noon.’

Emily used the same metaphor of Noon for Heaven in poems 112 (‘centuries of Noon’), 287 (‘Degreeless Noon’) and 297 (‘and the Everlasting Clocks chime – Noon!’).
Poem 1057 F1029 ‘I had a daily Bliss’
As usual with her experiences, Emily does not say what her ‘daily Bliss’ was, but just gives its history. She only gave it her full attention when it began to disappear. As she pursued it, it grew but then vanished ‘around a Height.’

Whether the object of ‘estimate’ in line 8 is taken to be ‘it/the daily Bliss’ or the whole of line 7, the meaning is much the same, namely that only when it disappeared did she realise that it had grown in importance beyond all her imagining. Her bliss may have been some long lasting personal relationship.

Poem 1058 F1038 Bloom – is Result – to meet a Flower’
On a literal level this poem offers an unusual way of looking at a flower. Our usual, casual glance at ‘the Bright Affair’ that is a flower takes it to be as ephemeral as a butterfly at its noonday ‘Meridian,’ but this is to overlook the fact that a flower’s ‘Bloom – is [the] Result’ of the many small ‘Circumstances’ described in stanza 3, all of which are necessary if the flower is to fulfil her ‘Responsibility’ as a flower and not disappoint ‘Great Nature.’

But on a symbolic level, as Judith Farr (G) observes, Emily may be suggesting that any ‘Bright Affair’ such as an artistic achievement or a human relationship will have a history of hard endeavour behind it, which we may miss as we look at the finished product.

Structurally the poem is made up of two short sentences, ‘Bloom – is Result’ (line 1) and ‘To be a Flower, is profound/Responsibility’ (lines 15-16), which frame the long sentence which is the rest of the poem.

Poem 1059 F1083 ‘Sang from the Heart, Sire’
Paula Bennett takes the ‘Sire’ of the poem to be God. Emily’s response to him has been from the heart, but if it has also been ‘awkward [and] faltering’ through dealing with deep suffering and ultimately death, that was not her ‘blame’ but God’s for causing the suffering. God might pause from listening to the ‘Chorals’ of praise from others while Emily just repeats his ‘Hallowed name.’

But Charles Anderson believes that this ‘ballad’ of Emily’s has been sung to her beloved master. It was his failure to respond to her which has made her ballad falter as it sang of the suffering he has caused and the death of their love which he has
brought about. She is in such deep despair that she cannot manage her usual praises of him. All she can do is to repeat his name.

**Poem 1060 F989** ‘Air has no Residence, no Neighbour’
The first stanza, in which Emily regards neighbourless Air as happy, perhaps stems from Emily’s own ‘Apprehension’ at hearing visitors knocking at the Dickinsons’ door. In the second stanza she describes Air’s universality. He is willing to be a Guest even at the ‘Outcast’s Pillow.’ He is the Host that we all need throughout the ‘faint, wailing Inn’ of this life. He is the last thing we shall be conscious of at our departing.

**Poem 1061 F992** ‘Three weeks passed since I had seen her’
Emily had not seen a particular friend for three weeks as the friend had been ill. Their pleasure had been tête a tête conversations. Alas, the next time they met was at the friend’s funeral with its sermon and hymns and company of people. Neither the company nor Emily had been able to express dissent at her removal to join the separated people of the invisible dead. The only question remaining is whether she is equally gracious to all of them (as a saint in heaven) or gracious to none of them (as she is totally extinct).

This reading takes the question mark at the end of the poem to refer to lines 7-8.

**Poem 1062 F994** ‘He scanned it – staggered’
Emily’s empathy with drastically alienated characters extends here even to a suicide. In line 1 the ‘it’ may refer to a letter with bad news or the victim’s extreme situation. In line 2 ‘Dropped the Loop’ perhaps suggests that he is drawing the curtain over both his past and any period in the future, his present despair being all engulfing. He ‘gropes up’ for God but cannot find him. He ‘gropes backward’ at his own hopeless situation and almost absent-mindedly shoots himself.

**Poem 1063 F1097** ‘Ashes denote that Fire was’
Emily seems to be considering the cremated and not the buried body. Even the ‘Grayest Pile’ of ashes at a cremation should be revered because they were once a living Creature. But Fire, like a living person, can only be seen when ‘alight,’ and ‘into what Carbonates’ they are later consolidated, ‘only the Chemist [that is God] can disclose.’
**Poem 1064 F1087  ‘To help our Bleaker Parts’**

In the ‘Bleaker Parts’ of our lives we may be given from outside ourselves evidences of goodness which could restore us to health, and even if such evidences seem out of place in our tangled lives on earth, they at least prepare us ‘silently for Heaven.’

In line 4 ‘arrange the heart’ is a variant reading for ‘drill silently.’

**Poem 1065 F1117  ‘Let down the Bars, Oh Death’**

Emily imagines the dying as ‘tired Flocks [of sheep]…whose wandering is done.’ They ask Death to ‘let down the Bars’ of the sheepfold that they may come in. Death is stillness, security, too near to be sought and too willing to need to be called.

‘Too willing to be called’ is a variant for the last line of the poem.

**Poem 1066 F892  ‘Fame’s Boys and Girls, who never die’**

Emily herself could be one of the ‘Girls’ in this couplet, which Thomas Johnson describes as being a ‘pencilled scrap, a jotting perhaps intended for future use.’

**Poem 1067 F606  ‘Except the smaller size’**

These eight lines, sent both to Sue and Thomas Higginson in 1865, are the first half of a poem written three years earlier, but with the second half now discarded. In a letter (L316) sent to Higginson the eight lines are led into by the words, ‘If I still entreat you to teach me, are you much displeased? I will be patient – constant, never reject your knife and should my slowness goad you, you knew before myself that

Except the smaller size...

In other words, only small talents, like small apples, reach the roundness of fruition and completion quickly. Larger talents, such as her own, and larger apples, such as those of the Hesperides, grow more slowly and hang later from the tree.

The Hesperides were three nymphs who guarded the golden apples which Jupiter had given to Juno on the day of their nuptials. Hercules, for his eleventh labour, was given the task of obtaining some of these apples.

The copy of the poem sent to Sue may have been accompanied by a gift of apples.

**Poem 1068 F606  ‘Further in Summer than the Birds’**
It is late August (line 10). The birds are no longer in full song. Nature’s year is approaching its decline and death. Repeatedly at noonday, Emily finds herself listening to the ‘spectral Canticle’ sung by the unseen crickets ‘from the Grass.’ This ‘pensive custom’ increases her sense of loneliness at the year’s departure. But gradually there arises in her heart the grace of the thought that this ‘minor Mass,’ sung by the crickets most powerfully at Noon, may typify, not only our repose at the end of nature’s year, but also our final ‘repose’ in the Noon of eternal life.

This grace has not yet been remitted or actualised. Indeed the furrows of the autumn ploughing have not yet disturbed the glow of the late summer of this particular year. But the thought that the end of Nature’s year does not symbolise man’s extinction but, through the Druidic or priestly Mass of the crickets, his repose in eternal life means that she looks differently now at an enhanced Nature.

In line 13 ‘remit’ is taken as a short form of the past participle ‘remitted.’ For Noon as a symbol of eternity see the notes on poem 1056.

In ch. 37 of The Bostonians Henry James also writes that there were, ‘certain afternoons in August, long, beautiful and terrible…[which] seemed the voice of the coming autumn, of the warnings and dangers of life.’

Poem 1069 F1125  ‘Paradise is of the option’
One of the two copies of this poem ends a letter (L319) to Thomas Higginson postmarked 9 June 1866. The poem is preceded by the words, ‘The “infinite Beauty” – of which you speak comes too near to seek. To escape enchantment one must always flee.’

The poem which now follows might be paraphrased:
‘Despite the fact that the Paradise of Eden was cancelled and repealed for Adam, its infinite Beauty is so always near us that we can at any moment dwell in Eden in this life by allowing ourselves to be enchanted.’

In line 3 ‘dwell’ is a variant for ‘own.’ This suggests that ‘own’ means ‘is an owner.’

Poem 1070 F991  ‘To undertake is to achieve’
Ruth Miller suggests that Emily in this poem is referring to her own undertaking to write poetry, and making points which she might have liked Thomas Higginson to hear. Emily says in effect:
'For me to undertake my sort of poems is quite an achievement, since this undertaking
is mingled with two barriers to success: firstly the strength of the obstacle itself (it is
hard to write a good poem), and secondly the fact that my only encouragement is
suspicion from those Natures or critics who only admire traditional poetic forms
(departed Standards) and the few contemporary poets whom they take to be the
criterion of good poetry (Criterion Sources here).'

Miller adds that if the poem was aimed at Higginson, it was written ‘tongue in
tongue,’ as Emily in fact ‘had no doubts whatever about her capacity for verse or her
chance of success.’

In line 2 the words ‘Be Undertaking’ would be more normally expressed as ‘If
undertaking is.’ Lines 5-6 are a compressed form of ‘that fine Suspicion [which]
natures must [have who] permit themselves to revere.’

Poem 1071 F1103 ‘Perception of an object casts’
My perception or idea of X, for example my wife, means precisely that I lose contact
with the real object that is X. The gain of the perception has to reply to or be balanced
against the price paid of losing contact with the real X. While my perception is of
something fair and perfect, I am ignoring or treating as nought the real X ( the ‘Object
Absolute’), and I will later resent my illusion of the perfectness of X because it has set
me so far from the real X.

George Whicher aptly says of this poem that Emily ‘had been caught this way
once, with Sue.’

Alex Ross in his book The Rest is Noise says, ‘Van Gogh, in his garden at Arles,
was haunted by the idea that the conventions of painting prevented him from seizing
the reality before him.’

Poem 1072 F194 ‘Title divine – is mine!’
Emily sent one copy of this poem to Samuel Bowles in about 1862 and one copy in
1866 to Sue. Sue’s copy had ‘Tri[ple] Victory’ added after line 11 ‘In a Day.’

As sent to Samuel Bowles, the poem seems to say that Emily imagines herself as
having achieved the ‘Acute Degree’ of being wife to him, but of course ‘without the
Sign’ that they are married. As such, she may be ‘Empress’ but only with a ‘Cavalry’
of suffering, ‘royal’ but without a crown, and ‘betrothed [but] without the swoon’ of
sexual consummation of a real marriage, which has an exchange of gold and jewelled rings and which is one of the three key days in a woman’s life.

Ruth Miller, on the other hand, believes that in this poem Emily is portraying herself as the bride of Christ, having shared the Cavalry of his suffering, while Richard Sewall mentions a third possibility, that Emily is conferring upon herself the ‘Acute Degree’ of poet and as being married to poetry.

Whichever view is correct, or if all three are intended by the poet, Emily will be saying in the last three lines that whereas ordinary wives delight is saying out loud ‘My Husband,’ this is not something that she will ever do.

When Emily sent the poem in a letter (L250) to Samuel Bowles, she added after it the words, ‘Here’s – what I had to “tell you” – You will tell no other? Honor – is it’s own pawn.’ It is perhaps easier to imagine Emily putting Bowles on his honour not to reveal that she regards herself as his wife, than not to reveal that she is deeply religious or dedicated to poetry.

**Poem 1073 F1081  ‘Experiment to me’**

Emily in her unusually restricted life was understandably always on the look out for kindred spirits. Just as all nuts on the tree look the same but only those with kernels inside are of use to squirrels, so Emily is only interested in a new acquaintance if his ‘inner man’ provides food for her spirit.

Vinnie once remarked that Emily was always on the lookout for the rewarding person. In her novel *Anne of Ingleside* L.M. Montgomery shows the heroine on the lookout for people who, as she puts it, ‘belong to the house of Joseph.’

**Poem 1074 F1124  ‘Count not that far that can be had’**

Towards the end of a letter (L318) of May 1866 to her friend Mrs Holland Emily writes, ‘You refer to the unpermitted delight to be with those we love. I suppose that to be the license not granted of God.’ In other words, circumstances or God do not allow the two of them to be together just then. And so, to comfort her absent friend, she adds this four line poem, which says in effect:

‘Even though sunset lies between us, we can be close to each other in memory, while two people in the same house can be further away from each other than is the sun.’

Then Emily ends the letter with ‘Love for your embodiment of it’ or ‘I send you my love because you embody the truth of my poem.’
Poem 1075 F1121 ‘The Sky is low – the Clouds are mean’
This poem was written on a November day in 1866 and sent in a letter (L321) to Mrs Holland. It is preceded by the words, ‘Today is very homely and awkward as the homely are who have not mental beauty.’

Emily, to whom the beauty of the seasons meant so much, is able to treat this ‘homely and awkward’ November day with an amused, rueful forbearance, even if it was not a day for keeping the door of her Soul ‘ajar,’ as in poem 1055.

Poem 1076 F478 Just Once! Oh least request!’
This poem at first reading may seem to be Emily’s desperate appeal to God to grant her some boon, but in fact the poem was sent to Samuel Bowles to reinforce Emily’s request that he accept the present of a barrel of apples from her mother. The request had read, ‘Mother never asked a favour of Mr Bowles before – that he accept from her the little barrel of apples. “Sweet apples,” she exhorts me, with an occasional Baldwin for Mary and the squirrels.’

Bowles clearly accepted the offer, as he later wrote to a friend, ‘The elder Mrs Dickinson gave me a basket full of big apples, which are a big treat for me.’

Poem 1077 F1106 ‘These are the Signs to Nature’s Inns’
Nature’s Inn Signs say ‘Open to all.’ Her ‘mystic bread’ of the foreshadowing of Eternity is available for all those who hunger for it. Her hospitality extends to the lowest and the smallest. And the unchanging purple of the dawn in the East and the fixity of the North Star are ‘sureties of her staunch Estate’ (that she will keep her promise).

The last line may be an echo of Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar when he claims, ‘But I am constant as the northern star.’ (Julius Caesar 3:1:60)

Poem 1078 F1108 ‘The Bustle in a House’
Referring to this poem Charles Anderson says of Emily, ‘She could give new meaning to the most orthodox of sentiments by the freshness of her phrasing.’ She also gives a structure to the poem by moving from the physical in the first stanza to the mental in the second stanza.
Poem 1079 F1109  ‘The Sun went down – no Man looked on’
Only Emily and the Earth were aware of the sunset. Only Emily and the Earth and one
nameless bird saw the crown of dawn appear in the sky.

Poem 1080 F1042  ‘When they come back – if Blossoms do’
The return of spring with nature’s rebirth symbolising our rebirth at death was so
precious to Emily that in this poem she admits to always feeling a fear, when it
happens, that it may not happen next year. Of course, if she is still alive when spring
does happen next year, she will take back all she says.

In lines 13-15 ‘Party’ is perhaps used in the legal sense of ‘person involved,’ with
Emily saying that she does not know whether tomorrow she will be a person involved
with this world or with the next.

Poem 1081 F1043  ‘Superiority to Fate’
We can only make ourselves feel ‘superior to Fate’ by our own efforts and we can
only achieve it a little at a time, but if we continue making these small advances with
‘strict economy,’ we may surprisingly last out until we enter Paradise.

Poem 1082 F1044  ‘Revolution is the Pod’
George Whicher helpfully points out that this poem is made up of three units of
3+4+5 lines, with mental full stops needed at the end of lines 3 and 7.

Just as every summer the bloom of a flower disappears and all that is left is a pod
on the ‘Russet Base’ of its stalk, in the same way when the purple bloom of political
liberty has fled and it is just a pod on a stalk, revolutionaries who are willing a change
shake that pod to see if that system has any life in it or is completely dead.

Poem 1083 F1045  ‘We learn in the Retreating’
Shakespeare says in *Cymbeline* (4:2:262) that

Golden lads and girls all must
As chimney-sweepers come to dust

but when a ‘golden lad’ does retreat from us in death, he becomes doubly dear as we
realise how great he was.
Poem 1084 F1099  ‘At Half past Three, a single Bird’

At 3.30 am Emily heard a bird trying out one ‘cautious melody.’ By 4.30 the bird had found by repeated tests that ‘silver Principle’ of song which it was seeking. At 7.30 there was no sign of the ‘Element’ (= the song) or of the ‘Implement’ (= the bird), but only an empty ‘Place’ where their ‘Presence’ had been, the ‘Circumference’ of a circle now marking that place off from the rest of the world to which the bird had gone.

Despite her protests in poems 13 and 112, Emily is still apparently being woken early by her father. She sent a copy of this poem to Dr Holland, who as editor chose poems to include in *Scribner’s* magazine, and Richard Sewall points out how different is this unincluded poem of hers from such included lines as

Hops the sparrow, blithe, sedate
Who, with meekly folded wing,
Comes to sun himself and sing.

Poem 1085 F1101  ‘If Nature smile – the Mother must’

As in poem 790 Emily views Nature as our Mother. She is not to be blamed for smiling at the whims ‘of her eccentric Family,’ with members like the worms of poem 885 or the frog and gnat of poem 1000. F. W. Harvey made a similar point in his poem *Ducks*

And as for the duck, I think God must have smiled a bit
Seeing those bright eyes blink on the day he fashioned it.
And He’s probably laughing still
At the sound that came out of its bill!

Poem 1086 F1046  ‘What Twigs We held by’

Emily seems to imagine that she has struggled through to the end of ‘Life’s swift River’ and to be pausing ‘before a further plunge’ into eternal life viewed ahead. As she pauses, she thinks how small were the Twigs she held on to as props while she careered down the river, how she might have got into difficulties and pitifully sunk, how she is glad that what was looking after her had not been more blind. Her aids on
the journey now seem as small as a garment’s fringe when the garment has been removed from it.

As she stands on the edge of heaven, its ‘everlasting Light’ makes her earthly ‘Discs’ or guiding lights seem ‘scant,’ and ‘the Things esteemed’ by her on earth seem dimmer than the bar faintly seen in Saturn’s atmosphere when compared with the ‘Things that are’ before her in heaven.

**Poem 1087 F1047**  ‘We miss a Kinsman more’
When a Kinsman has returned from foreign travel and is now in the next Parish, we have a ‘warrant’ that he should visit us soon. If he fails to do so, it is a ‘pricklier pain’ than when Oceans or Pyrenees made such a visit impossible.

**Poem 1088 F1048**  ‘Ended, ere it begun’
Judith Farr sees this poem as a plaint made by Emily to her beloved master. The interdict of God stopped the story of their love from getting any further than the Title. If only she could have printed the whole story, and he could have read it!

**Poem 1089 F1049**  ‘Myself can read the Telegrams’
Again Emily may be speaking to her beloved master and saying in effect: ‘Don’t forget that I am capable of reading a Telegram, saying for example that you are coming tomorrow, for your letters are chiefly about the stock markets and the weather, which to me is no news at all. Even so, your letters are sweeter than no letters.’

**Poem 1090 F1050**  ‘I am afraid to own a Body’
My property is the ‘Double Estate’ of a body and a soul. I did not ask to have this ‘profound [but] precarious Property’ entailed on me as an inheritance, and its possession makes me fearful. All of a sudden I was brought to life and made the ‘Duke’ of an estate which has God for a boundary wall.

**Poem 1091 F1051**  ‘The Well upon the Brook’
A Well cannot get its water from a Brook but only from the ‘failless Ground,’ whereas a Brook can have its water renewed from other Brooks.
Perhaps Emily is suggesting that a shallow person can be sustained sufficiently by other shallow persons, but a deep person, like herself, needs deep sustenance, and would be foolish to depend on shallow persons.

**Poem 1092 F1052** ‘It was not Saint – it was too large’
The ‘It’ of this poem is perhaps God. He is bigger than a Saint, but smaller than a Snowflake as he gets into even the smallest place. At the same time he is distant from our perceptions, like all spiritual things.

**Poem 1093 F1053** ‘Because twas Riches I could own’
The ‘Riches’ are probably Emily’s poems. They are ‘Dollars’ which she knows by their names, and she had produced these poems or earned these dollars, because they were riches whose ownership meant something to her. To anyone else such an invisible Earldom, such ‘Income in the Air’ seems ‘like Poverty.’ The Miser, for example, likes to hear the chink of coins as he counts them.

**Poem 1094 F1054** ‘Themselves are all I have’
These lines may have been sent with flowers to her beloved master. They are all she has to send. As her own cheek is freckled, she thought, alas, that he might prefer the velvet or ivory cheeks of the flowers to her own. Or has she got that wrong?

**Poem 1095 F1055** ‘To whom the Mornings stand for Nights’
Emily describes the depth of despair. If it is night at morning for the sufferer, what must his midnight be like?

**Poem 1096 F805** ‘These Strangers, in a foreign World’
As Jesus says in the parable of the Sheep and the Goats (*Matthew 25:41-3*), we shall be cast out from his sight on Judgement Day unless we can say to him that we took strangers into our home.

**Poem 1097 F1102** ‘Dew – is the Freshet in the Grass’
We miss the small things in Nature, the dew watering the grass or insects using the moisture as Mills: these Artisans might as well be still, for all the notice we take of them at work. We may see the big things in Nature, the Forests and the Hills, but even
there we only see the visible outside and miss the inner message (as in poem 668). If only Commentators on the meaning of Nature could obtain admission to her inside ‘some Wednesday afternoon.’

Poem 1098 F1105 ‘Of the Heart that goes in, and closes the Door’
The ‘Ring’ of children’s games, referred to in passing in poem 712, is here used as a symbol for the friendship holding a circle of friends together. When one Heart leaves the Ring by dying, so that the company can never be complete again, his ‘playfellow Heart[s]’ can hardly complain, as death might have taken one of them instead.

Poem 1099 F1107 ‘My Cocoon tightens – Colors tease’
On the surface this poem describes a chrysalis apprehensive of breaking out of its cocoon to become a butterfly, but at a deeper level the poem may be about Emily’s own apprehension at the possibility of breaking out of the body at death and becoming immortal. At death, she imagines, her body tightens. She glimpses tantalising colours. She feels she has such little capacity for immortality that she feels ashamed of her human body, and yet the power of immortality will convey such immense freedom. So she must try to break out of the chrysalis, puzzling at the hints and working out the signs received until, after many blunders, she is led by ‘the clue divine’ into immortality.

Poem 1100 F1100 ‘The last Night that She lived’
Many of the death bed scenes in Emily’s poems were imaginary, but this one was real. The dying person was Laura Dickey of Michigan, who, Thomas Johnson informs us, died on 3 May 1866 in her parents’ home in Amherst, their home being just to the east of the Dickinsons’ house.

Emily describes how the ‘great Light’ given to the watchers by imminent death enabled them to see with clarity things in the room ‘overlooked before.’ They not only felt ‘a Blame’ that others would go on living when the dying person was dead, but also ‘a Jealousy’ that she was so near to knowing ‘infinity.’ At length the dying person spoke her last words, immediately forgot them and gently died. All the watchers could do was to arrange the body – and consider whether this experience had changed their beliefs about God and immortality.
Poem 1101 F1123  ‘Between the form of Life and Life’
There is as much difference between merely existing and being truly alive as there is between ‘Liquor in the Jug’ and ‘Liquor [brought to] the Lip.’ Admittedly liquor in the jug will keep, but taking the cork out of the jug and actually drinking is superior.

Emily takes up a theme of poems 422 and 990. If line 3 were prose, the word ‘between’ would be put before ‘Liquor.’

Poem 1102 F1126  ‘His Bill is clasped – his Eye forsook’
Emily does not say what creature had ‘gored’ this bird to death, but asserts that to kill birds who do nothing but ‘squander’ and pour out for us ‘their Miracles of Tune’ is as bad as to fire on the Angels in Heaven (something which the fallen angels had actually done in Milton’s *Paradise Lost* 6:571ff).

Emily is suggesting that death and destruction spoil our picture of life. As she was to write later in poem 1205, ‘Except for [death’s] marauding Hand/it had been Heaven below.’

The poem consists of two sentences and a mental full stop is needed after ‘Death’ in line 7. In line 1 Franklin adopts the variants of ‘locked’ and ‘estranged’ for ‘clasped’ and ‘forsook.’ Judith Farr points out how the movement in this *nature morte* is suitably slowed down by the alliteration of ‘clasped,’ ‘claws’ and ‘clung,’ by the l’s of ‘low,’ ‘lifeless’ and ‘gloves,’ and by the participles ‘hanging’ and ‘waiting.’

Poem 1103 F802  ‘The spry Arms of the Wind’
The tone of this poem is even more fantastically whimsical than that of poem 1000. Emily would like the wind to take her to a neighbouring town, where she might light the wick of her soul from the wick of the soul of a friend of hers in that town. Presumably Emily is in a dark, barren period and needs to be cheered up by meeting a friend who has that ‘Meat within’ mentioned in poem 1073.

Poem 1104 F1104  ‘The Crickets sang’
Emily describes freshly the daily descent of night. The singing of the crickets is without the significance it had in poem 1068. In line 4 ‘their Seam’ is their portion of work ‘upon’ that day. Line 11 describes the sky and the earth at peace with each other.
Poem 1105 F964  ‘Like Men and Women Shadows walk’
In another flight of fancy Emily imagines that the shadows on the hills are men and women walking and bowing or curtsying to their neighbours, but not bright enough to perceive smaller items like human beings and their habitations.

1867  (Emily is 37. She writes only eight poems)

Poem 1106 F1139  ‘We do not know the time we lose’
Emily distinguishes between trivial and worthwhile activities. While we are engaged on trivial activities like a visit with a visiting card, a chance happening or gossip with a friend, these activities seem solidly important and we fail to realise we are wasting time. But the moment, once wasted, takes its place among the things that are inescapably what they are.

Poem 1107 F1147  ‘The Bird did prance – the Bee did play’
Emily describes the ‘Republic of Delight’ which is a summer morning. The sun, for example, was so ‘blind with joy he could not choose’ any particular place for his holiday. If dwellers in ‘Heavy laden Lands’ were only able to reach this ‘Republic of Delight’ by crossing seas, the Caspian and other seas would be crowded. But as this Republic is on everybody’s doorstep, it is not famous.

   Judith Farr points out how the rapid movement in the first two stanzas of this poem contrasts with the stolidity of poem 1102.

Poem 1108 F1131  ‘A Diamond on the Hand’
A diamond ring, worn daily, loses its importance, but, despite this, many people sigh because they cannot afford diamonds and are jealous of those who can. Because of all this, it would be better if diamonds did not exist.

Poem 1109 F1129  ‘I fit for them’
This poem is written on an unfinished worksheet and Thomas Johnson suggests that line 1 may have been jotted down as a partial variant for line 3. The poem could apply to anyone making sacrifices for the good of others, but it applies especially well to Emily herself. She seeks ‘the Dark’ of her own house and exclusion from society until she is thoroughly fit to write poems. It is hard, sober work, but she is led on by the
thought that, if her poems are successful and published, she is providing ‘purer food’ for people by her abstinence from society, and, if they are unsuccessful, at least her aim was a reason for elation.

**Poem 1110 F1135** ‘None who saw it ever told it’
Emily does not say to what the word ‘it’ in the poem refers. Whether it is literally a huge diamond or a diamond used as a symbol for true love or for heaven, the poet says that anyone who had a glimpse of this hidden thing in this life kept it a secret until his ‘departing breath.’ But this shows how important it is, for we only invest or regard as important things which are rare on the ‘surface’ of visibility. For example Diamonds, not Dandelions.

**Poem 1111 F1132** ‘Some Wretched creature, savior take’
Emily begs her Saviour to take in her place some wretch only too glad to die, and allow her one more hour of life.

**Poem 1112 F1189** ‘That this should feel the need of Death’
Emily makes the same distinction between those who merely exist and those who really live as she had made in poems 422 and 1101. In poem 422 she had suggested that those who merely exist ‘extinguish easier.’ In this poem she claims that it is an ‘Irony’ and an ‘Audacity’ that one who merely exists should not only share the adventure of life with ‘the Great’ in his simple way, but also feel the same need to die. There is some point in the great dying, since, as she wrote in poem 1030, ‘That Such have died enable Us/The tranquiller to die.’

**Poem 1113 F1133** ‘There is a strength in proving that it can be borne’
Although winds may tear the sails of our ship as we voyage through life, we gain strength from finding that our sinews are of such tough cordage that we can survive. Our ship for the seas of life might have been made of ‘satin’ and not ‘cedar,’ if we did not have to fight.

**Poem 1114 F974** ‘The largest Fire ever known’
Emily views the daily setting of the sun in the ‘Occidental Town’ of the west as the world’s biggest bonfire. Apparently it ‘consumes’ and does damage, but is never reported in the papers.

Poem 1115 F1142  ‘The murmuring of Bees, has ceased’
Again, as in poem 1068, it is autumn. The bees have ceased their murmuring, but later creatures with their murmuring have replaced them. These creatures may be the crickets of poem 1068, and their ‘lower metres’ are suitable for the change to autumn, as the sounds of our friends of the summer die away and we are left with the interval of winter.

But there may be more to the crickets than this. For they are sent by Nature, our ‘Typic Mother’ and their prophetic murmurings suggest that ‘Genesis’ (our birth) and ‘Revelations’ (our rebirth in heaven at death) are all part of the same book of the story of our lives. But such daring thoughts we keep closely to ourselves until they come true.

Poem 1116 F1138  ‘There is another Loneliness’
Loneliness is usually occasioned or caused by ‘want of friend’ or by the circumstances in which fate has placed us. But there is ‘another Loneliness’ which happens to a person absorbed by nature or deep in thought. Such a person is richer than could be revealed by our usual assessments.

Emily is perhaps hinting at her own rich loneliness. The whole of line 5 is a third subject of the verb ‘occasions’ after ‘want of friend’ and ‘circumstance of Lot.’

Poem 1117 F1162  ‘A Mine there is no Man would own’
Emily does not name the ‘Mine’ which is ‘conferred’ rather than ‘owned’ after purchase, but which is so rich in its rarity that a universe is poor by comparison. Misers pray for jewels ‘in the Ground,’ but the wealth of Emily’s Mine is kept in the mind and never spent.

Perhaps her Mine is her insight into immortality and the ability to write poems about it. The silver mines of Potosi in Bolivia were also mentioned in poem 119.

Poem 118 F1157  ‘Exhilaration is the Breeze’
In the second part of this definition of Exhilaration Emily may be thinking of the return of Jesus' disciples from the mountain of Transfiguration (*Matthew 17:1-9*). Line 4 perhaps means that the place to which Exhilaration lifts us cannot be described by some statement of fact. It is as ‘reportless’ as the Joy of poem 1382.

Poem 1119 F1144  ‘Paradise is that old mansion’

‘Paradise’ in this poem, as in poem 1069, is not the paradise of eternal life in heaven but this life’s revelations of paradise, which only last an instant before the door is closed again. Bliss has leased out her paradise in small instalments, ever since Adam, by eating the fruit of the forbidden tree, bankrupted her (*Genesis 3:1-24*).

Poem 1120 F1198  ‘This slow Day moved along’

In poem 781 Emily had said, ‘To wait an Hour – is long –/ If Love be just beyond,’ and perhaps in this poem the day moves slowly for the same reason – that she is waiting for a visit from Samuel Bowles. After waiting downstairs in vain, she tells her soul to come with her up to her room. She plays or communes with her soul for a time, but when she goes downstairs again, she finds that Bowles has been and gone.

Poem 1121 F1338  ‘Time does go on’

In poem 686 Emily had disagreed with the common belief that ‘Time assuages.’ Here she takes the opposite view and gaily tells sufferers that they shall survive and that there will be sunshine. She might obtain consistency by replying that, although a sorrow never diminishes, it will be joined by compensating suns.

Poem 1122 F1151  ‘Tis my first night beneath the Sun’

The first two lines make no sense if taken literally, but some sense is obtained by the bold hypothesis that ‘the Sun,’ as in poem 106, stands for Samuel Bowles. Emily had already in poem 190 fantasised about just failing to make love with a man, and here also she ultimately chooses abstinence. It would be her first night in bed with Samuel Bowles, if she should spend it thus. But such is her expectation and so much does she wish to take the wind of passion at its beginning, that there is not enough height above him for her expectation to register on her barometer. So it is better to enjoy the sure delights that ‘Distance’ between them provides. Whenever she writes Bowles a letter or thinks of him, she, as it were, is visiting ‘Distance.’
On this reading of the poem, ‘for his’ in line 4 will mean ‘for one, whose’ and not be specifically masculine.

Poem 1123 F1187  ‘A great Hope fell’
Franklin prints lines 1-9 and 10-17 as separate poems, but this reading follows Johnson in taking lines 1-17 as one poem.

Emily is ruined when ‘a great Hope’ is not realised, but she gives no sign of the ruin to the outside world. Indeed we are so capable of bearing and hiding our ‘Freight’ of sorrow that often we are ‘ostensibly, on Land,’ when in fact ‘foundering at Sea.’ Emily did not reveal her wound until it grew so wide that all her life blood could not fill it, and the lid of her life was closed. It only remained for Jesus, ‘the tender Carpenter,’ to ‘perpetual nail it down.’

Her ‘great Hope’ was perhaps that Samuel Bowles would declare his love for her.

Poem 1124 F1185  ‘Had we known the Ton she bore’
Line 3, like the previous poem, describes a person who gave no outward sign of the ‘Freight’ of terror which she was carrying. Emily’s alternative for line 3, ‘smiled too brave for the detecting’ makes the description clearer.

Poem 1125 F1186  ‘Oh Sumptuous moment’
In line 6 Emily asks the rhetorical question whether her famishing was the time before her ‘Sumptuous moment’ (= ‘then’) or the ‘now’ of its happening. A similar rhetorical question would be to ask a prisoner on the morning of his execution how today was different from yesterday.

She does not say what caused her ‘Sumptuous moment,’ perhaps more likely some exchange of love than glimpse of God.

Poem 1126 F1243  ‘Shall I take thee, the Poet said’
Emily describes a poet’s word selection process as a job interview. There is a strong candidate for the word to be used (= ‘propounded’), but he must wait with the other candidates while the poet searches the dictionary of his mind for yet others. He is just about to give the job to the strong candidate, when ‘there came unsummoned’ from the Cherubim just the right word for that position in the Vision of his poem for which the previous ‘Worldly’ candidates had been applying.
Ironically Emily herself made use of both methods of word selection. No doubt some of her happiest choices were inspirations which ‘the Cherubim reveal,’ but she also often nominated possible candidates and selected one. For this very poem she noted down six marginal alternatives, for example ‘vainer’ or ‘further’ for ‘finer’ in line 4, and for line 5 of poem 1333 thirteen marginal variants exist.

**Poem 1127 F1146** ‘Soft as the massacre of Suns’
Richard Sewall says that this worksheet fragment has the ‘wholeness of a haiku,’ and continues, ‘In ten words, their sound and rhythm under perfect control, the awesome silence of spectacular sunsets, intensified by the sense of terrifying cosmic power, is conveyed with rare completeness in this tiny-huge poem.’

**Poem 1128 F1150** ‘These are the Nights that Beetles love’
Emily describes the June beetle, which makes frequent dive-bombing attacks from the ‘Eminence remote’ of the ‘Ceiling,’ intimating or causing both terror and merriment. This ‘Bomb upon the Ceiling’ keeps the nerves in good trim, for you can only guess when his next attack will be. But the ‘Summer evening’ would be too ‘dear’ and cosy without some ‘discreet alarm’ from the insect population.

**Poem 1129 F1263** ‘Tell the Truth but tell it slant’
The truth Emily primarily has in mind is probably the truth of God and immortality. This has to be approached obliquely by a series of guesses (cf. poem 1221) and mediated indirectly and gradually, for, as she writes in poem 1247, ‘None see God and live.’

The first two lines of this poem may have been suggested by John Donne’s lines in his poem *Seek True Religion*

On a huge hill
Cragged and Steep, Truth stands, and he that will
Reach her, about must and about must go.

**Poem 1130 F1156** ‘That odd old man is dead a year’
This old man who died on such an evening a year ago seems to be someone who after the ‘fluent Blood’ of a promising beginning never really lived. The light his wick
gave out was so ‘antiquated’ that it is doubtful if any will miss him, unless he has a widow, as hardened into old age as himself, who is still hoping he will come home one evening. The goddess ‘Achievement’ can only pass over him (= be transitive) and feel ‘cool’ about the contribution he has made.

In a phrase from poem 990 this man was ‘a Junior of Fourscore.’ In line 6 ‘bleak’ is a variant for ‘hoar.’

Poem 1131 F1134 ‘The Merchant of the Picturesque’
The ‘Merchant of the Picturesque,’ like the poet whose poems are described in poem 1048, needs receptive customers. He will run away from customers who ‘counterfeit’ an appreciation of his wares, and prefers to sell to children for a small price than receive a cheque from the rich.

Emily could well regard herself as such a merchant, reluctant to publish her poems and sell them to unsuitable, uncomprehending customers.

Poem 1132 F1143 ‘The smouldering embers blush’
As in poem 1383, Emily discovers that the fire of love in a lover’s heart can survive the absence of the loved one over ‘many years.’ At the news of his coming the embers turn red and ‘blush.’ They ‘smile’ as the news stirs and lights them. The passing ‘seconds,’ which had been ‘stolid’ and cold for so long, now ‘glow.’ Such a fire has ‘one requisite [that] Prometheus never knew,’ namely that it lasts.

When Prometheus in the Greek myth created men and contrived fire for them, the fire was taken away by Zeus, so that Prometheus had to steal it back for them. ‘Hearts’ in line 2 in Johnson is a misprint for ‘Heart.’

Poem 1133 F1155 ‘The Snow that never drifts’
Emily contrasts the snow that comes once late in the year, perhaps at the end of March, with the sterner snowdrifts of winter proper. This late snow is so ‘thorough’ that one would swear it was ‘the foot of February’ walking across the world, but it is also ‘transient.’ This once a year snow is ‘repaired’ or freed from the drawbacks of heavy snowfalls by Nature claiming it was elsewhere at the time, although it still for a short period causes a feeling of ‘Loneliness.’ Indeed if every fall of snow was ‘so spice’ it would lose the value of contrast with fine weather. ‘Pang’ is good, only when it is no nearer than our memory of it.
Emily writes this poem while the snow is falling, just as she had written poem 36.

Poem 1134 F1152  ‘The wind took up the Northern things’
The first three stanzas describe the onset of a summer storm and the last three its passing and the resumption of ordinary life. There is a similar description in a later letter (L690) of 1881 to her cousins: ‘We have had two hurricanes within as many hours, one of which came near enough to untie my apron – but this moment the sun shines, [and] Maggie’s hens are warbling.’

In lines 11 and 12 ‘her subjects’ and ‘her systems’ are the objects of the verbs ‘scattered’ and ‘ranged about.’ Line 14 means that the ordinary sounds of day, like ‘Maggie’s hens,’ could be heard again.

Poem 1135 F1137  ‘Too cold is this’
Anyone who has looked down on a dead body will recognise the truth of this description. There is no ‘Contusion..nor Rip nor Wrinkle’ on the ‘Husk’ of the body to show how the ‘Kernel’ of life departed. Only an ‘Asterisk’ indicates that the body is dead.

Jane Eberwein Donahue suggests that Emily, in her use of ‘asterisk,’ may have in mind the asterisk used as a printer’s sign to indicate the dead in a list of names. In line 5 ‘defying’ is a less startling variant for ‘outstaring.’ The metaphor of ‘kernel’ was also used in poem 1073.

Poem 1136 F1130  ‘The Frost of Death was on the Pane’
Judith Farr (G) and Paula Bennett both give helpful readings of this poem in which Emily’s failure to prevent the frost from killing a particular flower in her conservatory symbolises man’s general helplessness in the face of death.

Emily fought hard. The flower was watered (= ‘Sea’), put on a shelf (= ‘Mountain’) and given enough ‘Sun,’ just as doctors prescribe watering places, mountains and the sun for sick people. She and her sister even wedged protective newspapers or canvas around the flower, but still the snake of frost made its way along the sunniest, ‘Scarlet shelf’ and killed the flower.

Hating both the death which had killed the flower and the life in which this could happen, they hunted down death but found that there ‘nowhere was to go,’ as death is
outside time and space. They only discovered that ‘Woe’ is ‘larger than Sea and continent.’

1869  (Emily is 39. She writes 17 poems)

Poem 1137 F1160  ‘The duties of the Wind are few’
Emily lets her imagination roam as freely as the wind on the subject of *The Wind*, but sets out her results in orderly fashion with the first line of each stanza acting as a heading.
Line 2: ‘cast’ perhaps means ‘put in motion.’
Lines 3-4: March proverbially comes in ‘like a lion.’
Line 8 perhaps means that the wind can stay in the sky just speculating what to do next, or come nearer and ‘Forests entertain’ by blowing through them.
Line 10: ‘Azof’ or ‘Azov’ is the huge bay in the NE corner of the Black Sea.
Lines 13-16: Emily seems to be saying that it could be a ‘limitation’ of the wind that he dies down, as he certainly seems ‘too wise’ to choose never-ending ‘Wakelessness,’ but that she actually doesn’t know.

Poem 1138 F1163  ‘A Spider sewed at Night’
Emily returns to the Spider of poem 605. Whether his ‘Arc of White’ or web was intended to be a lady’s collar or an elf’s grave-clothes, it is impossible to say. The spider only tells himself – or informs himself (= the web) out of himself (= his actual body.) As for his prospect of ‘Immortality,’ all he can do is to study the face of the web which he has made, the primary meaning of ‘physiognomy’ in Emily’s day being ‘the foretelling future destiny from the features of the face.’

    But in poem 605 Emily used the Spider as a picture of herself writing poems, and so also in this poem. For she often wrote at night and with little light. She herself could best say what her poems meant. And her ‘Strategy’ for ascertaining the prospects of ‘Immortality’ was to study the face of Nature.

    Charles Anderson points out how these three stanzas, each of three rhyming lines, with the homely vocabulary of the first two stanzas turning philosophical in the third, are as condensed and organised as the spider’s web itself.

Poem 1139 F893  ‘Her sovereign People’
This poem was the whole of a note (L336) sent to Sue apart from the heading, ‘Rare to the Rare.’ Nature both knows and is fond of showing who her ‘sovereign’ or ‘rare’ people are, two of them being Emily and Sue. She would not do it more often even if she were trying to answer a charge of fallibility.

Poem 1140 F1164 ‘The Day grew small, surrounded tight’
Emily describes how the ‘Yellow shortness’ of a November afternoon is swallowed up by the ‘early, stooping Night’ of a long evening. As the wind gets up, the leaves have an excuse for dancing about. November is indeed like a ‘Granite Hat’ hung upon the ‘nail of Plush,’ which was spring, summer and autumn.

Poem 1141 F1293 ‘The Face we choose to miss’
If we have decided not to see each other just for a day, it is like the absence of ‘a Hundred Years,’ when we have parted from each other. This poem, like poem 1139, may also have been sent to Sue.

Poem 1142 F729 ‘The Props assist the House’
This poem, originally written in 1863 but copied to Sue in 1869, consists of two sentences, lines 1-7 describing the removal of ‘the Props’ when the House has been built, and lines 8-12 using this as a simile for the removal of the scaffolding from the Soul when it has been ‘perfected.’

If Emily is writing about her own soul, Richard Sewall is probably right to suggest that the poem refers to 1863 when she lived through a time of terror but reached equilibrium. In that time of terror she had spoken of Auger-like ‘Gimlets’ in poem 244, told of when ‘a Plank’ in Reason broke’ in poem 280, and in a letter (L281) said that ‘that old nail in my breast pricked me’ (the italicised words all reappearing in lines 7-10 of this poem).

Alternatively, it could refer to her more general development as a unique human being and poet, the props being the family, schools and community which had nurtured her, and the removal of the props being her decision on reaching maturity to give up social and matrimonial norms for a private life as a poet.

Poem 1143 F1159 ‘The Work of Her that went’
‘Our Mother’ in this poem is not a human mother at work in the kitchen, but Nature, the ‘gentlest Mother’ of poem 790 and the ‘Typic Mother’ of poem 1115. This mother, with the ‘Fires of the Sun’ bakes in the ‘Ovens Green’ of their graves ‘the Work’ of a woman that has died and ‘the Toil’ of men that has come to its end.

**Poem 1144 F1449**  ‘Ourselves we do inter with sweet derision’
This poem ends a short letter (L489) sent to Samuel Bowles. It is preceded by the words, ‘Dear friend, You have the most triumphant Face out of Paradise – probably because you are there constantly, instead of ultimately.’

Thomas Johnson suggests that this letter may be thanking Bowles for a photograph of himself which he had recently sent to Emily. She tells him that his Face changes her usual attitude towards Paradise and immortality. Usually she regards the prospect of her own death and interment with ‘sweet derision,’ as she ‘doubts as fervently as [she] believes.’ But the photo, which shows that ‘the dust’ which is Samuel Bowles has already achieved Paradise, is for her a channel which ‘invalidates the balm’ of her customary attitude.

**Poem 1145 F1145**  ‘In thy long Paradise of Light’
Emily, in a moment of fervent belief in Paradise, addresses God.

**Poem 1146 F1161**  ‘When Etna basks and purrs’
Why Emily mistakenly wrote ‘Etna’ instead of ‘Vesuvius’ is an unsolved mystery. She is presumably saying that the basking and the purring, when an eruption might happen at any moment, is more frightening than the red tooth of an actual eruption, when the loud noise warns the people to seek safety. People living in a flat with noisy neighbours overhead might agree.

In poem 175 the volcano had been Emily herself. In this poem it is perhaps more likely to be Sue.

**Poem 1147 F1149**  ‘After a hundred years’
Emily describes an overgrown, disused graveyard. Nobody now remembers the ‘Agony’ of the dead people who lie buried there, though their names may be spelled out from the inscriptions by strolling strangers, and their graves are at least visited by
Summer winds who remember the way there by instinct, when memory has lost the Key.

Poem 1148 F1127  ‘After the Sun comes out’
When the sun comes out, yesterday’s clouds are forgotten, and men meet as if each had a special item of news stored up. Nature is as fresh as a cargo from Balize (probably = the port of Belize on the Gulf of Honduras in Central America).

In Haydn’s Creation Adam similarly sings, ‘And thou, bright sun, that cheerest the world, thou eye and soul of all.’

Poem 1149 F1154  ‘I noticed People disappeared’
Emily herself learns a truth gradually, just as she had recommended in poem 1129. In line 8 ‘withheld’ is short for ‘withheld from.’ ‘Regions wild’ is one of her less paradisal descriptions of heaven.

Poem 1150 F1326  ‘How many schemes may die’
Emily gives two examples of schemes, which, because they were not carried out, were ‘entirely unknown/to those they most concern.’ Firstly a traveller is not ‘robbed’ or ‘killed’ (both variants for ‘lost’ in line 5) because he deviates slightly from his usual route. Secondly a suitor does not declare his love because he unexpectedly sees another man’s horse tied up outside his lady’s door.

Franklin omits line 11, ‘It must be competitions,’ and Johnson regards it as meaningless, but, put between dashes, it could be the thought of the lover ‘that would not try.’

Poem 1151 F1136  ‘Soul, take they risk’
As in poem 139, Emily addresses her soul. This time she tells her soul to ‘take [the] risk’ that it will become immortal at death. For herself, if her soul is not immortal, she would prefer to be dead!

Poem 1152 F1148  ‘Tell as a Marksman – were forgotten’
Emily claims that William Tell would not be remembered today as a ‘Marksman’ if it were not for the ‘humble story’ of the apple, that being more memorable than some
‘statelier Tale.’ Readers who know the story can skip the next dozen lines. Those who do not know it will shed a tear for Tell’s dilemma.

Gessler, the Austrian governor of Switzerland, had hung his ‘Ducal Hat’ on a pole and ordered passers-by to bow to it. William refused. Gessler at first threatened Tell with death, and then thought it would ‘surpass Death’ to promise to release Tell if he first shot an apple from his son’s head. Tell was ‘stolid’ or deaf to the appeal of Love to save his son. Strong in Faith and begging a merciful God to help him, he shot the apple from his son’s head. God, Emily concludes, responds to heartfelt prayer.

With conventional punctuation there would be a full-stop after ‘Death’ at the end of line 18.

Poem 1153 F1265  ‘Through what transports of Patience’
The ‘thee’ of line 4 is perhaps her beloved master, and Emily is describing the ‘stolid Bliss’ and the ‘bleak Exultation’ of at last after ‘transports of Patience’ being able to live her days without him. Various things in her behaviour ‘attest’ that she has reached this sort of bliss.

Then she prays by that same ‘bleak Exultation,’ which she only just managed to attain, that this state may be ‘abbreviated’ by his ‘privilege of dying,’ as that will be one step nearer to them enjoying a less stolid bliss together in heaven.

Poem 1154 F1141  ‘A full fed Rose on meals of Tint’
A beautiful ‘full fed Rose’ became during one ‘Noon’ ‘a Dinner for a Bee.’ This is a symbol of a common happening in nature. For example, whenever we pick an ‘adored’ flower, this ‘Creature fair’ pays the forfeit of a ‘bright Mortality,’ and for us whom it does not know submits ‘to be esteemed no more.’

1870  (Emily is forty. She writes 20 poems)

Poem 1155 F1128  ‘Distance – is not the Realm of Fox’
The ‘Beloved’ of the poem is probably Sue. Some time during the 1860’s Emily had begun a period of not visiting Sue, even though she only lived a hundred yards or so away. This period was to last for fifteen years. So Emily can say that true ‘Distance’ is the small space between herself and Sue, rather than the huge tracts roamed by a fox or the distance which only relays of birds could wipe out.
Poem 1156 F1191  ‘Lest any doubt that we are glad that they were born Today’
These lines were sent with flowers to Sue on her fortieth birthday (L356), so that Sue should have no doubts about Emily being glad that it was her birthday. Indeed Emily always regards Sue’s whole life as a ‘holy-day’ of some nobility, which does not need a particular date within it to be marked, any more than ‘Consciousness’ does or ‘Immortality.’

Sue was born on 19 December 1830, only nine days after Emily herself.

Poem 1157 F1169  ‘Some Days retired from the rest’
Richard Sewall acutely analyses the language of this pencilled scrap probably sent to Sue: ‘The verbs “retired” and “obliged,” the adjective “soft,” the opening spondee and the concluding anapaest of the first line and the delayed stress on “obliged” in the fourth, the beautifully controlled combination of dentals and sibilants throughout – all unite to redeem a commonplace subject.’

Poem 1158 F1158  ‘Best Witchcraft is Geometry’
The magician knows that even his ‘Best Witchcraft’ is all worked out by thought beforehand, whereas his audience think that even his ‘ordinary acts’ are fantastic ‘feats.’

Poem 1159 F1166  ‘Great Streets of silence led away’
This poem ended a letter (L339) to her cousins. It as prefaced by the words, ‘Did you know about Mrs. J – ? She fledged her antique wings. Tis said that “nothing in her life became her like the leaving it.”

It is not known who Mrs J – was, but Emily describes for her cousins the Eternity in which she is now living. Unlike earth with its alarum clocks for morning and its church bells for night, Eternity is timeless with no ‘Epochs’ or ‘Period’ and can only be imagined spatially as ‘Streets’ and ‘Neighbourhoods.’

    The quotation in the letter is used of the Thane of Cawdor (Macbeth 1:4:7-7)

Poem 1160 F1173  ‘He is alive, this morning’
This poem was written as a note (L341) for Samuel Bowles the morning after he and his wife Mary had stayed the night at the Dickinsons in June 1870. If the last two lines
mean that Emily tried to go down to breakfast to please him but in fact stayed silent in her room, she must have had the note taken down to him. As Judith Farr (G) points out, Emily’s picture of all nature adorning herself for Bowles’ pleasure while she alone stands ‘dumb’ is ‘a judgement which the very fact of her poem belies.’

Bowles, for whatever reason, did not take the note with him when he left.

**Poem 1161 F1177**  ‘Trust adjusts her “Peradventure”
Thomas Higginson first visited Emily in August 1870. This couplet is part of the letter (L352) written to him after his visit, and is preceded by the words, ‘I remember your coming as a serious sweetness placed now with the unreal.’

Now that Higginson has been and gone and his coming is ‘placed now with the unreal,’ Emily has to adjust her ‘Perhaps he will come’ to the belief that it was ‘Phantoms entered’ and not actually him.

**Poem 1162 F1178**  ‘The Life we have is very great’
The poem, as it stands on the page, claims that the greatness of this life and the vastness of the life to come are reduced to nothing by the extent of ‘the smallest Human Heart,’ a claim she had already made in poem 632 ‘The Brain – is wider than the Sky’ and implied in poem 832 ‘Soto! Explore thyself.’

But the poem in its context as the conclusion of a letter (L354) of October 1870 to Mrs Holland has another level of meaning. The Hollands in the spring had returned from a lengthy visit to five European countries, and Emily’s letter of early October leads up to the poem with these sentences:

‘We are by September and yet my flowers are bold as June. Amherst has gone to Eden.
To shut our eyes is Travel.
The Seasons understand this.
How lonesome to be an Article! I mean – to have no soul.
An Apple fell in the night a Wagon stopped.
I suppose the Wagon ate the Apple and resumed its way.
How fine it is to talk.
What Miracles the News is!
Not Bismark but ourselves.’
So as part of this letter to a much-travelled friend the poem is also saying that life in Amherst is very great, and even if that is surpassed by the globe-trotting life, the human heart is of more significance than either. The crucial item of news when they write to each other is not Bismark, but themselves.

Richard Sewall wonders whether the sentences of the Apple and the Wagon might be a tiny parable on soul-less foreign travel. Bismark had just begun the Franco-Prussian war.

Poem 1163 F1192 ‘God made no act without a cause’
This poem concludes a letter (L357) of December 1870 to her cousins. Emily tries to comfort them in their pain and sorrow, perhaps at someone’s death, by writing, ‘I am sure you will gain, even from this wormwood. The martyrs may not choose their food.’ This thought is then reinforced by the poem, the ‘inference’ presumably being that the early death is without reason, and the ‘premise’ that their hearts now have no aim.

Poem 1164 F1165 ‘Were it to be the last’
This poem is part of a letter (L338) which Emily wrote in February 1870 to her Aunt Katie (Mrs Joseph A. Sweetser) on the death at the age of 33 of her eldest son Henry after a long illness. The word ‘it’ in line 1 refers to the ‘final interview’ of line 4.

The thoughtful empathy of the letter shines out. It begins, ‘When I am most grieved I had rather no one would speak to me, so I stayed from you, but I thought by today, you would like to see me, if I came quite soft and brought no noisy words. But when I am most sorry, I can say nothing so I will only kiss you and go far away.’

Poem 1165 F1175 ‘Contained in this short Life’
The ‘magical extents’ are the glimpses of Infinity that we get ‘in this short Life.’ Emily’s soul turns to them as keenly as children, usually ‘strictest kept’ at home, turn towards the infinity of the sea. Lines 3 and 4 probably mean that the soul returns from the extents ‘soft at night’ in order to be safe from anyone knowing about it: for in another version of the poem she says that the extents are ‘discernible to not a friend/except Omnipotence,’ and that ‘the soul came home from trips/that would to sense have dazzled.’ Also Emily may have in mind the verse in Mark’s gospel which states that as Jesus returned from the mount of transfiguration with Peter, James and
John, ‘he charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen, till the Son of man were risen from the dead.’ (Mark 9:9)

Poem 1166 F1206  ‘Of Paul and Silas it is said’
The story of the liberation of Paul and Silas means that we also have the ‘Security’ that liberation is a possibility for us when our Minds are assaulted, for the staple by which an omnipotent Immortal God has fixed us in some trouble must also be removable if he should so choose.

This interpretation supplies ‘the story of Paul and Silas’ as the subject of ‘insures’ in line 5. Emily seems to have written the poem without consulting her Bible. It was ‘the apostles’ who on an earlier occasion were not found when the officers visited them in prison (Acts 5:18-23). Paul and Silas were still in the prison, though unfettered, when the jailer woke to find the prison doors wide open (Acts 16:23-40).

Poem 1167 F1174  ‘Alone and in a Circumstance’
This whimsical poem in which Emily finds that spiders have taken over her ‘abode’ falls into three sections. The first two sections, lines 1-8 and lines 9-16, tell the story, and the third section, lines 17-28, is one long sentence giving Emily’s view of the incident. To paraphrase:

I had to withdraw one day when a spider visited my room and seemed more at home than I was. I don’t like to tell you what I was doing at the time. (lines 1-8)

Returning with ‘articles of claim’ I found that spiders had taken over the room as their gym, paying no taxes and removing its title of ‘Emily’s room.’ (lines 9-16)

But what can I do about an offence where no self defence is possible and which is not covered by the Laws on Theft, but which was merely a spider stopping me using ‘the marrow of the Day’ for that exercise of my mind which I am shy about disclosing. (lines 17-28)

Although Emily asks the Lord to forbid her giving a detailed specification of what ‘that Larceny of time and mind’ actually was, she does provide a clue. For Thomas Johnson reports that two strips of paper with the words ‘George Sand’ and ‘Mauprat’ are stuck on the other side of the sheet of paper containing the poem. So what she was probably ashamed to admit doing in the middle of the day was reading the novel Mauprat. Certainly in poem 604 her novel reading is confined to ‘far ends of tired Days.’
Poem 1168 F1259  ‘As old as Woe’
At the end of poem 1136 Emily had defined ‘Woe’ spatially. Here she defines it chronologically, saying that Woe and Bliss have been part of human life from the beginning. If lines 7-8 mean that life is usually a mixture of the two rather than a block of Woe followed by a block of Bliss, they will be saying the same as William Blake in this passage from his *Auguries of Innocence*:

Man was made for Joy and Woe;
And when this we rightly know,
Thro’ the World we safely go,
Joy and woe are woven fine,
A clothing for the soul divine.

Poem 1169 F1204  ‘Lest they should come – is all my fear’
These pencilled lines on a very small scrap of paper may mean that when Emily is shut away on the ‘sweet’ task of writing poems, her only fear is that she may be interrupted.

Poem 1170 F1176  ‘Nature affects to be sedate’
Nature attempts to appear composed and even grand, but, if we shut our eyes for a moment, she will be up to magic tricks and strange practices, such as the ‘dizzy evanescence’ of the humming bird in poems 500 and 1463, or the rapid, vertiginous movements of the snake in poem 986, or the springing up overnight of the mushroom, named ‘Vegetation’s Juggler’ in poem 1298.

Poem 1171 F1203  ‘On the World you colored’
Since yesterday some ‘Misery’ has befallen Emily. For her this morning the glowing colours of the day crept idly and aimlessly over the orchards. The day before she was as happy as the robin and life was fair. But Misery’s ‘wrinkled finger’ has now pushed the sun away and brought the awfulness of Midnight into the beautiful things of the day.

The ‘you’ in line 1 may be the ‘Misery’ of line 8 or the person who had caused that misery. At the beginning of line 3 the word ‘But’ is needed.
Poem 1172 F1246  ‘The Clouds their Backs together laid’
The dead in their Tombs are immune to Nature’s thunderstorms, in which trees are so blown about that they fall, the lightning darts like mice at play, and thunder makes a crumbling sound like the crackling of some material.

Poem 1173 F1140  ‘The Lightning is a yellow Fork’
The five lines beginning ‘the awful Cutlery’ are in apposition to the statement in the first three lines: a dash after ‘dropt’ would have made this clearer.

Although Emily’s similes domesticate the lightning, just as her simile at the beginning of poem 824 domesticated the Wind, her conclusion is the sombre one that we are half kept in ignorance of the world from which it comes. In line 5 the word ‘mansions’ may have been suggested by Jesus’ promise that ‘In my Father’s house are many mansions.’ (John 14:1)

Poem 1174 F1316  ‘There’s the battle of Burgoyne’
In September 1777 the English major general Burgoyne was forced to surrender to the American forces after a defeat at Saratoga. Emily suggests that the battle between good and evil which is fought in each one of us every day is in its way as momentous as the battle which brought about Burgoyne’s surrender. The “Sunset” which ends each day sounds majestic enough, but if you really took in ‘the solemn War’ which has gone on that day on the battlefields in the hearts of men, ‘you would chastened stare.’

Poem 1175 F1247  ‘We like a Hairbreadth scape’
Conventional punctuation would put a colon after ‘scape’ in line 1 and a full stop after ‘Wind’ in line 4.

Imagine a man almost cut off by the incoming tide, but just able to clamber up the cliffs to safety. Years later the adventure still keeps blowing through his mind. If the incident had been less desperate, the ‘Breeze’ of the memory of it would not still be capable of extending its ‘Tentacles divine’ as far as his innermost Hair.

‘Gale’ is a variant for ‘Breeze’ in line 6 and is printed by Franklin. The ‘Tentacles’ are said to be ‘divine’ perhaps because they remind us that we escaped in our extremity.
Poem 1176 F1197  ‘We never know how high we are’
We do not know the height of the heroism that grows within us until we are
challenged to display it. And yet such heroism would have been a normal or daily
occurrence, if we ourselves had not stopped the ‘Cubits’ of our growth by our ‘fear to
be a King’ or such a hero.

‘Growth’ is a variant for ‘plan’ in line 3 and ‘daily’ a variant for ‘normal’ in line
6. Richard Morrison, writing in the Times of 18 February 2009, echoed the first
stanza of this poem when he wrote, ‘Humanity shows its finest face when tested to
destruction. Heroism is what happens when those ‘other plans’ – those dull routines
that we sleepwalk through each day – are suddenly thrown into disarray and instinct
takes over. It’s then that we realise that our instincts are not always so self-serving
and self-preserving as the cynics claim….I once saw a man jump in front of an
oncoming train to snatch to safety a child who had fallen from the platform.’

Poem 1177 F1022  ‘A prompt- executive Bird is the Jay’
‘A Bailiff’s Hymn’ or the variant reading ‘a Norseman’s Hymn’ has a no nonsense
sound about it, and in a letter (L315) of March 1866 to Mrs Holland Emily had
written of the jay that, ‘The wind blows gay today, and the jays bark like blue terriers
(L315).’ Or, as a Bird Guide puts it, ‘Jays have a scolding alarm screech which
sounds like violently tearing linen.’

After describing the sound of the Jay in stanza 1, in stanza 2 Emily turns to the
Jay’s appearance. Different versions of the poem give two possibilities for lines 7-8.
They can either be

Much is the mien of him in March
As a Magistrate – (printed by Johnson) or

Good is the look of him in March
As a Benefit. (printed by Franklin).

Emily also writes about the jay in poem 1561.

1871 (Emily is 41. She writes 20 poems)
Poem 1178 F1168  ‘My God – He sees thee’
Emily addresses the sun. Since God sees him, she gives him a list of imperatives
(‘shine,’ ‘fling,’ ‘elate’ and ‘swim’) telling him how to behave in this situation (lines
1-7). Then in lines 8-9 she tells the sun not to worry if he cannot outdo God. Just to
come second in his long race with him will be no disgrace.

Poem 1179 F1202  ‘Of so divine a Loss’
In September 1871 Susan Dickinson was visiting her sister Martha Smith in Geneva,
New York. This poem is part of a letter (L364) which Emily wrote to Sue, saying how
much she was missed, now that her house just through the trees was empty of her. For
‘A silent Hen frequents [your] place with superstitious Chickens – and still Forenoons
a Rooster knocks at your outer Door. The Novel “out” [or borrowed], pathetic worth
attaches to the Shelf.’

But in the poem Emily declares that to have known Bliss with Sue in the past is
indemnity or compensation for her present loneliness. Indeed she does not even put
her present ‘Loss’ of Sue in the Debit column, but only enters their past ‘Bliss’ in the
Profit column. For, as she says at the beginning of the letter, ‘The stimulus of Loss
makes most Possession mean.’

Poem 1180 F1208  ‘‘Remember me” implored the Thief!’
Line 1 and lines 3-4 of this poem are Emily’s paraphrase of the exchange between the
thief and Jesus as they were being crucified. ‘And the thief said unto Jesus, “Lord,
remember me when thou comest into the kingdom.” And Jesus said unto him, “Verily,
Today thou shalt be with me in Paradise.” (Luke 23: 42-3). Line 2 is Emily’s
comment on Jesus’ reply.

She continues in stanza 2 by saying that we now cite with delight the thief’s
‘compensated Trust’ and that when we turn into ‘Dust’ at death, Jesus’ ‘Courtesy
fair’ will remain for us as well. We can then hope for everything, but we at least have
Jesus’ pledge to the thief of Paradise, even if most people there, she’s afraid to say,
turn out to ‘be unexpected Friends.’

The variant ‘some’ for ‘most’ in line 12 reduces the number of unexpected
inhabitants of Paradise. Line 11 becomes clearer if the phrase ‘we fear’ is put between
commas.
Poem 1181 F594  ‘When I hoped I feared’
A possible paraphrase of this poem might be: ‘When I hoped for a return of love, I feared it would not happen. Since I hoped for a return of love, I dared to make advances. But now that I remain as completely alone as a church on weekdays, I am out of the range of the ‘Spectre’ of fear or the ‘Serpent’ of enticement. I have deposed Doom by suffering and surviving him.’

Richard Sewall points out that Emily in her copy of Thomas a Kempis’ *Imitation of Christ* had marked the similar thought, ‘In temptations and afflictions a man is proved, how much he hath profited.’

Poems 1181-4 were all enclosed in a letter (L368) to Thomas Higginson of November 1871.

Poem 1182 F1234  ‘Remembrance has a Rear and Front’
The Rear of the House is past memories of the past, the Front is those same memories in the future. In its Garret we scurry about, mouse like, through the rubbish of our memories, nibbling away at them. Let us be on our guard that we are not pursued by what lies in the depths of the House of Remembrance, the deepest cellar ever made.

‘Besides’ in line 5 means ‘also.’ A dash, as in Franklin, seems more appropriate at the end of line 4 than a full stop, as in Johnson.

Poem 1183 F1227  ‘Step lightly on this narrow spot’
This poem is an epitaph for a soldier killed in action, and now resting in the ‘Emerald Seams’ of the ‘narrow spot’ which is his grave. The passer-by should ‘step lightly’ because of the soldier’s generous courage, and ‘step lofty’ because the soldier’s fame will endure as long as tales are told of cannons and warfare and of men dying for their Flag.

The two words introducing each stanza have the solemn sound of muted trumpets.

Poem 1184 F1229  ‘The Days that we can spare’
We could do without those days on which we lose a friend or a function such as our eyesight, or the day at the end of autumn which marks the death of Nature. Such losses upset our planning. Our ‘Estimates’ remain just ‘Schemes,’ our ultimate goals
unfulfilled. We seem to live outside time and do not count the hours and days of its passing.

In poem 1157 Emily had included the day a Companion dies among the days ‘of soft distinction.’

Poem 1185 F1236 ‘A little Dog that wags his tail’
The boy in this poem is Emily’s ten years old nephew Ned. His happy play reminds her of ‘a little Dog.’ But the grown-ups who beseech little boys to keep quiet remind her of the old cat in the corner who has lost all desire for her own mice-chasing exploits.

The particular grown-up Emily had in mind was her own mother, for in the copy of the poem which she sent to Ned she wrote after the last two lines, ‘Grandma characteristically hopes Neddy will be a good boy. Obtuse ambition of Grandma’s.’ Emily had said the same thing to Ned five years earlier (L320).

Poem 1186 F1201 ‘Too few the mornings be’
This poem is part of a letter (L362) of July 1871 to her cousin, Louise Norcross, although in the letter the poem is written as prose. It is introduced by the words, ‘This is a mighty morning. I trust that Loo is with it, on hill or pond or wheel,’ and says in effect:

‘We do not have enough mornings and nights. And our delights, like this July morning, can never find a place on earth to stay permanently.’ As she had implied in poem 1162, we return to ordinary life after our ‘magical extents.’

Poem 1187 F1237 ‘Oh Shadow on the Grass’
This is perhaps a dialogue poem in which Emily imagines herself speaking with Christ. As follows:

Emily (1-2): Should I take the step of belief in you or not?
Christ (3-4): Make yourself fair for me, for I have chosen you.
Emily (5-7): While I delay, you will choose some other.
Christ (8): Your delay may make you Unelected.

Alternatively, Emily may be imagining a conversation with her beloved master.

Poem 1188 F1230 ‘Twas fighting for his Life he was’
Emily is perhaps imagining someone fighting for his Life as death draws near. Such a person, if he succeeds does ‘accomplish well,’ since the piece of artillery which is used against Vitality only needs one ball to finish off a man. ‘No second War’ is needed in that invisible Campaign fought inside a man between life and death.

**Poem 1189 F1207** ‘The Voice that stands for Floods to me’
Emily disagrees with the maxim that ‘Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.’ Admittedly it can happen that a Voice that sweeps her away like ‘Floods’ has no effect on others, and that the Face (whether that of the Sun or of her beloved) that gives meaning to the morning for her ‘glows impotent’ on others. But this must be because there are differences in the ‘Substance’ itself – if what seems a ‘Sum’ to her is thought to be ‘exclusive Poverty’ by other valuers.

Alternatively, if the second stanza is taken as ironical, Emily is agreeing with the maxim.

**Poem 1190 F1248** ‘The Sun and Fog contested’
Victory for the Sun.

**Poem 1191 F1222** ‘The pungent atom in the Air’
The keener air of Autumn does not allow us to argue that ‘Summer Days’ are still with us. In general, the limits and endings of our Delights are more certain than the delights themselves. ‘Magical extents’ is all we are given in this life (poem 1165). ‘Dominion’ in line 7 perhaps means our feelings of power in the face of life.

**Poem 1192 F1232** ‘An honest Tear’
Emily wishes that each of us when we die may have the Cenotaph of an ‘honest Tear’ of regret at our passing. No building is needed for this Cenotaph, but neither can there be any substitute for it. And such tears of gratitude will endure ‘when Obelisk decays.’

It is either a coincidence or Emily was aware that the Roman poet Horace had made the claim that his poems were ‘perennius aere’ = ‘durabler than Bronze.’ *(Odes 3:30:1)*. If she was aware, she may have hoped that the same would be true of this poem. It can only be true that the ‘honest Tear’ is ‘durabler than Bronze,’ if that tear comes from successive generations, for example for the early death of Schubert.
In line 4 ‘have’ needs to be supplied after ‘each.’

Poem 1193 F1205  ‘All men For Honor hardest work’
With a pun on ‘earn’ and ‘Urn’ Emily makes the point that she, like all men, will only
know after her death whether her work earns ‘Infamy’ or the ‘Urn’ of honourable
burial and praise.

Poem 1194 F1209  ‘Somehow myself survived the Night’
Some catastrophe has befallen Emily. It is enough for her that she has ‘survived the
Night’ and been ‘saved’ to face the next Day, without knowing the ‘Formula’ or
recipe for how it happened.

But her future life will be changed. She will still be a ‘Candidate’ for receiving
the chance of another morning but she will be numbered among the dead. And, as she
had said in poem 1017

To die – without the Dying
And live – without the Life
This is the hardest Miracle
Propounded to Belief.

Poem 1195 F1272  ‘What we see we know somewhat’
As in poem 1018 Emily says that seeing gives us a chance of some knowledge,
whereas not seeing forces us to ‘surmise’ or guess, fickle operation though this is.
Her surmise is that Heaven has become ‘Lands with Locks’ ever since Adam’s eating
of the apple made a patent for such locks necessary. So her share in the ‘transports’
under locks is doubtful, unless she ‘can pick em.’

Commas after ‘see’ in line 1 and ‘don’t in line 3 make the meaning clearer.

Poem 1196 F1238  ‘To make Routine a Stimulus’
Emily may have cooking in mind in this poem, as the first line sounds like the
heading of a recipe. If so, her ‘Stimulus’ for ‘Routine’ is this:
You could, of course just stop the Routine, but you will need a special grace to do
this, otherwise the Arrow of Retrospect will show you that the ‘Torment’ of routine,
having ended, has ‘become, alas, more fair’ and that it is now too late ‘to repair’ the routine and make it more acceptable.

Poem 1197 F1233  ‘I should not dare to be so sad’
It is only when she has emerged from ‘so many Years’ of sadness that Emily realises that she could not bear so much sadness again. The Load only seems impossible when she puts it down, for it is only then that her ‘Superhuman’ aid, the ‘Giant’ she never saw, leaves her side and she realises that without him she ‘begins to perish.’

The Giant is perhaps one of the Giants referred to in poem 534.

Poem 1198 F1199  ‘A soft Sea washed around the House’
This poem was written on the back of a Commencement programme for Amherst College of August 1871, and it probably describes that occasion. It was as though a ‘Sea of Summer Air’ washed around the College. The crowd was so big it seemed that the ‘entire universe’ formed the ‘delighted crew’ on the planks of a ship that sailed on that summer air with a Butterfly for a Captain and for a Helmsman a Bee.

Poem 1199 F1224  ‘Are Friends Delight or Pain?’
If the ‘Bounty’ that comes from friendship is lasting, the ‘Riches’ of friendship are good. But if those Riches increase only to ‘fly away,’ they are sad.

Poem 1200 F1235  ‘Because my Brook is fluent’
The only ‘Brook’ in Emily’s housebound life was the brook or current of her poetry. She seems to be saying that when her ‘Brook is fluent’ and the words come too easily from her pencil, it is ‘dry’ of real quality. But when her ‘Brook is silent’ and she sits waiting for the words, then the Sea of inspiration may startle her with its rising and this divine afflatus be so awesome that she tries to escape to where there is ‘no more Sea.’ (Revelation 21:1)

The rising Sea in this poem may be another way of describing the revelations of the cherubim in poem 1126.

In ch. 6 of Henry James’ novel *The Tragic Muse* the prospective politician, Nick Dormer, warns his sponsor of the dangers of ‘fluency,’ when he says, ‘I speak beautifully. I’ve got the cursed humbugging trick of it. I can turn it on, a fine flood of it, at the shortest notice. The better it is, the worse it is.’
Poem 1201 F1271  ‘So I pull my stockings off’
On a literal level Emily is arguing that we might as well have the fun of ‘Disobedience,’ as there is no guarantee that doing what we ought to will get us to heaven. God did not fairly use Moses or Ananias, so he might not fairly use us either. Moses was unfairly used in that his leadership was not rewarded with entry into the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 3:1-6: vid. Poem 597), and Ananias, although he gave most of the proceeds from the sale of his property to the apostles, ‘dropped dead’ when upbraided by Peter for keeping part of them (Acts 4:32 – 5:1-6).

On the metaphorical level the poem may be an answer to critics like Thomas Higginson who had advised her to write in a more conventional manner if she wanted to attain the poetic heaven of publication. Emily replies by saying that since there is no guarantee that the conventional manner will achieve this, she might as well ‘wade in the water’ and write in her own way.

The poem is also reminiscent of Prose Fragment 117 where Emily says, ‘Two things I have lost with Childhood – the rapture of losing my shoe in the Mud and going Home barefoot wading for Cardinal flowers, and the mothers reproof which was [for] more for my sake than her weary own for she frowned with a smile.’

Poem 1202 F1190  ‘The Frost was never seen’
Emily uses our ignorance of the operations of Frost as a symbol for all our metaphysical ignorance. To paraphrase:
We never quite see frost actually at work (1-3).
It is the frost’s catching the edge of flowers which first warn remote Villages to be on their guard (4-7).
We search out and nullify frost’s efforts until the fatal night when we are caught napping and our whole garden is shot to pieces by the untraceable frost (8-12).
But this is typical. Much which we feel we know, for example heaven, is unproved. The worst which we fear, for example extinction at death, is unknown. Earth and the heavens are full of ‘Strangers’ and ‘Secrets’ (13-16).
A Philip would like to work out cause and effect exactly, but the work of inferring from evidence is a ‘Labour’ too vast for my brain (17-20).

When the only clue given to the disciples by Jesus concerning the nature of God the Father was the remark ‘No one comes to the Father except by me,’ Philip wanted
a more certain knowledge and said, ‘Show us the Father, and we ask no more (John 14:1-9).

Emily in this poem says that there are some things which we must be content not to know, an attitude which Keats called ‘negative capability.’

Poem 1203 F1273  ‘The Past is such a curious Creature’
Our Past is such a curious mixture of the transport of joy and of disgrace that it is better not to visit her ‘unarmed,’ for fear that her ‘rusty Ammunition’ might still succeed in wounding us. In line 7 ‘rusty’ is a variant for ‘faded.’

Poem 1204 F1200  ‘Whatever it is – she has tried it’
This poem of prayer for a loved one who has ‘tried it’ (= experienced death) may well have been written for Eliza Coleman Dudley, a cousin and lifelong friend of Emily, who died on 3 June 1871. Emily prays that God will ‘not chastise [their] Dove,’ as they, the mourners, have been chastised enough in losing her. They have no words of prayer for their own loss now that Eliza ‘is finished.’ Their only petition is for Eliza, that if she is lonely in Heaven, she may be allowed for this ‘Transgression’ to think of her mourners.

1872  (Emily is forty two. She writes 37 poems)

Poem 1205 F1223  ‘Immortal is an ample word’
Emily sent just the second stanza of this poem in a letter (L371) to Thomas Higginson on the death of his brother on 9 March 1872, although the whole poem would have been appropriate. When our loved ones are by us and still alive, ‘immortality’ is just a grand word, but when they leave us in death until the time of some future meeting, ‘immortality’ becomes a ‘necessity.’ Indeed the strongest proof of ‘Heaven above’ is our deep knowledge that earth would have been ‘Heaven below’ but for the marauding, death-dealing Hand of ‘Heaven above,’ inflicting losses which must somewhere be made good.

In the letter to Higginson the second stanza is introduced by the sentences:
‘I am sorry your Brother is dead.
I fear he was dear to you.
I should be glad to know you were painlessly grieved.’
Poem 1206 F1270  ‘The Show is not the Show’
On his first visit to Emily in August 1870 Thomas Higginson had asked her if she did not feel a lack of contact with society, and Emily had replied, ‘I never thought of conceiving that I could ever have the slightest approach to such a want in all future time (L342a).’ Despite this strong assertion, Higginson seems to have suggested to her in a letter of 1872 that it might be good for her to visit him at his new home at Newport (Rhode Island). Emily concludes her reply (L381) to this letter with the words, ‘Thank you for the “Lesson.” I will study it though hitherto
Menagerie to me
My neighbour be.

Your Scholar

In other words Emily is saying in the whole poem, ‘I don’t wish to visit the Show at Newport, because the Menagerie of the Show is basically just the people that go, and I can see from my bedroom window my own Menagerie of the neighbours who walk past. Newport visitors and people who stay at Amherst are both studying the ‘Fair [amusing] Play’ of human beings.’

It is just possible that Emily may have remembered an article in the Springfield Republican of 14 September 1864 which satirised the social season at Newport under the heading ‘The Human Menagerie.’

Poem 1207 F1266  ‘He preached upon “Breadth” till it argued him narrow’
Emily shows her detestation of the unctuous liberal preacher of her day. His insistence upon ‘Breadth’ drives him into the ‘narrows’ of an inability to define religious concepts. He is too confident that he knows the ‘Truth’ on matters where certainty proclaims the ‘Liar.’ As true Gold shuns the fool’s gold of the ‘pyrites’ (a firestone mistaken by the fool for gold), so ‘simplicity’ flees from this ‘counterfeit’ preacher. Even Jesus would blush to hear such a glib operator.

Poem 1208 F1267  ‘Our own possessions – though our own’
Emily’s letter (L381) to Higginson which had ended with the third and fourth lines of poem 1206 had opened with the words, ‘To live is so startling, it leaves but little room for other occupations though Friends are if possible an event more fair. I am happy
you have [had] the Travel you so long desire[d] and chastened – that my Master met neither accident nor Death.’ Then follows poem 1208. Emily seems to be saying to Higginson: ‘Now that you are back at home among your own possessions, you should hug them close to you again, always remembering the possibility of accident or death on your foreign travels.’

**Poem 1209 F1239** ‘To disappear enhances’
Emily knew the value of disappearance and remarks in poem 1422 ‘As finer is a going/than a remaining face.’ In this poem she seems to be talking about the Man who disappears from us at death. To paraphrase:
For a moment a dead man is gilded with the thought that he is now immortal (1-4). Yesterday he wandered in our world but today he is just a memory. We meddle with the idea that we may see him again, for if we are never to see him any more, he is a ‘Worthless thing’ and as far withdrawn from us as Honour is (5-10).
We cannot cherish him now, so we adorn him with praise of his qualities. And ironically it is only when a man dies that we ‘discern the Excellence’ of him, and we can most securely harvest ‘the Fruit’ only when it is beyond the plucking. This fruit leans towards the sight of our imagination, but is now an unobtainable Delight (13-20).

**Poem 1210 F1275** ‘The Sea said “Come” to the Brook’
Emily perhaps has in mind herself as the Brook and Thomas Higginson as the Sea. In the first stanza Higginson invites Emily to write poetry on his model. She asks to be allowed to grow in her own way. He promises her that she will become a Sea or a great poet herself. He wants a Brook as a pupil and so she should come now.

The second stanza refers to a later time. Emily has now become a Sea herself or a great poet according to her own fashion, and can tell her teacher to go as she has no use for him now. He protests that she cherished him once and asked his advice. She says that the wisdom of his learned waters is now a stale thing for her.

**Poem 1211 F1257** ‘A Sparrow took a Slice of Twig’
The ‘Slice of Twig’ may have been a slice on which the American beetle called the ‘Twig-girdler’ had deposited enough eggs for the sparrow to have two helpings.
Poem 1212 F278  ‘A word is dead’
This poem is the whole of a note to Emily’s cousin, Louise Norcross, apart from the introductory line, ‘Thank you dear for the passage. How long to live the truth is (L374).’

Louise’s words were written rather than said, but Emily’s protest can be true of both.

Poem 1213 F1194  ‘We like March’
Emily returns to her favourite month of March, described earlier in poem 736.
Line 2 ‘purple’: denoting majesty. See poems 776 and 980.
Line 3 ‘high’: perhaps referring to March’s high, windy skies after the low mists and frosts of February.
Lines 4-5: his rain makes the road muddy, while his winds dry out the winter branches of the trees.
Line 10: March, ‘that month of Proclamation (L976),’ announces that all the other months of spring and summer are coming.
Lines 11-13: it would be a brave thing to die in March when the Blue Birds were in the sky. ‘British’ is perhaps chosen just for the alliteration, especially as ‘exercising’ was changed to ‘buccaneering’ in the later version of the poem. Emily herself died on 15 May.

Poem 1214 F1184  ‘We introduce ourselves’
Both the planets in the sky and the flowers in the garden are so far beyond us that we can introduce ourselves to them without any difficulty. But when we meet other people we need ‘etiquettes’ to deal with the ‘embarrassments and awes’ that may arise.

Poem 1215 F1167  ‘I bet with every Wind that blew’
Emily had a wager with ‘every Wind’ that her balloon could sail securely on it – until Nature sent the ‘Fact’ of, say a tree, to ‘scuttle [her] balloon.’ Emily had also described a scuttled balloon in poem 700, and, as in that poem, it may stand for the attempt to believe in immortality being scuttled by one of the brute facts of this world.

Poem 1216 F1294  ‘A Deed first knocks at Thought’
A ‘Thought’ will only issue in ‘Act’ if the ‘Will,’ the ‘manufacturing spot,’ agrees to it. Otherwise only God will hear and know that the thought did not issue in act.

Poem 1217 F1255 ‘Fortitude incarnate’
True fortitude is only shown when we sail on the ‘awful Sea’ of one of the challenges of life. Survivors babble happily about their success. The bold treat the challenge as a cavil or frivolous objection to be overcome. This sea is old and has grown grey in its enjoyment of the wrecks that have happened upon it. Even so, Emily prefers the dangers of the sea to the ‘Tombs’ of a dead life on land.

Ruth Miller suggests that for Emily herself the sea, upon which she has embarked, is the challenge of writing poetry. She has chosen this rather than the ‘Tombs’ of a normal social life.

Poem 1218 F1254 ‘Let my first knowing be of thee’
Emily could have in mind her father, mother or sister. May her ‘first Knowing’ each morning be of one of them, her ‘first Fearing’ that one of them may have died in the night.

Poem 1219 F1274 ‘Now I knew I lost her’
Emily’s last full-scale poem to Sue (poem 869) was sent in 1864. Since roughly about that time Emily has never visited Sue although Sue lived only two hundred yards away, and her only poems to her have been four brief stanzas enclosed in notes (poems 1139, 1155, 1156, 1179). She now sums up their situation at length. To paraphrase:

Sue lives in an ‘adjoining’ house and still ‘pauses’ or stays in Amherst, but I never see her face and I know I have lost her. For me it is though she is journeying through ‘Latitudeless Place.’ (1-8)
The ‘elements’ of our world are the same but love has departed. (9-12)
All I can do is remember that it was her Nature that removed our Day of happiness in which I had invested so much. The truly poor woman is she who struggles for the riches of the restitution of her idol. (13-20)

The ‘Nature’ of line 14 may be a reference to Sue’s heterosexual nature.

Poem 1220 F1170 ‘Of Nature I shall have enough’
These lines perhaps accompanied the gift of flowers to a friend: Emily is so besotted by Nature that she will only have enough of her when she is entitled to enter these flowers as familiarly as a Bumble bee.

Poem 1221 F1210 ‘Some we see no more, Tenements of Wonder’
When the dead leave us in the mysterious way that they do, their ‘removing manners’ leave us to suppose that they are now occupying ‘Tenements of Wonder,’ although in fact their Days may now be simpler than this.

We can only grapple with this ‘Sublime Theme’ by ‘Conjecture’ and guessing, by imagining what the after-life is like as though we were now dead and ‘Dust’ ourselves, and capable of enlisting ‘the Tomb’ as the route to heaven as though we were beating drums.

Poem 1222 F1180 ‘The Riddle we can guess’
The unguessable ‘Riddle’ Emily has in mind especially is the riddle of immortality, for this quatrain begins a letter (L353) to Thomas Higginson which continues with the words, ‘The Risks of Immortality are perhaps its charm – A secure Delight suffers in enchantment.’

Poem 1223 F1219 ‘Who goes to dine must take his Feast’
If we go to a dinner party in a bad mood we shall ‘find the Banquet mean.’ In all our tasks, even the ‘ignoble’ ones, we have first to find a ‘Pattern’ or purpose bestowed by our Mind so that they may be done the ‘worthier.’

As George Herbert’s hymn puts it

Teach me, My God and King,
In all things thee to see..........  
Who sweeps a room as for they laws
Makes that and the action fine.

Poem1224 F1213 ‘Like Trains of Cars on Tracks of Plush’
Emily views the bee’s level entry into a flower, moving like a railway carriage on ‘Tracks of Plush,’ as a ‘sweet [sexual] assault.’ The chivalric, ‘Velvet Masonry’ of the flower is jarred and then consumed. The bee then wheels away for other conquests.
Poem 1225 F1211  ‘Its Hour with itself’
The ‘loudest Place’ we know is our Spirit when it has an Hour of self-examination, and uncovers its ‘Subterranean Freight.’ Thank the Lord that our neighbours in the Street cannot read on our faces the horrors we unearth.

Poem 1226 F1220  ‘The Popular Heart is a Cannon first’
George Whicher suggests that this poem of contempt for ‘the Popular heart’ may reflect the behaviour of the masses at the Fourth of July celebrations. The crowds love the cannons, drums and bells and the tots of Rum that follow. Not thinking of tomorrow and unworried by the past, they may find that their kingdom is a ditch or ‘a Trip to Jail [their] Souvenir.’

Whicher also observes that ‘contempt’ was one of Emily’s changes of garment, as also for poem 1207, but not her habitual wear.

Poem 1227 F1212  ‘My Triumph lasted till the Drums’
Emily imagines herself a victorious general whose Triumph lasts only until he sees the ‘Conclusion’ in the faces of the slain. Then he wishes he ‘were They.’

Unfortunately we best evaluate the future only when it has become the past (lines 9-10) and tyrants in general would be kinder towards ‘the Transitive’ (= those who will cross over into death because of their actions), if they could taste in advance the contrition they will feel after they have had somebody bayoneted to death.

Poem 1228 F1240  ‘So much of Heaven has gone from Earth’
Believers will argue that there ‘must be a heaven’ because so many Saints have died who had received an ‘Affidavit’ that there would be a fitting enclosure for them when they were ‘gone from Earth.’ But even if such a ‘Missionary’ believer feels the need to prove to the blinkered Mole that there must be a Sky, the Mole can still ask what excuse or reason he himself can give for entering it. In fact, if the Mole is confronted with too much proof, he may give up his belief altogether – just as the Turtle will not try to get to his hibernating ‘heaven’ unless you leave him alone.

Poem 1229 F1183  ‘Because he loves Her’
The ‘He’ and ‘Her’ of this poem may be imaginary, but it would make sense to suppose them to be Samuel and Mary Bowles. Emily would then be saying in effect, ‘I will try to see what is special about Mary. I shall not slow her down by trying to make her favourably disposed to me from so far behind, any more than forests slow down the wind by touching it in adoration as it passes. It is her glorious, distant ‘sufficiency that makes our trying poor.’

As a marginal variant for the last two lines, Emily wrote, ‘Tis Glory’s overtakelessness that makes our running poor.’ The last two lines of this poem were used by Emily in her letter (L353) to Thomas Higginson mentioned in the notes on poem 1222. In the letter they come after the words, ‘the fear is mine, dear friend, and the power your’s.’

Poem 1230 F1221 ‘It came at last but prompter Death’
Perhaps a letter has come at last from a loved one to Emily saying that her love is returned. But it has come too late because the loved one has died. If only his declaration of love had been as punctual as the Frost of his death which arrived on the day it was due, her delight would have so fortified and strengthened the gate of his body that Death could not have found a way in.

Poem 1231 F1226 ‘Somewhere upon the general Earth’
Emily has perhaps experienced one of the ‘Magical Extents’ of poem 1165. The ‘Magic’ that ‘consecrated’ her is still on the earth somewhere, doubtless unnoticed by the seasons that play around it, and Emily would pay ‘each Atom’ of herself to have the right to be where that ‘Magic’ is. But in poem 1191 she had ruefully admitted that Ecstasy has its ‘Dams,’ and here she admits that God is reserving that right so that he may give her the opportunity of proof on another occasion. Emily prays that God may never ‘curtail [those proofs] of Eternity.’

Poem 1232 F1256 ‘The Clover’s simple Fame’
Those who know that they are famous are inferior to the Clover who is gratefully remembered by the Cow, but does not know this. A Daisy that looks behind to see if anyone is admiring it has ‘compromised its power’ or ‘forfeited its dower.’

There are two drafts of this poem. Johnson follows the one, Franklin the other. Besides the variant reading of the last line quoted above, line 3 has ‘better’ or
‘sweeter,’ line 4 has ‘notability’ or ‘notoriety,’ and line 6 has ‘degrades the Flower’ or ‘defiles the power.’

Poem 1233 F1249  ‘Had I not seen the Sun’
Judith Farr takes the ‘Sun’ of this poem to be Emily’s beloved master. Unfortunately his ‘Light’ has only made her previous ‘Wilderness’ a ‘newer Wilderness,’ presumably because her love for him was unrequited.

Poem 1234 F1250  ‘If my Bark sink’
Thomas Johnson says that the first two lines of this quatrain form the last line of a poem by William Ellery Channing titled *A Poet’s Hope*, and guesses that Emily may be saying that if her poems sink in this life and remain unpublished, there is another sea under this life called immortality in which they might get published.

But this seems a strange idea, and perhaps the poem just means what it says, that to sink in death is not the end. Channing’s poem of 42 lines has this theme.

Poem 1235 F1245  ‘Like Rain it sounded till it curved’
At first Emily thought she heard the rain coming straight down. But then as the sound of it ‘curved’ or, a variant reading, ‘swelled,’ she realised it was the Wind, sweeping as remorselessly overhead as the unceasing wetness of the waves. But after the Wind, there did come a torrential Rain, which pulled out the ‘spigot’ or bung so that it streamed down the Hills. Finally it ‘rode away’ skyward as majestically as Elijah going to heaven in his chariot. (2Kings 2:11)

In line 14 ‘Centres’ are perhaps centres of civilisation.

Poem 1236 F1264  ‘Like Time’s insidious wrinkle’
Emily compares the action of the Frost on the prime of plants to the action of Time as it insidiously scores the crease of a wrinkle on the face of a loved one. Both processes are unstoppable, as the Frost asserts from the ‘Prism’ of his transparent body. We ‘clutch the Grace’ of the human relationship ‘the tighter’ because of the inevitable decay.

Lines 3 and 4 seem to be a parenthesis.

Poem 1237 F1331  ‘My Heart ran so to thee’
Emily tells her beloved master how her heart ran on ahead of her and got to him first, so that she herself ‘drew away’ to the roadside ‘affronted’ or, ‘in a variant reading, ‘discouraged’ in the competition for this ‘general Grace allotted’ to both herself and her heart.

She does not mention this out of any ill-will towards her heart. She is just saying that if her heart had been the one to turn aside and not been greedy for her ‘Premium’ and ‘Bethlehem’ before she got there, she would have been the one ‘soonest to share’ the exchange of love with her master.

This alleged race between Emily and her heart is a way of showing the depth of her love for him.

**Poem 1238 F1287** ‘Power is a familiar growth’

This ‘power’ which is no stranger to us and is not something which belongs only to the future may be the possibility of extinction at any moment of our lives, an ‘Abyss’ beside us in ‘every company,’ however ‘bland’ the moment may have seemed. Our only chance of escaping it is when our mind and body give ‘a final glance’ to this world at the moment of death, for if we then ‘disprove’ that that glance is final, we may have escaped extinction.

Although Emily states that ‘power’ is a ‘familiar growth,’ ‘power’ is not a familiar word in her poems. The only entry under ‘power’ in Johnson’s index is this poem.

**Poem 1239 F1253** ‘Risk is the Hair that holds the Tun’

A *hollow* tun or cask can be more safely held in the air by the Hair of Risk, but tuns so heavy that they have hundred weights to spare, when decoyed by the same delusive hair, take the same risk but with disastrous consequences (a variant reading for line 7 is ‘then mounts, to be to atoms hurled’). Sensible ‘Critics’ can see that the Tun is too slow-witted to ‘suspect the snare’ involved, but the Tun does not listen.

This poem could apply to the gambler of any era or to the financial experts who were ‘to atoms hurled’ in 2008.

**Poem 1240 F1291** ‘The Beggar at the Door for Fame’
It is easier to be ‘supplied’ when we beg for Fame than when we beg for the ‘bread of heaven,’ which in this life is ‘disclosed’ in glimpses but then ‘denied,’ as Emily has also pointed out in poems 1191 and 1231.

Poem 1241 F1261 ‘The Lilac is an ancient shrub’
The lilac colours of the nightly sunset are even older than the Lilac shrub itself of Persian origin. As we contemplate without being able to touch this ‘Flower of Occident,’ we can imagine that ‘the West’ is its inner petals or ‘Corolla,’ the ‘Earth’ its outer petals or ‘Calyx,’ and the ‘Stars’ the seeds in its ‘Capsules.’ (1-11)
Empirical scientists of the Christian faith have just started to analyse how natural phenomena like sunsets can be used as proofs to point to God, but as yet these phenomena are ‘above [their] synthesis.’ (12-16)
Of course those who just believe that the splendours of the sunset point to the glories of heaven may be counted among the ‘Blind’ by the scientist of faith, but their sense of ‘Revelation’ should not have to be put on hold until it is proved by his theses. (17-20)

In line 17 the quotation is part of St Paul’s assertion that, ‘Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.’ (1 Corinthians 2:9). ‘The Scientist of Faith’ of line 12 could be Emily’s old teacher Edward Hitchcock, who claimed that ‘the elements of nature are a universal alphabet.’

Poem 1242 F1343 ‘To flee from Memory’
In a later letter of 1882 (L792) to Mrs Holland Emily says that Memory is both ‘Jubilee’ and ‘Knell,’ but in this poem, as in poem 1182, she excludes its ‘Jubilee’ aspect. Here it is something so frightful that we would flee from it ‘had we the wings,’ and birds, used ‘to slower things,’ would look in amazement at our ‘cowering,’ scampering throng.

1873  (Emily is forty three. She writes 50 poems)

Poem 1243 F1196 ‘Safe Despair it is that raves’
The man who raves to others about his despair is safe from true agony, as the victim of that keeps it to himself. No soul, when confronted by ‘Trouble,’ can be
‘garrisoned’ with help from others. His love anguish is experienced by him alone, and so is his dying.

Poem 1244 F1329  ‘The Butterfly’s Assumption Gown’
A butterfly this afternoon fluttered down to the buttercups of Amherst. It was ‘condescending’ to the townspeople because it gave them the chance to realise that its ‘Assumption Gown,’ which hangs on a peg in the ‘Chrysoprase Apartments’ of heaven, was a symbol of the immortality to which we shall be assumed at death.

Emily also gives this role to the butterfly in poem 1685.

Poem 1245 F1171  ‘The Suburbs of a Secret’
The ‘Strategist’ or person of sense should keep to ‘the Suburbs of a Secret’ revealed to him by a friend and not press for the centre of the story. It is better ‘to scrutinise’ the sleeper than to ‘intrude’ upon his dream.

Poem 1246 F1305  ‘The Butterfly in honored Dust’
The butterfly of poem 1244 will ‘assuredly’ be honored in death by all nature passing by his ‘Catacomb.’ In that parade none will be ‘so chastened as the Fly’ – as he thinks that this glorious creature is dead, while he, pitiful performer that he is, still lives.

Poem 1247 F1353  ‘To pile like Thunder to its close’
Emily had ended poem 505 by wondering what it would be like to be a poet and have the Art ‘to stun [herself]/ with Bolts of Melody.’ Here she says that to be visited by true poetic inspiration from God would be like a thunderstorm, which piles to a climax before crumbling ‘grand away/while Everything created hid.’ Then she adds that to be pierced by the love of God (as is St Theresa in Bernini’s statue) would feel exactly the same, as the two are ‘coeval.’ But in this world we both have fleeting visits from these two and never experience them in their fullness, for to do so would be to be consumed, as ‘None see God and live.’

Poem 1248 F1172  ‘The incidents of love’
The best indication that a love relationship has been a good investment is not the big events of marriage or the birth of children, but the daily, small 1% incidents of a shared joke or a kiss.
Poem 1249 F1242  ‘The Stars are old, that stood for me’
This poem perhaps refers to the deteriorating relationship between Emily and Sue. ‘The Stars,’ which Sue saw in Emily’s eyes, ‘are old’ now. ‘The West’ of Sue’s affection for her is now ‘a little worn.’ And yet for Emily Sue, ‘the only Gold’ she ever wanted, glows newer every day.

At first Emily presumed that her abandonment by Sue just showed Sue’s ‘infinite disdain.’ But then she realised that her own defeat also meant a defeat for Sue, as what had really been killed was the ‘Victory’ of the love between the two of them.

Emily had referred to Sue as her true ‘Gold’ in line 26 of poem 299.

Poem 1250 F1193  ‘White as an Indian Pipe’
In a later letter (L971) of February 1885 Emily characterised February as ‘that Month of fleetest sweetness.’ Here she says that there is often a whiteness about the February atmosphere like that of the woodland flower called the ‘Indian Pipe,’ and also in February a redness in the sticky red buds on shrub and tree like the redness of the garden flower called the ‘Lobelia Cardinalis.’

Poem 1251 F1300  ‘Silence is all we dread’
These lines end a letter (L397) written by Emily in the autumn of 1873 to Sue, who with her children was visiting her sister Harriet in Geneva, New York. Emily wants to be ransomed from ‘Silence’ by the ‘Voice’ of Sue, either in a letter or in person after her return home. A faceless Silence seems to go on for ever.

Poem 1252 F1241  ‘Like Brooms of Steel’
Emily describes a winter’s day. Her house has been ‘hooked’ or caught by the cold. Silence has tied his horse where once ‘rode the Bird.’ The only Apple that plays is the one ‘in the Cellar snug.’

Poem 1253 F1281  ‘Had this one Day not been’
Emily perhaps has in mind the day on which she had her greatest experience of love. If this day had not been, or if she could cease to remember it, all her other days would be a waste.
Love constantly cherishes this day, lest love should value it less than loss would value it if the memory of the privilege of this day were ‘stricken’ from her.

Poem 1254 F1288  ‘Elijah’s Wagon knew no thill’
The foremost of Elijah’s ‘feats inscrutable’ was when, as the writer of *Kings* puts it, ‘behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire…..and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.’ (2 Kings 2:11) Certainly this was no ordinary Amherst farm wagon with thill (=shaft) and wheel. And the skill to give the details of this journey has vanished with the writer of *Kings*, who ‘justified’ or ‘authorised’ (a variant) our belief in this event.

Poem 1255 F1298  ‘Longing is like the Seed’
The human longing for the Sun of fame or love or immortality requires the ‘Constancy’ of the ‘Seed’ as it pushes towards the light, ignorant of the hour of its arrival or of its destination.

Poem 1256 F1214  ‘Not any higher stands the Grave’
As in poem 970 Emily says that all are equal in the eyes of death. In the second stanza the first line is a unit, before Emily declares that both ‘the Beggar and his Queen’ might find themselves trying to appease or conciliate ‘this Democrat/a Summer’s Afternoon,’ to avoid the ‘latest Leisure’ of the grave.

Poem 1257 F1299  ‘Dominion lasts until obtained’
The editors of *Bolts of Melody*, the selection of Emily’s poems published in 1945, noted that this poem was ‘sent with leaves.’ As often, for example in poem 1299, Emily declares that human dominion or possession disappears as soon as obtained, whereas these leaves (perhaps the spring leaves of a flower) at least remind us of God the creator and his eternal world ‘as they flit’ and gradually decay. Their Lips have been ‘known only to the Dew,’ unlike the lips of human brides, but they are the ‘Brides of permanence,’ a symbol of our rebirth into everlasting life.

Poem 1258 F1280  ‘Who were “the Father and the Son”’
Emily describes how her childhood experiences have given her a lifelong aversion to the God of traditional religious belief. To paraphrase:
As a child, when I asked about the Father and the Son, I was ‘portentous told’ that God was an all-powerful being who would punish my misdeeds. I was not attracted by this, but, by ‘Childhood’ or ‘distance (a variant) fortified,’ thought that it might have been even worse. (1-8)

If I asked about the Father and the Son now as an adult, they could tell me themselves, but we might have been ‘better Friends’ than we have become over time, if in my childhood they had shown a ‘readiness’ (a variant for ‘felicity’ in line 13) to reply to my question then. (9-16)

As an adult I’m startled to find that my childhood doubt about them has become a fixed, unchanging thing, so that now I blush to think that if – per impossibile – I get to heaven, I would have continued my disbelief right up to the moment when I am ‘ashamed to own the Miracle.’ (17-24)

In her second letter (L261) to Thomas Higginson Emily says of her family, ‘They are all religious – except me – and address an Eclipse, every morning – whom they call their “Father.”’ She would have benefited from the sort of approach to God which she later experienced in the prayers of Dr Holland. She said of his God in a letter (L371) to Mrs Holland, ‘That God must be a friend – that was a different God – and I almost felt warmer myself, in the midst of a tie so sunshiny.’

Poem 1259 F1216 ‘A Wind that rose’
This poem concludes a letter (L407) to Sue which opens with the sentences, ‘It is sweet you are better – I am greedy to see you. Your Note was like the Wind.’ The poem tells Sue that her letter was a Wind unknown to Forest or Bird but one which engaged with the cold in her heart, and woke a delight in her loneliness, like the swell in the heart when we think of a distant loved one. She has been ‘restored…to the invisible [Sue] by receiving the ‘confidence’ of Sue’s letter in her ‘Arctic’ solitude.

Poem 1260 F1314 ‘Because that you are going’
Emily analyses her relationship with her beloved master, just as in poem 640. In this poem she is saying farewell to him in this life. To paraphrase: Because you are never coming back and because, however absolute my devotion to you, I may lose sight of you until the finality of Death, we should suspend above the power of death this moment of farewell and the knowledge that we have found and discovered each other. (1-12)
You were my ‘Existence,’ and now that I perceive that you are leaving me and so have forgotten to live as though you were my ‘Existence,’ I can only presume that there will be an Eternity where we can meet again. (13-16)

When we meet in Eternity, the ‘life that is’ [to be after your departure] will seem like ‘a thing I never knew,’ just as the Paradise of the ‘life that is to be’ will seem fictitious until you share its Realm with me, and ‘a residence too plain’ unless I recognise your face in my Redeemer’s. (17-24)

Anyone who doubts that there is Immortality in store for us could enjoy heaven in my place because I shall be doing nothing but gaze into my Redeemer’s face with your face also seen in it and shutting out everything else. (25-8)

Also, as I shall see your face in the face of my Redeemer, I shall leave any criticism of Heaven and Hell to him who might see in his Redeemer’s face the face of ‘his less priceless Friend.’ (29-32)

Anyway as God’s assertion that he is a ‘jealous God’ is true because he has taken you from me, it could be that his claims that he is ‘Love’ and can do all things are also true. And if this is so, he will give you back to me in heaven as one of my ‘confiscated Gods.’ (37-40)

Poem 1261 F1268  ‘A Word dropped careless on a Page’

Emily sent this poem, which continues the thought of poems 952 and 1212, in a letter (L379) to her cousin, Louise Norcross. It is preceded by the words, ‘Do you remember what you said the night you came to me? I secure that sentence. If I should see your face no more it will be your portrait, and if I should [see your face, it will be] more vivid than your mortal face. We must be careful what we say. No bird resumes its egg.’

Indeed Emily’s own words still ‘stimulate an eye’ although she is ‘folded in [the] perpetual seam [of her grave].’ And we can still ‘inhale [the] Despair’ that, for example, Andromache feels when she hears of the death of her husband Hector in book 22 of Homer’s Iliad, even though we are centuries away from the actual ‘Malaria.’

Johnson prints ‘stimulate’ in line 2 and ‘Maker’ in line 4 where Franklin has ‘consecrate’ and ‘Author,’ as Johnson is following the manuscript version of the poem, Franklin the letter version.
Anthony Trollope makes the same point as this poem when in ch.51 of The Duke’s Children the duke says of correspondence that, ‘Words, when once written remain, or may remain in testimony for ever.’

Poem 1262 F1276 ‘I cannot see my soul but know tis there’
This poem is part of a letter (L382) to Louise and Frances Norcross, which begins, ‘I know I love my friends – I feel it far in here where neither blue nor black eye goes, and fingers cannot reach.’

And, just as in these opening sentences she cannot ‘see’ her love for her cousins, so in the poem which follows she cannot see her soul which has invited her to live with him. But she is ‘a confiding guest’ and has asked her soul how she can be most suitably ‘dressed’ for him, perhaps when she is called with him to the wedding in heaven on the day of her death. But her soul has never given her the insurance of specific knowledge on this matter. Indeed, as her death can only be dated as ‘a sudden feast’ and the day of its coming unknown, the only insurance is for her to have her soul ‘perpetual drest’ in readiness.

Poem 1263 F1286 ‘There is no Frigate like a Book’
This poem is the whole of a letter (L400) to Louise and Frances Norcross apart from the introductory sentence, ‘I think of your little parlor as the poets [like Wordsworth] once thought of Windermere, - peace, sunshine, and books.’

In line 3 ‘Coursers’ are powerful, racing horses, and in line 5 ‘travel’ is a variant reading for ‘traverse.’ The last two lines presumably mean that the soul’s chariot needs to spend very little on its journey, seeing that books are so cheap and available.

The delight of books is also the theme of poems 371, 604 and 1587.

Poem 1264 F1284 ‘This is the place they hoped before’
Emily begins a letter (L390) to Frances Norcross with the words, ‘Thank you, dear, for the love. I am progressing timidly. Experiment has a stimulus which withers fear.’ Then there follows this poem. At the moment Emily is recovering from some despair or illness and experimenting with feeling better ‘within [her] capsule gay.’ The possibility of future disappointment is at the moment too ‘distant’ to stop her walking on her ‘plank of balm.’ But she cannot go back, so the future is what has to be faced.
Poem 1265 F1285  ‘The most triumphant Bird I ever knew or met’
Emily included versions of this poem in letters to her cousins and to Mrs Holland in the late spring of 1873. The version sent to the cousins (L388) had ‘competent’ instead of ‘eminent’ in line 4, and ‘impudent’ instead of ‘intimate’ in line 6. The cousins’ version was preceded by the words, ‘so with a few spring touches, nature remains unchanged.’ Mrs Holland’s version (L391) is introduced with the words, ‘Eden, always eligible, is peculiarly so this noon. It would please you to see how intimate the Meadows are with the Sun. Besides –.’

Until the ‘Dominion’ over Emily’s senses of this ‘most triumphant Bird’ came to an end, she was hungry for more of the sight of a bird singing for no other ascertainable reason than sheer ‘Delight.’ It did not last long as the bird resumed his flights across his world, but the ‘finest Glory’ of his song was a ‘delicious Accident!’

Poem 1266 F1301  ‘When Memory is full’
This poem was enclosed as a penciled note in a letter to Mrs Holland. Something good has happened for Emily that morning, perhaps a letter arriving from Mrs Holland. She wants to keep a full Memory of ‘this Morning’s finest syllable’ by putting a ‘perfect Lid’ on it. ‘Presumptuous Evening’ had said the good thing would happen, but she hadn’t been able to believe it.

Poem 1267 F1304  ‘I saw that the Flake was on it’
Meeting an old friend after a long interval, Emily sees that her hair is now flaked with white, but agrees with Time that she will falsely tell her friend that she looks ‘unchanged.’ The friend is aware of the lie, and bravely replies that Emily on the other hand has ‘altered,’ before adding that Emily was no doubt progressing while Time was making his ravages (as indeed she was.)

Thomas Johnson thinks that the girlhood friend may have been Abby Wood, as she is known to have visited Amherst in this year. Poem 1444 has a similar theme.

Poem 1268 F1303  ‘Confirming All who analyse’
Emily agrees with the opinion that true Eloquence is when the heart is too full to speak. An example would be Cordelia at the beginning of King Lear. Lear asks his three daughters to say who loves him most, but when he says to Cordelia ‘Speak,’ she replies with ‘Nothing.’
Poem 1269 F1217  ‘I worked for chaff and earning Wheat’

It is impossible to be sure what ‘chaff’ and ‘Wheat’ symbolise in this poem. A guess would be that Emily worked for getting her poems published in the Springfield Republican (= ‘chaff’). But when she found that her poems were not turning out to be the ‘chaff’ that this paper published, she at first was annoyed that her poems had let her down. Then, realising that her poems had the much better taste of ‘Wheat,’ she thanked the paper and its editors for being wise enough to show her from their more distant viewpoint the true nature of her poems.

Poem 1270 F1260  ‘Is Heaven a Physician?’

Emily undermines the metaphors of Heaven as a doctor or a bank. If heaven heals, its ‘Medicine’ is ‘Posthumous,’ and so is no good in this life. If Heaven is a bank, paying out after death a place there because of the good deeds paid in during this life, all Emily can say is that she never signed up to that agreement.

Poem 1271 F1313  ‘September’s Baccalaureate’

In the USA a ‘Baccalaureate’ can be a farewell discourse to a graduating class. September’s farewell to us consists of ‘Crickets [and] Crows – and Retrospects,’ but it also, with a ‘breeze’ that is not quite what it seems, hints with a late ‘innuendo’ that we should put away the fun of summer and consider whether the annual cycle of death and renewal is a sign of our own death and renewal in eternity.

Poem 1272 F1278  ‘So proud she was to die’

A dying woman was so proud and satisfied to die that the anguished mourners were ashamed and almost jealous. The mourners cherished the idea of her living longer, but this did not accord at all with her own desires.

Poem 1273 F1385  ‘That sacred Closet when you sweep’

If we want to remember our past, which will contain other people beside ourselves, we should sweep the ‘Closet’ of memory with ‘a reverential Broom.’ But it is better to leave our past unvisited and ‘unchallenged.’ We cannot change it and it ‘can silence [us].’

Emily had also explored the dangers of memory in poems 1182 and 1242.
Poem 1274 F1218  ‘The Bone that has no Marrow’
Just as a marrowless ‘Bone’ has no ‘Ultimate’ use, so the assembly of bones making up a man is more blameworthy ‘than shame,’ if it does not have the ‘Marrow’ of rebirth or ‘function fresh’ after it has died and is seemingly ‘finished.’ It will be a mere ‘Phantom,’ as Nicodemus had once implied it was.

When Jesus surprised the Jewish elder Nicodemus with the statement, ‘Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God,’ Nicodemus asked in exasperation, ‘How can a man be born when he is old?’ *(John 3:3-4)*

The story of Nicodemus was also used in poem 140.

Poem 1275 F1373  ‘The Spider as an Artist’
Emily praises the common Spider, whose artistry is known to every ‘Broom and Bridget’ of a housemaid in the land. In poems 605 and 1138 Emily had seemingly identified herself as a poet with the spider, but perhaps not in this poem. For while she may have felt herself ‘neglected’ as a poet, she would hardly imply that she was ‘a Son of Genius’ or possessed ‘surpassing Merit.’

Poem 1276 F1312  ‘Twas later when the summer went’
Each year the arrival of the cricket is a ‘Clock’ striking the hour for summer’s departure, and each year the departure of the cricket announces the coming of winter. This regularly repeated sequence of events, marked by nature’s ‘Pendulum,’ affects us all, and yet the significance of it for our destiny (cf. poem 1271) is known only to the ‘esoteric’ circle of a few initiates.

Poem 1277 F1317  ‘While we were fearing it, it came’
Imagine a man who for a long time had feared retirement and regarded it with dismay and despair. The prospect turned out to be worse than the actuality, as it was somehow ‘fitting’ when the actual day arrived, and even the shock of that day passed off as the days went by.

Poem 1278 F1225  ‘The Mountains stood in Haze’
Emily describes the hushed stillness of the evening twilight which makes the ‘Invisible’ world a neighbour for a moment. The sun shuts down for the day,
mountains and valleys stand still, river and sky go on or wait and the twilight points to the spire of the church across the street from Emily’s house.

**Poem 1279 F1348** ‘The Way to know the Bobolink’
The bobolink of poems 324 and 755 returns. We can distinguish the bobolink, this ‘Bird of Birds,’ if we look at the reasons for the joy which he gives us. He looks so ‘impudent’ and at times majestic in his mating ‘Habiliment’ of yellow nape, black feathers on top and white underneath, and he behaves as a complete rebel, no more law-abiding than heretical exhilaration or Puck of Shakespeare’s *Midsummer Night’s Dream*. He is a flipperty-gibbet, a happy soul, who sings songs of compliments to creation until called away on business of his own.

**Poem 1280 F1215** ‘The harm of Years is on him’
Emily could be talking of a lover or friend who has grown old and no longer satisfies, or of a public figure. It is time to get rid of him and give someone else the chance to exercise ‘Dominion.’ In ‘Decay’ his former ‘Glory’ is smaller than the least amount of ‘Vitality’ which is actually present.

A supporter of the Conservative party in England in 2009 might well see Gordon Brown in the ‘him’ of this poem.

**Poem 1281 F1258** ‘A stagnant pleasure like a Pool’
The syntax of this poem is clearer with ‘is’ supplied after ‘pleasure’ in line 1, a comma put after ‘bright’ in line 5, and a full-stop after ‘going down’ in line 6. In other words lines 2-5 make up one sense unit.

When the pool of our pleasure is stagnant, its ‘Shadows’ or ‘ripples’ (a variant reading) go straight down, but spread outwards again ‘when freshets [from outside] come along.’ Emily reminds us that when we feel low, something from outside ourselves may come along to rouse us. For Robert Frost in his poem *Dust of Snow* the ‘freshet’ was a crow shaking snow on him ‘from a hemlock tree.’

**Poem 1282 F1311** ‘Art thou the thing I wanted?’
This biting attack could be launched against Sue. It is so long since Emily received any food of love from Sue that her ‘Tooth has grown’ accustomed to its absence. Sue can now give her food of love to some lesser lover who has not starved as long as
Emily has (draft I) or who could not be tantalised so long (draft II). While Emily waited, the food of love became such a ‘mystery’ that she gave it up and learned to dine in isolation, ‘Like God.’

Johnson prints both rough drafts of this poem, Franklin only the second. Ruth Miller points out that this is the only poem in which Emily dealt with the shame of unrequited love by attacking the beloved. Usually, as with Samuel Bowles, she ‘transfigured her shame into an impregnable devotion.’

**Poem 1283 F1282**  ‘Could Hope inspect her Basis’

If I could see the real ‘Basis’ for my hope, its edifice would crumble. To exist, Hope needs a ‘fictitious Charter.’ With such a charter, my grandest hope, when ‘balked,’ can still be renewed. Hope is only exterminated by a ‘Prosperity’ which makes hope unnecessary.

**Poem 1284 F1310**  ‘Had we our senses’

Emily seems to be using ‘senses’ in this poem as gateways into spiritual insight, and is saying that it is perhaps just as well that we do not [very often] have such gateways, for we then become ‘intimate with [the] Madness/that’s liable [to happen] with them.’ Indeed if we had such spiritual ‘eyes within our Head’ instead of blindness, we would be shattered as we looked ‘upon the Earth.’

In line 4 the variant reading ‘That’s liable’ is easier to understand than ‘He’s liable.’

**Poem 1285 F1283**  ‘I know Suspense – it stops so terse’

Emily returns to the theme of ‘Suspense’ which she had defined so powerfully in poem 705. Here it first of all dogs her footsteps persistently, only weakly occasionally turning aside. Then it becomes the neighbour at the window who watches her riding through life, though recently Emily said to her horses, ‘that neighbour seems to be on the lookout for some body else today and not me.’

**Poem 1286 F1269**  ‘I thought that nature was enough’

Emily describes her progressive concerns with nature, then man, and finally with God. At first ‘nature’ seemed sufficient subject for her poetry until it was absorbed by ‘Human nature,’ just as a ‘Flame’ is absorbed by the ‘Parallax’ of heavenly bodies.
And then came the addition of ‘the Divine.’ There was a brief struggle for elbow room as she could only ‘contain’ what she had space for, but, as tends to happen, the ‘Giant,’ that is God, pushed the others out.

   This is true to the extent that Emily regarded ‘immortality’ as her ‘flood subject.’

Poem 1287 F1292  ‘In this short Life’
In four brief lines Emily captures two of life’s paradoxes. Our three score years and ten can seem like ‘an hour.’ Most of us do so ‘little’ for the human race, but affect so ‘much’ the people in our orbit.

Poem 1288 F1309  ‘Lain in Nature – so suffice us’
When a loved one is laid in the earth, we have to make do with the ‘enchantless Pod’ of his coffin and grave, while we advertise in vain throughout the world ‘for the missing Seed.’ For not even the ‘Maddest Heart’ can remove the sod which one ordinary summer has pasted over the coffin of the lost one.

Poem 1289 F1289  ‘Left in immortal Youth’
Emily describes the death of a young man, left now on the ‘low Plain’ of the graveyard or battlefield, from where there is no looking back or forward. He may have been set free from the normal span of ‘years’ ending in ‘Decay,’ but he has been ‘cancelled’ in the ‘Dawn’ of a ‘Day’ which should have comprehended so much more.

Poem 1290 F1345  ‘The most pathetic thing I do’
As was noted on poem 1251 Sue visited New York during the summer of 1873, and the ‘you’ of this poem is probably Sue. Emily can nearly make her Heart believe that a letter has come from Sue, until she breaks it with the news that Sue knows no letter has been sent. But then she wishes she had not broken her heart. Sue would wish it too.

   As in poem 540, Emily calls Sue ‘Goliah’ (a common mis-spelling for ‘Goliath’) to indicate her power.

Poem 1291 F1262  ‘Until the Desert knows’
What we regard as the ‘Utmost’ is relative to our situation and knowledge. The Sahara desert is content with his sands until he suspects the ‘Caspian Fact’ that there is water. ‘Have not’ and ‘Have’ are ‘adjacent sums’ on a sliding scale, and ‘enough’ is in a different position on that scale for each of us, though we do know that for any man ‘enough’ is the first stop on the road travelled in his dreams.

Poem 1292 F1290 ‘Yesterday is History’
Yesterday is in the past, now merely subject matter for poetry and philosophy. But while we speculate on the mystery of ‘where it is Today,’ both Yesterday and Today ‘flutter away.’

Poem 1293 F1279 ‘The things we thought that we should do’
We may have done other things than the ones we thought we should do. We may not have visited the lands we thought we should visit when grown up, and passed on the speculation of a possible visit to the next speculation. But the Heaven we hope to rest in when the Discipline of our lives is over, although not provable by Logic, may be something which will actually happen.

Three years later in the spring of 1876 Emily included the whole of this poem in a letter (L459) to Thomas Higginson. As he had just been away on a short trip filling speaking engagements rather than doing his normal work, the first stanza is applicable to him.

1874 (Emily is forty four. She writes 36 poems. Her father, Edward Dickinson, dies on 16 June)

Poem 1294 F1327 ‘Of Life to own’
In a letter (L413) to Thomas Higginson of late May 1874 Emily highly praises Higginson’s new poem called *Decoration*. She ends the praise with the words, ‘You have experienced sanctity. To me it is untried’ and then follows the poem, in which she is presumably saying that, unlike Higginson, she has not yet touched the deepest things at the bottom of the reservoir of life, such as writing a comparable poem herself.

Poem 1295 F1354 ‘Two Lengths has every Day’
A Day is both always twenty-fours in extent and seeming shorter or longer depending on our emotions. Whether Eternity is ‘Velocity or Pause’ depends on the fundamental organisation of the universe. To die is usually regarded as a going, but the dying person takes with him all he has made of himself up to that point, and there is no going to any ‘Territory new’ from that.

Poem 1296 F1315  ‘Death’s Waylaying not the sharpest’

Edward Dickinson’s sister Katie married Joseph Sweetster of New York in 1835. On 21 January 1874 her husband walked out of his house and was never seen again. Emily sent this poem as a message to her aunt after her husband’s disappearance. It is the whole of the letter (L408) apart from the first sentence which reads, ‘Saying nothing, my Aunt Katie, sometimes says the Most.’

Her poem says that the Silence of his disappearance was worse than Death, for, unlike Death, there is no ‘Assault’ or ‘Menace’ to signify that Silence is about to happen. It just at one stroke removed ‘the Balm’ from the ‘Cluster’ of the things which made up her aunt’s life.

Poem 1297 F1322  ‘Go slow, my soul, to feed thyself’

This poem is part of a letter (L410) of early March 1874 sent to her cousins, Louise and Frances Norcross. It is introduced by the words, ‘Infinite March is here, and I “hered” a bluebird. Of course I am standing on my head.’

Presumably the ‘his’ in the poem refers to ‘infinite March’ and the coming of spring which is symbolic of our own rebirth. She must ‘go slow’ as March only comes once a year, but also ‘go rapid’ lest Death overtakes the ‘Coach’ on which she is travelling through life. She must ‘go timid,’ for fear that March, with his final judgment, should decide that she is not fit to share in the blessings promised by his symbolism. But she should also ‘go boldly,’ for she can be redeemed and become a sharer in rebirth if she has given ‘a Kiss’ to March in welcome and anticipation.

Poem 1298 F1350  ‘The Mushroom is the Elf of Plants’

As Charles Anderson points out, Emily in this poem on the mushroom limits herself to just one pictorial phrase, that he is like an Elf ‘in a Truffled Hut,’ before she concentrates on his sudden appearance and the fleetingness of his existence. He is ‘fleeter than a Tare’ or weed which springs up overnight among corn. He is always
claiming he was elsewhere. He has no more ‘antedate’ than a bubble, and disappears as quickly. Even the grass seems pleased at the disappearance of this interloper, which summer, for all its watchfulness, has allowed to creep in.

If Nature had any item which she could condemn for instability and untrustworthiness, it would be the Mushroom!

In line 10 ‘Joy’ is a variant reading for ‘Germ,’ and in line 19 ‘Iscariot’ is a variant for ‘apostate.’

Poem 1299 F1375  Delight’s Despair at setting’
This poem is on Emily’s familiar theme that anticipation is superior to fulfilment. When delight dies, we despair that the delight is less sufficient than was the longing during our period of impoverishment.

We mistake the actual ‘Enchantment’ when we are as near to the sun of actuality as we can get, for it is somehow not so ‘Authentic’ as our previous orbit around the sun of longing.

Poem 1300 F1339  ‘From his slim Palace in the Dust’
Edward Dickinson, Emily’s father, died on 16 June 1874, and this poem could well refer to him. He was the King of the house, but now from his ‘Palace’ in the grave can only ‘relegate’ his household ‘Realm’ to his family, who surprisingly feel more loyal to him after his departure in death. Perhaps they tended to forget his stern, unsmiling side and to remember his more lovable qualities.

Poem 1301 F1228  ‘I cannot want it more’
Emily cannot want ‘it’ more than she does or less than she does, because she wants it with her ‘fullest force’ all the time. Those who have ‘it’ take it for granted, whereas those who do not have ‘it’ think it worth digging fathoms deep into the distance to obtain ‘it.’

Emily leaves the reader to guess what ‘it’ is. It might be a belief in the goodness of God or the daily love between a man and woman in marriage.

Poem 1302 F1295  ‘I think that the Root of the Wind is Water’
Emily attempts the paradox that the Wind comes from the depths of the sea. If it came from the sky ‘it would not sound so deep,’ and there are ‘no Oceans’ in the sky. No,
the Wind is ‘Mediterranean intonations’ in the ears of currents of water. Surprisingly there is something convincingly maritime about the winds of ‘the Atmosphere.’

Poem 1303 F1296  ‘Not One by heaven defrauded stay’
No one, defrauded of this life by death and Heaven, stays behind on earth. But although the dead person seems to steal away from us, he also restores himself to us ‘in some sweet way’ which only he knows about and understands, perhaps in dreams or as we think about him.

Poem 1304 F1349  ‘Not with a Club, the Heart is broken’
This heartfelt poem seems to reflect Emily’s own experience. She says that the ‘Magic Creature’ which is her Heart has not been broken by Club or Stone but by the invisible Whip of a lover’s rejection. She was too noble to complain, just like the bird which went on singing to the boy who had given him his death wound by a stone from his catapult. But she need not be ashamed that she has received this shameful treatment, as our Universe has been given over to shame since the shameful actions of Adam and Eve.

   This poem is reminiscent of poem 925 where Emily says that she was not struck by lightning but slain by what she loved the most, and also of the second Master letter (L233) which opens with the sentence, ‘Master, if you saw a bullet hit a Bird – and he told you he wasn’t shot – you might weep at his courtesy, but you would certainly doubt his word.’

Poem 1305 F1306  ‘Recollect the Face of me’
The first stanza of this poem, like the first stanza of poem 1180, re-enacts the conversation between Jesus and the thief on the cross (Luke 23:42-3). In lines 1-2 the thief asks Jesus to remember him when he comes into his kingdom, and in lines 3-4 Jesus replies to the thief that he will be with him in Paradise that day.

   The second stanza is then Emily’s own prayer to Jesus. She commends herself to him, hoping that she may experience the same Courtesy which he had extended to the thief and others in the past.

Poem 1306 F1324  ‘Surprise is like a thrilling – pungent’
Just as a pungent sauce would be too powerful on its own but is an ‘edible Delight’ when combined with ‘tasteless meat,’ so a ‘surprise’ on its own would be too powerful, if it did not combine with the previous usualness of our existence.

Poem 1307 F1363  ‘That short – potential stir’
Emily repeats her point of poem 98, that each of us has one day of importance, namely the day of our funeral, although this fame, of which we will never be conscious, would be spurned by the poorest Beggar, if he were able to spurn it.

Poem 1308 F1302  ‘The Day she goes’
Some other woman is Emily’s ‘existence.’ As such she has ‘a stated width’ (= is equally important for Emily) whether it is a day when she is ‘at Home’ or a day on which she has ‘departed.’

The last line of this poem is also the last line of poem 1037. The woman concerned could by Sue or Kate Anthon.

Poem 1309 F1344  ‘The Infinite a sudden Guest’
The Infinite is always there. But we only know him as ‘a sudden Guest’ because usually we fail to see him. As poem 685 puts it

Not “Revelation” – tis – that waits,
But our unfurnished eyes –

Poem 1310 F1319  ‘The Notice that is called the Spring’
Spring, which calls us to notice the world again, is but a month away. So Emily tells herself to put away the housework of winter and take a chair to welcome the roses. After all flowers don’t keep house and birdsong charms away care. Our payment at the end of the longest life is only a grave, so ‘carpe diem.’

Poem 1311 F1378  ‘This dirty –little – Heart’
Emily imagines winning the heart of a child with dirty knees by giving him a bun. Besides his dirty knees he is also a shrine for freckles, but he is fair enough to be selected for favours if you look at his soul.
Emily mentions her own freckles in such poems as 166, 275 and 1094. In poem 401 she uses ‘freckled’ to describe ordinary human nature. See also the notes to poem 225.

Poem 1312 F1308 ‘To break so vast a Heart’
Like poem 1300 this poem almost certainly refers to the death of Emily’s father. Richard Sewall comments, ‘The stiffness that amused her in his ‘Roman General’ bearing now has the dignity of a tall cedar.’ For ‘Roman General’ see the notes to poem 585.

Poem 1313 F1307 ‘Warm in her Hand these accents lie’
Perhaps Emily has sent a copy of this poem to Sue, who may be geographically absent from Amherst or psychologically distant from Emily in her own house a hundred yards away. She imagines Sue reading the poem at this moment, while Emily, her fond subject, whose Grace towards her is often so awkward, remains ‘faithful and afar.’

Poem 1314 F1330 ‘When a Lover is a Beggar’
Imagine a Lover who goes down on one knee, asking for a return of love. When that love is bestowed upon her so that she becomes its Owner, the person who bestowed it may become a beggar, in his turn asking for a return of love. In fact true love or the ‘Bread of Heaven’ resents the process of begging and bestowing as much as it would resent being abused in ‘an obloquy.’ It operates through free mutual giving and exchange.

Poem 1315 F1376 ‘Which is best – the Moon or the Crescent’?
As in many poems, for example 1299, Emily warns against the dangers of fulfilment. In this poem it is the Moon who says that it is neither the full moon nor the crescent moon which is the best, but rather the growth or development towards either. The achievement of a joy effaces ‘the Sheen’ and decomposes the ‘Transport’ of it. Transport always comes in such brilliant, prismatic colours that it will never last more than a moment.

Poem 1316 F1374 ‘Winter is good – his Hoar Delights’
Judith Farr (G) gives a helpful reading of this poem. Summer, as in poem 214, inebriates our ‘Intellects’ with worldly pleasures, but Winter with its frosty ‘Delights’ has a more ‘Italic’ or emphatic character. As a genus Winter is ‘a Quarry’ or a source, for without his frost and snow producing decay and mould, there would be no fresh growth next spring. At the same time Winter’s heart is luckily as transient as the heart of a rose, and, despite his delights and necessary functions, we still invite him to come with a certain bitterness, and are glad when he goes.

Poem 1317 F1332 ‘Abraham to kill him’
According to the writer of Genesis God put Abraham to the test by commanding him to offer his young son, Isaac, as a sacrifice. Abraham was about to do so, when the angel of the Lord appeared to Abraham forbidding this sacrifice. ‘And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold a ram caught in a thicket by his horns.’ (Genesis 22:1-18) Abraham was able to sacrifice the ram in place of Isaac.

Presumably Abraham showed ‘Manners’ by immediately complying with the Mastiff’s commands. A more committed Evangelical Christian than Emily might have expressed the ‘flattered by Obeisance’ of line 7 in some such words as ‘deeply touched by Abraham’s complete trust in himself.’

Poem 1318 F1231 ‘Frigid and sweet Her parting Face’
Judith Farr suggests that the other woman in this poem is Sue. For Emily her frigid parting face was still sweet. Emily’s feet would have been fleet to follow her, but, now that she has been frozen out of Sue’s love, every Clime and every fate would be equally bitter.

And yet Sue had given Emily the riches of love without being courted by Emily. So Emily had not deserved to be deprived of a life together with Sue in a ‘Home,’ which admittedly would have had the ‘Penury’ of no male sexual love.

Poem 1319 F1379 ‘How News must feel when travelling’
Emil imagines what it must be like to be ‘News.’ If he ‘have any Heart,’ what must he feel when he arrives at a house which he will ‘enter like a Dart.’ If he is capable of thought, what must he think when he is bringing a stupendous freight of unexpected woe. And what will he do when there is no News left to tell on that day in Heaven when all men are completely open to and readable by each other?
Poem 1320 F1320  ‘Dear March – Come in’
Visitors were always an event in Emily’s reclusive life. Here she imagines going to answer a knock at the door and finding March on the doorstep. Talking non-stop she takes him upstairs to her room, where she, as breathless as March, continues to prattle. ‘I got your letter saying you were coming. The birds have started singing. Strangely, the maples did not know you were coming, and blushed red for shame when I told them. I’m sorry I haven’t written any poems about purple hills lately, but you have monopolised all the purple. Oh dear, there’s April knocking at the door, but I’m not going to answer it. He hasn’t called for a year, and now he calls just when I’m busy with you. Trifles like April look so trivial when you are here. But I’m only joking. I love blamed April as much as praised March, and my praise is no more significant than my blame. I love you both.’

Thomas Higginson, on his first visit to Emily’s home, received much the same sort of reception as March. On the evening of his visit he told his wife in a letter (L342a) that Emily, on meeting him, had said, ‘Forgive me if I am frightened; I never see strangers and hardly know what I say – but she talked soon and thenceforward continuously – and deferentially – sometimes stopping to ask me to talk instead of her – but readily recommencing.’

Poem 1321 F1336  ‘Elizabeth told Essex’
Two years before her own death in 1603 Queen Elizabeth I of England told the Earl of Essex that she ‘could not forgive’ him for his treacherous rebellion against her, but added that God’s mercy might still be available for him.

Emily hopes that Elizabeth herself ‘partook that secondary succour’ of God’s mercy, when she herself on Judgement Day in heaven was ‘suing like her Essex, for a reprieving look.’

It is just possible that Emily identifies herself with Essex and Sue or Kate Anthon with Elizabeth.

Poem 1322 F1335  ‘Floss won’t save you from an Abyss’
Emily says why we should choose ‘the Rope’ rather than the ‘Floss,’ when both are ‘reasonable prices,’ or, as a variant reading of line 8 puts it, ‘Fate has both to sell.’ Although the floss-silk of the silkworm may be a better souvenir, a rope will save you
from ‘an Abyss.’ And as every step through life is ‘a Trough,’ if not an abyss, and every ‘stop a Well’ from which you might need to draw water to continue, the rope will be used more often.

Poem 1323 F1325  ‘I never hear that one is dead’
The ‘chance of Life’ is that at any moment we may be plunged into death. This truth annihilates Emily afresh whenever she hears ‘that [some]one is dead.’ It is too mighty a truth to dwell on daily, and once or twice the consciousness of it has driven Emily mad. Mostly we bandage this belief, for if some tongue could tell us of the terror of death ‘in any Tone commensurate’ with the actuality, we would fall dead on the spot.
No man when on his own dare ‘look [the consciousness of death] squarely in the face’ (a variant reading for line 16).

Poem 1324 F1346  ‘I send you a decrepit flower’
Emily presumably sends to a friend a late autumn flower, a gift from Nature ‘going’ south for the winter like a migrating bird. Emily cannot say whether Nature provided the flower out of friendship for herself, or just from the forethought that such a flower might come in useful for somebody.

Poem 1325 F1333  ‘Knock with tremor’
The ‘Caesars’ of this poem may be Emily’s ancestors and especially her recently deceased father, or perhaps famous poets of the past. To imagine either group so vividly that they are summoned to her presence would be like treading ‘unthinking/on the Foot of Doom.’ They may have been summoned by death centuries ago, but what would she have to show to them for her lifetime’s achievements?

Thomas Johnson says that this poem was written on the back of a note saying:
‘Dear Father –                Emily’
But whether or not the note relates to the poem it is impossible to say.

Poem 1326 F1318  ‘Our little secrets slink away’
Ever since the world began God has never told his secrets. And we might never tell our secrets if it were not for the sweetness of making someone stare by our confession that we were responsible. Because or this ‘our little secrets slink away’ from us.
Poem 1327 F1328 ‘The Symptom of the Gale’
Emily seems to describe the second before the gale comes (lines 1-12) and the aftermath of the gale (lines 13-16). The second before the actuality ‘is almost Revelry’ or ‘ecstasy’ (a variant) for humans, while ‘Houses firmer root,’ everything takes cover, and no one can remember the so recent sun.

But when the ‘Noise [of the gale] is caught’ and extinguished, and Nature seems to ask ‘Was there a gale or did we dream it?’ do we then say ‘Good Morning’ to each other as though nothing had happened?

Poems 1134 and 1397 are also about storms and their passing.

Poem 1328 F1323 ‘The vastest earthly Day’
Just one person leaving this world and now hidden under his pall or shroud in his coffin can shrink small the ‘vastest Day’ of this earth. Emily probably has her father’s recent death in mind.

Poem 1329 F1334 ‘Whether they have forgotten’
This poem could refer to any people we once knew, but it is most likely to refer to our dead. Mercifully we cannot know for certain but can only guess whether they remember us. Again, Emily is probably thinking of her father.

Poem 1330 F1340 ‘Without a smile – Without a Throe’
Summer departs ‘without a smile’ or tear. She seems to dissemble or hide the fact that we were friends and met so often. She is an unknown stranger.

In many poems Emily is confident that Nature reveals the secret of our own rebirth at death. But sometimes, as here or in poem 1386, she regards Nature as an inscrutable mystery.

Richard Sewall says of Emily’s late poems that most of them ‘are wisdom pieces, distillations, summings up – or deal in some way or other with the ends of things, whether they be summer or sunsets or human lives.’

Poem 1331 F1347 ‘Wonder – is not precisely Knowing’
This is one of Sewall’s ‘wisdom pieces.’ We do not precisely know or not know whether spring, for example, symbolises our own rebirth. We are left wondering.
As we grow older Wonder turns into suspense, and we are ‘mangled’ as we try to decide whether the delight we still feel as adults is now actual Pain (perhaps at the thought that we are soon to be parted from it) or merely ‘a new misgiving’ as to the symbolic worth of that pain.

**Poem 1332 F1357  ‘Pink – small – and punctual’**

This poem describes the mayflower or trailing arbutus (*epigaea repens =the creeper over the ground*), and one copy of this poem was signed ‘Arbutus.’

In line 4 ‘candid’ means ‘open,’ and in line 7 ‘next to’ means ‘next in importance to.’

In lines 11-12 Emily is saying that when Nature is adorned with the arbutus, she makes the world feel young again.

In a later letter (L1037) to Mrs George Dickerman Emily asks, ‘Are not both [the daphne and arbutus] as beautiful as Delight can make them?’

**1875  (Emily is forty-five. She writes 18 poems)**

**Poem 1333 F1356  ‘A little madness in the Spring’**

Emily here takes a balanced view. When faced with the ‘Experiment of Green’ that is the Spring, even a King is entitled to ‘a little Madness.’ But God help the foolish Clown who tries to posses it. As ‘possessing the spring’ is a strange idea, perhaps ‘deriving from the spring evidence for his own rebirth’ is what is meant to be the Clown’s folly, especially as in this poem Spring is only God’s Experiment.

The fact that Emily tried 7 marginal variants for ‘whole’ in the fifth line and 5 variants for ‘Experiment’ reminds the reader of poem 1126.

**Poem 1334 F1352  ‘How soft this prison is’**

Edward Dickinson died on 16 June 1874. The following January, in a letter (L342) to Mrs Holland, Emily described the scene in the Dickinson household on a winter’s afternoon in these words: ‘Mother is asleep in the Library – Vinnie in the Dining Room – Father – in the Masked Bed – in the Marl House (= in his coffin in his grave).’ Then follows the first stanza of this poem, in which ‘the Masked Bed’ becomes his ‘soft prison.’
In the second stanza Emily adds the reflection that if Fate ‘has no added Realm’ for us but the grave ‘is All,’ at least we can think of the ‘Dungeon’ of the grave as a ‘Kinsman,’ and our ‘Incarceration’ in it as ‘Home.’

Perhaps Emily thought the gloomy possibility of the second stanza unsuitable for the pious Mrs Holland.

**Poem 1335 F1361**  ‘Let me not mar that perfect Dream’
Emily would like her ‘perfect Dream’ not to be spoiled by her waking to the day, and would love to adjust each Night so that the dream came again. For ‘the Power’ of revelation does not come when we are conscious, but when we can be taken by surprise, just as in the Garden of Eden ‘our timid mother,’ Eve, wore no garment but ‘the Garment of Surprise.’ *(Genesis2:25-3:7)*

**Poem 1336 F1371**  ‘Nature assigns the Sun’
This poem concludes a letter (L439) of 1875 to Mrs Holland. She has told her friend that she can no more think of how to thank her for her friendship than the Psalmist could think of how to thank God when he asked, ‘What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me *(Psalm 116:12)*?’ She then adds the sentence, ‘Thank you with all my strength – and Doctor [Holland] as yourself – And again yourself for your sweet note.’ Finally she ends with this poem: the fact that the Sun is part of Nature is determined by the laws of Astronomy, but that Mrs Holland is her friend is a matter of ‘Astrology’ or good luck for Emily.

**Poem 1337 F1368**  ‘Upon a Lilac Sea’
The last three lines of this poem were included in the first surviving letter (L444) of Emily to Mrs Helen Hunt Jackson, perhaps America’s leading woman writer of that time. Mrs Hunt had been widowed in 1863 when Major Hunt died, but now, in October 1875, Emily has just learned of her second marriage to William S. Jackson of Colorado Springs, and sends her this brief note of congratulation. The whole note is the last three lines of poem 1337 preceded by the question, ‘Have I a word but Joy?’

To paraphrase the whole poem: that person who ‘fleeing from the Spring’ of a first marriage is flung by the Spring of a second marriage to a fate of Balm will be floating ‘upon a Lilac Sea,’ and even if life still has its alarms and ups and downs, these will be cushioned by the plushness of the second marriage.
In the phrase ‘the avenging Spring’ Emily may even be referring to the fact that Mrs Hunt’s second husband came from Colorado Springs! Mrs Hunt herself was baffled by the last line of the poem, and wrote back to Emily saying ‘I do wish I knew just what ‘dooms’ you meant, though,’ but never received a reply.

Poem 1338 F1358 ‘What tenements of clover’
The poem is made up of three statements or exclamations, each introduced by ‘what.’ For the bee there are many ‘tenements of clover.’ For butterflies to fly in and for Emily to gaze into there are the ‘edifices azure’ of the sky. There are also many temporary habitations which never know the ‘rhythmic rumour’ of the bees or the ‘assaulting guess’ of the human spectator trying to divine their secrets.

Emily sent this poem as a whole letter to Mrs William Stearns, the wife of the president of Amherst College. She may have been puzzled by it.

Poem 1339 F1351 ‘A Bee his burnished Carriage’
Emily sent this poem as a letter (L446) to an unknown recipient with just the introductory sentence, ‘Sweet is it as Life, with its enhancing Shadow of Death.’ The ‘it’ in this sentence presumably refers to the sexual encounter between the bee and the flower in the poem, sex like life being ‘sweet’ but ending with a ‘death.’

Judith Farr comments that the poem regards the necessary congress between bee and flower as ‘a genteel, if sensual romance,’ described in terms applicable to human love-making. In line 7 ‘Crescent’ perhaps means ‘curved petal.’

Poem 1340 F1377 ‘A Rat surrendered here’
If, like the Rat, we keep surrendering to the temptation to ignominious acts, we shall also, like the Rat, after our ‘brief career of Cheer/and Fraud and Fear,’ be caught in the inevitable trap of punishment and our temptation ‘reluctantly resigned.’

Poem 1341 F1370 ‘Unto the Whole – how add?’
When our life seems a totality, perhaps of despair, to which nothing different can be added, from somewhere there comes stealing in a ‘Subsidy of Balm’ to heal us. See also poem 1281.

Poem 1342 F1277 “Was not” was all the Statement’
Thomas Johnson says that this poem was inspired by the sentence in *Genesis* which describes the career of Enoch, the sixth descendant of Adam. The sentence runs, ‘And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him.’ (*Genesis* 5:24)

Emily seems to be saying that if we only remember the words ‘and he was not,’ we shall be stunned by this bald statement, and can only think that in Enoch’s day comprehension was poor as ‘they wore no Lexicons.’ But when such a brief statement means that we are running out of material for ‘Speculation,’ we should mention that the writer adds the words ‘God took him,’ and God is subject matter for ‘Philology,’ if ever anything was.

Johnson also suggests that the poem may be an elegy on the death of her own father.

**Poem 1343 F1297  ‘A single Clover Plank’**

A bee seems to be injured. He is in danger of sinking (=dying) as he tries to fly, with the sky above and the earth below and the billows of circumferential air ‘sweeping him away.’ He is momentarily saved when a ‘Clover Plank’ gives him something to alight on, but then a sudden wind causes the clover to sway, and the bumble bee falls dead into the grass without even an ‘Alas.’

Paula Bennett thinks the poem is about Emily herself, as is suggested by lines 3-4, and that she is describing the same situation as in poem 378, where she likewise found herself upon the circumference between this world and the next. If this is so, this poem is the gloomier of the two. In poem 378 the fate of the speaker when she went ‘beyond the dip of Bell’ is left unstated. In this poem the bee dies with no hope of reaching the firmament of the sky above.

**Poem 1344 F1382  ‘Not any more to be lacked’**

Emily leaves the reader to guess the identity of the ‘it’ of this poem. One guess would be that Emily is thinking again of her dead father. For a span he was a significant citizen of Amherst, but now is not known there and is no longer the one they need. Even nature has forgotten he is dead, as she has multitudes to think about. Of the people who pleaded with her father not to depart, some have come to terms with the feeling that they wished to die as well, some have ‘rescinded the Wrench’ of his loss, while others have covered over what was left by the Axe of death ‘with Monotony.’
Poem 1345 F1367 ‘An antiquated Grace’
The grace of old age on this ‘cherished Face’ makes it as comely as it was in its ‘prime,’ and so enjoins Emily and her heart to part as ‘Good friends’ with the passage of time. Again Emily may have her father in mind, and be thinking that all things have their season, and it was time for her father to die, even though her heart was ‘pouting’ as the loss, or, in a variant reading, ‘plotting’ to keep him.

Poem 1346 F1341 ‘As Summer into Autumn slips’
This poem is the whole of a letter (L420) sent to Samuel Bowles apart from the introductory sentence, which runs: ‘The Paper wanders so I cannot write my name on it, so I give you my Father’s Portrait instead.’ The verse portrait seems to describe the closing period of her father’s life. To paraphrase:

*Just as* we say in autumn that it is still summer and consider autumn, however lovely, to be second best to summer, *in the same way* we refused to call my father old as he shyly attempted to find his way round and round ‘the shaft of Life’s’ declining years, because it was our younger, more vigorous father whom we really loved.

Poem 1347 F1364 ‘Escape is such a thankful Word’
A little wisdom piece on ‘Escape.’ When safely in bed at night and with no ‘spectacle’ or ‘monster (a variant) in sight,’ Emily thinks about ‘escape.’ It is the ‘basket’ which catches and preserves the heart, when the rest of life drops away. It is not so much to ‘see the saviour’ as to feel saved. As she knows what to be saved is, she gives thanks and goes to sleep ‘upon this trusty word.’

Poem 1348 F1362 ‘Lift it – with the Feathers’
‘It’ is perhaps ‘your life’ or ‘your heart.’ This would give:
Lift up your heart to God, as it is not with feathers alone that we creatures fly through life.
Launch yourself confidently on to the sea of life, as the actual water is ‘not the only sea.’
‘Advocate the Azure’ of God to the unbeliever, as the one who knows ‘Paradise’ is under an obligation to proselytise.

Poem 1349 F1366 ‘I’d rather recollect a setting’
Emily would rather remember a sun or love that has set rather than experience a love which is actually happening. For the departure of love is at least ‘a [greater] Drama’ than the continuance of love. And it is easier and more divine to die once and for all at ‘Twilight’ like the sun than for a love relationship to wane gradually.

Poem 1350 F1360  ‘Luck is not chance’
A poem on the common idea that luck is earned by hard work. If you are relying on luck alone, you need to be told that ‘the Father of the Mine [of luck] is ‘that old-fashioned Coin’ of hard work which you spurned.

Poem 1351 F1359  ‘You cannot take itself’
Just as in poem 822 Emily had declared that the soul is always ‘attended by a single Hound/its own identity,’ so here she says that you cannot destroy the ‘estate’ made up of your identity and your soul any more than you can destroy the light – which is as difficult to remove ‘as undiscovered Gold.’

1876  (Emily is forty-six. She writes 15 poems)

Poem 1352 F1387  ‘To his simplicity’
Emily ends a letter (l449) of January 1876 to Thomas Higginson with this quatrain, introduced by the sentence, ‘Mr Bowles lent me flowers twice, for my Father’s Grave.’ The poem nobly declares that her father regarded dying as a ‘little fate,’ if it was his duty to do so. As Richard Sewall remarks, ‘The sense of duty that kept Edward Dickinson from his children now becomes a mark of triumph over fate.’

At then end of line 3 ‘to be’ needs to be supplied.

Poem 1353 F1380  ‘The last of Summer is Delight’
The last part of summer to disappear is the delight it causes us, and even that is kept from vanishing by our looking back over it, as we review the ecstasy that was revealed to us and the enchantment that we agreed to respond to, although to expose ourselves to this ‘nameless’ ecstasy and enchantment without heavenly armour would be as bold as to enter within the Veil of heaven without knocking. See also poem 1284.
Poem 1354 F1381 ‘The Heart is the Capital of the Mind’
Emily asserts the unity of ‘Heart’ and ‘Mind,’ perhaps much the same unity as that of soul and identity in poem 1351. But it is the Heart which is the capital of this ‘single Continent,’ this nation with a population of one, yourself.

Poem 1355 F1384 ‘The Mind lives on the heart’
Continuing the thought of the previous poem, Emily declares that the Heart is the dominant part of our make-up, with the Mind being parasitic on it. ‘If the Heart omit to function properly or is ‘lean’ (a variant), the ‘wit’ of the Mind to decide on action withers away, ‘so absolute’ in its control of the Mind is the ‘Aliment’ or food provided for it by the Heart.

Poem 1356 F1369 ‘The Rat is the concisest Tenant’
As Paula Bennett remarks, ‘Emily seems to have found no creature too mean or ‘homely’ to focus on – neither the dive-bombing June beetle of poem 1128 nor the rat,’ whose career was briefly summed up in poem 1340 and now gets a longer treatment.

Instead of the usual human response to the rat of a shriek of terror Emily takes a wider view. He is outside our human obligation to pay a rent, always ‘on Schemes intent’ to outwit us, untouched by our hate for him, and in fact an integral part of nature with every right to be there.

Charles Anderson gives a helpful reading of this poem.

Poem 1357 F1386 “Faithful to the end” amended’
Emily has in mind the promise of the writer of Revelation to the church at Smyrna, ‘Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.’ (Revelation 2:10)
She wants ‘faithful to the end’ to be deleted from this promise, as true ‘Constancy abhors a Proviso.’ Anyway the ‘stately heart’ of the free man does not want the prize of ‘a crown of life.’ That is only for slaves. Constancy is given for its own sake. No prize or ‘Emolument’ is needed.

Version II of this poem is printed only by Johnson. Its second stanza is perhaps saying, ‘As for this ‘I will give you a crown of life’ with its ‘base Proviso’ – forget it. The writer of Revelation should try it on himself!’
Poem 1358 F1388  ‘The Treason of an accent’
Version I of this poem, the only version printed by Franklin, is in a letter (L450) of February 1876 to Thomas Higginson. It comes immediately after the opening sentence, which reads, ‘There is so much that is tenderly profane in even the sacredest Human Life – that perhaps it is instinct and not design, that dissuades us from it.’ Emily may have in mind her developing love for her father’s married friend, Judge Lord, for in a letter (L477) to Higginson later in the year she says, ‘Judge Lord was with us a few days since – and told me the Joy we most revere – we profane in taking.’

Even the most upright person can feel a tenderness or love for the ‘profane’ (= another person, who is legally outside his orbit), and it is only ‘instinct’ which stops him from declaring it. For example, says Emily in the poem, if I spoke out and said that I loved Judge Lord, this treason, as he is married, ‘might Ecstasy transfer,’ but the declaration of such a deep love, obliterating what is lawfully there, could never be called back.

Similarly in version II, printed by Johnson, to speak her love would ‘vilify the Joy [of purity],’ and to breathe ‘I love you’ would ‘corrode the rapture/ of Sanctity to be.’

Poem 1359 F1394  ‘The long sigh of the Frog’
This poem concludes the letter (L459) to Thomas Higginson which towards its beginning included poem 1293. The words ‘the Revery’ in line 4 of the manuscript of the poem are changed in the letter to ‘the Passer by.’ The poem is introduced by the sentence, ‘I was always told that conjecture surpassed Discovery, but it must have been spoken in caricature, for it is not true.’ Most of the time we can only ‘conjecture’ or guess what heaven might be like, but when something happens which feels like an actual ‘Discovery’ of heaven, we know this to be superior. Emily has had this experience ‘upon a Summer’s Day’ with, strangely enough, a Frog. His ‘long sigh’ intoxicates the passer-by, and, as it dies away, makes the passer-by feel so at peace that he longs beyond measure to be released from his body to heaven.

Poem 1360 F1391  ‘I sued the News – yet feared – the News’
This poem is part of a letter (L458) to Thomas Higginson praising him for his first book ‘Out-Door Papers’ (= ‘the News’ of the poem). The poem is introduced by the
words, ‘Your thought is so serious and captivating, that it leaves one stronger and weaker too……It is still as distinct as Paradise – the opening your first Book. It was Mansions – Nations – Kinsmen – too – to me.’

In the poem she says that she eagerly read his book but was in awe of it at the same time, for it revealed to her that ‘Realm’ described by St Paul when he says, ‘For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle was dissolved, we have a building of God, an “house not made with hands,” eternal in the heavens.’ *(2 Corinthians 5:1)*

**Poem 1361 F1410**  ‘The Flake the Wind exasperate’
This poem comes in a letter (L472) to Mary, the wife of Thomas Higginson, offering her comfort in her sorrow at the death of her father on 27 July 1876. The poem is preceded by the sentences, ‘I hope you may sometime be so strong as to smile at now – That is our Hope’s criterion, for things that are – are ephemeral, but those to come – long – and besides,

The Flake the Wind exasperate…’

The poem says that the Flake tossed by the wind will speak ‘more eloquently’ about its resting-place than if it had been escorted to its soft bed by some chivalrous knight. In other words, we shall appreciate heaven more, if we have suffered on earth.

**Poem 1362 F1396**  ‘Of their peculiar light’
There are two versions of this poem. One, printed by Johnson, comes in a letter (L470) to Thomas Higginson in which Emily alludes to the deaths of Mrs Higginson’s father and of her own father. If the two fathers are the ‘they’ of the poem, Emily will be suggesting to Mrs Higginson that keeping one ray ‘of their peculiar light’ will enable them to see their fathers better in their imagination.

The second version, printed by Franklin, comes in a letter to an unidentified correspondent which was never sent. This second version changes the ‘their’ in line 1 to ‘his,’ and the ‘I’ of line 2 to ‘we.’ As the poem is introduced by the words, ‘Thank you for the Delight. The Book is fair and lonely, like a Memoir of Evening,’ Emily is presumably referring to the author of the book in the word ‘his.’

**Poem 1363 F1411**  ‘Summer laid her simple Hat’
The second stanza of this poem ends a letter (L477) to Thomas Higginson of late October 1876. Now that summer has taken off her hat and gloves at the end of her
journey, all we can do is ‘snatch’ a fallen ribbon as a souvenir, and ask, ‘Did that summer really happen, which demanded of us our Awe?’

Poem 1364 F1412  ‘How know it from a Summer’s Day?’
Thomas Johnson says that this poem was sent without any opening greeting or signature to Mrs Higginson, probably during the Indian Summer of 1876, when she was suffering from an illness following her father’s death.

To us the days of an Indian Summer are as warming and scintillating as a proper ‘Summer’s Day,’ but nameless squadrons of birds see it differently. To them it is an ‘Admonition’ to depart and go their separate ways.

Poem 1365 F1390  ‘Take all away’
This poem is part of a letter sent to Thomas Higginson (L457) in the spring of 1876, nearly two years after the death of Emily’s father. The poem follows the sentence, ‘When I think of my Father’s lonely Life and his lonelier Death, there is this redress.’ The ‘redress,’ says the poem, is that when all earthly things have been lost, there is still left the only thing worth stealing – Immortality in heaven.

In a letter (L471) to her cousins a few months later she could say, ‘I dream about father every night, always a different dream, and forget what I am doing daytimes, wondering where he is.’

Poems 1366 A and B and C F1462  ‘Brother of Ophir’
Franklin only prints the third of the poems in Johnson.

Johnson’s poem 1366B was later sent as a note (L585) to Sue with just the introductory sentence, ‘Susan – I dreamed of you, last night, and send a Carnation to indorse it.’ Emily does not know the ‘Sum’ which could buy the riches of Sue’s love, previously described as a ‘Peru’ in poem 299. In this poem Sue is also associated with ‘Ophir,’ the port from where the servants of Solomon ‘fetched gold, four hundred and twenty talents, and brought it to king Solomon.’ (I Kings 9:28)

Poem 1366C was sent in a note (L677) of December 1880 to Mrs Edward Tuckerman to console her for the loss of her friend, professor Elihu Root, who had recently died at the early age of 35. Emily writes to her, ‘I thought of you [when I heard of his death,] although I never saw your friend.’ Then she boldly states in the poem that for us ‘Honour’ is the shortest route to the immortality where he is.
Poem 1336A seems to describe a man whose love can only be won by all the ingots of Peru.

**Poem 1367 F1417**  “Tomorrow” – whose location
This wisdom poem on ‘Tomorrow’ was sent as a letter (L490) to Mrs Holland with the preface ‘Austin will come tomorrow.’ The Hollands had invited Austin to visit them when he was next in New York, but he was slow to respond to the invitation, and ‘Austin will come tomorrow’ is sarcastic, as Emily’s next letter (L491) to Mrs Holland shows.

Even though ‘the Wise’ cannot pin down the location of Tomorrow, the fancy that we shall get there is the last thing that leaves us at death. Of course when it comes, it brings with it the memory of ‘every tare’ that has sprung up in the gardens of our lives. We can only wonder whether Tomorrow has an alibi or where it lives.

**Poem 1368 F1392**  ‘Love’s stricken “why”
This poem, signed ‘Emily,’ was sent as a whole letter (L463) to Mrs W.A. Stearns, whose husband, the president of Amherst College, had died on 8 June 1876.

The question ‘Why [did he have to die]?’ is only one syllable, but the ‘hugest hearts break’ when they utter it.

**Poem 1369 F1415**  ‘Trusty as the stars’
This poem ends a letter (L479) to her cousins, Louise and Frances Norcross, of November 1876, in which Emily ecstatically describes finding in the late autumn woods a ‘beloved witch hazel.’ She adds, ‘it looked like a tinsel fringe…witch and witching too, to my joyful mind,’ and ‘I had never seen it but once before, and it haunted me.’

The ‘fringe’ probably refers to the yellow star-shaped flowers of the witch hazel which can appear on the lifeless stems in winter, and which may suggest the simile in the first line of the poem. Emily seems to imagine God himself, who ‘lit’ the stars, speaking in the poem and saying, ‘This witch-hazel can be trusted to flower as much as the stars can be trusted to stop shining promptly at sunrise, and is as ‘durable’ as the ‘blossom’ of the Dawn, whose coming each day since antiquity removes ‘a world’s suspense’ that it will not come and enables it to ‘rejoice.’
Poem 1370 F1398  ‘Gathered into the Earth’
These powerful words about her father’s death were written in pencil on a scrap of paper. He has been ‘gathered’ out of the story of this life into the ‘strange Fame’ and ‘lonesome Glory’ of death, for which in this world we have no prophetic sign except our feelings of Awe.

Poem 1371 F1414  ‘How fits his Umber Coat’
Emily marvels at the chestnut. How does its maker fit on that seamless ‘Umber Coat’? ‘Who spun the Auburn Cloth’ [of which it is made], and how was the size of these ‘primeval clothes’ worked out? We humans are skilled at dealing with the surprises that come our way, yet even we are baffled by this chestnut Countryman of ours.

Poem 1372 F1399  ‘The Sun is one – and on the Tare’
The Sun is no respecter of persons. He has as much regard for the Tare as for the Flower and arrives punctually for all.

Poem 1373 F1400  ‘The worthlessness of Earthly things’
Nature at first may seem to sing of ‘the worthlessness of Earthly things,’ as all such things die, but then Nature brings home to us ‘their delight,’ until even those Synods of pious preachers, who have proclaimed that all is vanity, are swept off their feet (or, as a variant reading puts it, until ‘rectitude is suffocate’).

As Emily later wrote in a letter (L860) to her friend, Maria Whitney, ‘To have been made alive is so chief a thing, all else inevitably adds.’

Poem 1374 F1407  ‘A Saucer holds a Cup’
Emily sees a squirrel’s life as superior to ours. For us ‘a Saucer holds [just] a Cup,’ but for the squirrel the Saucer of the calyx holds the Loaf of a nut. Then this ‘little King’ has a whole Tree for a table, and at mealtimes his flashing teeth outdo all the cutlery made in Birmingham. If it could only be brought home to us that we humans deal in ‘Minutiae’ of trivialities, we would conclude that the smallest creature that flies has more of a life than we do.

Poem 1375 F1409  ‘Death warrants are supposed to be’
We usually suppose a death warrant to be the work of equity, as the condemned person deserves it, but that can be a mistake which we make out of mercy towards the judge. For often an ‘Idol’ has signed the death warrant for a ‘Devotee,’ who did not deserve it.

Emily may have in mind a death-warrant served on her by some loved one, whom she idolised.

Poem 1376 F1401  ‘Dreams are the subtle Dower’
For example, Emily may day-dream that Sue has renewed the love they once shared, but at the end of this purple dream, she is thrown back into the raw reality she knew before the dream.

Poem 1377 F1482  ‘Forbidden Fruit a flavour has’
Paula Bennett thinks that this ‘Forbidden Fruit,’ this Pea locked by Duty within the Pod, is a woman’s clitoris, which mocks the ‘lawful Orchards’ of heterosexual love, and means that a woman can discover ‘in her own body and in the bodies of other women…all the love, pleasure and power that she needs.’

In more general terms Emily has always had a hankering for the forbidden, from the strawberries of poem 251 to the wish to take her stockings off in poem 1201, and in five years time she writes a letter (L851) to her young nephew, Ned Dickinson, saying, ‘We have all heard of the Boy whose Constitution required stolen fruit, though his Father’s Orchard was loaded – There was something in the unlawfulness that give it a saving flavour.’

Poem 1378 F1402  ‘His Heart was darker than the starless night’
Emily describes the blackness of utter despair. If she had a particular man in mind, she gives no clue to his identity.

Poem 1379 F1355  ‘His Mansion in the Pool’
A Frog addresses the two worlds of water and air and Emily as well. It is a struggle for him to be eloquent, as he is hoarse and has no hands to make hand gestures, but when Emily generously applauds, he vanishes, just as the worm-eating bird had done in poem 328.

Demosthenes was the most famous orator in Athens in the fourth century BC.
Poem 1380 F1420  ‘How much the present moment means’
Those who stake their ‘entire store’ on the present moment being the only thing that
matters are quite unaware that ‘the Torrents of Eternity’ are all but washing over their
feet – which they have ‘commuted’ as part of that stake.

In line 3 a variant reading for ‘the Fop – the Carp’ is ‘the Dog – the Tramp.’

Poem 1381 F1389  ‘I suppose the time will come’
Emily is perhaps writing this poem in February. She would like to ‘aid’ the coming of
spring, but ‘hinder a little’ the coming of autumn with its corn crops and apples and
‘halt a little’ the return of winter, when the Jay will be reduced to laughter at the sight
of the snow-covered earth.

Poem 1382 F1404  ‘In many and reportless places’
Emily speaks of ‘a Joy’ which can sweep over us in quite ordinary places and is
impossible to describe but which is as real as ‘Nature or Deity.’ It comes and goes
without commotion but leaves a sumptuous, nameless feeling behind. We cannot
search for it as it has no home, but, once we have experienced it, we know it is where
we really belong.

Emily is referring to those momentary glimpses of the divine of which she had
also tried to give an account in, for example, poem 673. She also used the word
‘reportless’ in poem 1048.

Poem 1383 F1405  ‘Long Years apart- can make no’
Emily declares that after the longest of absences the return of her lover can in a
second rekindle the fire which has all the time been smouldering in her heart. The
spell has continued to work in the absence of ‘the Witch.’

Poem 1132 beginning ‘The smouldering embers blush’ explores the same theme.
Judith Farr observes that for Emily ‘no passion ever died.’

Poem 1384 F1406  ‘Praise it – tis dead’
Emily seems to be speaking to fellow mourners gathered around a newly filled grave.
Now that the loved one is a corpse, it can only be praised and given to warm it the
‘encomium’ it has deserved since it became a corpse. All the mourners can do now is
to clothe this ‘alabaster [which was once] Zest’ by remembering the Delights which it experienced and provided when it was human clay and which it has now given up ever since it ‘flitted’ this human clay ‘in recusance august’ for eternity.

Poem 1385 F1494 “Secrets” is a daily word
We daily use the word ‘Secrets’ of things which do not exist outside their owners. Kept hidden, they cannot be guessed. When spoken, they vanish. No doubt there are going to be secrets in the dungeons of our hearts, but the gratings of those dungeons remain intact and ‘inviolate.’ No speaking or listening can come out or go into those dungeons, whose secrets will only emerge at death.

Richard Sewall remarks that in such poems of pure clinical analysis as this one, it is almost as though Emily ‘felt impelled to shape and clarify thoughts for the thoughtless.’

Poem 1386 F1413 ‘Summer – we all have seen’
The work sheet draft of this poem has more than twenty variant readings, but the only differences of text in Johnson and Franklin are that Johnson’s ‘our’ in line 8 becomes ‘the’ in Franklin, and lines 9-10 in Johnson read ‘The Doom to be adored – /the Affluence conferred’ but in Franklin appear as ‘Deputed to adore – /the Doom to be adored.’

Emily herself was one of those who ‘unquestionably loved’ Summer, but even she admits that ‘Summer does not care’ for men, but is as remote as the moon to any rash human attempts to elicit sympathy from her. Indeed summer is as heartless towards her as is Sue.

Then she says, in Franklins’s text, that our job is to adore summer, even though the eventual ‘Doom’ or fate of that adoration is as unknown to us as its eventual ‘Ecstasy’ is to an ‘Embryo,’ or, in Johnson’s text, that whether we are adoring ‘Doom’ or that which will confer ‘Affluence’ is as unknown to us as its eventual ‘Ecstasy’ is to an ‘Embryo.’

Poem 1387 F1395 ‘The Butterfly’s Numidian Gown’
The butterfly, with its ‘Numidian Gown’ from North Africa, cannot get sunburnt, but it does need to rest on a clover leaf occasionally. If Emily is still using the butterfly as
a symbol of our immortality as she seemed to be in poems 1244 and 1266, she may be hinting in this poem that we need to rest occasionally on our journey to heaven.

**Poem 1388 F1393**  ‘Those Cattle smaller than a Bee’

Richard Sewall deftly sums up this poem as being ‘a *jeu d’esprit* whose pompous Latinisms and legalisms cavort with pure Saxon to present the case (which in mock helplessness she finally abandons to Nature) against the common fly.’

In line 5 ‘ignorant’ is a variant reading for ‘blameless.’ At then end of line 12 we could supply ‘by getting in our soup or eye.’ Emily might have liked Bartok’s piano piece ‘The Diary of a Fly’ (*Mikrokosmos vol.6:3*).

**Poem 1389 F1403**  ‘Touch lightly Nature’s sweet Guitar’

The literal meaning of this poem is clear, any symbolic meaning less obvious. Perhaps she is saying that unless we really understand Nature, we must be careful what deeper meanings we extract from it, otherwise Nature, in the persons of the Birds, will laugh at us.

1877  *(Emily is forty-seven. She writes 42 poems)*

**Poem 1390 F1416**  ‘These held their Wick above the West’

Emily sent the second stanza of this poem (beginning with the variant ‘to wane’) in a letter (L486) of January 1877 to Thomas Higginson. As the stanza did not conclude with a full stop, but had the prose addition ‘is sunset’s perhaps – only,’ it clearly refers to the sunset.

Samuel Bowles after a long illness died on 16 January 1878, and some time soon after that Emily sent the whole of poem 1390 to Mrs Holland, prefaced with the words ‘We hope that you are happy so far as Peace is possible, to Mortal and immortal Life…….But I intrude on Sunset, and Father and Mr Bowles (L5440.’ So, when embedded in this letter, the poem refers to her father and Samuel Bowles as well as the sunset. With all three of them it is impossible to describe exactly the process of their setting.

**Poem 1391 F1425**  ‘They might not need me – yet they might’
This poem and the second stanza of poem 1392 are both part of a letter (L498) sent to Mrs Mary Higginson in the early spring of 1877. Mrs Higginson had been in failing health for some years and eventually died in September 1877. Poem 1391 concludes the letter and is introduced by a paragraph beginning ‘Forgive me if I come too much (= write too often).’

**Poem 1392 F1424** ‘Hope is a strange invention’

Richard Sewall points out that Emily in an early letter (L194) to Sue had said of her sister Vinnie’s attacks on the housework that, ‘She has the “patent action” I have long felt,’ and he wonders if this comment reflects the advertisements of newly invented machines in the *Republican*. In this definition poem Hope is a patent action but with the improvements that it never wears out and to the end of our lives gives an embellishment to our existence.

When Emily sent the second stanza only in a letter (L498) to Mrs Higginson, she changed the last line to ‘inebriate our own,’ and made the lines refer to Nature’s bringing back spring and not to Hope.

**Poem 1393 F1428** ‘Lay this Laurel on the One’

This poem and poem 1394 are both part of a letter (L503) sent to Thomas Higginson in June 1877. Emily’s father had died in that month three years earlier, and she tells Higginson that she has been re-reading his poem *Decoration* which had been originally published in the June of her father’s death and has been inspired by his poem of 28 lines to write her own version of 4 lines. Higginson later generously said of the two poems that hers ‘is the condensed essence [of mine] and so far finer.’

In the poem Emily seems to be saying that she could put a Laurel on her father’s grave to commemorate him, but that, as her father is too intrinsically noble to need this mark of renown, the Laurel should instead veil its deathless tree, as the one, whom the Laurel branch would be ‘chastening’ or refining, is he who has no need of it.

**Poem 1394 F1427** ‘Whose Pink career may have a close’

This poem comes earlier in the letter (L503) sent to Higginson in June 1877. As it is the height of summer, Emily writes, ‘I hope you are joyful frequently, these beloved Days. And the health of your friend [Mrs Higginson] bolder. I remember her with my
Blossoms and wish they were hers.’ Then follows the poem, after which Emily continues, ‘Summer is so kind I had hoped you might come.’

The poem appears to say that we cannot know whether the ‘Pink’ life of flowers ends as portentously as ours i.e. bound for heaven or hell, but at least we should imitate the ‘innocence’ of these flowers and transfer to other things the ‘awe’ they inspire.

**Poem 1395 F1383**  ‘After all Birds have been investigated and laid aside’

In poem 1213 Emily had described blue birds careering across the March sky. Here she adds that the blue bird is not only the first bird to start his courtship in March but also the last bird to leave at the end of the year. Indeed James Audubon in *Birds of America* says that the blue bird is almost a permanent resident, adding to the delights of spring and enlivening the dull days of winter.

Emily also used the last two lines of the poem to refer to Samuel Bowles, in a letter, now lost, which she wrote to him just before his death on 16 January 1878. Bowles’ very being, like that of the blue bird, is a poem of faithfulness.

Emily enclosed poems 1395-8 in a letter (L513) to Thomas Higginson of August 1877 with the sentence, ‘I send you a Gale [1397], and an Epitaph [1396] – and a Word to a Friend [1398] and a Blue Bird [1395].’

**Poem 1396 F1453**  ‘She laid her docile Crescent down’

A woman docilely laid down the parabola of her life. Her tombstone, her ‘emblem,’ still constantly confides the news of her death to those who have forgotten her and ‘shames [their] Constancy.’

**Poem 1397 F1454**  ‘It sounded as if the Streets were running’

From her window Emily watched with ‘Awe’ the apparent ‘Eclipse’ produced by a hurricane. The commotion was followed by a stillness, and ‘by and by’ she saw a few bold spirits emerge, as Nature, a housewife in her ‘Apron’ began ‘mixing fresher Air.’

Emily paints the same picture in verse in poem 1134, and in prose in a letter (L690) to her cousins of the early spring of 1881. She writes in the letter, ‘We have had two hurricanes within as many hours, one of which came near enough to untie my apron – but this moment the sun shines, Maggie’s hens are warbling, and a man of anonymous wits is making a garden in the lane to set out slips of bluebird.’
Poem 1398 F1432  ‘I have no Life but this’
This poem comes in the last surviving letter (L515) which Emily wrote to Samuel Bowles. Richard Sewall suggests that it was written ‘probably a year or so before his death’ and immediately after Bowles’ visit when Emily at first refused to see him and Bowles called upstairs to her, ‘Come down at once, you dammed rascal.’

She introduces the poem by saying, ‘I went to the Room as soon as you left, to confirm your presence – recalling the Psalmist’s sonnet to God, beginning…’ and follows the poem with the ending, ‘It is strange that the most intangible thing is the most adhesive.
Your “Rascal.”
I washed the Adjective (= left out ‘damned’).’

The poem says: ‘I have no Life but this [with you], nor any Death unless dispelled [from you], nor any new fields of activity except ‘the Realm of you.’

‘Love’ is a variant for ‘Realm’ in the last line.

Poem 1399 F1455  ‘Perhaps they do not go so far’
Emily sent the first stanza of this poem in a letter (L517) to Thomas Higginson on his wife’s death in September 1877. The letter begins, ‘Dear Friend. If I could help you?’ Then comes the poem. Finally she ends the letter by saying, ‘Did she know she was leaving you? The Wilderness is new – to you. Master, let me lead you.’

She also sent the whole poem in a letter (L518) to the sisters of her uncle, William Dickinson, to console them for the death of their father.

In the second stanza Emily wonders if, in the different time scale of the dead, it may be so short a time before we join them that they regard us as being already there.

Poem 1400 F1433  ‘What mystery pervades a well!’
As in poems 1330 and 1386 Emily depicts nature as a mystery to human beings. To paraphrase:

To us a well is a mystery from another world and an object of awe, although the grass, which grows right up to the well is no more afraid of it than the sedge, the relation of grass, is afraid to live next to the sea. In fact the whole of nature is a mystery and a stranger to us. Even those who refer to her most often [such as myself]
have never got beyond the ghosts in nature’s ‘haunted house’ to some simpler reality behind it.

Some time after the composition of this poem Emily sent the last two stanzas only as a whole letter to Sue (L531), replacing ‘nature in line 17 with ‘Susan’ and ‘passed’ in line 19 with ‘scaled’ and ‘simplified’ in line 20 with ‘compromised.’ The word ‘scaled’ perhaps suggests that Sue lived on an unreachable height above Emily, and the word ‘compromised’ that Sue’s spirit could not be deprived of its rich fullness. Sue, like the summer of poem 1386, remains essentially an unknown mystery to Emily.

Emily also used the metaphor of a well when she said of her sister that, ‘the tie [between us] is quite vital; yet if we had come up for the first time from the two wells where we had hitherto been bred her astonishment would not be greater at some things I say.’

Poem 1401 F1436  ‘To own a Susan of my own’
This poem forms another whole letter to Sue (L532) and in The Letters of Emily Dickinson is placed by the editors immediately after the letter which was an adaptation of the last two stanzas of poem 1400.

Emily’s youthful passion for Sue has not lessened with the passing of the years.

Poem 1402 F1434  ‘To the stanch Dust’
The speaker seems to be at the committal of a body to its grave in the ‘stanch’ or dried up dust of the earth. The speaker prays that, if this dust has a tongue, it may do no harm to the body; that only silence may denote the presence of a body; and that the holiness of the person may give its spirit strength on its journey to ‘Infinity.’

Poem 1403 F1463  ‘My Maker – let me be’
Emily prays that she may be inspired the most with the love of God, but then ironically adds that the nearer this becomes her chief love, the more of her other loves in this world she would miss.

Poem 1404 F1422  ‘March is the Month of Expectation’
March, ‘the Month of Expectation,’ is full of ‘the Persons’ or signs which forecast those joys of summer, which, as yet, are ‘things we do not know.’ It is hard to show a seemly self-control in March.

This poem forms a triad with poem 1213 ‘We like March./His Shoes are purple’ and poem 1320 ‘Dear March – come in.’

Poem 1405 F1426 ‘Bees are Black, with Gilt Surcingles’

At the end of a letter of late May 1877 to Mrs Holland Emily reports that Vinnie is saying she will miss the post, but then adds, ‘I must just show you a Bee, that is eating a Lilac at the Window. There – there – he is gone! How glad his family will be to see him (L502).’ Emily then dashes off as the last bit of the letter the eight lines of this poem. The yellow bands on the bodies of bees are elaborately described as ‘Gilt Surcingles.’ The bees are high and mighty ‘Buccaneers’ as they raid the flowers. And the foodstuffs of their ‘Fuzz’ or loose paste of nectar and pollen are so ordained and built into the scheme of things from the beginning that such ‘Marrowes of the Hill,’ such ‘Jugs’ from blossoms could not be upset even by ‘a Universe’s fracture.’

The reader is left wondering if such a remarkable composition was finished in time/quickly enough to catch the post.

Poem 1406 F1451 ‘No Passenger was known to flee’

For Emily the power of memory is so immense that even a person who has lodged for just one night in the ‘Inn’ of our memory will never flee from it.

Poem 1407 F1419 ‘A Field of Stubble’

This poem is most of a letter which Emily wrote to her fifteen-year old nephew Ned in March 1877, when he was recovering from an illness. She begins the letter with, ‘I send you a Portrait of the Parish, and the first [maple] Sugar [of the season] – Don’t bite the Parish, by mistake, though you may be tempted,’ and after the poem adds, ‘I rejoice you are better – Grandma’s fervent love (L493).’

Her ‘Parish Portrait’ depicts ‘a Field of Stubble’ under the sun of an Indian summer. Tawny workmen had been given the task of harvesting it, and the ‘Triumphs’ of its corn have been garnered away. Now it is only approached by a bird, unsure if he will find any food there. Such a field is a common sight, but seldom felt deeply enough to be made the subject of a poem.
Poem 1408 F1435  ‘The Fact that Earth is Heaven’
The fact that we live on a heavenly earth, whether or not heaven exists, is no
guarantee that there is a heaven to which this earth corresponds, and in fact should
show us clearly that such a heaven would not be for us (as we already have a heavenly
earth) and that it would upset us to live there.

As Judith Farr (G) says, Emily at times believed that earth was heaven, as in this
poem, and at other times longed ‘to envision herself united with her dead in a heaven
unlimited by time and season.’

Poem 1409 F1456  ‘Could mortal lip divine’
If we could guess the ‘Freight,’ as yet ‘undeveloped,’ which a syllable will carry
when it is spoken, we would crumble into silence.

Emily was fascinated by words but also appalled by their power, as is shown by
poem 1261 and this poem.

Poem 1410 F1429  ‘I shall not murmur if at last’
Emily will not mind if ‘at last’ (perhaps on her death-bed ?) her loved ones are
allowed to know why she shunned them. It was because to tell them what had
happened would have relieved her own heart but ravaged theirs. Katie used her
‘Voice’ to speak her ‘Treason,’ but Emily just wept in silence, like the sad-lipped
person of poem 353.

As Kate Anthon is known to have visited Amherst in 1877, the ‘Katie’ of line 7
probably refers to her. She was also named as Katie in the vastly different context of
poem 222.

The loved ones may be Emily’s family and friends, or a plural which just refers to
Kate.

Poem 1411 F1421  ‘Of Paradise’ existence’
Paradise remains an ‘uncertain Certainty,’ but we can infer or guess that it is our
neighbour from the fact that it sends Death as its Messenger to bisect our lives.

Poem 1412 F1437  ‘Shame is the shawl of Pink’
When people are likely to attack us because we have done something wrong, we can blunt their attack by wrapping our soul in shame, that ‘shawl of Pink.’ And when we are pushed helplessly upon a scene which revolts our sense of goodness, we can drop the ‘Veil’ of shame in front of our eyes and think that we would be ashamed to do such things.

Emily had spoken in defence of shame in poems 551 and 1304, and here she even declares that it is ‘the tint divine.’

**Poem 1413 F1438  ‘Sweet Scepticism of the Heart’**

Emily was later to claim in a letter to Judge Otis Lord that ‘On subjects of which we know nothing, or should I say Beings …..we both believe, and disbelieve a hundred times an Hour, which keeps Believing nimble (L750).’ In this poem she says that such scepticism is sweet, and that ‘Certainty’ would be a withered thing compared with the delicious mixture of joy and fear which is uncertainty. The poem also brings to mind poem 1144 and the last stanza of poem 673.

In line 3 ‘a Fleet’ is probably a run of water and she is suggesting that knowing and not knowing is like a calm stretch of water ruffled by a snowstorm.

**Poem 1414 F1439  ‘Unworthy of her Breast’**

Emily is unworthy of some woman who judges others so severely that she regards even Emily’s ‘white’ as a sham. The woman may by Sue or Kate Anthon. The ‘white’ may be literally Emily’s habitual dress of white but also a metaphor for Emily’s essential innocence and goodness, which the woman regards as put on. A sentence in a letter of 1859 to Kate Anthon may be relevant to this poem. Emily says to her, ‘[In your absence] I hold your black in strong hallowed remembrance, and trust my colours to you are tints slightly beloved (L209).’

**Poem 1415 F1418  ‘A wild Blue Sky abreast of Winds’**

The threatening Winds made the Blue Sky run and the Sun crouch behind his door. These ‘upper friends’ are usually so kind to us that we are really upset when they turn ‘arrogant’ and want to fight us.

**Poem 1416 F1365  ‘Crisis is sweet and yet the Heart’**
‘Crisis’ or making a decision is sweet, yet on ‘the hither side,’ before the decision is made, there are countless possibilities which are denied to those ‘Denizens’ who have made a decision (e.g. to marry x). Similarly a rose, when dying, will admit that the greatest rapture of her life was when she was still a bud with all the possibilities of growth latent within her.

A variant reading for line 4 is ‘withheld to the arrived.’

**Poem 1417 F1440**  ‘How Human Nature dotes’

As in poem 1413 Emily attacks certainty, and claims that ‘Human Nature dotes’ on what is unsolved, for the prospect of one day ‘plumbing the Plot’ is more desirable than the actual plumbing. Indeed we may only realise that the ‘Prospective’ is our friend when our constant searching has clarified our curiosity. The plot which is most difficult to plumb and which is all prospective is whether there is life after this one.

In a letter of 1876 to her cousins she had said that, ‘It is true that the unknown is the largest need of the intellect, though for it, no one thinks to thank God (L471).’

**Poem 1418 F1441**  ‘How lonesome the Wind must feel Nights’

Having already empathised with such creatures as the fly, the frog and the rat, Emily now imagines what the Wind must feel at night, at noon and at dawn. Lines 7-8 perhaps refer to the wind blowing the clouds about, and lines 10-12 to the Wind meeting each new dawn with thoughts of settling down peaceably with it before soaring up to his seat of power in the sky.

**Poem 1419 F1442**  ‘It was a quiet seeming Day’

The charming picture of a sunset in the first stanza turns in the second stanza into a nightmarish fantasy, with only ‘seeming’ in line 1 sounding a warning note. For the ‘accidental Red’ in the sunset brings on a cataclysm of dissolution which overwhelms the earth and makes men understand in awe the real power of ‘the Poppy in the Cloud’ which is the sun.

**Poem 1420 F1450**  ‘One Joy of so much anguish’

Emily will only know at the instant of death why it is that the dawn birdsong of summer stabs her ‘ravished spirit/with Dirks of Melody.’ She hopes it is because the birdsong is an intimation of immortality, but until she knows that this is so, the Joy of
the birdsong is also an anguish that it might not be such an intimation and so is shunned by her as much as despair or wrong doing which seems dear at the time.

**Poem 1421 F1431**  ‘Such are the inlets of the mind’
This poem seems to follow on naturally from poem 1420: the ‘inlets’ of the mind take in such possible intimations of immortality as the birdsong of that poem. If you want to see whether the mind’s ‘outlets’ admit the owner one day into eternity, you must climb with her the hill of immortality.

**Poem 1422 F1457**  ‘Summer has two Beginnings’
As in poem 930 Emily enjoys contrasting the real summer with the Indian summer of October. The Indian summer may lack the ‘Riot’ of colour and scent of the real summer, but, as it is the last summer before winter, it imprints more graphically upon our minds as it departs what a Grace summer has been.

The qualifications then pile up. The Indian summer is the end of summer, but only until it returns next May. The summer is ‘deciduous’ (i.e. falls down only to recur again), but not for those who have died before it returns.

In line 11 ‘recurrent’ is a variant reading for ‘deciduous.

**Poem 1423 F1443**  ‘The fairest Home I ever knew’
The ‘fairest Home’ Emily ever saw was a spider’s web on a flower – a manse of Mechlin lace (poem 274) and silk floss (poem 1322).

**Poem 1424 F1458**  ‘The Gentian has a parched Corolla’
Emily briefly referred to the Gentian in poems 18, 20 and 331 and gave a longer description of it in poem 442. In this poem she says that it is a humble flower ‘without a vaunt or sheen’ and its blue fringed flowers are like ‘dried’ sky or Nature ‘beatified.’ (Judith Farr provides a picture of the fringed gentian on p. 212 of *The gardens of Emily Dickinson.*) As in poem 442, Emily then stresses that the gentian is the last flower of the year to appear, and does not feel isolated because it is accompanied by its ‘Bond’ and promise to men to ‘aid an aged Year [with an]/abundant end.’

If we were ever tempted to overlook the gentian, it would be endeared to us by the truth that everywhere ‘fidelity is gain.’
Poem 1425 F1423 ‘The inundation of the Spring’
Emily had described the sacred nature of spring in poem 844. Here she says that the coming or ‘inundation of the Spring’ is so powerful that it ‘enlarges’ or submerges (a variant) ‘every soul’ with its sacred waters which point to God. The ‘tenements’ which have kept us safe within their confines during the winter are swept away and our souls are flooded by the sacred waters of spring. Our souls, ‘at first estranged – seek faintly’ for the familiar shore of the inertia of winter, but gradually become used to the sacred waters and seek no more ‘for that Peninsula.’

Poem 1426 F1444 ‘The pretty Rain from those sweet Eaves’
Her bursting into tears took herself and us by surprise. Her effort to keep back her tears was defeated by a burst of sudden emotion which was in fact her ‘Crown.’

Poem 1427 F1445 ‘To earn it by disdaining it’
Emily perhaps tries to come to terms with the small amount of fame her poems are receiving in her lifetime by arguing that the artist will receive his full payment of fame if he ‘disdains’ and ‘spurns’ fame. All the artist can do is every day to ‘gather’ a bit more of fame by his disdain, so that his artistic life as a whole is a matter of honour for him and not a matter of shame.

Emily could not have known how much her honour her art would receive after her death, but she may have guessed it. She once said, ‘I have a horror of death; the dead are soon forgotten. But when I die, they’ll have to remember me.’ (Leyda II, 481)

Poem 1428 F1446 ‘Water makes many Beds’
Water is often the symbol for that which we do not know and in this poem perhaps stands for the great unknown of death. We may be averse to the sleep of death but we can be sure that there is no limit to its rooms with their many beds and that they always stand open with their curtains invitingly swept back, however abhorrent and unending the sleep of death may actually be, for the water of death has no ‘Axis’ on which to turn and so bring the morning.

Poem 1429 F1430 ‘We shun because we prize her Face’
Thomas Johnson says that this poem was jotted down on the reverse side of the sheet which contained poem 1410 ‘I shall not murmur if at last,’ and suggests that in both poems Emily is giving to her friend Kate Anthon reasons why she shunned her on her recent visit to Amherst. In this poem it is because Emily values her ‘Face’ (= person) so highly, that her ‘Adoration’ of her would only be stained if she were to have the unspeakable disgrace of seeing it now, after Kate’s treason towards her.

Poem 1430 F1447 ‘Who never wanted – maddest Joy’
The person who never ‘wanted [that which he thought he could not obtain]’ has not experienced the ‘maddest Joy.’ The perfect goal for our desires is when they are within reach but not yet grasped. Nearer than that is less good, as the ‘Actual [might] disenthrall.’

As Emily once wrote to Sue, ‘the stimulus of Loss makes most Possession mean (L364).’

Poem 1431 F1448 ‘With Pinions of Disdain’
The soul with its ‘Pinions of Disdain’ for the body and for this world can fly in imagination further than any bird in the bird books. This ‘electric gale’ of the imagination, when the soul frees itself from the control of the body and the body, as it were, becomes a soul, also shows what a small thing it will be at death to put off the body for immortality.

1878 (Emily is forty eight. She writes 21 poems)

Poem 1432 F1485 ‘Spurn the temerity’
This poem was a whole letter sent to Helen Hunt Jackson. In The Letters of Emily Dickinson it is dated to ‘about mid-April 1879’ and the editors suggest that it may have been a reminder to Mrs Jackson about Easter time that Emily had not recently heard from her. So Emily may be saying in effect, ‘You can spurn my rash temerity in writing to you in the Calvary of your absence, but all I can say is that Gethsemane itself would be gay, if I had only had a letter from you.’

That Mrs Jackson had become a dear friend to Emily can be seen from Emily’s saying in a letter of November 1878 to Thomas Higginson that ‘I had a sweet
Forenoon with Mrs Jackson recently, who brought her Husband to me for the first time (L574).

Mrs Jackson later sent poem 1432 to Higginson, adding at the bottom ‘wonderful twelve words!’

Poem 1433 F1459  ‘How brittle are the Piers’
This poem is part of a letter sent to Thomas Higginson in June 1878, some nine months after the death of his wife, and is introduced by the sentences, ‘I have thought of you often since the Darkness – though we cannot assist another’s Night – I have hoped you were saved – That those who have immortality with whom we talked about it, makes it no more mighty – but perhaps more sudden – (L553).’

The poem then says that those piers are brittle which hold up the tottering bridge of our faith in immortality, but God, who made the bridge, sent his son to test it and ‘he pronounced it firm.’

Emily has altered her metaphor from poem 915 which begins ‘Faith – is the Pierless Bridge,’ but both metaphors work in their contexts.

Poem 1434 F1479  ‘Go not too near a House of Rose’
This poem is the whole of a letter sent to Mrs Edward Tuckermann in July 1878 and introduced by the sentences, ‘Would it be prudent to subject an apparitional interviews to a grosser test? The Bible portentously says, “that which is Spirit is Spirit” (L558).’

Judith Farr (G) convincingly suggests that Mrs Tuckermann has proposed coming to see Emily, and that Emily is replying by saying that it would not be wise to subject the ‘apparitional interviews’ of their letters to the ‘grosser test’ of a face to face meeting. For Emily is as fragile as a Rose, as untouchable as a Butterfly and Mr Tuckermann’s Joy in her will be more lasting if she does not try to climb into Emily’s ‘magic Prison’ (see poem 1601). Or, as Emily begins her next letter to Mrs Tuckermann by saying, ‘To see is perhaps never quite the sorcery that it is to surmise (L565).’

The quotation ‘that which is Spirit is Spirit’ is from Jesus’ encounter with Nicodemus (John 3:6), and hints that the poem is also saying that the unseen spiritual world can be destroyed if subjected to the observations and experiments of science.
Poem 1435 F1461 ‘Not that he goes – we love him more’

Samuel Bowles died on 16 January 1878, and this poem comes towards the end of the second letter which Emily wrote to Mrs Mary Bowles in the weeks after his death. It is introduced by the sentences, ‘Dear “Mr Sam” is very near, these midwinter days. When purples come on Pelham, in the afternoon we say “Mr Bowles’s colors.”’ I spoke to him once of his Gem chapter [Revelation 21] and the beautiful eyes rose till they were out of reach of mine, in some hallowed fashion (L536).’

Then in the poem she seems to be saying that in a way Mr Sam has not gone beyond that frontier for traffic between earth and heaven, as those left behind love him, their leader, all the more after his death and he is more present to them in their hearts. For what he moved or brought into being [bonds of love] he made [firm and lasting].

The full-stop at the end of line 2 seems to deprive lines 3 and 4 of any possible syntax, so perhaps the full-stop should replace the comma at the end of line 3 and ‘we love him more/Who led us while he stayed’ be taken as a parenthesis.

Poem 1436 F1460 ‘Than heaven more remote’

Maria Whitney of Northampton was another person deeply affected by Samuel Bowles’ death. She was a relative of Mrs Bowles and spent much time with the family. Emily first sent her a short note in which she said of Bowles, ‘That he has received Immortality who so often conferred it, invests it with a more sudden charm…(L537)’ and then sent her this poem as a whole letter. To paraphrase:

Our dead are more remote from us than Heaven, for Heaven is the root and ground of this world, from which they are now the flitted seed. They are more remote than the unborn or those that are alive but hide their true selves. (1-6)

It is madness to imagine planning the future with them, for no longer are they here to approve our ideas. (7-10)

As they cannot call to us or test or woo us, you, my soul, must find them. For that they have a mansion somewhere is as absolutely true as the existence of God, and can be found as quickly. (11-16)

Poem 1437 F1372 ‘A Dew sufficed itself’

A Dew, which had been sufficient for and satisfied a Leaf, thought how trivial had been his life but to what a vast destiny [the life of a tree] he had contributed. That dew
was never seen again for anybody to comment on his face, but his tragedy is still to be found in the records of the fleetingness of transport or joy and the celerity of fate.

Maybe the Dew is anyone of us.

**Poem 1438 F1464** ‘Behold this little Bane’
Paradoxically Love is both ‘Bane’ and ‘Boon,’ both ‘common’ and ‘unknown’ in the depths of its full capacity. Its equivalent is nowhere found, except maybe in Paradise.

**Poem 1439 F1465** ‘How ruthless are the gentle’
Emily surprises the reader by giving a theological example of the well known paradox of the first two lines. It is difficult to say what she has in mind in this example. A guess would be that God, in order to calm down ‘the Wind’ (=the Holy Spirit) who was saying that something should be done to save mankind, broke his contract with ‘his Lamb’ (=Jesus) that they should all live together in heaven by sending him down to earth on this mission.

**Poem 1440 F1466** ‘The healed Heart shows its shallow scar’
The wounded person may confidentially show to a friend a ‘shallow scar’ as a sign that his Heart is healed, but ‘Fabrics truly torn’ are not mended during this mortal life. Indeed for the wounded person to pretend to be ‘convalescent’ is ‘shameless’ and such a belief is less genuine than the treason which caused the wound.

**Poem 1441 F1468** ‘These Fevered Days – to take them to the Forest’
Emily is experiencing ‘Fevered Days’ of mental anguish and darkness. She sometimes thinks that all she needs to do is to take such days to the depths of a forest where the only darkness ‘that devastates the stillness’ is the natural shade of the forest.

**Poem 1442 F1468** ‘To mend each tattered faith’
Emily’s own Faith had been frequently tattered and mended by the needle ‘threaded in the Air’ (= God working through his Holy Spirit), and, after each mending, it felt for a time ‘as comfortable indeed/and spacious as before,’ even if it was not quite the same as an untorn garment.

She had been less confident about her mended faith in lines 19-20 of poem 1258 where she had declared that ‘belief, it does not fit so well/when altered frequently.’
Poem 1443 F1469 ‘A chilly Peace infests the Grass’
Emily is perhaps imagining the ‘chilly Peace’ that descends on a cemetery at the setting of the sun. The shadows or the ghosts in their graves do not witness people bound up in the trance of work, for the ‘Allies’ that were their bodies have long since ceased to travel in search of employment or happiness. All men are delivered from the various seas of their lives when they become shadows in such cemeteries.

Poem 1444 F1480 ‘A little Snow was here and there’
Emily has just met an old childhood friend after the passing of many decades. The friend now has some white hairs, but Time has failed to seize her in its grip. Rather it has added to her such vitality that she seems like a Rose, which neither her summer nor the white hairs of her winter can stop from blooming.

Thomas Johnson suggests that the poem may refer to a meeting with her childhood acquaintance, Helen Hunt Jackson, as Mrs Jackson is known to have visited Amherst in 1878. Poem 1267 also referred to meeting a childhood friend after a long absence.

Poem 1445 F1470 ‘Death is the supple Suitor’
In this poem Emily describes herself as a shy virgin who has to be wooed tactfully and indirectly by Death. But he is a ‘supple Suitor’ who wins her at last and takes her away amid triumphant music in a ‘bisected Coach’ to a marriage in heaven. Nothing can be known about this marriage, or about the kindred who await her there.

‘Bisected’ presumably refers to two compartments, one for Emily and one for the driver. There are many variant readings in the last two lines. From them Johnson chooses, ‘and Kindred as responsive/as Porcelain’ and Franklin ‘and Kinsmen as divulgeless/as Clans of Down.’ A third possibility would be ‘and Pageants as impassive/as Porcelain.’

Emily had also described Death taking her off in a carriage in poems 279 and 712.

Poem 1446 F1471 ‘His Mind like Fabrics of the East’
The ‘Mind’ on display in this poem could belong to God, the ‘mighty merchant’ of poem 621. His gift of Love is not to be bought with gold, but is available to anyone
who understands its worth. But the ‘Fabrics of the East’ could also be the poems of Emily herself. The only price she asks for them is the ‘Ear/susceptive’ of poem 1048 which understands their value. Whether she sells her poems or not depends on the attitude of those who would buy them. The ‘Merchant of the Picturesque’ in poem 1131 had followed the same principle.

Poem 1447 F1472 ‘How good his Lava Bed’
The hard, uncomfortable ‘Lava Bed’ is good for this Boy, as it means he does not oversleep. Emily is perhaps referring to the Sun who appears to go to sleep on a red, volcanic bed.

Poem 1448 F1523 ‘How soft a Caterpillar steps’
Emily has some empathy for the Caterpillar on the back of her hand, but he has none for her and is as much a stranger to her as is Nature in general in poem 1400.

Poem 1449 F1473 ‘I thought the Train would never come’
Richard Sewall suggests that Emily’s ‘Provoking Lover’ in this poem is Judge Otis Lord. The Judge had been one of Edward Dickinson’s closest friends and had frequently visited the Homestead. After the death of Emily’s father, Judge Lord had continued to visit Amherst, staying there with his nieces, and he and Emily had fallen in love. The death of his wife on 10 December 1877 meant that marriage between him and Emily was a possibility. Around the time of poem 1449 she wrote five ecstatic letters to him. The first one (L559) begins, ‘My lovely Salem [= the town where Lord lived] smiles at me. I seek his Face so often – but I have done with guises. I confess that I love him – I rejoice that I love him – I thank the maker of Heaven and earth – that gave him me to love – the exultation floods me.’

As Sewall says, the poem has the same verve and excitement as the letter. Waiting in her room for the Judge to arrive by train at Amherst station at the bottom her garden, Emily thought she would never hear the train’s whistle. She had taught her heart exactly what to say (presumably ‘No! It won’t do. We can’t carry on with it.’), but, as soon as she saw him, the ‘strategy’ of this ‘Treatise’ flew away. As in the letter, she had ‘done with guises.’ She did not even have time to hide the ‘strategy’ somewhere on her person from where she could use it later. It just ‘flew away.’ And, with him at her side, it was too soon to return to the wisdom of that strategy.
Poem 1450 F1474  ‘The Road was lit with Moon and star’
Emily is looking out of her bedroom window at the moonlight. She sees a traveller or a horseman (a variant reading) climbing up a hill towards ‘magic Perpendiculars.’ She does not know what his ‘shimmering ultimate’ goal is, but he somehow by his presence confirms ‘the sheen’ of that goal.

In the moonlight Emily is able to imagine that a horseman climbing a hill is Everyman, earthbound perhaps, but nevertheless climbing during his lifetime to the ‘magic perpendiculars’ and ‘shimmering ultimate’ of heaven.

Poem 1451 F1475  ‘Whoever disenchants’
‘Whoever disenchants’ another person by lack of reverence commits an offence against life. He may be ‘as guileless as a bird,’ but for the person disenchanted his lack of reverence is as clear and unmistakeable as a star and awakes the horrible idea that perhaps such irreverence, and not goodness, is after all the basic way in which human beings act.

In ch. 12 of Bk 12 of War and Peace Pierre, on witnessing the irreverent act of murder, ‘now felt that the universe had crumbled before his eyes and only meaningless ruins remained, and this not by any fault of his own. He felt that it was not in his power to regain faith in the meaning of life.’

Poem 1452 F1476  ‘Your thoughts don’t have words every day’
In Emily’s annus mirabilis of 1863 when she averaged a poem a day, the words did come daily, but in this poem she is perhaps revealing that writing poetry in 1878 is more of a struggle. The right word now comes as rarely as a sip ‘of the communion Wine’ to its devotees left behind at the end of the service, although, when she does find the right words, they seem so ‘native’ or familiar that she cannot see why they should come so infrequently or involve such effort. For example, Johnson records that in line 6 Emily tried out nine other possibilities before settling on ‘easy.’

Jane Donahue Eberwein comments that although her last poems still show her characteristic vitality and distinctive angle of vision, she has more difficulty in completing them.

Poem 1453 F1514  ‘A Counterfeit – a Plated Person’
The manuscript of this poem is headed *in petto* (= in confidence) and is signed *Lothrop*. Thomas Johnson explains the background to these words.

The daughter of a certain clergyman called C.D. Lothrop had fled from her father’s house, accusing him of maltreatment, and appealed to her neighbours, including Austin. When *The Republican* published an account of the matter, her father brought a libel suit against it. The case went to Salem in Essex County and judgement was given against Lothrop.

Emily may have sent this poem on the incident to Austin himself, with *Lothrop* at the end perhaps indicating Emily’s view of Lothrop’s character. She does not want her own ‘strata of Iniquity’ plated over with a deceptive veneer of surface goodness, any more than she had approved of the ‘Plated Wares’ of poem 747. It is the ‘Truth’ about her which will reach ‘the Sky’ (= heaven), while lying deception, like Lothrop’s, exiles him from his fellows in this life and will be exposed in the next.

When Emily in the previous year had enclosed a batch of poems in a letter (L513) to Thomas Higginson, she had said of them, ‘Excuse them if they are *untrue*.’

1879  (Emily is forty-nine. She writes 30 poems)

**Poem 1454 F1486** ‘Those not live yet’
People who doubt whether they will live ‘again’ after death are not yet living properly in this life. For if they were, they would realise that this life and the next life are all one piece, and that the next life is not an ‘again.’ Imagine a ship going under a drawbridge linking two pieces of water. That ship has not run ‘aground’ or come to an end under the drawbridge but is on one voyage. Similarly death is the connecting ‘Hyphen’ between the river of life and the sea of eternity, although our ‘Schedule’ or timetable puts deep water to be navigated before we reach the bright ‘Disk’ of immortality and begin existing as ‘Costumeless Consciousness.’

**Poem 1455 F1495** ‘Opinion is a flitting thing’
This poem is the whole of a letter (L625) to Sue apart from the introductory sentences: ‘Emily is sorry for Susan’s Day – To be singular under plural circumstances, is a becoming heroism.’

Perhaps Sue’s trying day was that she came under attack from various people. If so, Emily reassures her by saying that the ‘truth’ of her character is more important
than people’s good ‘opinions’ of her. If she cannot have both, she should go for the one which has been around so long that it ‘outlasts the Sun.’

Poem 1456 F1496  ‘So gay a Flower’
Thomas Johnson says that this poem was probably sent with a flower to Sue. The poem adds the thought that the experience of beauty can be so intense that it becomes painful and a woe, and claims that many people must have had this experience of beauty as an affliction.

Three years later Emily wrote to a friend a short note (L759) which just said, ‘In a World too full of Beauty for Peace, I have met nothing more beautiful.’ Perhaps the affliction comes partly from the thought that we may not continue to see such beauty when we die.

Poem 1457 F1497  ‘It stole along so stealthy’
The wealthy had no idea that ‘it’ had happened, as they did not even begin to own ‘it.’ The ‘it’ in this poem may be ‘the kingdom of God,’ with Emily having in mind Jesus’ remark that, ‘It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.’ (Matthew19:24)

Poem 1458 F1498  ‘Time’s wily Chargers will not wait’
Emily sent this poem as a whole letter (L604) to her eighteen year old nephew, Ned Dickinson, signing it ‘Dick – Jim.’ Dick and Jim were Ned’s horses, and Mrs Bianchi says that the lines were sent to Ned after his horses had run away with him.

The poem may be a sombre warning to Ned, with his aunt saying that just as his own horses bolted with him, he may similarly find on his journey through life that Time’s horses often bolt and indeed are only very keen to wait and hesitate at Woe’s Gate.

Poem 1459 F1487  ‘Belshazzar had a Letter’
The only letter that we know king Belshazzar received was the one written by the ‘fingers of a man’s hand’ on the wall opposite him as he sat at his banquet (Daniel5:5.) But since the main point in this letter, when interpreted by Daniel, said, ‘Thou art weighed in the balances, and found wanting,’ Emily adds that Belshazzar may be the one who received the letter but we can all in our Consciences read this
‘immortal’ letter as applied to us, without needing to use our glasses to read it on ‘Revelation’s Wall.’

Emily sent a copy of this poem to Ned with the postscript ‘Suggested by our Neighbour,’ so it is probable that the ‘Belshazzar’ she had in mind was the Lothrop referred to in poem 1453.

Poem 1460 F1499  ‘His Cheek is his Biographer’

This poem was written on a single sheet of paper and signed ‘Thief.’ Thomas Johnson thinks that the poem may have been sent to Ned, with the signature showing that the poem is teasing him for stealing something. Emily says that his ‘Cheek’ gives him away. As long as it blushes red, she knows that his feelings of shame put him in ‘Perdition,’ but that once his cheek returns to normal, he is sinning ‘in peace.’

Poem 1461 F1500  “Heavenly Father” – take to thee’

The sheet of paper on which this anti-God poem was written is addressed on the back ‘Ned.’ As the similar poems 1479 and 1545 were also sent to Ned, it looks as though his aunt found that he was sympathetic to her unorthodox religious views and enjoyed sharing them with him. In this poem she asks her “Heavenly Father” to look after mankind, his ‘supreme iniquity,’ which he smuggled into the world by a hand usually regarded as ‘candid’ or ‘above board.’ It might be more respectful to trust mankind and let them get on with it, but as we sinful humans are but dust, she says that we apologise to you – for your underhand behaviour in creating us!

Poem 1462 F1481  ‘We knew not that we were to live’

This poem ends a letter (L575) of December 1878 sent to Thomas Higginson. According to Mrs Todd, it also came at the end of a slightly later letter (L591) sent to Maria Whitney. The letter to Higginson congratulated him on his recent engagement to Mary Thatcher, and introduced the poem with the sentence, ‘Till it has loved – no man or woman can become itself – Of our first Creation we are unconscious.’ The letter to Maria Whitney had included the sentence, ‘Consciousness is the only home of which we now know.’

The poem says that we did not know that we were about to be born, and our ignorance of when we shall die is our breastplate. Until the moment of death comes,
we wear the fact that we shall die as lightly as a dress chosen in a shop by ourselves. 
God makes himself known when life ends and when it begins.

Poem 1463 F1489  ‘A Route of Evanescence’
Emily was so pleased with this poem that she sent it to at least five people including Helen Hunt Jackson (L602). She had already described the humming bird in poem 500, but captures the humming vibration of its wings and its rapid flight even better in this poem. The ‘r’s’ in lines 1-4 and the absence of a verb suggest rushing speed. In lines 5-6 the blossoms adjusting themselves suggest the emptiness after the bird’s departure, and finally in lines 7-8, as George Whicher puts it, ‘the startled mind of the (assumed) spectator regains its poise with a whimsical comment’ – the spectator being a Shakespeare expert who knows that in The Tempest Antonio says of Claribel:

She that is queen of Tunis; she that dwells
Ten leagues beyond man’s life; she that from Naples
Can have no note, unless the sun were post (2:1:246-8)

Poem 1464 F1516  ‘One thing of it we borrow’
There are two versions of this poem. The first, a pencilled draft, is printed by Franklin. The second, a revision of the draft and sent as part of a letter (L622) to Thomas Higginson, is printed by Johnson. Lines 1-4 of the draft become lines 5-8 of the letter, and lines 5-8 of the draft become lines 1-4 of the letter. There are other minor changes. These notes are on Johnson’s version.

The letter effusively thanks Higginson for the gift of a copy of his Short Studies of American Authors. The poem is preceded by the words, ‘Remorse for the brevity of a Book is a rare emotion,’ and followed by the words, ‘Had I tried before reading your Gift, to thank you, it had perhaps been possible, but I waited and now it disables my Lips.’ In the poem Emily seems to say to Higginson:
One thing I take from your book and promise to return (to you in my own writings, if I can) is the knowing from its ‘Sweetness’ both the ‘Booty’ or profit of reading it and the ‘Sorrow’ that it came to an end.
One thing I covet from your book is the ability to forget (how much better your writing is than mine), though perhaps the ‘Anguish’ or ‘Pathos’ (a variant) of my greediness to write as well as you diminishes ‘the Dross’ of this behaviour.
Poem 1465 F1484  ‘Before you thought of Spring’
This bird of ‘Indigo and Brown’ is the bluebird, and, as in poem 1395, he is the very
first bird of the year to appear, before a single leaf has appeared on the trees. He
doubtless sings his ‘specimens of Song’ for his own joy, but it seems to us as if he is
asking us to choose between them.
Emily sent this poem to Helen Hunt Jackson, who praised it warmly, for she
began a letter (L601a) of April 1879 to Emily with the sentence, ‘I know your “Blue
bird” by heart – and that is more than I do of any of my own verses.’ Mrs Jackson also
asked if she could pass the poem on to Colonel Higginson. Emily’s answer is
unknown, but she may not have minded, as she had sent her earlier bluebird poem to
him.

Poem 1466 F1488  ‘One of the ones that Midas touched’
Emily says that King Midas may not have touched everybody, but he at least touched
the Golden Oriole (the word ‘Oriole’ itself coming from aureolus, a Latin word for
‘golden’). In poem 526 Emily may have used the oriole’s song as a symbol for her
own poetry, but in this poem she is content to pile up details about the oriole, in order
to give as true a description of him as she can.
He is so dazzingly full of life that he may seem a drunken Prodigal, but he
enchants us with his ‘badinage divine’ and the ‘Oratorio’ of his song. When we see
him in the tree, we could mistake him for a mine of gold. He takes the ‘entire Attar’ of
a rosebush for his drink before travel. In his flight he is a Meteor and as splendid as
Burmah, that exotic country. If Emily ever thought there was a real Jason (and in
poem 870 she claimed there was no such person), she would tell him that the lost
Golden Fleece for which he was seeking was right there ‘upon the Apple Tree.’
It was Mrs Jackson who had suggested that Emily should write a poem on the
oriole, for, when Emily sent her the humming bird poem (L602), she introduced it
with the words, ‘To the Oriole you suggested I add a Humming Bird and hope they
are not untrue (L602).’

Poem 1467 F1501  ‘A little overflowing word’
A little word, which anyone hearing it spoken would have regarded as the natural
overflow of ‘Ardor [or] of Tears,’ may, even after the passing of ‘Generations’ and
'Traditions,' be regarded as 'eloquent,' provided that it was recorded and written down.

Poem 1261 also says that a word may live for centuries.

Poem 1468 F1502 ‘A winged spark doth soar about’
The ‘winged spark’ which for Emily is ‘a speck of Rapture’ may be literally some light which flashes across the sky and is so vivid that it can be mistaken for lightning. But line 9 suggests that Emily herself is somehow involved in the creation of the spark of rapture, so perhaps the ‘winged spark’ is a symbol for a revelation of God to her or for the moment of inspiration which ignites a poem.

Franklin does not print line 9, and Johnson regards is as a possible alternative to line 8, though he admits that in the manuscript the nine lines are written out as one apparent poem.

Poem 1469 F1503 ‘If wrecked upon the Shoal of Thought’
If our scheme or search for an answer is wrecked ‘upon the Shoal of [too much] Thought,’ we are bound to reflect, when thinking about the Sea of thought, that safety would have been ours had we stayed in the vessel which we shunned, namely Simplicity. Like Hamlet, we may find that too much thought is a sickness.

Poem 1470 F1504 ‘The sweets of Pillage, can be known’
Only the thief enjoys the thing stolen. But of his sorrows the most godlike is the ‘compassion’ he feels for his lost Integrity.

Poem 1471 F1505 ‘Their Barricade against the Sky’
The armies of the trees in autumn at the turn of every day lose more of the leaves which are their Flags. We may wonder at the meaning or cause of the fall of these leaves with their ‘Russet Halts’ but the thought of the war with Mexico in Emily’s youth gives us the answer, as we think back on the leaf-fall, that ‘that Massacre of Air’ was ‘not Wound nor Scar’ but merely ‘holidays of War’ as the falling leaves tussled with each other and with the wind.

Poem 1472 F1491 ‘To see the Summer Sky’
True poems are the transient poems of nature, not poems in a book.
Poem 1473 F1506  ‘We talked with each other about each other’
It is just possible that he ‘We’ in this incident are Emily and Judge Lord. They sit silently, looking expressively at each other, listening with white faces to the time they have left galloping and racing away. But then some how Time takes compassion on them (maybe the only train to Salem from Amherst that day is cancelled), and they gratefully accept the ‘arks of reprieve’ on the mountains of Ararat (Genesis8:4) which Time offers them.

Poem 1474 F1515  ‘Estranged from Beauty – none can be’
We can never be separated from Beauty, for Beauty lasts forever, and our power not to last forever was taken from us before ‘Identity was leased’ to us at birth.

Poem 1475 F1507  ‘Fame is the one that does not stay’
Emily has not experienced fame staying on her in her lifetime. She feels that she will only be famous when she dies. Then, she will either ‘ascend incessantly’ or flash across the literary sky just once like the ‘electrical embryo’ of lightning. But this third route to fame is an ‘insolvent’ one and will not sell many books. Even so this ‘flame’ is the one which she demands.

Poem 1476 F1508  ‘His voice decrepit was with joy’
If this poem refers to Emily’s own life, the couple concerned are probably Emily and Judge Lord. A few months later Emily wrote a letter (L656) to her cousins saying that Mr Lord ‘remained a week’ in Amherst. On the occasion described in the poem their conversation began ‘with Glee.’ But then they exchanged ‘the News of Love’ (perhaps said they loved each other or he asked her to marry him) and were both completely overcome by this. Emily is not sure whether this exchange is a ‘Delight’ for her, or a ‘Woe’ or a ‘Terror.’ This is a typical reaction from one who in poem 1456 wondered whether Beauty was an Affliction.

Poem 1477 F1509  ‘How destitute is he’
The wealthy man who does not use his Gold is ‘destitute,’ whereas the lover with only a few pence who expresses his love (= spends his money) will display a wealth
outdoing the wealth of India. Emily perhaps has in mind Jesus’ parable of the talents *Matthew25:14-30*.

**Poem 1478 F1251**  ‘Look back on Time, with kindly eyes’

If on our death bed we look back over our time ‘with kindly eyes’ and think we had a good deal, the sun of our life may tremble at its setting but it will sink softly.

**Poem 1479 F1510**  ‘The Devil – had he fidelity’

According to this poem the Devil is so able that, were we able to trust him, he would be our ‘best friend’ and ‘thoroughly divine.’

Such unorthodox religious views are reminiscent of those of poem 1461, and, like that poem, may have been intended for Ned’s eyes. Richard Sewall wonders whether this roguish poem may not be derived from a passage in a sermon of Charles Wadsworth in which he says, ‘And although Satan, with his wonderful power might, if truly regenerated and reformed, become a most efficient teacher of morals, yet as for six thousand years he has proved himself still a devil, the Church, hopeless of reform, will use other ministries…’

**Poem 1480 F1511**  ‘The fascinating chill that music leaves’

That music both fascinates and chills is a corroboration that on this earth our ‘Ecstasy’ is impeded. But as the rapture of music estranges us from earthly things it also woos us to ‘something upper.’ If this is not to a personal ‘Creator,’ it is at least to an awe that such perfection and beauty can exist.

In an earlier letter (L381) to Thomas Higginson Emily wrote that the change of the seasons ‘hurt almost like Music.’

**Poem 1481 F1512**  ‘The way Hope builds his House’

The House of Hope is not built up solidly with sill or rafter, but is ‘only Pinnacle.’ Nevertheless we abide in this superficial, surface construction as supremely and as certainly as if it were a building hacked out of ledges of rock or joined together by Laws.

Other poems in which Emily attempts to define hope are 254, 1392 and 1547.

**Poem 1482 F1513**  ‘Tis whiter than an Indian Pipe’
Emily can only find negative images for the soul. Whiter than the Indian Pipe flower and less visible than lace, it has no stature and no voice to tell us where it is or to address us, and it is as functionless as the Air. But we shall all at death have the Drama of becoming this ‘limitless Hyperbole,’ provided that the Hypothesis that we have an immortal soul does not turn out to be the Tragedy that we do not.

In poem 1250 it was February that was ‘White as an Indian Pipe.’

1880  (Emily is fifty. She writes 25 poems)

**Poem 1483 F1520**  ‘The Robin is a Gabriel’
The robin, Emily’s New England criterion for tune in poem 285, gets a third poem entirely to himself. The other two are 634 and 828. In this poem he is a messenger from God found in humble places. His red breast places him among the joy-bringers, but at the working class end. He is just like a New England farmer, except that he is warmer to look upon.

He has few guests, as you need to be keen-sighted to find his nest. He hides away from us like any runaway, kindly dealing with our worry as to where he is by his songs to show defiance of his enemies, punctuated by flights through the trees.

**Poem 1484 F1517**  ‘We shall find the Cube of the Rainbow’
This poem was sent in a letter (L628) to Mrs Edward Tuckerman. The envelope, which still exists, is postmarked 5 January. The year was probably 1880. The poem is preceded by the sentences, ‘I read your little Letter (? A New Year greeting) – it had like Bliss – the minute length. It were dearer had you protracted it, but the Sparrow must not propound his Crumb (= allege that he had only received a Crumb).

The poem appears to say that it would be easier to find the Cube from which the Rainbow springs than for a Lover to guess how big is the Arc of the love with which he is loved. In other words, even a longer letter from Mrs Tuckerman could not have shown the extent of her love for Emily.

**Poem 1485 F1526**  ‘Love is done when Love’s begun’
This poem was sent as a whole letter to Mrs Edward Tuckerman and like poem 1484 refers to her affection for Emily. Wise men say that love is soon over, but do they
know? The truth about your affection for me is that it is a ‘Boon’ which is adjourned with no day named for its reappearance – as it is always present in your loving heart.

**Poem 1486 F1527**  ‘Her spirit rose to such a height’
The last three lines of this poem were sent as a letter to Sue, but the whole poem may depict Sue regarding herself as justifiably angry over some matter. She is so puffed up with anger that she looks to have ‘fed on awe’ that such behaviour could have happened. It would be wiser to attack the dawn than to deserve such celestial scorn.

**Poem 1487 F1538**  ‘The Saviour must have been’
Emily herself gave this poem the title of ‘Christ’s Birthday’ when she enclosed it in a letter (L675) to Thomas Higginson. She says that Jesus must have been very obedient to God to come all that way from heaven in winter time in order to show his ‘Fellowmen’ how to triumph over suffering. The ‘billion Miles’ of road between Amherst and Bethlehem would still be ‘rugged’ had not Jesus ‘levelled’ it by showing that he too as an adult knew what suffering was. Jesus’ suffering has made communication between him and Emily much easier.

As in poems 389 and 986, Emily refers to herself as a Boy.

**Poem 1488 F1541**  ‘Birthday of but a single pang’
Emily had sent poem 1156 to Sue on her 40th birthday. Now, ten years later, she sends Sue this poem on her 50th birthday.

The only ‘afflictive’ thing about the birthday is the Adjective ‘single’ showing ‘there are less to come.’ But the ‘doom’ or fate that there is such a person as Sue whose birthday is today is ‘affluent’ and a source of riches for Emily.

For ‘doom’ in a good sense compare ‘Dooms of Balm’ in poem 1337 and ‘The Doom to be adored –/The Affluence conferred’ in poem 1386.

**Poem 1489 F1522**  ‘A Dimple in the Tomb’
This poem ends a letter (L641) replying to a letter of Thomas Higginson in which he had told Emily of the death of Louisa, his seven weeks old daughter. Emily’s tender letter of consolation leads up to the poem with the words, ‘The route of your little Fugitive must be a tender wonder – and yet’ a baby’s Dimple in that Tomb makes all the difference.
Poem 1490 F1521 ‘The Face in evanescence lain’
When Emily replied to Thomas Higginson’s letter about the death of his daughter Louisa, she had already seen a notice of the death in the paper and had written him a brief note (L630), consisting of just this poem, apart from the introductory sentence, ‘I was sorry for what the Paper told me – I hoped it was not true.’ The poem seems to say:
Her vanished face will be more distinct to you than ours. For her sake we give up your thoughts of us, just as capsules with their seeds give themselves up for the sake of the Flower. Is there some brightness from her vanished face giving you confidence, winning over your dissent at her death, coming down from heaven to show us that even the deprivation of death can have something divine about it?

Poem 1491 F1525 ‘The Road to Paradise is plain’
This poem is part of a letter (L650) written to Mrs Holland in July 1880. The sentence immediately preceding the poem reads, ‘The Weather is like Africa and the Flowers like Asia and the Numidian heart of your “Little Friend” neither slow nor chill.’ After this sentence showing Emily’s extravagant delight in the natural world of summer, the poem may be saying:
The road to Paradise is clearly laid out in the teachings of the church, but very few people take it. The teaching is sound enough, but most people prefer to take a road through life which is more ‘dimpled’ or ‘florid’ (a variant) and makes a place for natural beauty. So, if Paradise is only reached through the teachings of the church, there will be few ‘Belles’ or ‘Guests’ (a variant) there, just a few unsuspected people, and certainly ‘not me – nor you,’ as we go deeper than the plain teachings of the church and so do not have the Wings for Paradise.

Poem 1492 F1537 “And with what body do they come?”
This poem is part of a letter (L671) thanking her cousin, Perez Cowan, for the memorial which he had sent her on the death of his little daughter. The poem picks up the question once asked by St Paul, ‘How are the dead raised, and with what body do they come?’ (1 Corinthians15:35) and, concentrating on the word ‘come,’ says that the coming of the dead to heaven is a cause for rejoicing. Indeed in lines 3-4 she seems to imagine her own soul as part of the welcoming party in heaven. Then,
concentrating on the word ‘body,’ she argues that, if the dead have a body, they will be real and capable of being known. Finally she says that Paul’s authority is Jesus.

St Paul in fact adds the rider that the spiritual body will be different from the natural body (*1 Corinthians*15:44).

Poem 1493 F1524  ‘Could that sweet Darkness where they dwell’

This poem is part of a letter (L643) to Maria Whitney. She had just told Emily that she was about to retire from teaching at Smith College in Northampton. She was presumably intending to leave the area, as Emily introduces the poem by saying, ‘I shall miss saying to Vinnie when we hear the Northampton Bells – as in subtle states of the West we do – “Miss Whitney is going to Church” – though must not everywhere be Church to Hearts that have or have had – a Friend.’

Then she says in the poem that if we could actually see where our friends are living, the clamour of the bells for their loveliness would burst open our loneliness.

Poem 1494 (not in F)  ‘The competitions of the sky’

This poem comes at the beginning of a letter (L669) to Emily’s cousins. It is introduced by the sentence, ‘Did the “stars differ” from each other in anything but “glory,” there would be often envy.’

Emily’s quotation is based on St Paul’s words, ‘for one star differeth from another star in glory.’ (*1 Corinthians*15:41) The stars, says Emily, compete only in glory, and so without the corrosion of envy.

Poem 1495 F1528  ‘The Thrill came slowly like a Boon for’

This poem may refer to the late love in Emily’s life for Judge Otis Lord. The thrill of it had been a long time in coming. The fitness of it had been growing in a solitude which was not desolate but sumptuous as it was preparing her for him. When it happened, her rapture at other things ‘changed its dress’ and became rapture for Judge Lord.

Alternatively, if less likely, the poem may recall the specific moment when she heard that Lord had recovered from a serious illness, for in a later letter (L752) to him she writes, ‘To remind you of my own rapture at your return, and of the loved steps, retraced almost from the “Undiscovered Country,” I enclose the Note I was fast writing, when the fear that your Life had ceased, came.’
Poem 1496 F1529 ‘All that I do’
The ‘He’ of this poem is Death, the ‘Supple Suitor’ of poem 1445. He is so enamoured of her that he watches her every movement. He is inescapable and omnipresent, patiently waiting to take her in his coach on her wedding journey to eternity (as in poems 279 and 712).

Poem 1497 F1530 ‘Facts by our side are never sudden’
‘Facts’ can live beside us without any sudden impact on us, until they look around and catch our gaze. Then they scare us (1-4).
For example we do not know the true stature of our neighbour, until – a portent for ourselves – we are called to recognise that he has bid us Adieu in death (5-8).
Where he is going, the wisest cannot guess and the bravest are as ignorant of that destination as you or I (9-12).

The thought of the second stanza had appeared in poem 1209, which begins, ‘To disappear enhances.’

Poem 1498 F1518 ‘Glass was the Street – in tinsel Peril’
It is winter in Amherst. The ice covered street is like glass. Tree and Traveller are equally in danger of frozen, glittering snow. Boys whiz past on sledges with vibrations like when you stamp your shoe. Each sledge emphasises its presence as it passes the onlooker and then disappears. The watcher is left with the reflection that it is the supreme italic indentations of the past which ‘makes this Present mean.’

Poem 1499 F1397 ‘How firm Eternity must look’
To ‘crumbling’ humans like Emily the only estate which can be identified as not-crumbling is firm Eternity. The insecure read their future in its mighty face. No human face properly fits together unless hidden in the prospect of Eternity.
(‘intrenched’ and ‘affixed’ are variant readings for ‘concealed’ in line 8.)

Poem 1500 F1519 ‘It came his turn to beg’
It is now the other who is begging for his life, the biggest want that any one can have. Emily sees how narrow his realm is, and at least allows him to live. If she gave him
more, his ‘Gratitude’ might cause trouble again, however smuggled her reprieve of him had been.

It is not clear how this poem might refer to Emily’s own life. It is perhaps a possibility that the person Emily has in mind is Sue, despite the masculine pronoun, and that, as in poem 1282, Emily is telling Sue that it is now too late for their relationship to blossom into love. She is willing for the relationship to exist once more (= ‘I gave him leave to live’), but she cannot let it develop into love, lest Sue’s gratitude starts the painful cycle all over again (= ‘Lest Gratitude revive the snake’). A variant reading for ‘the snake’ is ‘my thought.’

Poem 1501 F1490  ‘Its little Ether Hood’
Emily describes the Dandelion in the last stages of its growth. Its spirit-like hood of white particles slips away ‘a nothing at a time’ and the ‘Drama’ or life of this dandelion is over. But, although Emily does not mention this, the ‘nothings’ are the seeds of new life. Perhaps ‘the sagacious God’ has so arranged things that we likewise ‘expire’ into new life.

Poem 1502 F1531  ‘I saw the wind within her’
For this poem Johnson prints one stanza of 4 lines, while Franklin adds two further stanzas of 8 and 4 lines. Franklin’s extra lines are:

I watched the fluttering spirit
That would not intercede
Gibraltar could surrender
But not this little maid -
Precisely how it ended -
Redemption is the one
Of whom the explanation
Is hitherto unknown –

The saved have no remembrance
In our competing Days
Tis still an assistance
But their’s forget in praise
In his note on the poem Johnson says that the poem was written on three scraps of paper and is in too rough a state for a reconstruction to be possible. In Franklin’s reconstruction the wind within the ‘little maid’ is perhaps the wind of death. The speaker knows it blows for her as well, but she has humbly asked for the shelter of God when this happens. The little maid refuses to beg for this shelter, so whether she obtained it only Redemption knows. If she was saved, the little maid will not be remembering it, as all her life in heaven is spent in praise, but we who are still involved in the struggle of life find this shelter ‘an assistance.’

**Poem 1503 F1532**  ‘More than the Grave is closed to me’
While still alive we cannot imagine the ‘Grave or Eternity. Till we actually ‘fall’ in death, we have ‘nowhere’ or no knowledge to cling to on these subjects, so that to ‘Crash’ into ‘nothing’ or into ‘all’ appear remarkably similar.

In line 5 ‘and’ is a variant reading for ‘yet.’

**Poem 1504 F1533**  ‘Of whom so dear’
This may be another poem referring to Judge Otis Lord. When Emily hears someone speak his name, a fleeting glow illumines her face.

In line 3 Emily replaced an original ‘suffuses’ with ‘illumines,’ and in line 4 ‘magical’ is a variant for ‘intimate.’

**Poem 1505 F1535**  ‘She could not live upon the Past’
A woman whose Past was as cruel as her Present gladly gave herself in death to mother Nature, who accepts the greatest and the smallest without any bell of gloom.

**Poem 1506 F1483**  ‘Summer is shorter than any one’
Summer may appear shorter than a man’s life, but in fact the threescore years and ten of life are over before we can blink. It is sorrow that stays, because we allow him to. We shrink from delight, and we want to retain the sorrow we have got used to.

**Poem 1507 F1337**  ‘The Pile of Years is not so high’
Emily’s loved one has not yet been absent for as many years as the absence before that, but the pile of years of nothing but ‘recollection’ is now grown so high that she
can only just reach the top, and that by ‘standing on [her] Heart.’ Her lover should show his face – and catch her in his/her arms as she falls off the ‘mountain.’

Judith Farr regards this poem as a poem for Sue, but the teasing, affectionate tone seems to be more suited to Judge Lord, although for him ‘Years’ rather than ‘Days’ would be a humorous exaggeration.

Poem 1508 F1536 ‘You cannot make Remembrance grow’
Emily uses a gardening metaphor to show the difference between faded memory and real memory. Tamping down the earth around the plant of a memory which has lost its root may set it upright so that it looks all right, but it has no life. Real memory has the roots of a cedar tree and ‘cannot be overthrown’ (= the literal meaning of the Greek word from which ‘adamant’ comes), for ‘its Iron Buds will sprout anew.’

Franklin prints the further line ‘Disperse it – slay it,’ but Johnson omits it as not being part of the poem.

Poem 1509 F1539 ‘Mine Enemy is growing old’
As Emily herself, in sending this poem to Higginson (L675), gave it the title ‘Cupid’s Sermon,’ the ‘Enemy’ of the poem is presumably a person who once refused Emily’s love but who has now grown pitiably old. So Emily could now take some revenge for the loved one’s behaviour, but finds that as soon as the food of revenge is set before her, she no longer wants it. The tooth of her Palate has outgrown it, just as in poem 1282 it had outgrown the love which was at last being returned.

Poem 1510 F1570 ‘How happy is the little Stone’
Emily draws a contrast between human beings, with their ‘Careers’ and the ‘Exigencies’ of their problems, and the ‘little Stone,’ which, because it lacks consciousness, fulfills more simply the decree of its Creator who ordained that it should put on a coat of Brown and be a stone.

Emily sent one copy of this poem as a letter (L744) to Sue, merely following the poem with the exclamation, ‘Heaven the Balm of a surly Technicality!’ Perhaps by this she was suggesting that we would be able to see that the Calvinist view that only ‘the saved’ got to heaven was no more than a ‘surly Technicality,’ if we thought of the whole universe, including the ‘little Stone,’ as being part of God’s creation.
She sent another copy of the poem in a letter (L767) to Thomas Higginson. This time the poem was followed, after a gap, by four further lines which Johnson prints as poem 1543, and Franklin as poem 1573. If Emily meant the extra four lines to be attached to poem 1510, she is perhaps saying that everything in the world has its ‘own personal Expanse,’ from the little stone with its ‘stoneness’ to Christ whose ‘personal expanse’ raised him from the dead. She may even be hinting that her own ‘personal Expanse’ of ‘fulfilling absolute Decree’ by writing poems could win her immortal fame.

Poem 1511 F1540  ‘My country need not change her gown’
Emily sent this poem to Sue with ‘a flag of her own making – three bits of braid, red, white, and blue, pinned together with a thorn!’ (Leyda I, 379; II, 349). Johnson suggests that it may have been sent to her on Independence Day. Emily is saying that the ‘triple’ colours of the American Flag still suit her country as they did when in 1775 the battle of Lexington Green started the American revolution from Great Britain.

Of course Great Britain disapproves – discreetly – of the American flag with its stars, as there is something about American Independence which taunts her to take up her bayonet.

Poem 1512 F1548  ‘All things swept away’
Emily ends a letter (L735) to Thomas Higginson with this couplet. It is introduced by the thought, ‘It is solemn to remember that Vastness – is but the Shadow of the Brain which casts it.’ Perhaps she is saying that, as ‘Vastness’ is a concept of the Brain, even if all things were swept completely away, there would still be the concept of immensity in the Brain.

Poem 1513 F1561  “Go travelling with us!”
This poem ends Emily’s letter (L728) replying to Thomas Higginson’s news of the birth of his daughter Margaret on 25 July 1881. In the letter she says, ‘I know but little of the Little Ones, but love them very softly.’ In the poem Emily presumably speaks to the baby in the first line, the ‘us’ being the parents and herself. Then lines 2-4 are a prayer for Margaret’s daily journey through her life.
Poem 1514 F1544  ‘An antiquated Tree’
Emily begins a letter (L689) of early spring 1881 to Mrs Holland with the words, ‘Spring, and not a Blue Bird, but I have seen a Crow.’ Then, after a couple of lines, comes this poem. The venerable Crow avoids the disrespectful ‘Junior Foliage’ and selects ‘an Antiquated Tree,’ since his distinguished black ‘evening dress’ would suit not only ‘an Antiquated Tree,’ but even the oldest Consulate that ever happened back in the mists of Oblivion.

The crow is the most human of birds. William Fiennes in his book *The Music Room* tells how he saw a crow approach a man lying on his back smoking a cigarette. The man ‘took the cigarette from his mouth and offered it butt-end to the crow, which stretched its fat neck forward and took the cigarette in its beak and straightened, the man letting it go at just the right moment, the crow smoking a cigarette under the beech tree.’

Poem 1515 F1564  ‘The Things that never can come back, are several’
Dr Holland died of a heart attack on 12 October 1881. Emily replied immediately to the telegram announcing his death, and by the end of the month had written four more letters to Mrs Holland. This poem is the whole of the fourth letter (L729), apart from the closing words, ‘Emily, in love.’

The poem is in three sections, of 2, 6 and 5 lines. To paraphrase:
Some things such as Childhood or the Dead never come back (1-2).
But some Joys may go and come back again, just as we wait expectantly for some Traveller or Sailor to return with tales that may enlarge us (3-8).
Also, besides the ‘Here’ where we are now, there are other archetypal ‘Heres’ which are locations for the Spirit at death. However firmly rooted in his native land a man may be, his spirit does not stand and abide there at death, but journeys to that ‘foretold Location’ of heaven (9-13).

Roger Lundin comments on the ‘poignant acknowledgment of loss and gentle note of hope’ in this poem.

Poem 1516 F1563  ‘No Autumn’s intercepting Chill’
This poem is part of the next surviving letter (L738) of Emily to Mrs Holland. At the end of the letter Emily recounts how Dr Holland had said goodbye ‘that November morning.’ She says, ‘He put one Hand on Vinnie’s Head and the other on mine, and
his Heart on your’s, as we both knew, and said that the Sunshine and the Scene he should always remember.’

Then the poem affirms that the chill of death cannot quench the warm love of Dr Holland’s heart. In heaven he knows the exuberant joy of an Africa and the peaceful rest of an Asia.

Poem 1517 F1567  ‘How much of Source escapes with thee’
This poem ends Emily’s Christmas letter (L742) of 1881 to Mrs Holland. It is preceded by the words, ‘Shall we wish a triumphant Christmas to the brother withdrawn? Certainly he possesses it.’

Then in the poem Emily speaks to Dr Holland and says that so much of the source of what gave them life has departed with his death, for, as she thinks how important his times with them had been, she realises he has carried away ‘a universe.’

Poem 1518 F1566  ‘Not seeing, still we know’
This is the whole of a letter (L741) of late 1881 to Mrs Edward Tuckerman, apart from the opening sentence, which reads, ‘Vinnie asked me if I had any Message for you, and while I was picking it, you ran away.’

It looks as though Mrs Tuckerman called one day. Vinnie came into Emily’s room to ask if she had any message for their caller. While Emily was picking a flower from her conservatory to be her message, Mrs Tuckerman ran away. So Emily sent her this poem. It is a diminuendo in which Emily says: if we don’t see each other, we know the warmth of our friendship. Or, if we don’t know, we can guess it. And if we don’t even guess that it exists, we can smile at the possibility, half hiding it and half caressing it, and quaking with a joyful fear, and wondering if we dare confess it, much as the serpent cunningly suggested to Eve that she didn’t dare eat the fruit of the tree.

Poem 1519 F1565  ‘The Dandelion’s pallid tube’
This poem is another whole letter (L739) to Mrs Tuckerman, apart from the closing sentence, ‘Vinnie told me, dear friend, you were speaking of Mr Root.’ Mrs Todd says that the poem-note contained a pressed dandelion tied with scarlet ribbon.

At the beginning of spring the grass is amazed to see the tube or stalk of the dandelion. At once winter becomes an ‘infinite Alas’ which is now over. For the tube of the dandelion, acting as a tuba or trumpet, lifts up first a bud as a signal and then a
flower which shouts that the suns are returning and the ‘sepulture’ of winter over.
As it is about a year since Elihu Root died (see note on poem 1366), Emily is also
using the common, unvalued dandelion as a symbol of her belief in resurrection.
Paula Bennett gives an alert and appreciative reading of this poem, suggesting, for
example, that the flower is ‘shouting’ because it is ‘YELL-ow’ and bell shaped.

Poem 1520 F1543 ‘The stem of a departed flower’
This poem is most of a letter (L684) to Mrs Tuckerman. It was sent on the first day of
1881, as Emily introduces the poem with the words, ‘“Yesterday” was a Year ago,
and yet…,’ with these words leading straight into the poem. The letter then ends with
the words ‘Thank you for the lovely Love.’

Perhaps Mrs Tuckerman had sent Emily the New Year gift of a flower, and
Emily is suggesting that just as the flower, now cut and departed from the place where
it was growing, still silently proclaims that it was once part of ‘an Emerald Court,’ in
the same way the old year, though now cut away and departed, is still a silent bearer
of memories of the ‘Emerald Court’ parts of it.

Poem 1521 F1559 ‘The Butterfly upon the Sky’
Emily sent this poem to her young friends, Mattie Dickinson and Sally Jenkins. It
seems a light hearted version of the theme of poem 1510, and says that the only
grieving, which such young girls as her two friends should do, is to soar away like
carefree butterflies and never sigh. After all, the butterfly may well be ‘higher’ and
nearer the truth than leaden-footed humans.

Mattie Dickinson was the only daughter of Austin and Sue and was fifteen years
old at the time of the poem. Sally Jenkins was the daughter of the clergyman who
officiated at Emily’s funeral.

Poem 1522 F1547 ‘His little Hearse like Figure’
Emily sent this poem to her six year old nephew, Gilbert, accompanied by a dead bee
and introduced with the instruction ‘For Gilbert to carry to his Teacher.’ After the
poem the letter ends with the lines:
“All Liars shall have their part” –
Jonathan Edwards
“And let him that is athirst come” –
Jesus.

The title of the poem is ‘The Bumble Bee’s Religion’ (made the first line of the poem by Franklin), and Emily in this poem is attacking that religion of busy-ness and hard work. The dead bee, whose only Dirge was its buzzing when alive, shows the Lilac, which seduced him into working, how vain is the ethic of hard work and moral behaviour seeing that it only leads to death, and when compared with the ‘perdition’ or sin of idly enjoying the spring – a sin which has something divine about it.

As a note to the teacher, the poem is presumably a plea to her not to work Gilbert too hard, as people who tell the lie that hard work is necessary shall have the reward promised them by Jonathan Edwards (and Revelation 21:8). The key thing, as Jesus said, is to be ‘athirst’ for the divine revelation of the spring.

In an earlier letter (L542) of 1878 Emily had instructed Mrs Holland to give her love to Dr. Holland ‘and tell him the “Bee” is a reckless Guide. Dear Mr Bowles found out too late, that Vitality costs itself.’ She also quotes from Revelation 21:8 in poem 1598.

**Poem 1523 F1546** ‘We never know when we are going’

This poem ends a letter (L691) to Emily’s cousins. It is introduced by the words, ‘It is startling to think that the lips, which are the keepers of thoughts so magical, yet at any moment are subject to the seclusion of death. …I must leave you, dear, to come perhaps again.’

The poem expands this thought that we may perhaps die at any moment. We will never know that we are about to go away in death when we go away from someone’s house or end a letter. We exchange a joke and shut the door, whether of the house or the letter. But we shall never accost our hosts or correspondents again, for the fate of our death has bolted that door for ever.

**Poem 1524 F1549** ‘A faded Boy – in sallow Clothes’

A cowherd, who might have been a statesman if he had lived, has died at an early age along with his cow. But just think of all those boys who whistled but are now dead, all those cows who were thankful to be fed but who now are only housed in ballads or the memories of the clover fields where they grazed.

**Poem 1525 and poem 1616 F1571** ‘He lived the Life of/Who abdicated Ambush’
The two drafts of this poem differ only in the first line, the earlier poem reading ‘He lived the life of Ambush’ and the later ‘Who abdicated Ambush.’ The later version was sent by Emily in a letter (L935) to Samuel Bowles the younger. Both versions are discussed here.

The later poem was accompanied by a spray of pressed jasmine from a jasmine plant which Samuel Bowles the elder had once given to Emily, and the poem about him is introduced by the words, ‘A Tree your Father gave me, bore this priceless flower. Would you accept it because of him.’

The earlier version opens with the thought that Bowles, like the rest of us, lived his life waiting for death to ambush him and finally did die; the second version with the thought that Bowles gave up waiting for death to ambush him and quietly resigned himself to the long Dusk of death. But now we are as confident and impregnable in our belief that he is immortal, as is the star or asterisk against his name which marks him as departed but possessing ‘the whole of Immortality.’

Judith Farr suggests that ‘subtle’ is used in its meaning of ‘elusively fragrant’ and that Emily is saying that Bowles’s name is as fragrant as the jasmine plant he once gave her.

Poem 1526 F1562  ‘His oriental heresies’
The ‘oriental heresies’ and ‘gay apostasy’ of the bee perhaps refer to the exciting, unconventional life which he lives as he buzzes from flower to flower, exhausting himself in a burst of activity rather than pacing himself, as most people might.

Poem 1527 F1550  ‘Oh give it Motion – deck it sweet’
Emily imagines herself standing over a corpse. She pleads eloquently for it to be given Motion, Artery, Vein and speech, and for it to be married to that ‘Pink Stranger [of living flesh which now] we call Dust.’ For we are ‘acquainted more’ with that living flesh than we are with this horizontal, immobile stranger.

Poem 1528 F1574  ‘The Moon upon her fluent route’
There are two versions of the second stanza of this poem. Johnson prints the earlier version of 1881, Franklin the later version of 1884. Franklin’s version reads:

How archly spared the Heaven “to come” –
If such prospective be –
By superseding Destiny
And dwelling there today –

Emily, who had squarely faced the indifference of the moon to our lives in poem 629, is now prepared to claim that both the orderly, ‘fluent Route’ of the moon who needs no ‘Road’ and the ancient, ‘Etruscan’ argument from the stars prove the existence of a God. Then, in the 1881 version, Emily goes on to say that only the dead know whether the ‘Aims’ of a God are in fact impelling ‘these Astral Ones.’ If they do know that such aims are at work, they will know something, namely God, which makes the moon and the stars of this world as forgotten by them as they are by the Dawn of each new day.

In the 1884 Version she seems to be saying that it was very arch of Heaven not to reveal to us in this life whether the argument is true or not, if, ‘by superseding Destiny’ and being in Heaven today, we would discover that ‘such prospective’ was true.

Poem 1529 F1551  ‘Tis Seasons since the Dimpled War’
Emily is perhaps fantasising that she and Sue enjoyed the ‘Dimpled War’ of sexual relations ‘Seasons’ ago, and sighing that it will be ‘Centuries’ before they enjoy them again. These bouts of passion, in which in turn they sought the other’s ‘Pink Redoubt,’ were ‘without a Formula’ as they were Lesbian. They were also ‘vain’ in being done without the need of a man, and ‘modest’ in that they did not involve exposure before a man.

Poem 1530 F1545  ‘A Pang is more conspicuous in Spring’
A hurt or sorrow is worse in spring, because then everything including our minds is normally singing for joy, but now the ‘Pang’ has driven out the joy and we cannot make our normal response. Even Jesus’ ‘Resurrection had to wait’ until the weight of the stone had been taken away.

‘Minute effulgencies’ are perhaps things like crocuses.

Poem 1531 F1552  ‘Above Oblivion’s Tide there is a Pier’
Most people at death are swept away on the tide of Oblivion. Only a few are not effaced and find a place upon the Pier above the tide. They do so by their own achievements in life, as Fame is a creature or concept who has no arms to do any lifting herself. And she has so many to consider that nobody gets any more than the meagre ‘Balms’ of ‘one smile’ from her.

Poem 1532 F1553  ‘From all the Jails’
When this poem was published in 1896 it was titled ‘Saturday afternoons,’ so it looks as though in Emily’s day children were not released from the jails of their schools until Saturday lunchtime. Emily says that they are so happy then that it is sad to think of the ‘Frowns’ that await ‘such a Foe’ as they grow up. At the bottom of the sheet on which this poem was written, Emily jotted down as possible substitutes for ‘Foe’ the words ‘Sweet – Bud – Glee – Dawn – Scene – Dew – Joy.’

Poem 1533 F1554  ‘On that specific Pillow’
The ‘specific Pillow’ may be the pillow of our death-bed. On that pillow we forget life’s ‘projects.’ The soul can do no more than consider the ‘tremendous Morrow’ in store for it, and wonder whether we shall stay asleep or be ushered into new worlds when we die.

Poem 1534 F1195  ‘Society for me my misery’
Since Emily has been given the gift of love, all she wants is to be alone with her lover or with thoughts of him. Society is a misery.

Poem 1535 F1555  ‘The Life that tied too tight escapes’
The Life which, like a horse, is tied too tight, will, when it escapes, always run looking behind and imagining its recapture, whereas the Horse that has known ‘living Grass’ and smiling pastures, will confidently gallop away when it is released, and only be brought to a halt by a rifle shot, if at all.

This poem may be intended as an argument against over-strict bringing up of children.

Poem 1536 F1560  ‘There comes a warning like a spy’
The shorter day warns that summer is stealing away, though summer is quite open and not ‘stealthy’ about her disappearance.

Poem 1537 F1608 ‘Candor- my tepid friend’
This poem is most of a short note (L853) sent to Sue. The note begins with the words, ‘How inspiriting to the clandestine Mind those words of Scripture, “We thank thee that thou hast hid these things.” (Matthew 11:25)

Emily uses Jesus’ words to support her attack on Candor. She wants nothing to do with it, as Candor is at best a ‘tepid friend’ for the person who uses it and can also do much harm in the mind of the person who is told the truth about himself. His mind will be full of bitter myrrh and Mochas or moths eating away his self-esteem.

Karl Popper takes the opposite view of Candor. He believes that ‘no one can possibly give us more service than by showing us what is wrong with what we think or do…..the man who welcomes and acts on criticism will prize it almost above friendship.’

Poem 1538 F1569 ‘Follow wise Orion’
Franklin prints the worksheet 8 lines draft of this poem, Johnson the smaller version of the last 4 lines, sent in a letter (L758) to Sue and introduced by the sentence ‘A “Pear” to the wise is sufficient.’ The first 4 lines are:

Echo has no Magistrate –
Catch a Drop of Dew
And the Sun will loose him
With a sneer at you –

Emily seems to be talking about the limits of human power. Once you have made the sound which produces an echo, you cannot control that echo. If you do manage to catch a drop of dew, the sun will remove it in an instant. You can follow Orion until your eyes are tired, but you will never catch him to get his wisdom. Dazzling you, he disappears, and he is just as high when you next try to penetrate his wisdom. But to the wise person an accessible thing like the pear which she is sending to Sue is a sufficient proof of God’s goodness.
1882  (Emily is fifty-two. She writes 18 poems)

Poem 1539 F1575  ‘Now I lay thee down to sleep’
Emily makes a few changes to the well-known children’s prayer. The version of it printed in the *New England Primer* reads:

Now I lay me down to sleep
I pray my Lord my soul to keep.
Should I die before I wake,
I pray the Lord my soul to take.

Emily seems to change this prayer before bedtime into a prayer over a dead person. She asks the Lord to keep the Dust that is in the grave, but if it should live (in Purgatory) before it wakes (on the day of the Last Judgment), she prays that the Lord may make its Soul.

Poem 1540 F935  ‘As imperceptibly as Grief’
Emily returns to the theme of poem 1536, the departure of summer. In this poem it is like, amongst other things, the departure of a much loved guest, ‘courteous, yet harrowing.’

Five years after Emily’s death in 1891 Thomas Higginson wrote an article about Emily Dickinson for the October issue of the *Atlantic Monthly*. It consisted of poems and letters sent to him by Emily, together with his comments. He ended the article with this poem, doubtless thinking that in many ways the poem could be read as a poem about her own death. Certainly the last two lines are reminiscent of Emily’s description, in a letter (L785) to her cousins, of her own mother’s death, ‘She slipped from our fingers like a flake gathered by the wind, and is now part of the drift called “the infinite.”

Poem 1541 F1576  ‘No matter where the Saints abide’
As a star lights up tracts of Firmament, so saints both in earth and heaven ‘make their Circuit fair.’

Poem 1542 F1572  ‘Come show thy Durham Breast’
The first six lines of this poem are part of a letter (L767) sent to Thomas Higginson in the summer of 1882. Some pin or brooch must have been enclosed, as the letter begins with the words, ‘Perhaps “Baby” will pin her Apron or her Shoe with this? It was sent to me a few Moments since, but I never wear Jewels – How I would love to see her!’ Then follows the first six lines of this poem about a Robin, presumably suggested to Emily by the small size of the baby.

The poem seems to say that Emily wants to see the Robin, as she loves him best. But if someone else loves him more, she asks that the Robin will at least do his courting for his miniature Nuptial in her tree. It is only humans who ‘soar away’ in ‘vaster suing’ when the day for making a proposal arrives.

It is not clear why the robin should have a ‘Durham’ breast.

Poem 1543 F1573 ‘Obtaining but our own extent’
This poem has been discussed in the note on poem 1510. In late 1882 Emily sent a third copy of the poem in a letter (L776) to James Clark. He had known Emily’s ‘dearest earthly friend,’ Charles Wadsworth, who had died on 1 April 1882, and the lines are now used of Wadsworth. They are fittingly introduced by the sentence, ‘He was a Dusk Gem, born of Troubled Waters, astray in any Crest Below. Heaven might give him Peace, it could not give him Grandeur, for that he carried with himself to whatever scene.’

Poem 1544 F1609 ‘Who has not found the Heaven – below’
Like poem 1521 this poem was sent in a letter (L845) to the two young girls, Mattie Dickinson and Sally Jenkins. They seem to have been spending a holiday together, for Emily begins the letter with the sentence, ‘I hope you are having superb times, and am sure you are, for I hear your voices, mad and sweet – as a Mob of Bobolinks.’

The poem says that if the girls cannot see that the marvels of this world such as bobolinks are heavenly angels or messengers from God, they will not recognise the heaven of the next world either, as angels will be their neighbours there as well.

Poem 1545 F1577 ‘The Bible is an antique Volume’
This is the third poem sent to her nephew Ned satirising orthodox Christian beliefs. The other two are poems 1461 and 1479. It was sent in a note (L753) written after a Sunday on which Ned had claimed the ‘Sanctuary privileges’ of not going to church.
Emily’s first draft of the poem was headed *Diagnosis of the Bible, by a boy*, so she is presumably putting the words of the poem into Ned’s mouth. He says:

The Bible was written by ‘faded’ men (= both dead and insipid), who were given their information by ‘Holy Spectres’ rather than by the ‘Holy Spirit.’ It should have been given more zip. Eden could have been the old Homestead. The bad ones, Satan and Judas, and the good ones such as David could have been given more glamorous descriptions. Even Sin could have been called ‘a distinguished Precipice’ for frail humans to fall into. As it is, the Bible says that the good boy who is saved is one in a thousand, while the countless ordinary boys are ‘lost.’ The Bible needs a ‘warbling Teller’ like Orpheus, who reclaimed his wife, Eurydice, from Pluto by the charm and not the condemnation in his song.

In line 13 of the first draft of this poem Emily wrote ‘Thrilling Teller,’ with thirteen marginal alternatives to ‘thrilling,’ including her final choice of ‘warbling’ which came twice. Emily tended to be on the side of the ‘bad boy,’ as she had shown in poem 1201.

**Poem 1546 F1568 ‘Sweet Pirate of the heart’**

This poem completes a short letter (L745) of January 1882 to Mrs Edward Tuckerman. The letter begins, ‘The Gray Afternoon – the sweet knock, and the ebbing voice of the Boys are a pictorial Memory – and then the Little Bins and the Purple Kernels – twas like the Larder of a Doll. To the inditing heart we wish no sigh had come (L745).’

Thomas Johnson suggests that the ‘Boys’ may have been Mrs Tuckerman’s four young orphaned nephews, whom she was bringing up. Perhaps Mrs Tuckerman was ill, and so had sent her nephews with a New Year note and a gift of fruit. Emily wishes that no sadness had come to the Heart which had written or indited the note, and in the poem asks Mrs Tuckerman, the pirate who has stolen her heart and the hearts of others, what shipwreck she has suffered. Could it be that one of her other dear friends has upset her, ‘Spice’ and ‘Attar’ though they be?

**Poem 1547 F1493 ‘Hope is a subtle Glutton’**

This is Emily’s third definition poem anatomising Hope. The other two are 254 and 1392. To give an example of Emily’s definition: I always hope I shall play a good round of golf, and yet I never have this ‘Fair’ experience but only ‘Abstinence.’ The
table of my hope could not be bettered, Only I sit at it, and when the hope is consumed (I play another bad round), I have the same amount of hope that I will play well next time.

Poem 1548 F1578 ‘Meeting by Accident’
Emily imagines two people meeting by accident, but deciding to prolong the meeting as they are falling in love. ‘So divine’ a wandering to each other is only brought about by Destiny once a century, as Destiny is ‘economical [of] her Bliss.’

Such accidental, requited love is charmingly illustrated in William Sansom’s short story The Girl on the Bus.’

Poem 1549 F1579 ‘My Wars are laid away in Books’
Emily imagines that she is writing this poem, having reached the age of seventy. By that time the ‘Wars’ of her life have been put away in the ‘Books’ of her poems, and the only ‘Battle’ left for her is her battle with death. She is the only one of her friends still alive, and it will be so sweet if they remember her when she dies and joins them.

Poem 1550 F1580 ‘The pattern of the sun’
Judith Farr suggests that this is a poem about Samuel Bowles, Charles Anderson that it is ‘an epigram on the oneness of form and content.’ For Anderson Emily is saying that the ‘pattern’ (= form) which helps to make the ‘sun’ (= a poem) can only fit the content of that particular poem. And the ‘pattern/sheen’ needs this ‘Disk’ of content to be the sun of a poem. Anderson adds that this very poem is ‘a shining illustration of its own proposition.’

For Judith Farr Emily presumably would be saying that Bowles’ particular characteristics are only to be found in ‘the sun’ that is him, and that they needed him to come into existence/for embodiment. Poem 106 is one example of Bowles being referred to as the ‘sun.’

Poem 1551 F1581 ‘Those – dying then’
In the old days the dying knew they were bound for ‘God’s right hand.’ But for people alive now that hand has been so cut off that the drama of our lives has become a smaller thing, and we may well conclude that belief in the light of a ‘false’ God is better than no light at all.
Emily herself in a letter (L750) to Judge Lord, written in the year of this poem, was prepared to admit that ‘On subjects of which we know nothing, or should I say Beings……..we both believe, and disbelieve a hundred times an Hour, which keeps Believing nimble.’ In this poem she swings towards disbelief, just as in, for example poem 1573, she swings towards belief. An ‘ignis fatuus’ (literally = delusive fire) was that will o’ the wisp, generated by gases in marshes, which was wrongly taken by unwary travellers to be the light of a fire made by men.

Poem 1552 F1582 ‘Within thy Grave!’
This quatrain is perhaps being said over a baby who died at birth. Its body is in the grave, but its soul is in flight back to heaven, having said ‘Good night’ to its heartbroken parents.

Poem 1553 F1583 ‘Bliss is the plaything of the child’
There are four variant readings in this short poem. For Bliss there can be no ‘rebuke’ or ‘indict,’ as it is present in all stages of our lives, the ‘plaything’ or ‘sceptre’ of the child, the ‘secret’ or ‘lever’ of the man which keeps him going, and the ‘sacred stealth’ or ‘happy guilt’ of Boy and Girl, who fall in love but feel it would be profane to publish it or but feel such happiness may be somehow wrong.

Poem 1554 F1584 “Go tell it” – What a Message’
The message in this poem was inscribed on a stone memorial to the Spartans who died fighting against the Persians at Thermopylae in 480 BC, and read in full:

O stranger, go and tell the people of Sparta
That we lie here obedient to their decrees.

This message, says the poem, was no letter to a sweetheart, but a kiss given at death by soldiers to the Law which was their dearest love. The Law said that they should not surrender but fight to the last man.

Rebecca Paterson wonders if Emily regarded herself as dying in obedience to the moral law, in that she did not consummate a Lesbian relationship with Sue or Kate Anthon.
Poem 1555 F1585  ‘I groped for him before I knew’
This poem may describe Emily’s relationship with Judge Otis Lord. Before she met him, she felt a need for some nameless person like him. After she met him, the presence of the ‘foreshadowed Food’ made ‘other bounty sudden chaff.’ Others might sneer at their relationship, but Emily thinks that if ‘consecrated’ in marriage, it could be ‘the only Food that grows.’

Richard Sewall reports that both Sue and Abbie Farley, Lord’s niece, did pour scorn on the relationship of Emily and Judge Lord. Abbie thought the friendship ‘disgusting’ and said of Emily, ‘a little hussy…loose morals. She was crazy about men,’ and Sue warned Mabel Loomis Todd away from the ‘immorality’ of the Homestead where she had found Emily ‘in the arms of a man.’

Poem 1556 F1586  ‘Image of Light, Adieu’
Charles Anderson wonders whether in this poem Emily is saying ‘Adieu’ to her ‘Preceptor,’ Charles Wadsworth, who had recently died. Wadsworth, she says, had been for her an ‘Image of [the] Light [of God],’ and she thanks him for the ‘glimpses’ which he gave her of God’s presence. (Judith Farr points out that Webster’s dictionary gives ‘interview’ as coming from the French ‘entrevue’ = ‘a glimpse.’) His life was long, but, now that he is dead, it seems short. He taught her about the ‘whole’ of man’s journey. Alive at the same time as her, he taught her the ‘Cardinal’ truth of immortality. He imparted this truth, and departed.

Poem 1557 F1587  ‘Lives he in any other world’
When a loved one dies, Emily cannot then say for certain that he is alive ‘in any other world,’ although before circumstances required her to consider this possibility for someone close to her, her faith was clear and sure enough.

Emily may have her father in mind, or possibly her friend, James Clark, who had recently died. In a letter (L827) to Clark’s brother, written around the time of the poem, she says, ‘Are you certain there is another life? When overwhelmed to know, I fear that few are sure.’

Poem 1558 F1588  ‘Of Death I try to think like this’
Emily imagines that ‘the Well’ of the grave is like the Brook which she and her childhood friends knew. Just as they had to jump across the brook if they wanted the flower growing on the other side, so we must go through the waters of the grave to get to heaven. We may be dismayed by the loud roaring of these waters just as the roaring of the brook dismayed her playmates, but we must follow the lead of ‘the boldest’ friend and leap across to grasp the flower of heaven.

For Emily the flower of immortality is ‘purple’ in its majesty and ‘Hesperian’ in that the task of reaching it is like the labour laid on Hercules of fetching the golden apples of the Hesperides.

Judith Farr (G) gives a helpful reading of the meaning and details of this poem.

**Poem 1559 F1589** ‘Tried always and Condemned by thee’

Richard Sewall relates the legal terminology of this poem and its ‘notion of guilt, real or whimsical’ to Emily’s letter (L559) of 1878 to Judge Otis Lord beginning ‘My lovely Salem.’ In this letter, after confessing that she loves him, she asks, ‘Will you punish me?’ In the poem she would be playfully saying, ‘If you are going to condemn me for saying I love you, at least when I am dying give me a look which acknowledges our love, as that is what I am dying for.’

**Poem 1560 F1601** ‘To be forgot by thee’

Judith Farr suggests that this poem of paradoxes was originally sent to Sue. That Emily was even just once ‘raised from oblivion’ by Sue before being forgotten by her, is worth more than Emily’s being remembered by other friends who gave her less. After all, Sue logically cannot ‘forget’ and ‘decline’ Emily unless she had first ‘contemplated’ her. In line 9 any one of the three variants (‘signal,’ ‘royal,’ ‘hallowed’) is perhaps easier to understand than the final choice of ‘single.’

Thomas Johnson says that Emily later sent just the last three lines of this poem as an entire note to Helen Hunt Jackson. The lines accompanied a gift of flowers, and so ‘my’ in the last line was changed to ‘their.’ Also the dash at the end of the first line was changed to a question mark. In this context the lines may mean that, unlike Emily’s flowers, nondescript flowers would not even be especially noticed so as to be later forgotten.

1883 (Emily is fifty-three. She writes 30 poems)
Poem 1561 F1596  ‘No Brigadier throughout the Year’
Emily has already written about the Jay as Brigadier in poem 1177. This reprise was the last poem which she enclosed in her letters to Thomas Higginson.
Line 4 ‘shrill felicity’: the scolding, alarm screech of the Jay’s call.
Line 5 ‘censure us’: the Winds censure human beings as unable to stand up to them like the Jay does.
Lines 13-16: Emily feels that Heaven has insulted the sky by sending it too much snow to cope with, even though this ‘pompous frown’ of snow is meat and drink to the bold Jays.
Lines 22-4: Jane Donahue Eberwein comments that ‘the contentious blue jay directs Emily’s thoughts towards the almost inevitable cosmic question’ of whether there is a life after death for such birds.

Poem 1562 F1602  ‘Her Losses make our Gains ashamed’
This poem is a tribute to the novelist George Eliot. When Emily sent the poem as part of a letter (L814) to the publisher Thomas Niles, she had just been reading a life of George Eliot by Mathilde Blind. Emily had long admired George Eliot. In a letter (L389) of 1873 to her cousins she had said of her, ‘What do I think of *Middlemarch*? What do I think of glory?’ And after George Eliot’s death on 26 December 1880 Emily had written (L710) to her cousins, saying, ‘The look of the words [stating her death] as they lay in print I shall never forget. …The gift of belief which her greatness denied her, I trust she receives in the childhood of the kingdom of heaven. As childhood is earth’s confiding time, perhaps having no childhood, she lost her way to the early trust, and no later came (L710).’

Besides these ‘Losses’ of an unhappy childhood and absence of a belief in God, George Eliot’s ‘Pack’ had also been ‘empty’ of good looks (Henry James called her a ‘great horse-faced bluestocking’), and she had been ostracised by her female friends when, at the age of 34, she had become the lover of a man who was legally unable to divorce his wife. But Fate could not punish her by inflicting these deprivations upon her. Such was her innate, sweet goodness that punishments only increased it.

Emily also sent a copy of this poem to Sue, in which ‘Her’ and ‘She’ were changed to ‘His’ and ‘He’. Thomas Johnson suggests that Sue’s copy may have been an attempt to console her for the death on 15 May 1883 of her favourite ‘Cousin
Willie’ – William Hawley Dickinson. In a letter (L822) of early May Emily had told Mrs Holland that ‘Our Cousin, Willie Dickinson, is dying at Saratoga.’

Johnson prints the copy sent to Thomas Niles, Franklin the copy sent to Sue.

**Poem 1563 F1611** ‘By homely gift and hindered Words’
Thomas Johnson says that this was probably a poem sent to Sue and accompanied by a small gift. Emily tells Sue that the ‘homely gift’ and the few, halting words tell ‘Nothing’ of her love for Sue. And yet it is the ‘Nothing’ of such small remembrances which may renew the world of their love.

**Poem 1564 F1624** ‘Pass to thy Rendezvous of Light’
On 5 October 1883 Gilbert Dickinson, the eight-year-old son of Austin and Sue, died of typhoid fever, caused through his playing at a mud-hole. Vinnie wrote to friends that ‘Emily received a nervous shock the night Gilbert died & was alarmingly ill for weeks …she was devoted to Gilbert and was there the night of his death.’

But Emily was soon strong enough to send a letter (L868) of consolation to Sue. This letter, which Sewall calls ‘Perhaps the finest she ever wrote anybody,’ ends with poem 1564. Gilbert’s passing to immortality is without a pang, apart from the pang for those who are still on the journey.

Emily sent the same poem two years later to Thomas Higginson. It ended a letter (L972) thanking him for the gift of a new biography of George Eliot written by J.W. Cross, and in this context the poem refers to George Eliot.

**Poem 1565 F1666** ‘Some Arrows slay but whom they strike’
This poem ends a short note (L938) to Sue. It may have been sent on the first anniversary of Gilbert’s death. The sentences leading up to the poem read, ‘Twice, when I had Red Flowers out, Gilbert knocked, raised his sweet Hat, and asked if he might touch them – Yes, and take them too, I said, but Chivalry forbade him – Besides, he gathered Hearts, not Flowers.’ (As had Mrs Tuckerman in poem 1546.)

The poem says that an arrow usually kills the person it hits. But the arrow of death that struck Gilbert killed all his loved ones but not Gilbert. For he so clothed his escape from this life to death and eternal life that at his tomb there were no tracks for them to follow him.
Poem 1566 F1626  ‘Climbing to reach the costly Hearts’
This poem was also sent as a whole note (L870) to Sue in the days after Gilbert’s death. Emily says that Gilbert was growing to be as big as the hearts which were precious to him. Paradoxically it was Gilbert who had given to these hearts their preciousness. But, fearing punishment for not being good enough, he broke those hearts by running away ‘from Earth.’

Five months later Emily sent an amended version (L893) of the poem to Thomas Higginson’s three-year-old daughter Margaret, on the anniversary of the death of her infant sister Louisa. This version, arranged as prose, reads
‘In memory of your Little Sister
Who ‘meddled’ with the costly hearts to which she gave the worth and broke them – fearing punishment, she ran away from Earth.’

Poem 1567 F1623  ‘The Heart has many doors’
This poem was also sent as the whole of a note to Sue after Gilbert’s death. It was one of the condolence notes which Sue kept.

Emily is knocking on the door of Sue’s heart in case Sue wants to see her and says ‘Come in.’ She will not be sad if Sue does not want to see her. It is enough for Emily if there exists a supreme figure for her adoration.

Poem 1568 F1597  ‘To see her is a Picture’
Emily is writing (L802) to Mrs Holland, who has sent her photographs of her son and her two sons-in-law. Emily describes the effect the photographs have on her, and then says to Mrs Holland, ‘[And now] may I present your Portrait to your Sons in Law.’ Poem 1568 is that portrait. It is intoxicating to know her, but that ‘drunkenness’ is ‘as innocent as [the drunkenness we feel] in June.’ (See poem 214)

Emily also sent the poem about the same time in a letter (L809) to an unknown correspondent. In this letter the poem refers to the correspondent’s ‘little Girl,’ and lines 3 and 4 are changed to, ‘To know her, a disparagement of every other Boon.’

Poem 1569 F1598  ‘The Clock strikes one that just struck two’
(In Johnson’s edition ‘for’ in line 3 is a misprint for ‘from.’) In March 1883 Emily sent this poem in a letter (L805) to Mrs Holland, whose daughter Kate had got
married the previous September. Having said that Kate will know what it is like now to be married, Emily says ‘Please tell her from me [this poem].’

Just over a year later Emily sent the same poem to Samuel Bowles the younger, in a note (L902) congratulating him on his engagement. In this version ‘Vagabond’ in line 3 is changed to ‘Sorcerer.’

In the poem she seems to be saying that when two individuals come together in marriage the double ‘tick-tick’ of the Clock has been split into one ‘tick-tick.’ The Clock’s Pendulum has been wrecked by that ‘Sorcerer’ or ‘Vagabond’ from Genesis. ‘Sorcerer’ could refer to God who made Eve or to Eve herself. ‘Vagabond’ presumably refers to Eve wandering about the garden of Eden.

Poem 1570 F1600  ‘Forever honored be the Tree’
This poem ended the letter (L809) to an unknown recipient referred to in the note on poem 1568. It is introduced by the sentence, ‘Lest [your little Girl] miss her “Squirrels,” I send her the little Playmates I met in Yesterday’s Storm – the lovely first that came.’ Emily also sent the poem about the same time in a letter (L809) to Mrs Holland.

The poem describes how two Robins, who were in fact Angels in disguise, flew down to breakfast on an apple which had lasted out the winter on its tree.

Poem 1571 F1607  ‘How slow the Wind’
In the summer of 1883 Emily wrote (L830) to her friend Maria Whitney, saying that she had her ‘foot in a sling from a vicious sprain.’ By the time of this poem, sent in a note (L832) to Mrs Edward Tuckerman, her foot was very slowly getting better. The note begins with the words, ‘Sweet Foot, that comes when we call it! I can go but a Step a Century now,’ and ends with the poem written out as prose. The Wind and the Sea are as slow as her foot, and their feathers as late in arriving as her walking properly again.

Poem 1572 F1619  ‘We wear our sober Dresses when we die’
Emily sent this poem as a whole note to Mrs Edward Tuckerman in late August 1883. When we die, we wear sober grave clothes. When summer gives her last sigh, she is ‘frilled as for a Holiday’ with late flowers.
Poem 1573 F1603  ‘To the bright east she flies’

Emily and Vinnie had grown closer to their mother during her last illness of 1881-2. As Emily said in a letter (L792) to Mrs Holland, ‘We were never intimate Mother and Children while she was our mother – but Mines in the same Ground meet by tunnelling and when she became our Child, the Affection came.’ Their mother died on 14 November 1882. Emily wrote (L779) of it to Mrs Holland, ‘After a restless Night, complaining of great weariness, she was lifted earlier than usual from her Bed to her Chair, when a few quick breaths and a ‘Don’t leave me, Vinnie’ and her sweet being closed.’

In the following spring Emily wrote a letter (L815) to Maria Whitney about her mother’s death. The letter includes poem 1573. Emily leads up to it with the words, ‘All is faint indeed without our vanished mother, who achieved in sweetness what she lost in strength, though grief of wonder at her fate made the winter short, and each night I reach finds my lungs more breathless, seeking what it means.’

In the poem her mother flies like a bird to the east which is bright with the rising sun of the new life of eternity. She comes without any of the changes of clothes or ‘conveniences’ she habitually took with her on her travels. Those left behind live in a dream, trying to imagine where she is, remembering deeply what she was. They are still at home, but ‘homeless’ without her.

Poem 1574 F1605  ‘No ladder needs the bird but skies’

This poem ends a letter (L824) which Emily sent to Maria Whitney in May 1883. Miss Whitney took special interest in the Children’s Aid Society. Emily refers to this in the sentences which lead up to the poem. She says, ‘I can easily imagine your fondness for the little life so mysteriously committed to your care. The bird that asks our crumb has a plaintive distinction. I rejoice that it was possible for you to be with it, for I think that the early spiritual influences about a child are more hallowing than we know. The angel begins in the morning in every human life. How small the furniture of bliss! How scant the heavenly fabric!’

The poem says that just as a bird need no ladder for its wings and can sing without any teacher’s ‘grim baton,’ so children need few things for bliss. Indeed Jesus said that all that was needed was his invitation ‘Come unto me.’ This small thing can waft to the skies both cherubim and children.
Poem 1575 F1408  ‘The Bat is dun, with wrinkled Wings’
Emily finds the Bat a strange, out of the way creature like a fallowed field. He makes no sound to our ears, (though he actually finds his way about by listening to the echoes of his high-pitched squeaks bouncing off objects). The quaint half-umbrellas which are his wings cannot be seen in flight either. So, as he cannot be seen or heard, he is an interesting problem for the philosopher. It is by no means obvious whether he comes from some subtle region of heaven or from the world of vampires. Perhaps the best thing to do is to praise the ingenuity of his Creator and to believe that ‘his Eccentricities’ like the Bat are ‘beneficent.’ (Emily may have known that the bat does at least clear the air of insects.)

Poem 1576 F1627  ‘The Spirit lasts – but in what mode’
This poem is the whole of a letter (L872) of October 1883 to Charles Clark, apart from the opening sentences. They are, ‘These thoughts disquiet me, and the great friend is gone, who could solace them. Do they disturb you?’

The disquieting thought, which Charles Wadsworth, the ‘great friend,’ could have helped to deal with, is the difficulty of knowing in what form the spirit will exist after death. She describes the difficulty thus in the poem:

In this life below Spirit and Body are as indissoluble as the music in the violin and the arm of the violinist, or as the tides and the sea. If they are ‘estranged,’ neither can produce the same result on its own. (1-12).

When the Spirit suffers estrangement from its earthly body, does it then cease or does it still then ‘know’ and have consciousness, resuming at some date convenient for the two of them its union with its body now in some spiritual form? (13-16)

When our ‘Instinct’ pursues this question, it reaches only ‘Adamant’ and the reply that whether death is followed by ‘Adversity’ or Wild Prosperity,’ even before we were born, the gate was ‘shut so tight’ against any ‘rumour’ of the truth coming out to us in this life that even the push of so keen a Prognosticator as Emily cannot make the smallest dent on it (17-24).

The final 6 lines of this poem also conclude poem 1588, and the final 4 lines of this poem become lines 5-8 of poem 1584.

Poem 1577 F1621 ‘Morning is due to all’
Emily sent this poem as part of a short note (L864) to Samuel Bowles the younger congratulating him on his engagement to Miss Elizabeth Hoar. She signed it, ‘Reverently, E. Dickinson.’

The morning of birth and childhood comes to all. Some then have the night of a single life or a life of sorrow. But to a few comes the ‘Auroral light’ of a happy marriage which is a foretaste of heaven.

Poem 1578 F1614 ‘Blossoms will run away’
Emily sent these lines as the second half of a note (L840) to a neighbour, Mrs Nellie Sweetster, presumably with gifts of flowers and a cake. George Whicher, commenting on her later handwriting, says that although its vigour is lost in print, something of her ‘high-pitched, staccato’ style may be conveyed if the whole note is printed line for line as it stands:

Sweet Nellie,
   Blossoms,
and Cakes,
and Memory!
“Choose ye which
ye will serve”!
_I serve the
M e m o r y._
Blossoms will
Run away,
Cakes reign
But a Day,
But Memory
Like Melody,
Is pink
Eternally.
   Emily.

The quotation is adapted from _Joshua 24:15_: ‘Chose you this day whom ye will serve.’

**Poem 1579 F1615**  ‘It would not know if it were spurned’

Thomas Johnson says that this poem note signed “Aunt Emily” was evidently sent with a flower to one of Austin and Sue’s children. Emily may have hoped that Sue would read it as well, as its message seems more appropriate to her.

Emily says that it is safer for a flower to interfere in their house than it is for her, as a flower has no aspirations to enter the house and will not know if it is spurned
when it does so. Though might it not be sorry not to know that it is going on a
dangerous mission?

Poem 1580 F1595  ‘We shun it ere it comes’
Emily had more or less said in a note (L786) to Professor Joseph Chickering, a family
friend, that he might call upon her, but, when he did so, she panicked at the thought of
receiving a visitor and would not see him. She then sent her excuses to him in a short
note (L798) which ended with this poem. The note begins, ‘I had hoped to see you,
but have no grace to talk, and my own Words so chill and burn me, that the
temperature of other Minds is too new an Awe.’

The poem explains that her attitude towards Professor Chickering is much like
her attitude towards Heaven. Before she meets with either, she shuns the thought of it
as it brings too much Joy. So she keeps asking for a delay. But she does not want to
lose the chance of a meeting altogether, so she has to ‘beguile [them] more and more’
lest the chance disappears completely. The truth is that both her suitors, Heaven and
Professor Chickering, are capable of causing her dismay.

Poem 1581 F1665  ‘The farthest Thunder that I heard’
This poem records a key experience in Emily’s life. She can only describe it as a ‘Bolt
of Lightning’ followed by a ‘Thunder’ which was as close to her as possible and
whose effect on her ‘rumbles still.’ Happy people can repay their debt to the oxygen
that keeps them alive [by doing something worthwhile], but the ‘Electricity’ of
Emily’s experience is beyond repayment, for the rest of her life has been adorned by it
and ‘every clamour bright’ is bound up with its ‘waylaying light.’ Indeed the
‘reverberation’ [of joy in her life] is explained when she quietly thinks back to the
‘Crash without a Sound’ of the thunder of that experience.

As Emily later sent the first four lines of this poem in a note (L914) to Sue
preceded by the sentence, ‘Tell the Susan who never forgets to be subtle, every Spark
is numbered,’ it is possible that the experience being described is that of meeting and
falling in love with Sue, with lines 8-9 recalling lines 7-8 of poem 299. On this
reading Emily is saying in effect to Sue, ‘I may not get the missiles of your love in
‘torrid Noons’ any more, but I remember ‘every Spark’ of that initial Lightning with
its Thunder that ‘rumbles still.’
Charles Anderson on the other hand thinks the experience was of the grace of God and the ‘waylaying light’ to be the same as that which blinded St Paul on the way to Damascus (Acts 22:6-11). Or the Lightning might refer to that key internal experience which led her to become a poet.

Lines 15-16, written as prose, are later used to describe summer and autumn in a letter (L937) to Mrs Holland.

Poem 1582 F1610  ‘Where Roses would not dare to go’
Although there is no evidence that these lines were sent to Sue or intended for her, their ‘Roses’ are reminiscent of the ‘gallant little flower’ of poem 1579. It is too risky for Emily to visit Sue herself until she has sent her the ‘Crimson Scouts’ of some roses to see how the land lies there.

Poem 1583 F1612  ‘Witchcraft was hung, in History’
It is true that History records that in New England in the seventeenth century witches were put to death, but Emily’s story is that she can find ‘all the Witchcraft’ needed for her poems in the things which are ‘around [her] every Day.’ Emily uses this metaphor in other poems. In line 29 of poem 593 she referred to the ‘Tomes of solid witchcraft’ which Elizabeth Barrett Browning had written, and in poem 1708 the witchcraft of poetry is said to be coeval with the breath of life itself.

Helen McNeil points out that the people of Amherst may have regarded the silent and invisible Emily who kept herself to herself as something of a witch in the normal sense of the word.

Poem 1584 F1625  ‘Expanse cannot be lost’
This poem concludes a letter (L871) of consolation written to Sue shortly after the death of her son, Gilbert. Emily writes that she and Sue are, ‘Moving on in the Dark like Loaded Boats at Night, though there is no Course, there is Boundlessness.’ Then in the poem, picking up the word ‘Boundlessness,’ she claims that at least the ‘Expanse’ of the universe cannot be lost. God does not send us never-ending Joy, but he does decree that the infinity of immortality awaits us, even if we cannot gain the slightest hint in this life of what it might be like.

In the second stanza Emily addresses Gilbert. He is not alone, for his loved ones follow him in their imaginations even though, as in poem 1564, they are proceeding
more slowly than him to the ‘Tracts of Sheen’ which are Heaven. They, ‘the Tent,’
are still listening even though Gilbert, ‘the Troops,’ has departed.

Lines 5-8 of this poem also appear as the last lines of poems 1576 and 1588, with
‘Beam’ in line 6 changed to ‘Mind.’

**Poem 1585 F1556**  ‘The Bird her punctual music brings’
The Bird never takes a holiday from its task of bringing the ‘Heavenly Grace’ to the
‘Human Heart’ each morning. But, then, it may not regard its ‘Magic’-making as work.

Emily may also be implying that poets are the same. They never have a respite
from making the Magic of their poems – except that this high-powered activity could
be seen as an ‘electric Rest’ from the mundane tasks of housework.

**Poem 1586 F1617**  ‘To her derided Home’
For the Weed Ignorance is Bliss. She does not know that she is derided and fameless,
and goes by the shameful name of ‘Weed,’ and so, at summer’s end, can depart
without a pang.

But just as the Weed needs only one Code of Bliss, so do we human beings. For
Jesus’ invitation ‘Come unto me’ is a sufficient Code on its own to waft us to the
skies as it does the Seraphim.

The last 4 lines of this poem are the same as the last 4 lines of poem 1574, with
‘Implements’ changed to ‘Codes,’ ‘says’ to ‘cites,’ and ‘cherubim’ to ‘Seraphim.’

**Poem 1587 F1593**  ‘He ate and drank the precious Words’
Emily claims that reading is a spiritual experience, like eating the bread and drinking
the wine at the Eucharist, and enables the reader to forget poverty and mortality.

This is the last of four major poems about books and reading, the other three
being poems 371, 604 and 1263.

**Poem 1588 F1616**  ‘This Me – that walks and works – must die’
That we die is certain. But there is absolutely no way of finding out whether that
death is ‘Adversity’ or ‘wild prosperity.’
The last 6 lines of this poem are the same as the last 6 lines of poem 1576, with ‘sown’ being changed to ‘born.’ The last 4 lines are the same as lines 5-8 of poem 1584, with ‘Beam was sown’ changed to ‘mind was born.’

Poem 1589 F1592  ‘Cosmopolites without a plea’
In October 1882 Sue was about to go to a niece’s wedding in Michigan. This poem was written on the verso of a sheet of paper containing a draft of a note sent to Sue just before she went. And as Sue had always been keen to get out of Amherst and go on her travels, it looks as though she is one of these ‘Cosmopolites’ who, without asking if it is all right, turn up on doorsteps ‘in every land’ and expect royal treatment from whatever their hostess has on hand. They enjoy being on the move for its own sake, and believe that any door they knock on will be opened for them. (Matthew 7:7)

Emily herself was the opposite of a Cosmopolite, and would have agreed with a fellow New Englander, Abigail Adams, who after a few rough voyages across the Atlantic supporting her husband John on his diplomatic missions, recorded in her diary that she would be quite content to learn what more there was to know of the world from the pages of books.

Poem 1590 F1604  ‘Not at Home to Callers’
Emily sent these lines in the spring of 1883 to eight-year-old Gilbert, who may have smiled at this picture of the tree being ‘not at Home’ until she was suitably clad in her April bonnet. ‘Jacket’ is a variant reading for ‘Bonnet.’

Poem 1591 F1620  ‘The Bobolink is gone’
The unfinished worksheet draft of this poem allows alternative readings of the second half of the poem. In Johnson it reads:

He boldly interrupted that overflowing Day
When supplicating mercy
In a portentous way
He swung upon the Decalogue
And shouted let us pray –

Franklin’s version is:
He gaily interrupted that overflowing Day
When opening the Sabbath in their afflictive Way
He bowed to Heaven instead of Earth
And shouted Let us pray –

As in poem 324 Emily is keeping the Sabbath ‘staying at home,’ and as before she has a ‘Bobolink for a Chorister.’ But this time the Bobolink has been a Rowdy and a nuisance. He has interrupted the ‘afflictive Way’ of worship of ‘the Presbyterian Birds’ by swinging on the Decalogue instead of keeping reverently still and by shouting ‘Let us pray.’ In Franklin’s version he has also bowed mockingly to heaven instead of humbly to earth.

Charles Anderson comments that the poem is ‘part of her playful satire upon a church that needed revitalising. By the end of her life she had come a long way from the Presbyterian (or, rather, Congregational) birds down at the First Parish Meeting House.’

Poem 1592 F1613  ‘The Lassitudes of Contemplation’
We need inactive periods of Contemplation to ‘beget [the new] force’ of spirit which will enable us to translate our dreams into action. Such periods are a ‘mettle fair.’ The author Ronald Blythe spends half an hour each morning drinking his tea and staring out of the window (in summer) before beginning to write.

Poem 1593 F1618  ‘There came a Wind like a Bugle’
As in poem 1397, Emily’s world survives a tempest. She says that the Wind, like an angelic trumpet, had ominously signalled a terrific storm. People shut their houses. The ‘Doom’ of lightning passed in an instant with the stealth of an Indian and the speed of electricity. But then came the storm and those alive that day looked upon ‘panting’ Trees and Fences that had apparently ‘run away’ and rivers of water where houses had been. The church bell, set tolling by the swaying steeple, told of the storm that was flying over them. But the World survived even this storm.

The last three lines can be easily applied to the destructive storms of our personal experience.

Poem 1594 F1628  ‘Immured in Heaven!’
Thomas Johnson says that this poem was probably sent to Sue soon after Gilbert’s death on 5 October 1883. In poem 1601, written about the same time, Emily says that we are ‘Immured the whole of Life/within a magic Prison.’ In this poem she imagines Gilbert immured in a similar cell but in heaven, and she wishes that ‘every Bondage’ on earth could be like that which has carried Gilbert, the ‘sweetest of the Universe,’ away to the rapture of heaven.

1884  (Emily is fifty-four. She writes 42 poems)

Poem 1595 F1638  ‘Declaming waters none may dread’
This poem concludes a short note (L910) to Sue. The note begins, ‘Wish I had something vital for Susan, but Susan feeds herself – Banquets have no Seed, or Beggars would sow them.’ Then follows the poem.

   Emily is perhaps saying that Susan does not want Emily’s food any longer. If there was a seed which would produce the banquet of a loving relationship between Emily and Sue, Emily, the beggar, would sow it. If Sue would only communicate with her, she would not feel so much dread. But Sue’s Waters are still and silent, because, fatally for Emily, they are full of other concerns which do not include her.

Poem 1596 F1639  ‘Few, yet enough’
Thomas Johnson says that these lines were a note sent to Sue. Emily seems to say:
A few loved ones are enough. In fact, just one reciprocating lover is enough. Does not everybody, including you and me, have the right to belong ‘to that ethereal throng?’
Our love can be ‘stealthy.’ Other people do not need to know.

Poem 1597 F1631  ‘Tis not the swaying frame we miss’
Thomas Johnson suggests that this poem, sent to Sue, was written on the death of Judge Otis Lord on 13 March 1884. It is not so much the ‘outer’ man that Emily and his friends miss, but his ‘steadfast Heart.’ Had he lived ‘a thousand years,’ the beats of his heart would have been for love alone. But now the ‘fervour’ of that love has carried him ‘through the Tomb’ to Heaven. At least his mourners, as yet ‘denied [that] privilege,’ presume that this is so, even if for them now it is cold comfort.

   Emily had likewise stressed the ‘inner’ person in her appreciations of Charles Wadsworth in poem 1556 and of Helen Hunt Jackson in poem 1568.
Poem 1598 F1640  ‘Who is it seeks my Pillow Nights’
Thomas Johnson suggests that, as the MS of this poem is addressed “Susan,” Emily may be referring to some particular offence of commission or omission with regard to Sue, but the poem perhaps refers to more general feelings of guilt for sins of the past which come to Emily as she lies on her pillow. Her Conscience, formed in ‘Childhood,’ asks her “Did you [do that awful thing]” or “Did you not [do that which you should have done],” and then reminds her of the verse in Revelation which says that evil people of various kinds ‘shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.’ (Revelation 21:8)

Poem 1599 F1641  ‘Though the great Waters sleep’
About a year after the death of Judge Otis Lord Emily sent a copy of this poem to his kinsman, Benjamin Kimball. Somewhat earlier she sent another copy of it to Sue, in a letter (L908) expressing her glad amazement at the news that a Memoir of Samuel Bowles was about to be published. She leads up to the poem with these sentences about Bowles, ‘It seems like a Memoir of the Sun, when the Noon is gone – You remember his swift way of wringing and flinging away a Theme, and others picking it up and gazing bewildered after him, and the prance that crossed his Eye at such times was unrepeatable (L908).’

In this poem at least the deaths of two of her dearest men renew her faith in God. ‘The great Waters’ may appear to sleep, but they have within them the Deep Waters which we cross to get to Heaven. The last three lines are as positive as Emily’s remark: ‘This life is so good, that it seems impossible for it to be wholly interrupted by death.’

Richard Sewall says of Emily’s relationships with Samuel Bowles and Judge Lord that ‘what she seems to have cherished chiefly in both of them was their vitality, their range of responsiveness, and their extraordinary intellectual vigour.’

‘Poem 1600 F1663  ‘Upon his saddle sprung a Bird’
On 24 June 1884 Mrs Helen Hunt Jackson fell downstairs and badly broke her leg. In early September Emily wrote her a note (L937) of sympathy, saying, ‘I shall watch your passage from Crutch to Cane with jealous affection. From there to your Wings is
but a stride – as was said of the convalescing Bird.’ Then Emily quoted the last 4 lines of poem 1600.

The bird in this poem is completely better and sings his thanks to the Universe. In line 3 ‘without a Fare’ perhaps means that the bird selected a fence which did not have any competing bird resting on it as a passenger.

After the poem Emily reveals to Mrs Jackson that she too has been ill and has taken her summer ‘in a Chair, though from “Nervous prostration,” not [from] fracture.’ While making a cake, she had fainted for the first time in her life and grew very sick, the doctor calling it ‘revenge of the nerves.’ (L907) This may have been the first indication of the illness which was to kill her two years later.

Poem 1601 F1675 ‘Of God we ask one favour’
This poem concludes another letter (L976) to Mrs Helen Hunt Jackson. It is preceded by the sentence, ‘Knew I how to pray, to intercede for your Foot were intuitive, but I am a Pagan.’ In the poem she explains in what way she is a pagan.

We are immured within the prison of this life. So we must have committed a crime. And, although, like the prisoner in Kafka’s novel The Trial we do not know what the crime is, we feel guilty and ask God to forgive us for this unknown crime. Our prison is indeed a ‘magic’ one and full of delight and ecstasy, but we even feel guilty about that and so ‘reprimand the Happiness’ of this life as somehow competing with the happiness that should only be ours in heaven. If that is so, God should not have made our prison so magical.

Poem 1602 F1664 ‘Pursuing you in your transitions’
The letter (L937) to Mrs Jackson of September 1884 which included poem 1600 about ‘the convalescing Bird’ ends with this poem. It is preceded by the sentence, ‘The Summer has been wide and deep, and a deeper Autumn is but the Gleam concomitant of that waylaying Light.’

This ‘waylaying Light’ of Summer is perhaps the light which is a symbol or a foretaste of the light of Heaven. This light has pursued Mrs Jackson in her ‘transitions’ (perhaps from illness to health), telling her that her ultimate destiny is that she will be required to be in Heaven with its different ‘Motes’ of light and different stories. In our experience of the ‘Prism’ of the light of the earthly summer
we have never actually ‘held the Hues’ of Heaven in our hand, but merely heard the distant murmur of their play.

**Poem 1603 F1662**  ‘The going from a world we know’

Nearly a year after Gilbert’s death Emily ends a letter (L907) to her cousins with this poem, preceded by the words: ‘The little boy we laid away never fluctuates, and his dim society is companion still. But it is growing damp and I must go in. Memory’s fog is rising.’

She is sure that Gilbert has gone to another world, but she has no idea what it is like, and whether the view from the hill of death ‘will compensate/for climbing it alone.’ As she had said in a letter (L873) telling Mrs Holland how Gilbert had died, “Open the Door, open the Door, they are waiting for me,” was Gilbert’s sweet command in delirium. *Who* were waiting for him, all we possess we would give to know.’

**Poem 1604 F1643**  ‘We send the Wave to find the Wave’

This poem is the whole of a letter (L934) to Emily’s cousins apart from the introductory sentence, ‘A Tone from the old Bells, perhaps might wake the Children.’ In other words, Emily is sending her cousins this poem as a reminder that they have not written to her recently.

She sends the Wave of her love in a letter, hoping for the swash of the Wave of a letter back. She then humorously supposes that her ‘Messenger’ will be so ‘enamoured’ of his task that he will ‘forget’ to bring a letter back. If that is so, Emily will wisely conclude that the best time to stop the correspondence is when she has sent her letter. But this is a vain conclusion, as she will always want to keep writing to her cousins, whether they write back or not.

**Poem 1605 F1634**  ‘Each that we lose takes part of us’

This poem comes in a letter (L891) in which Emily thanks her cousins for their note of sympathy after the death of Judge Lord. The letter begins with the words, ‘Thank you, dears, for the sympathy. I hardly dare to know that I have lost another friend, but anguish finds it out (L891).’ The poem then follows.
A part of us is taken away by the death of each of our loved ones until only ‘a crescent’ of ourselves is left – and that too will be summoned by the tides of death ‘some turbid night.’

In the last eleven years of her life Emily lost to death:

16 June 1874 her father
16 January 1878 Samuel Bowles
1 April 1882 Charles Wadsworth
14 November 1882 her mother
5 October 1883 Gilbert
13 March 1884 Judge Otis Lord
12 August 1885 Mrs Helen Hunt Jackson.

Poem 1606 F1632 ‘Quite empty, quite at rest’
This poem comes in a letter (L890) to Mrs Holland which tells her of Judge Lord’s death. The letter begins, ‘When I tell my sweet Mrs Holland that I have lost another friend, she will not wonder I do not write, but that I raise my Heart to a drooping syllable – Dear Mr Lord has left us.’

Emily with her losses seems to equate herself to a Robin whose nest is empty of its nestlings. The Robin does not know where her nestlings are but she heads for the ‘Springs’ where it is at least ‘rumoured’ her nestlings might be. All she wants is her lost ones.

Poem 1607 F1633 ‘Within that little Hive’
This same letter (L890) of Emily to Mrs Holland which begins with the news of Judge Lord’s death ends with a reference to a recent meeting in Northampton between her sister Vinnie and Mrs Holland. It seems as though Vinnie had given some medicine including honey at bedtime to Mrs Holland’s grandchild. Emily’s comment on the incident is poem 1607:

The baby is a ‘little Hive’ with such hints of future honey as to make her reality seem a dream. At the same time her existence makes dreams a reality.

Poem 1608 F1680 ‘The ecstasy to guess’
These lines conclude a short note (L995) to unidentified ‘Sweet friends’ which begins with the words, ‘I send a message by a Mouth that cannot speak.’ Thomas Johnson
wonders whether these words imply that the note was written during Emily’s last illness.

As the note ends ‘With love’ with no signature added, the poem perhaps says that her friends’ ‘ecstasy to guess’ who sent the note would be a ‘bliss’ acknowledgeable by a receipt if some divine ‘grace’ could talk and tell them who it was that sent it.

Poem 1609 F1644  ‘Sunset that screens, reveals’
This quatrain was sent to Mrs Mabel Loomis Todd. She had moved to Amherst in 1881 when her husband, David Peck Todd, had been appointed Director of the Observatory of Astronomy and Navigation at Amherst College. Since then, she and Austin Dickinson had fallen in love. Later on in 1890 Mrs Todd together with Thomas Higginson was to be responsible for the first publication of some of Emily’s poems.

The poem, like such poems as 1602, claims that the study of this world is also a clue to the nature of the next. Sunsets may stop us seeing the world distinctly, but what we do see is enhanced by its suggestions of disturbing violet-purple coloured ‘Amethyst’ and ‘Moats of Mystery.’

Poem 1610 F1645  ‘Morning that comes but once’
This quatrain was also sent to Mrs Todd. If only an ordinary Morning could come again as the Morning of eternal life, this life would suddenly seem more precious.

Poem 1611 F1677  ‘Their dappled importunity’
These lines were also sent to Mrs Todd. Maybe Emily is asking her to forgive ‘the dappled importunity’ of Emily sending her poems. She asks her to consider as unimportant or to disregard altogether such ‘importunity,’ seeing that the censure of Etiquette is irrelevant to any relationship of bliss.

Poem 1612 F1646  ‘The Auctioneer of Parting’
Mrs Todd now receives one of the bleakest poems that Emily ever wrote. She seems to centre it on that moment in the Crucifixion of Jesus when he cries aloud to his Father, ‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’ (Matthew 27:46). For Jesus on the cross is said to be ‘The Auctioneer of Parting,’ bringing his hammer down on
the block of the cross and shouting “'Going, going, gone” precisely for gone-ness. What he is selling on the cross is ‘the Wilderness’ of isolation and separation.

What does it cost to buy this Despair? It costs one ‘human Heart,’ if one person renounces his love for another, or two ‘human Hearts’ if the renunciation is mutual.

Charles Anderson gives a detailed reading of this poem.

**Poem 1613 F1661** ‘Not sickness stains the Brave’

This poem concludes a short note (L906) sent to Mrs Todd. It begins with the words, ‘How martial the Apology of Nature! We die, said the Deathless of Thermopylae, in obedience to Law.’

Just as the Spartans at Thermopylae died in obedience to their Law (see poem 1554 and note), so in autumn Nature gives a similar ‘martial’ apology for her having to die in obedience to Law. The changing colours of autumn are not the stain of sickness or caused by any weapon. Nor do they doubt but what they will come again. They just know that it is time to adjourn.

**Poem 1614 F1667** ‘Parting with Thee reluctantly’

This poem begins a short note (L946) to Mr and Mrs E. J. Loomis, the parents of Mrs Mabel Loomis Todd, sent to them when they were leaving Amherst after a visit in the autumn of 1884. The note ends with the words, ‘In all the circumference of Expression, those guileless words of Adam and Eve never were surpassed, “I was afraid and hid Myself.” (Genesis 3:10)

It looks as though Emily was afraid to meet Mrs Todd’s parents. So she parts with them ‘reluctantly’ because they ‘have never met.’ She apologises by admitting that her Heart is ‘sometimes a Foreigner’ to hospitality, and that it only now ‘remembers [it] forgot’ to invite them.

**Poem 1615 F1669** ‘Oh what a Grace is this’

This poem ends a somewhat longer note (L953) to Mr and Mrs Loomis, written in November 1884. The letter begins, ‘The atmospheric acquaintance so recently and delightfully made, is not, I trust, ephemeral, but absolute as Ether, as the delicate emblem just received tenderly implies. Thank you for the Beauty – Thank you too for Boundlessness – that rarely given, but choicest gift.’
In the poem Emily exclaims on the ‘Grace’ and ‘Majesties of Peace’ in her relationship with the Loomises. Although she only allows them an ‘atmospheric acquaintance’ (i.e. they were in the same house or area but not actually ‘bounded’ together in the same room) the Loomises respond to this ‘breathing [of] the fine’ by sending her the ‘delicate emblem’ of a small gift, thus showing that the right procedures of social behaviour ‘without Diminuet Proceed.’

**Poem 1616 F1571**  ‘Who abdicated ambush’

See the note on poem 1525 F1571.

**Poem 1617 F1629**  ‘To try to speak, and miss the way’

This poem is the whole of a note which Emily sent to Mrs Edward Tuckerman in January 1884, apart from ‘Dear Friend’ at the beginning and ‘Emily, with love’ at the end. In line 8 of the original draft of the poem ‘discreetly called’ is a variant for ‘whose title is.’

Perhaps Mrs Tuckerman called on a New Year visit. Emily tried to see her, but could not manage it. This note would then be Emily’s apology, saying in effect: ‘I tried to speak with you, but missed the way, and now in tears I ask myself why I behaved like this. My Gratitude for your calling is now reduced to wearing these few but sweet tatters. If my Gratitude had a better Coat to wear, that might help him at least to conceal if not to subjugate my Mutineer soul, which makes me refuse to see people.’

**Poem 1618 F1637**  ‘There are two Mays’

Emily sent a copy of this poem with a basket of mayflowers to the wife of George S. Dickerman, who had been pastor of the First Congregational Church since the previous June of 1883.

Perhaps Mrs Dickerman has asked if she might call on Emily. Emily replies, ‘Well, there are two Mays (the ‘May’ we are now in and the ‘I May’ be able to see you). Then comes the ‘I Must’ see you. And then the ‘I shall’ see you, I am determined to see you. But it will require a massive compromise and change of attitude on my part before I am able to say ‘I will’ definitely see you.

**Poem 1619 F1647**  ‘Not knowing when the Dawn will come’
This poem was written in 1884. In the early spring of 1886 she wrote a letter (L1042) to Thomas Higginson to tell him of the death of Mrs Helen Hunt Jackson the previous August, and in the letter she quoted this poem, with ‘Dawn’ in the first line changed to ‘herself.’

In the 1884 version the ‘Dawn’ is perhaps primarily the dawn of new life after death. In the 1886 version Emily is perhaps saying that she never knows when thoughts or dreams or even visitations of Mrs Jackson will come.

Poem 1620 F1636 ‘Circumference thou Bride of Awe’
A month after she wrote down this poem, she sent a copy of it in a letter to her girlhood friend, Daniel Chester French, a sculptor, to celebrate the unveiling of his statue of John Harvard in Cambridge (L898). The poem is introduced by the lines, ‘We learn with delight of the recent acquisition to your fame, and hasten to congratulate you on an honour so reverently won. Success is dust, but an aim forever touched with dew. God keep you fundamental.’ Then follows the poem, which in the letter has this punctuation added to the first two lines:

Circumference, thou bride
Of awe, - possessing, thou

‘Circumference’ is perhaps the artistic achievement which for the artist is indeed ‘the Bride of Awe.’ Amazingly this artistic achievement can be won by any dedicated artist who is bold enough to covet it.

Richard Sewall points out that the writing of the poem can be dated to 2 March 1884, eleven days before the death of Judge Lord, and suggests that in this original version ‘Circumference’ may refer to Lord’s lifetime achievements or even to Emily’s own achievement in winning his love.

Poem 1621 F1648 ‘A Flower will not trouble her, it has so small a Foot’
Presumably these lines accompanied the gift of a flower to a very young girl. A flower is the right gift for her as it has so small a foot that it is hardly there. And yet the girl has the smallest foot of anyone in her family – but it is very big compared with that of a flower.
Poem 1622 F1599  ‘A Sloop of Amber slips away’
Thomas Johnson says that this poem was intended for Professor Edward Tuckerman though never sent, and headed with the words, ‘Please accept a Sunset.’

This poem is reminiscent of the sunset described in poem 266 with its ‘Banks of Yellow Sea’ and its ‘Merchantmen.’ Here a piece of yellow sky is a ‘Sloop’ which moves and wrecks, though peacefully, a cloud which had seemed like a purple sailor, ecstatically enjoying his part in the wonderful sunset.

Poem 1623 F1642  ‘A World made penniless by that departure’
Richard Sewall says that the finished draft of this poem was later discarded in favour of poem 1599, but that, like poem 1599, this poem probably referred to the death of Judge Otis Lord.

Left ‘penniless’ by Lord’s death, Emily and his friends can now only beg and that only for ‘minor fabrics,’ as there will never be another Lord. This is a poor state of affairs, with ‘The Gods but Dregs.’ What they need but cannot have is the ‘sustenance’ for the spirit such as Lord supplied.

Poem 1624 F1668  ‘Apparently with no surprise’
Emily is bitter about what she sees in Nature: the ‘blonde Assassin’ which is the frost accidentally and playfully beheading an unsurprised happy flower, while the ‘Sun proceeds unmoved’ and God approves.

The bitterness is only alleviated by the first word of the poem, ‘Apparently.’ There may be some deeper meaning behind the assassination. If there is, Emily is blind to it in this poem.

Charles Anderson gives a detailed, perceptive reading of this poem.

Poem 1625 F1649  ‘Back from the cordial Grave I drag thee’
Emily is desperate to save someone from death, however ‘cordial’ the prospect of the Grave may be to him. She cries out that incomprehensible death shall not take him in its arms.

Poem 1626 F1594  ‘No Life can pompless pass away’
Emily is perhaps watching the funeral procession of an Amherst dignitary and comments that even the ‘lowliest career’ has the pomp and pageant of a funeral (see
poem 98). Mysterious death is so cordial and his grave clothes so hospitable that he
denies no one entrance to his Miracle (see poems 583 and 970).

For the first line Johnson prints the fair copy order of the words, Franklin the
order of the worksheet draft.

**Poem 1627 F1650** ‘The pedigree of Honey’

There are two versions of this poem, a longer one of 8 lines and a shorter one of 4
lines. Johnson prints both, Franklin only the shorter.

The bee and the butterfly are not concerned with the ‘class’ of the flowers upon
which they alight, but only with having the ‘right of way’ to the Tripoli of those
flowers. Indeed the common clover always seems an aristocrat to the bee.

Emily also uses the word ‘pedigree’ in poem 1708.

**Poem 1628 F1630** ‘A Drunkard cannot meet a Cork’

A cork reminds the drunkard of drink, a fly in January reminds Emily of the
intoxication of summer (see poem 214). Both kinds of intoxication require an
appreciative drinker as well as the drink, just as the Bumble Bee enjoys the
intoxication of collecting honey.

**Poem 1629 F1635** ‘Arrows enamoured of his Heart’

Richard Sewall sees this poem as almost certainly a picture of Judge Otis Lord.
Arrows shot at his heart fell in love with it and ceased to give pain, as did venomous
words which he ‘mistook for Balms.’

Sewall reads the variant for the last line of ‘Renounced their character.’ The
poem is also reminiscent of the last two lines of poem 1562 on George Eliot.

**Poem 1630 F1651** ‘As from the earth the light Balloon’

Just as the balloon longs for the Ascension for which it was made, so does the Spirit,
indignant that it has been imprisoned for so long in the Dust of the body.

**Poem 1631 F1652** ‘Oh Future! Thou secreted peace’

The future may be a peace stored up for us or a woe undermining our lives. Is there no
‘route of grace’ which will avoid it? Have not wise men devised a ‘circuit’ which will
‘balk [it of its] Prey’?
Poem 1632 F1653 ‘So give me back to Death’
Emily perhaps imagines herself speaking to the dead Otis Lord. She ‘died’ when he
died, and now, having gone on living for a time, she asks to be given back to death.
She never feared it, except that it would deprive her of him if he died first, and if she
were now in her ‘own Grave’ of mourning, she would be at last able to ‘estimate [the]
size’ of death.
Emily wrote ‘surmise’ as a variant for the last word of the poem.

Poem 1633 F1654 ‘Still own thee – still thou art’
Emily perhaps wrote this poem during Judge Lord’s last illness, while he was slipping
to his Grave from which no report comes back. The question she will clutch is
presumably the one which she asked in a letter (L752a) of the Springfield Minister,
Washington Gladden, when Lord first fell ill, namely ‘Is immortality true?’ The
‘recalless sea’ of the last line recalls the ‘great Waters’ of the first line of poem 1599.

Poem 1634 F1655 ‘Talk not to me of Summer Trees’
Thomas Johnson says that the letters of this poem are roughly formed as though the
writer were lying in bed, and so Emily may be physically unable to see the ‘Summer
Trees.’ But she does not need them. Her mind is a resting place for spiritual ‘Birds’ or
thoughts, and winds pass through it on their way to heaven, calling ‘the least of us/to
[its] undepicted Realms.’
In the last line ‘unreported’ is a variant for ‘undepicted,’ and the wind was ‘like a
Bugle’ in the first line of poem 1593.

Poem 1635 F1670 ‘The Jay his Castanet has struck’
It seems to be late autumn. The shrill, repetitive, castanet-like cry of the jay
announces the end of ‘swarthy days’ and the onset of winter. Any one who ignores his
warning to put on muff or tippet is taking a risk with nature. The Lotus or food for the
jay at this time of the year is the chestnut. Even the cricket drops a gloomy line to say
he is signing off for the time being.

Poem 1636 F1656 ‘The Sun in reining to the West’
‘Whiffletree’ is an American word for the wooden structure that joins the cart to the horse. Emily seems to say that the Sun makes even less noise than the ‘Cart of man in road below,’ as at sunset it reins in its vehicle and guides round its amethyst whiffletree.

Line 3 of poem 1609 mentions the ‘amethyst’ of sunset.

1885  (Emily is fifty-five. She writes 10 poems)

Poem 1637 F1674  ‘Is it too late to touch you, Dear?’
Emily sent this poem as a note (L975) to Mrs Mary Crowell, a childhood friend, who was about to go on a trip to Europe with her husband. Emily wonders whether the note will reach her in time, as she only just heard of her intended departure. But she sends Mrs Crowell her love for all her travels.

Then, after the poem, she writes the words, ‘I give his Angels charge.’

Poem 1638 F1673  ‘Go they great way!’
Eleven months after the death of Judge Otis Lord on 13 March 1884 Emily wrote her first letter (L968) to Benjamin Kimball, the executor of Lord’s estate. The letter begins, ‘To take the hand of my friend’s friend, even apparitionally, is a hallowed pleasure. I think you told me you were his kinsman. I was only his friend.’ At the end of the letter this poem is introduced by the words, ‘On my way to my sleep, last night, I paused at [his] Portrait. Had I not loved it, I had feared it, the Face had such ascension.’

The poem addresses her beloved Lord. He is now a star in heaven, since heaven’s stars are like ‘Asterisks’ pointing to human lives existing after death.

In poems 1525 and 1616 Samuel Bowles likewise had an asterisk against his name.

Poem 1639 F1672  ‘A letter is a joy of Earth’
Thomas Johnson says that this couplet was part of a letter (L960) sent by Emily on 2 January 1885 to Mr and Mrs E. J. Loomis to thank them for a Christmas card. The couplet is introduced by the sentence, ‘And what is Ecstasy but Affection and what is Affection but the Germ of the little Note?’
A letter is a joy because it is prompted by affection. The Gods have no need to write letters and so do not know this joy. As Emily in her lifetime sent some 10,000 letters of which only about a tenth survive, her affection was boundless.

Poem 1640 F1671 ‘Take all away from me, but leave me Ecstasy’
Unlike poem 299 to Sue which began ‘Your riches taught me poverty,’ this poem shows Emily possessing the real riches of ‘Ecstasy,’ while the apparently wealthy live in ‘abject poverty.’

In the actual poem Emily does not explain the reason for her Ecstasy, and indeed she used the poem three times in her correspondence with the cause of the Ecstasy being different each time.

In the letter (L960) thanking the Loomises for their Christmas card (see note on poem 1639) the ecstasy is caused by their card being a sign of affection, for the poem is introduced by the line, ‘I thought as I saw the exultant Face [of Vinnie bringing in the mail] and the uplifted Letter [which was your card]…..’

In a later letter (L1014) to Samuel Bowles the younger the ecstasy poem refers to the ecstasy caused by flowers, for the poem, now written in prose, is introduced by the sentence, ‘Had I not known I was not asleep, I should have feared I dreamed, so blissful was their beauty, but Day and they demurred.’

In a draft for a letter to Mrs Helen Hunt Jackson, sent in March 1885 but now lost, the reference of the ecstasy poem is uncertain. It may refer to Mrs Jackson having lost her health through her leg injury but still having the ecstasy of being in California for the winter.

Besides these uses of the lines, Emily could also apply the poem to herself and her own ecstasy at finding herself a poet.

Poem 1641 F1657 ‘Betrothed to Righteousness might be’
This poem is the whole of a letter (L993) sent to an unknown recipient. Emily seems to be saying thank you for a gift of ‘Pinks’ in a teasing fashion. Goodness is ‘an Ecstasy discreet,’ but human nature such as mine absolutely relishes eating the ‘Pinks’ which you sent me.

The ‘Pinks’ could be cakes, or perhaps even peaches, as in a letter (L1019) of autumn 1885 to Mrs Frederick Tuckerman Emily says, ‘I have never taken a Peach in my Hand, so late in the Year. My Lips, also, are guiltless of that pink experience.’
Poem 1642 F1681 “Red Sea,” indeed! Talk not to me
For Emily the sunset is a ‘Navy in the West’ which would quite eclipse the Red Sea and the armies of ‘purple Pharaoh’ which came to grief in it. (*Exodus 14:21-31*). This sunset may be ‘guileless’ but is of such glory that as we look along the ‘Line’ of it, our eyes ask whether it is a sea or divine. And the vastness of it lifts the heart which is sad or tired.

On this reading, there should be a full-stop after ‘with a sigh’ at the end of line 9.

Poem 1643 F1682 ‘Extol thee – could I? Then I will’
If Emily has a particular person in mind, this poem is probably meant for Sue. Emily tells her, as she has done so often, that she is ‘heavenly’ and a reason for believing in heaven and immortality.

The MS of the poem is in an unfinished state. For line 3 Emily still had to choose between variants. Johnson chooses ‘But just the truest truth,’ and Franklin ‘But just the fair – averring.’

Poem 1644 F1678 ‘Some one prepared this mighty show’
Emily describes the ‘ticketless show’ available throughout the days of summer to even ‘the simplest.’

Emily left this poem unfinished and had not chosen between variant endings to it. Johnson prints ‘That all may witness it and more/the pomp of summer Days’ and Franklin ‘That all may examine it – and more.’

Poem 1645 F1679 ‘The Ditch is dear to the Drunken man’
We might suspect that Emily was never drunk in her life, but here she extends her empathy to the poor drunkard who lies oblivious of his shame in a sheltering ditch.

Poem 1646 F1683 ‘Why should we hurry- why indeed?’
Emily is perhaps looking at the night sky and having thoughts of immortality. Unusually for her, its inescapability is molesting and troublesome, though, as usual, she admits ignorance of basic facts about it, in this poem of exactly ‘where its labours lie.’
This poem was left unfinished. From the variants for line 6 Johnson chooses ‘That this which is begun’ and Franklin ‘That tragedy begun.’ With Johnson’s choice the reader has to supply ‘will end in tragedy.’ Franklin’s choice seems to be an elliptical way of saying ‘that life will end in tragedy.

1886  (Emily dies on 15 May. She writes 2 poems)

Poem 1647 F1685  ‘Of Glory not a beam is left’
Thomas Higginson had replied to Emily’s letter (L1042) telling him of the death of Helen Hunt Jackson (see note on poem 1619). Poems 1647 and 1648 come in Emily’s next letter to Higginson. Both are about Mrs Jackson. They were the last poems Emily wrote and the letter was her last letter to Thomas Higginson, written two weeks before she died.

All that is left of her friend’s glory is her ‘Eternal House.’ The asterisk beside her name may indicate that she is dead, but she is still living as a star in heaven, like two other great loves of Emily, Samuel Bowles (poem 1525) and Judge Otis Lord (poem 1638).

Poem 1648 F1684  ‘The immortality she gave’
Although in Johnson this poem follows poem 1647, in the letter to Higginson it precedes it.

Emily is saying: our friend in her life time gave us glimpses of immortality. At her Grave we borrowed it (to remind us she was now immortal.) The only thing we could not applaud her for was that she had taken from us ‘the Might of [her] Human love.’ This left us hungry.

The remaining poems are undated. In Johnson poems 1649 to 1709 are transcripts made by Sue from autograph copies now lost. The poems are arranged alphabetically.

Poem 1649 F 1735  ‘A Cap of Lead across the sky’
Emily is perhaps suggesting that in such a thunderstorm as this with its mixture of ‘Winter and of Hell’ it is difficult to detect the face of God, though, as Paula Bennett
points out, the first stanza also suggests a schoolboy with his cap pulled down over his face.

Poem 1650 F1741 ‘A lane of Yellow led the eye’
The first two lines may make the reader think of sunset, but the rest of the poem and especially the line ‘In that low summer of the West’ seem to show that ‘the lane of Yellow’ is this life leading to ‘the Purple Wood’ of the next. It will ‘surpass solitude,’ but we do not know whether it will include birds or flowers.

Poem 1651 F1715 ‘A word made Flesh is seldom’
Emily began her first letter (L260) to Thomas Higginson by asking, ‘Are you too deeply occupied to say if my Verse is alive? ……..Should you think it breathed – and had you the leisure to tell me, I should feel quick gratitude.’

In this poem she says that words which breathe and are alive are seldom found and as ‘tremblingly partook’ as the bread and wine at the Eucharist. Even then they may not be told to another, though each of us probably knows the unreported ecstasy of finding just the living words found to be suitable for us as we write. (lines 1-8)

Such words are immortal, and no more likely to die than the Holy Spirit. Jesus was ‘made Flesh and dwelt among us.’ (John 1:14) Could his willingness to be made flesh for our sake be like the consent of language to come alive for those who love the study of words? (lines 9-16)

This poem is reminiscent of poem 1452 with its beginning, ‘Your thoughts don’t have words every day/ They come a single time/Like signal esoteric sips, Of the communion Wine.’

Poem 1652 F1736 ‘Advance is Life’s condition’
Even the Grave is only a station on our advance through life and not the hated terminus that many believe it to be. The next part of the journey may be an unlighted tunnel, but that is better than life going no further than the grave.

Poem 1653 F1723 ‘As we pass Houses musing slow’
Whether we pass Houses or Minds, we can wonder if they are occupied. The Houses may be those in a street or those in a cemetery, as in poem 457 beginning, ‘Sweet – safe – Houses.’
Poem 1654 F1687  ‘Beauty crowds me till I die’
Emily asks Beauty to have mercy on her, because she knows of the shattering effect it can have on her. In one letter (L759) she wrote of ‘a World too full of Beauty for Peace,’ and in another (L965) she exclaimed, ‘How vast is the chastisement of Beauty, given us by our Maker!’

Poem 1655 F1739  ‘Conferring with myself’
As Emily was musing one day, a bird which had been feeding on ‘a berry fat’ suddenly flew off on his travels. She thought to herself how inferior was her earth-bound life to this ‘travelling bird.’

Poem 1656 F1721  ‘Down Time’s quaint stream’
Judith Farr says that this poem’s metaphor of sailing down the river of life in ignorance of tides or gales may have been suggested by the boat and the stream in Thomas Cole’s series of pictures called ‘The Voyage of Life.’ George Whicher sees a parallel with Huckleberry Finn ‘floating down the Mississippi on a raft, uncertain of his destination, but confident of meeting any emergency with pluck and ingenuity.’ Thomas H. Green SJ wrote a poem which begins, ‘My Lord, my Love, you have called me to float blind down the dark river which leads to the kingdom of light.’

Poem 1657 F1734  ‘Eden is that old-fashioned House’
We do not suspect our House is an Eden until we leave it. Afterwards we think how good it was the day we left it. At the time we had no thought of returning. Now we discover we cannot.
This House of Eden can symbolise many places and states. Perhaps Emily is thinking mainly of childhood. As Thomas Hardy said in his poem The Self Unseeing

Blessings emblazoned that day,
Yet we were looking away.

Poem 1658 F1688  ‘Endanger it, and the Demand’
A bull might serve as an example of what Emily has in mind in this poem. If it is endangered by being put in a bull-fight, ‘the Demand of tickets’ from people wanting
to see it suffer amazes us. To think they can sink so low as to believe this is a spectacle worth watching!

But once the bull is sent back to his field, the dejected spectators find that the ‘Carnival’ of its tribulation has been ‘divested of its Meat.’

Poem 1659 F1702 ‘Fame is a fickle food’

Fame is put on the table just once, and soon only crumbs are left. The cawing critics (with their harsh consonants) pass on to the ‘Farmer’s Corn’ of the next celebrity. Those who depend on fame to keep them alive will die when it vanishes.

Emily had written of the inconstancy of fame in poem 1475. In poem 288 she preferred to be Nobody and in poem 667 to be ‘blameless of a name’ like the bloom on a flower.

The first two lines of this poem were quoted by Matt Dickinson in a *Times* article of 16 June 2009 about the attitude of the public to the tennis player, Andy Murray.

Poem 1660 F1700 ‘Glory is that bright tragic thing’

‘Glory’ is perhaps the same as the ‘waylaying light’ of poem 1581. An experience of the grace of God can warm for an instant the poorest heart and give a feeling of ‘Dominion.’ But such glory is fleeting and soon puts the recipient back in forgetfulness of itself.

Poem 1661 F1717 ‘Guest am I to have’

Perhaps Sue, after years of absence, has promised to visit and bring light to Emily’s ‘northern room.’ Emily wonders why Sue has been so averse to experiencing her ‘cordiality’ and ‘fidelity,’ especially as she only lives a ‘narrow’ strip of land away.

Poem 1662 F1711 ‘He went by sleep that drowsy route’

Emily seems to describe someone who experiences the sleep of death and reaches that ‘Inn,’ about which we can only surmise. Will he rise at daybreak to ‘begin his race’ through eternity? Or will he remain for ever in that bed? We cannot know.

Poem 1663 F1730 ‘His mind of man, a secret makes’

Emily sadly admits that other people are essentially unknowable, for each man can make a secret of his mind and keep her out of it. Even if she thinks she has access to
some part of his mind, he may know that she is wrong. However close to her he lives, he can keep his mind an ‘impregnable’ secret.

Poem 1664 F1708  ‘I did not reach Thee’
Emily perhaps imagines herself speaking to her beloved master who has died before her and is already in heaven. To paraphrase her words:
I still have six obstacles to cross on my journey to you, but I shall not regard my journey as even one obstacle when I am telling you of it (1-6).
As the years of my life are now getting cold, I shall make light of the one desert still remaining. Anyway I would cross Sahara to reach you (7-13).
[then speaking to her feet for the rest of the poem]
The last bit of the journey over the Sea will be our lightest labour (14-19).
The Sun of earth goes crooked and the Night of death approaches. We almost wish the consummation of our reunion with you was further off (20-7).
We are almost there. The six obstacles are passed. The waters of the river of Jordan murmur of the new life on the other side. And now Death takes my first place, and looks at your heavenly face before I do (28-34).
Lines 20-7 are reminiscent of Emily’s remark to Daniel French, quoted in the notes on poem 1620, ‘Success is dust, but an aim forever touched with dew.’

Poem 1665 F1704  ‘I know of people in the Grave’
Emily seems to have had that night some news which gave her the ‘right to walk upon the Earth.’ She makes the ironical comment that she knows some people in the grave who would be very glad if they had been given the news that they had the ‘right to walk upon the earth.’ Whatever the news was, it makes the whole of life seem suddenly different (lines 5-6).

Poem 1666 F1695  ‘I see thee clearer for the Grave’
Emily claims that the grave shows a dead person clearer than a mirror, as the gap in the life of the mourner reveals the stature of the dead person. If Emily has a particular person in mind, it may be Samuel Bowles, as she had made a similar point about him in poem 611: 9-12.
The claim that ‘Judgment is justest’ after death opens poem 1671, and has also been made in poems 1083, 1209, and 1497.
Poem 1667 F1710  ‘I watched her face to see which way’
Emily is perhaps watching at the bedside of a sick person who is about to be told that she has a fatal disease. Will she die before she hears the news or hear it and linger on a few more years until the Frost of death kills her?

Poem 1668 F1725  ‘If I could tell how glad I was’
Extremes of emotion rob Emily of words. For example in 1862 she had written in a letter (L252) to Samuel Bowles, ‘I cant thank you any more ……..The old words are numb and there a’nt any new ones.’ So in this poem if she could find words for her gladness, she would not be so glad. It is when she cannot find words that she knows that she has a new example of the Dilemma of being wordless at the heights of emotion – although in this dilemma she is further from the means of expressing the emotion (=mathematics) than she is from the emotion itself (= in this example, an experience of eternity).

Emily repeats this point in poem 1700.

Poem 1669 F1714  ‘In snow thou comest’
Thomas Johnson indexes this poem under the heading ‘March.’ March comes with the snow, but goes as the ground reappears. March comes when we are still fearful from winter’s chill, but goes from a world become so joyful that we can start life afresh on the foundation provided by March for spring and summer.

Poem 1670 F1742  ‘In Winter in my Room’
As worms correctly presume they are a foreign element, when Emily found one in her room, she tied it to something by a string (1-9).
Unbelievably and horrifyingly the worm changed into a snake of awesome power, although the string was still there (10-21).
Emily tried to defend herself by praising its beauty, but the snake ‘fathomed’ her fear and hissed, ‘Are you so afraid of me that you won’t give me a warm welcome?’ And then in a slivery rhythm the snake merged into his form until all Emily could see was his swimming patterns on the carpet (22-31).
Finally she fled until, many towns away from her own, she realised ‘this was a dream (32-39).’
The worm-snake of this dream could be a phallic symbol or it could suggest the cold, live evil of the serpent in the garden of Eden. \(\textit{Genesis 3:1-24}\)

Poem 1671 F1707 \‘Judgment is justest’
As in poem 1475 Emily argues that a poet will be judged most justly only when he is dead, and when all ‘Suns’ have been taken from him apart from the truthfulness of his poetry. The honour of being a true poet is an award given most securely ‘in a posthumous Sun,’ for under it any false colours will be burnt away by the scrutiny of critics.

Poem 1672 F1698 \‘Lightly stepped a yellow star’
There is an abrupt change of register between lines 1-6 and lines 7-8. The abundance of ‘l’ sounds in lines 1-6 and the vagueness of lines 3-4 perhaps indicate that Emily is parodying the mellifluousness of the popular verse of her day. If so, Emily will be putting this verse in its place by the terse, matter of fact comment of the last two lines, with, as Charles Anderson observes, ‘the forced accent on the last syllable of ‘punctual’ only adding to the comedy.’

Emily may be saying to the popular versifiers that it is not only the sound of a poem that matters. It has to be saying something as well.

Poem 1673 F1722 \‘Nature can do no more’
It is autumn. Nature’s flowers are over. If a flower has failed to come, the swelling of Nature’s ‘crescent’ will have to reimburse us in future summers – if we are alive to see them. Anyway Nature is adamant that there is no chance now of seeing the flower this year.

Poem 1674 F1738 \‘Not any sunny zone’
As no glimmer of sunlight finds its way into any tomb, the comfort of a grave scaled down to human size with robins singing above is better than a massive monument which is as dead as we are.

Poem 1675 F1692 \‘Of this is Day composed’
‘Day’ in this poem seems to mean ‘Our Day’ or life. The ‘revelry’ of it at its best is beyond words, but it ends with the ‘unknown’ of death. We alternately are allured and
appalled by death as we think of it as dower or deprivation. Certainly, if death brings penury instead of Glory, there will be no remedy.

**Poem 1676 F1733**  ‘Of Yellow was the outer Sky’
This poem seems to describe a sunset. ‘The outer Sky’ or horizon in the west grew ever more yellow, until yellow slid seamlessly into red.

**Poem 1677 F1743**  ‘On my volcano grows the Grass’
As in poem 601, Emily could be using the image of a volcano to describe herself. People looking at her outside see a peaceful meadow, fit for day-dreamer or bird. But if the scarcely-contained volcano within her were to erupt, they would be filled with awe.

The ‘volcano’ may be her explosive poetry or her extreme sensitivity to great art. Thomas Higginson, writing (L342a) to his wife of his first visit to the Homestead, quoted Emily as saying, ‘If I read a book [and] it makes my whole body so cold no fire ever can 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 way I know it. Is there any other way.’

**Poem 1678 F1699**  ‘Peril as a Possession’
Imagine a man cut off by the tide who can only escape death by climbing precipitous cliffs. His ‘danger disintegrates Satietie.’ The ‘awe’ he feels searches out his inmost nature as cleanly as fire wraps itself around the object it is consuming.

**Poem 1679 F1718**  ‘Rather arid delight’
Emily may be talking about the ‘Ecstasy’ and ‘Rapture’ of two lovers. If, when they meet, they settle for ‘Contentment’ and abstain from ‘Ecstasy,’ this ‘rather arid delight’ is less than the ‘joy’ they might have had.

On the other hand, it is dangerous to go for the ‘Expense’ involved in ‘Rapture,’ if tomorrow you realise that you do not have the resources to sustain or pay ‘the Rent’ for that rapture.

**Poem 1680 F1727**  ‘Sometimes with the Heart’
Some love ‘with the Heart.’ Not so many love ‘with the soul.’ And those who manage to love, if only once, ‘with the Might’ of their whole personality are very few indeed.

**Poem 1681 F1694**  ‘Speech is one symptom of Affection’
In poem 1668 Emily had said that the heights of emotion could not be described in words. Here she admits that something of the bond between two lovers can be expressed in speech, but that the ‘perfectest communication’ between them is made in a silence in which they feel their love and endorse it.

The apostle Peter made a similar point when he said that God’s people ‘have not seen [Jesus] and yet [they] love him.’ (*1 Peter 1:8*)

**Poem 1682 F1693**  ‘Summer begins to have the look’
It is the turning point between summer and autumn. The reader of summer’s book sees that most of the leaves have now been turned backwards, and infers the beginning of autumn from the skies and deeper colours of the trees on the hills. As the distant trees are dyed once more, he greedily turns the last few pages of summer’s book and then falls into silent meditation. He admits that ‘conclusion’ is fixed as the end for all things, but at least the thought that nature escapes the fixedness of this by being ‘perennial’ recalls him to the hope that we too may escape the fixedness of our end by ‘immortality.’

**Poem 1683 F1716**  ‘That she forgot me was the least’
This poem, like poem 727, is addressed to a faithless Sue. But, whereas in poem 727, Emily confidently states, ‘Precious to Me – She still shall be – /Though She forget the name I bear,’ in this undated poem Emily wavers.

Sue’s forgetfulness of her is not the deepest hurt. Emily’s greatest puzzle has always been how she could have deserved it considering her ‘Constancy’ to Sue. And now, as Sue continues to ignore and never mentions that constancy, Emily has become rather ashamed of it.

**Poem 1684 F1690**  ‘The Blunder is in estimate.’
We blunder when we think of ‘Eternity’ as a ‘Station’ we may reach after death. In fact, says Emily, Eternity goes on walks with her, lives in the same house and is a friend that never goes away.
As she had said in a letter (L288) of 1864 to Sue, ‘There is no first, or last, in
Forever – It is Centre, there, all the time.’ Or, as Jesus said to his disciples, ‘In very
truth, anyone who gives heed to what I say and puts his trust in him who sent me has
hold of eternal life [already].’ (John 5:24)

Poem 1685 F1701 ‘The butterfly obtains’
In poem 1244 Emily had spoken of the butterfly as giving the citizens of Amherst the
chance to recognise him as a symbol of immortality. Here she again complains of
their lack of sympathy for this favourite of the entomologist, and supposes they might
regard him as evidence ‘for Immortality,’ if only he were as busy as the bee and was
not such a gadabout, dressed in the ‘coat’ suited for such travelling.

Poem 1686 F1724 ‘The event was directly behind Him’
Emily seems to describe a person who fails to realise that he is about to be killed from
behind. The assassin comes close, gets in position, loads and levels his gun and
shoots, releasing from his flesh the soul which will be without it for ‘Centuries.’
   The assassin may be an actual human assassin or Death itself.

Poem 1687 F1686 ‘The gleam of an heroic Act’
In January 2009 a pilot, unable to keep his failing plane in the air long enough to land
at one of New York’s airports, had the ‘Imagination’ to perform the ‘heroic Act’ of
saving the lives of all his passengers by landing on the Hudson river.

Poem 1688 F1728 ‘The Hills erect their Purple Heads’
Emily states the paradox that the hills and the rivers are more curious about Nature as
evidence for God than human beings are.

Poem 1689 F1731 ‘The look of thee, what is it like’
Emily had said of God in poem 338 that ‘He has hid his rare life/from our gross eyes.’
Here too she admits that God is transcendent and so we cannot know what he looks
like, where he lives, how he spends his time, who his companions are, whether he has
emotions including a ‘Longing’ for us.
   All we can do is to beg him to sign a small certificate saying that he at least will
always be the same, while others are blamed for changing their ‘Traits.’
Poem 1690 F1697 ‘The ones that disappeared are back’
Emily lacks the wisdom to work out whether it is spring or autumn. On the one hand the presence of the Phoebe and the Crow and the shrill cries of the Jay show that it is March and May not far away. On the other hand she sees the ripe nuts of autumn.

Judith Farr (G) points out that in Prose Fragment 43 Emily says that the unique qualities of the seasons are ‘forever here’ in her mind, so perhaps she is describing an occasion when both spring and autumn were so vivid to her imagination that they both seemed to be happening at once – as also seems to be happening in the nursery rhyme ‘Here we come gathering nuts in May.’

Poem 1691 F894 ‘The overtakelessness of those’
Emily says that for her the most majestic thing is the ‘overtakelessness’ of the dead by the living, once the soul has pinned her ‘Not at Home’ notice on the corpse.

Poem 1692 F1726 ‘The right to perish might be thought’
A sick woman’s right to die seems indisputable, but if she tries to let go of life, she will find the world of doctors and family trying to save her. She ‘cannot even die’ without scrutiny.

Poem 1693 F1709 ‘The Sun retired to a cloud’
The setting sun goes behind a cloud, sulks in its silver lining of mercury, sinks lower on to a ‘scarlet log,’ and finally, as dew falls and the bees fly home, unrolls ‘a purple fan’ just above the trees.

Poem 1694 F1703 ‘The wind drew off’
A mighty wind is followed by lightning. The mangled limbs of the trees show that when Nature attacks herself, we should beware if the attacker is a wind coming from the south. (Auster is the Latin word for the South wind.)

Poem 1695 F1696 ‘There is a solitude of space’
Emily claims that the usual solitudes of space, sea and death are ‘society’ compared with ‘the polar privacy’ of a soul in isolation from others, with an infinity of subjects for reflection within its finite self.
In poem 832 Emily had advocated the examination of this ‘polar privacy,’ even though she was aware of the dangers involved, as she had shown in such poems as 670 and 1225.

Franklin prints a poem of seven lines, as in Sue’s transcript of the poem. Johnson prints an eighth line ‘Finite infinity,’ as in the first publication of the poem in 1914.

**Poem 1696 F1705** ‘These are the days that Reindeer love’
In a letter (L311) of November 1865 to Mrs Holland Emily had said that November had always seemed to her ‘the Norway of the year.’ In this poem about midwinter ‘Norway’ gets changed to ‘Finland.’

Line 2 is a compressed version of ‘and these are the pranks which the Northern star loves.’ The ‘Sun’s objective’ is perhaps to reach the shortest day for itself.

**Poem 1697 F1732** ‘They talk as slow as Legends grow’
Emily is perhaps disparaging the talk of the gossips of Amherst. Their tales unfold as slowly as the growth of ‘Legends.’ Their minds are not quick-growing mushrooms but sterile tangles the wind cannot blow through.

The laughter which follows their tales is about as sensible as applause in the theatre for a plot’s outcome which has been obvious for ages and heavily signalled.

Emily herself preferred the quicksilver conversation she had with such men as Samuel Bowles.

**Poem 1698 F1719** ‘Tis easier to pity those when dead’
It is easier to pity the dead than to have pitied them when alive and when pity might have saved them, just as in the theatre a Tragedy more often receives applause when it is finished than when it is in progress.

**Poem 1699 F1729** ‘To do a magnanimous thing’
To surprise oneself by doing a rare ‘magnanimous thing’ is ‘the finest of Joys.’ To fail to do the ‘magnanimous thing,’ even if no one knows of our failure, and even if we know a previous failure had cost us ‘life,’ is still a spurning of ‘Rapture’ on our part.

**Poem 1700 F1689** ‘To tell the Beauty would decrease’
Emily says that true Beauty cannot be described but leaves her on a ‘syllable-less Sea.’ But even if she cannot find words for the beauty, she still feels as ecstatic as if she had been left ‘Legacies’ or given inner mines of gold.

Emily had also considered the limitations of words in poems 1668 and 1681.

Poem 1701 F1744 ‘To their apartment deep’
Emily is perhaps referring to a husband and wife buried side by side. ‘No ribaldry’ makes its way to that deep grave, as it might have done to their wedding night bedroom, and in the room of the grave their bed will remain ‘untumbled’ ‘by any man but God.’

Poem 1702 F1706 ‘Today or this noon’
Emily describes the vast distance between life and death. This afternoon a dying woman was so close that Emily could have touched her. Tonight she is as distant from Amherst as she is from Emily’s ‘surmise.’

Poem 1703 F1740 ‘Twas comfort in her Dying Room’
At a death bed Emily took comfort from hearing the clock, the wind and children playing. But the feeling of wrongness that these could be alive while her friend must die outweighed the comfort.

Poem 1704 F1745 ‘Unto a broken heart’
Towards the end of her life Emily herself had the qualification of this ‘high prerogative.’

The only surviving handwritten copy of this poem is in a letter of 31 July1912 which Sue sent to Samuel Bowles the younger. Sue added that it was Emily’s work.

Poem 1705 F1691 ‘Volcanoes be in Sicily’
Besides the famous Volcanoes in her Atlas, Emily can at any time climb the lava steps and view the ‘Crater’ of her ‘Vesuvius at Home.’ The Dickinson family believed that the ‘Vesuvius’ of this undated poem referred principally to Sue, and she had certainly been a volcanic element in their lives, forming a close relationship with Emily and then for years keeping her at arms length, marrying Austin and then by her coldness driving him into the arms of Mabel Todd. But Emily also had largely to keep within
herself the explosive force of her poetry and, in her earlier years, her disagreements with her beloved father.

Poem 1706 F1737  ‘When we have ceased to care’
The giver of ‘the Gift’ may be Sue, at last after many years of neglect making some response to Emily’s love for her, as in poem 1282. Emily would once have given everything for that response and even for it ‘mortgaged Heaven’ (? = broken Heaven’s law and engaged in a Lesbian relationship), but now that response has so ‘declined in worth’ that, as in poem 1683, she can only look upon it with shame.

Poem 1707 F1720  ‘Winter under cultivation’
Emily probably refers to the winter flowers which she cultivated in her conservatory. There may also be the thought that, if we were to look at it aright, we could be as exhilarated by the winter as by the spring.

Poem 1708 F1712  ‘Witchcraft has not a Pedigree’
As Emily had said in poem 1583, the ‘Witchcraft’ of God’s handiwork is around us every day. Here she says that it does not just filter down to those of noble birth, but surrounds all of us from our first breath to our last.

Poem 1709 F1713  ‘With sweetness unabated’
Emily describes autumn leaving the world behind to be at home ‘with Nature.’ To her last days she has been triumphant and her ‘sweetness unabated,’ but now, with her job done, it is as though ‘influential kinsmen’ invited her back home. Her final purple sunsets seem to be the feast which is an adequate reward from heaven for the good which she has left behind her.

In Johnson the undated poems 1710 to 1759 are transcripts made by Mrs Mabel Todd from autograph copies now lost. The poems are arranged alphabetically.

Poem 1710 F509 (1863)  ‘A curious Cloud surprised the Sky’
This poem in which a cloud looking like an animal comes very low, and then draws away looking like a queen may be based on Antony’s lines, which begin
Sometime we see a cloud that’s dragonish,
A vapour sometime like a bear or lion (Antony and Cleopatra 4:14:3-11).

**Poem 1711 F1774** ‘A face devoid of love or grace’
It is unknown whether this ‘face’ belonged to someone Emily knew or was imagined by her or was seen by her in a portrait. As she is rarely as hostile and lacking in empathy as in this poem, the reader hopes that the third possibility is correct.

**Poem 1712 F508 (1863)** ‘A Pit – but Heaven over it’
Emily imagines herself sitting with someone beside ‘A Pit- but [with] heaven over it.’ She may fall into it if she as much as stirs, looks, dreams or asks her feet to move. The top is cut so straight you would scarce suspect its circuit is just the same fathoms down. Is this ‘Pit – Heaven’ the ‘seed’ of future good, the ‘summer’ of happiness now or the ‘tomb’ of death with the two of them being each other’s doom?

If this Gothic horror tale relates to Emily’s life, it may refer to the moment when she and Sue were contemplating the ‘heaven’ of the consummation of their Lesbian love, with the ‘pit’ of widespread disapproval a step away.

The poem, as printed by Franklin, concludes with 5 extra lines. In Johnson’s edition these 5 lines appear as lines 25-9 of poem 443 (F522). One advantage of Johnson’s arrangement is that the word ‘them’ in the first of the 5 lines has something to refer back to, which it does not have in Franklin’s arrangement.

**Poem 1713 F1748** ‘As subtle as tomorrow’
Emily may be describing the first moment of a possible love relationship, perhaps just a glance exchanged, which in fact never came to anything, like tomorrow. Emily had a ‘conviction’ that it was a ‘warrant’ or pledge of love, but as it petered out, the person is just a name in her heart.

**Poem 1714 F1749** ‘By a departing light’
Emily seems to be saying, as in poem 1666, that we see a person ‘acuter’ by the ‘departing light’ of his death than when his ‘wick’ was fully alight in life. His departure ‘clarifies the sight,’ and, as in the second stanza of poem 1497, adorns him with qualities previously unrecognised.
Poem 1715 F1750  ‘Consulting summer’s clock’
Emily is shocked to realise that the summer is half over. She jokes that she will not look at summer’s clock again.

Poem 1716 F1783  ‘Death is like the insect’
Do everything you can to stop the death insect killing the tree of a life, including sawing off the branch it is on, but if the insect is unstoppable, leave the tree to die.

In line 11 both Johnson and Franklin print ‘Wring,’ as was written in Mrs Todd’s transcript. But when the poem was published in 1896, ‘Wring’ had been changed to ‘Ring.’ ‘Ring’ makes better sense: the tree is to be marked out for destruction.

Poem 1717 F1751  ‘Did life’s penurious length’
If the poverty-stricken length of our lives actually *hammered out* the sweetness that is to be found in them, our joy would ‘clog the cogs’ of our reason and we would become mad. It is only that strange ‘revolving’ belt of reason telling us that the world is no great place which keeps us sane.

Poem 1718 F1542  ‘Drowning is not so pitiful’
Emily takes a jaundiced view of God and his company in this poem. The man who dies by drowning leaves hope outside and enters an ‘abhorred abode.’ However kind God’s face may be to look upon, the dead man would much rather not be there.

As Emily said in a letter (L498) of 1877 to Thomas Higginson, ‘the time to live is frugal (\(\approx\) we have a short time in which to live) – and good as is a better earth, it will not quite be this.’

In line 7 Emily may have in mind the inscription at the entrance to Hell in Dante’s *Inferno*, ‘Abandon all hope, you who enter.’ (*Inferno* 3:1)

Poem 1719 F1752  ‘God indeed is a jealous God’
This quatrain carries on the line of thought of the previous poem.

Poem 1720 F1753  ‘Had I known that the first was the last’
As in poem 1529, Emily is perhaps fantasising about an experience of Lesbian love with Sue. Here she says that it happened only once. Had she known there would be no more, she would have made it ‘longer’ and ‘stronger.’ What stopped her? Their lips
were not to blame. When they said they loved each other, they truly did – it was the

cup of love which overwhelmed them. No, it was their lips’ fault. It was the bliss of

their kisses which overwhelmed them.

Poem 518 also perhaps implies that ‘the first was the last.’

Poem 1721 F1754 ‘He was my host – he was my guest’

Judith Farr suggests that Emily is imagining an intense sexual experience with her

beloved master. They were so equal and so intimate that analysis of it was no more

important than is the capsule to the keeper of the seed.

Jane Donahue Eberwein, on the other hand, believes that the poem describes a
divine visitation, such as the one of poem 679.

Poem 1722 F1755 ‘Her face was in a bed of hair’

If the ‘her’ in this poem is Sue, Emily seems to be fantasising further about the night

referred to in poems 518 and 1720, and imagining the loving attentions of Sue’s face,

hand and tongue to her body. The reader can be ‘incredulous’ if he wants to, but she

who saw it believes it.

Poem 1723 F1778 ‘High from the earth I heard a bird’

As in poem 1655 Emily comes across a bird who compares very favourably with

human beings. This bird is a father, but he copes with paternal worries by floating

down a breeze and singing a song of equal ‘benediction/and badinage.’ How different

from the respites from care of human fathers!

Poem 1724 F1782 ‘How dare the robins sing’

The return of the songs of the robins in spring is inappropriate for the dead, for they

have no more transactions with the seasons of the year. Indeed the sun itself is an

insult to those who, thinking they would be immortal, find their ‘light’ plunged into

night. In deference to the dead, all sounds should be ‘extinct’ from gardens of the

living, which each morning ‘wrestle with the dew,’ but by ‘daybreak [have] overcome
[it],’ as for the dead there may be no overcoming and no daybreak.

When this poem was published in 1896, in response to a marginal note in Mrs

Todd’s transcript lines 13 and 14 were reversed. The explanation above is of this

changed order of lines.
The poem is reminiscent of the earlier version of poem 216, in which for those who are ‘Safe in their Alabaster Chambers…….Pipe the Sweet Birds in ignorant cadence.’

Poem 1725 F396 (1862) ‘I took one Draught of Life’
For one life-enhancing experience, one ‘Dram of Heaven,’ Emily had to pay ‘precisely an existence,’ for the dusts and films of her dead body at its weighing would only be worth that one experience.

Similarly Emily had begun poem 247 with the question ‘What would I give to see his face? and had immediately answered it by saying, ‘I’d give – I’d give my life – of course.’

Poem 1726 F1756 ‘If all the griefs I am to have’
Happiness.

Poem 1727 F585 (1862) ‘If ever the lid gets off my head’
If ever Emily’s brain is released from her head, it will go to her natural home of heaven, where her soul has been all the time.

Poem 1728 F1757 ‘Is Immortality a bane’
In poem 1646 Emily had described us as being ‘molested by [an] immortality,’ which would get us sooner or later, and if the answer to her question in this poem is ‘Yes,’ she implies that we are so ‘oppressed’ by immortality that it becomes ‘a bane. Could she be troubled by the prospect of finding something to do for ever and ever?

Poem 1729 F56 (1859) ‘I’ve got an arrow here’
Emily holds an arrow from Cupid’s bow, perhaps in the shape of a love letter. When her family regard her unusual behaviour as that of someone wounded in a ‘skirmish,’ she will know the truth that she has been vanquished by love.

Poem 1730 F54 (1859) “Lethe” in my flower’
‘Lethe’ in Greek mythology was a river in the Underworld. Those who drank of it forgot their previous existence. When Emily drinks in the scent of a flower from her garden, she forgets this world and seems to hear the bobolink singing in ‘the fadeless
orchards’ of the next world. The flower may look just like flakes of petal, but to the perceptive eye it is the rose of immortality.

Emily presumably cries to Jupiter rather than God because of the classical associations of ‘Lethe.’

Poem 1731 F1758  ‘Love can do all but raise the Dead’
Love is such a giant that it could raise the dead, were it not lodged in a body which needs sleep and food, for, while it is eating and sleeping, the ‘shining Fleet’ of the dead recedes further out of sight.

There is no escape from the truth which opens poem 749, namely that ‘All but Death, can be Adjusted.’

Poem 1732 F1773  ‘My life closed twice before its close’
Emily, while alive, has suffered two bereavements which ‘closed her life’ for a time. It remains to be seen whether death will bring her a loss which is similar and just as huge and hopeless to conceive. For all we know of heaven is that it is a parting from this earth, and a similar parting is all we need if we are bound for hell.

Thomas Johnson comments that unless a dateable autograph copy of this poem is found, ‘speculation about its autobiographical import is vain.’

Poem 1733 F1342  ‘No man saw awe, nor to his house’
No man has seen ‘awe’ or God face to face, though many, like Moses or great artists, have got near him. The difficulty then is to get away alive, as the dawning comprehension of God ‘detains the vitality’ of the worshipper and the Spirit gives no clue to the return route. Moses claims to have done it, and Emily is convinced that he read God’s face, but he is an exception.

Emily’s memory of the Moses story seems imperfect, for God specifically does not allow Moses to see his face (Exodus 33:20-3), and it is the burning bush that is ‘not consumed’ (Exodus 3:2).

Poem 1734 F1477  ‘Oh, honey of an hour’
Emily imagines herself a flower, and asks a bee which has just visited her to keep away until her small ‘unfrequented flower’ is more deserving of this intense experience.
The poem may refer to the early days of one of Emily’s love relationships.

Poem 1735 F1759 ‘One crown that no one seeks’
No man seeks the ‘crown’ of suffering for others, although Jesus himself ‘its stigma deified.’ Pontius Pilate will never forget Jesus’ ‘coronation.’

Poem 1736 F1760 ‘Proud of my broken heart, since thou didst break it’
Emily has had her heart broken, but bravely protests she has found consolations. She is proud that it was x who caused her pain, that it is remembrances of x that bring her light in the darkness of the night, and that she can now be humble enough to do without their passion.

It is she and not x who can boast that like Jesus, she has drunk ‘the cup of anguish’ in isolation and had her side pierced by the spear on the Cross, for Emily has removed the necessity of crucifixion from x, so that her own crucifixion might have greater honour.

Poem 1737 F267 [1861] ‘Rearrange a “Wife’s” affection!’
As in, for example, poem 577, Emily imagines herself as ‘Wife’ to her beloved master, but in a marriage which will only begin in heaven. Until then she will be true to him. To paraphrase:
I could not stop being your ‘Wife’ unless they removed my brain or made me a man (1-4).
My spirit and my flesh can blush with pride at having learned more of love in seven years of ‘troth’ than they would have done in seven years of ‘Wifehood’ (5-8).
In unrelieved anguish I have stayed true and never made known my love (9-12).
I will never reveal its secret until at the sunset of death I take off my “Thorns” and put on my ‘Diadem’ in your presence (13-20).

Poem 1738 F1772 ‘Softened by Time’s consummate plush’
In poem 686 Emily had asserted that ‘Time never did assuage.’ In this poem she admits that the woes of childhood are an exception.

Poem 1739 F586 [1863] ‘Some say goodnight – at night’
Emily perhaps has in mind saying farewell to Samuel Bowles after he has spent a night at the Homestead. He says ‘Good-bye’ as he goes, but Emily replies ‘Goodnight,’ since parting from him is night, whereas his presence is ‘dawn’ and the ‘purple’ of ‘morn.’

Poem 1740 F1780 ‘Sweet is the swamp with its secrets’
That the children run away from the snake in an ‘enthralling gallop’ suggests that the snake in this poem is not as frightening as the snake in poems 986 or 1670.

In lines 7-8 Johnson prints Mrs Todd’s transcript copy, while Franklin, using the variants from her margin, has ‘a snake is nature’s treason/and awe is where it goes.’

Poem 1741 F1761 ‘That it will never come again’
Our half-belief in immortality is no compensation for this life, because, if it exists at all, it will be existence with this life’s sweetness taken away from it (= ‘an ablative estate) and make us hungry for its opposite.

Poem 1742 F1781 ‘The distance that the dead have gone’
At first we think the dead may come back. And then we seem to be half-dead ourselves, so often do we think of them. But, as she had said in poem 1691, the dead cannot be overtaken.

Poem 1743 F1784 ‘The grave my little cottage is’
Emily seems to imagine keeping house for her beloved master in their grave after death, when, after the brief separation of a life time, they will be united in the ‘strong society’ of ‘everlasting life.’

She had also envisaged such housekeeping in poem 961.

Poem 1744 F1762 ‘The joy that has no stem nor core’
The ‘fundamental palates’ are perhaps people like Emily herself who prefer those ‘products’ or foods which are joyful foretastes of heaven. But although we may long to eat such foods, we cannot grow them for ourselves, they are not obvious to see (= ‘ablative to show’), and we cannot transport them from heaven by our own efforts. They are just laid before us from time to time as ‘pods’ which we open in wonder.

This poem has an affinity with poem 1382.
Poem 1745 F1763  ‘The mob within the heart’
We can do nothing about the riot of unruly passions ‘within the heart.’ We may at first give them permission to stay and pretend that they bring ‘peace.’ But, unseen and unheard, they soon grow to ‘hurricane’ force in a ‘congenial’ soil.

Poem 1746 F1764  ‘The most important population’
The bumblebees and nations of other small creatures which ‘unnoticed dwell’ are in fact the ‘most important population’ because they show us how to live, with ‘a heaven each instant.’

Poem 1747 F1765  ‘The parasol is the umbrella’s daughter’
This comparison between the parasol and the umbrella is nicely deflated by ‘borrowed’ in the last line, and has delicious word play between ‘abuts’ and ‘abridges,’ and between ‘siren’ and ‘serene.’

‘abuts’ perhaps means ‘leans against.’

Poem 1748 F1776  ‘The reticent volcano keeps’
If the volcano is ‘reticent’ about his next explosion, and if nature in general does not pass on to us ‘the tale Jehovah told to her,’ why should we hurry to find a listener for our talk, especially when the only ‘secret’ worth disclosing is ‘immortality,’ and that we don’t know about.

The poem may also be a defence of Emily’s reluctance to publish her poems.

Poem 1749 F1766  ‘The waters chased him as he fled’
In this fantasy a drowning man is offered by a merman a paradise in which he can have a different fish for every meal. The poor soul makes no reply, sensing that he is just an ‘object’ and probably food for fishes himself.

Poems 107 and 723 similarly record the sea’s destructiveness and man’s insignificance.

Poem 1750 F1767  ‘The words the happy say’
As in poems 1688 and 1700 Emily claims that unsaid words are a more beautiful melody than spoken ones.
Poem 1751 F1768  ‘There comes an hour when begging stops’
In despair at God’s refusal to answer her prayers, Emily tells him that a plain ‘No’
would be kinder than ‘call again.’

Poem 1752 F1769  ‘This docile one inter’
Emily tells Death to bury a woman who was ready to die and who ‘sparkled to the
Grave.’ She, as brave there as here, may not be in any wilderness now, but her friends
can only regret the ‘sunny brevity’ of her life.

Poem 1753 F1770  ‘Through those old Grounds of memory’
To wander alone in the ‘Grounds of memory’ shows a lack of moderation which a
prudent man would leave to the gods. It is easy not to buy illegal ‘liquors,’ but no
statute stops us drinking at the ‘internal bar’ of our memory. We can pursue a good
moment from our past, but we can no more take hold of it than we can the sunset.
Such a pursuit may make us ‘tranquil’ briefly, but it is treacherous for it debases our
‘firmer moments’ by offering us ‘the severest gold’ of something which is easy to
long for but impossible to obtain.

Poem 1754 F1777  ‘To lose thee – sweeter than to gain’
Emily consoles herself for the loss of Sue. She may now be left ‘destitute’ and in
‘drought,’ but at least she once ‘had the dew.’

‘The Caspian’ (to which Emily had abandoned herself in poem 212) is made up
of sterile sand as well the waters of love.

Poem 1755 F1779  ‘To make a prairie it takes a clover and one bee’
Emily wastes no words in her recipe for an American prairie. Take one clover and a
bee and some thought. Or just some thought.

Poem 1756 F1771  ‘Twas here my summer paused’
As Emily speaks of ‘my summer,’ the pause of summer may stand for the ending of a
love relationship. Emily is now sentenced to gain what ‘ripeness’ she can from ‘other
scene or other soul,’ as the summer of this love has turned to winter and she must
‘manacle the icicle’ which is her heart against any thought of returning one day to her ‘Tropic Bride.’

**Poem 1757 F1775** ‘Upon the gallows hung a wretch’
A man too bad even for hell is being hung. His old mother appears and cries that she is losing all she has. What sort of a ‘boon’ has her son turned out to be?

**Poem 1758 F1179** ‘Where every bird is bold to go’
Paula Bennett convincingly expounds this poem. Only we human beings are ‘foreigners’ in this life, because only we are aware that death is coming and may be our end. So we have to push back the tears before we knock on the door of death, while birds and bees boldly play in front of it without fear.

**Poem 1759 F1786** ‘Which misses most’
This poem might have been written in support of Jesus’ teaching in his parable of the sheep and the goats (*Matthew 25:31-46*). The helping of suffering means more to the sufferer than to the helper, and actual help means more than help which is considered but not given.

**Poem 1760 F1590** ‘Elysium is as far as to’
Mabel Todd says that this poem was written during a visit which she made to the Homestead. Emily had invited her to come to sing to her, but with the proviso that Mrs Todd would not actually see her. So Emily listened to the singing from the next room, and, when Mrs Todd stopped, sent her in a glass of rich sherry together with this poem, which had been written as she sang.

In the first stanza Emily is perhaps contemplating going in to the music room. It can be ‘Elysium’ and ‘Felicity’ if a ‘Friend’ awaits, but ‘Doom’ if not. In the second stanza Emily seems to consider the possibility of Mrs Todd coming into her room, and what ‘fortitude’ that would take on her part.

**Poem 1761 F397 [1862]** ‘A train went through a burial gate’
As a funeral train goes through the churchyard gate into the graveyard, a bird bursts into song, saying his good-by to the person being buried.
From 1840 to 1855 the Dickinson family lived at North Pleasant St in a house which overlooked the cemetery, and in a letter (L11) of 1846 to her friend Abiah Root Emily mentioned that, ‘Yesterday as I sat by the north window the funeral train entered the open gate of the church yard.’

Poem 1762 F1787 ‘Were nature mortal lady’
If ‘nature’ was a ‘mortal lady,’ like, say, Emily’s mother or Sue, the seasons would be packed up and sent off in a tearing hurry. But nature, unlike one’s wife, is ready ‘an hour’ before the time, and can still improve what was already too beautiful for peace of mind (see poem 1654). Then, when she eventually departs, her absence is more ‘enchanting’ than her presence (see poem 1209).

Poem 1763 F1788 ‘Fame is a bee’
Emily condenses the thought of poem 1659. The ‘sting’ is perhaps adverse criticism.

Poem 1764 F1789 ‘The saddest noise, the sweetest noise’
As in poem 783 Emily is awake at dawn to hear the birdsong. In this poem the birdsong is ‘the saddest’ as well as ‘the sweetest’ because it happens at that magical time when March becomes April, and we are brought closest to heaven but also to thoughts and tears for our dead. Indeed the birdsong goes so quickly from Emily’s ears to her heart that she almost wishes it would stop happening.

In line14 ‘deplore’ means ‘weep for.’

Poem 1765 F1747 ‘That Love is all there is’
This poem is undateable, but Emily had concluded a quatrain of 1862 sent to Samuel Bowles with the lines

But the Heart with the heaviest freight on –
Doesn’t – always – move –

and perhaps this quatrain too was written at the height of her unrequitable love for him. She may be saying that the weight of this unrequitable love is proportioned to the groove of her heart which can bear it, because it is enough for her to know that love means more than anything.
Poem 1766 F1746 ‘Those final Creatures – who they are’
As only summer herself knows who those faithful creatures are that keep her ecstasy
going to the very end, it is presumptuous for the reader to guess their identity, but they
might be the crickets of poem 1276.

Poem 1767 F1785 ‘Sweet hours have perished here’
The ‘sweet hours’ might be those she enjoyed with Samuel Bowles in this room, as
Emily’s ‘hopes’ of a lifelong relationship with him are indeed ‘shadows in [his]
tomb.’

Poem 1768 F1606 ‘Lad of Athens, faithful be’
Thomas Johnson suggests that the short note (L865) containing this poem may have
been sent to Samuel Bowles the younger in the autumn of 1883, just after his
engagement to Miss Elizabeth Hoar. If this is so, Emily seems to be giving some pre-
 wedding advice to one who was born or lived in one of the many American towns
called Athens. She says that provided he follows his own instincts and recognises that
much is ‘Mystery,’ he can regard any certainties he receives from others as ‘Perjury.’

Emily had already congratulated him on his engagement in poem 1577. At a
New England wedding reception in Portland in 2004 which I attended a microphone
was passed around for guests to give their advice to the married couple.

Poem 1769 F1153 ‘The longest day that God appoints’
This poem was sent to her cousins in 1868 as part of a letter (L329) comforting them
in some trouble. When twenty years or so later Mrs Todd asked Fanny Norcross what
the trouble had been, she replied that she could not remember.

The first two lines of the quatrain are reminiscent of Macbeth’s aside

Come what come may,
Time and the hour runs through the roughest day (Macbeth 1:3:146-7).

The second two lines perhaps mean that ‘anguish’ can only travel as far as the ‘stake’
or finishing post of sunset, before returning next day.
Poem 1770 F1181  ‘Experiment escorts us last’
This poem was sent as part of a letter (L353) to Thomas Higginson in October 1870. Emily wrote her poetry and lived her life following this Credo, to which any golfer would give a rueful assent.

Poem 1771 F1557  ‘How fleet- how indiscreet an one’
This poem was found after Emily’s death in an envelope containing drafts of poems and letters to Judge Otis Lord written on scraps of paper. Lord’s letters to her usually arrived on Monday, and this poem is preceded by lines (L695) which show how important Monday was for her. The lines are, ‘My little devices to live till Monday would woo (win) your sad attention……..Full of work and plots and little happinesses the thought of you protracts (derides) them all and makes them sham and cold.’

The poem then repeats the point, saying that although she may try to fill up the time with housework, thoughts of love speedily crop up at the wrong, inconvenient moment. But after all, Love is not a Deity we are whipped to serve, like the God of housework.

Poem 1772 [not in F]  ‘Let me not thirst with this Hock at my Lip’
This poem was also found in the Judge Lord envelope. The ‘Hock’ and the ‘Domains’ both describe her love for him.

Poem 1773 F1622  ‘The Summer that we did not prize’
This poem was also found in the Judge Lord envelope. It is not clear how the poem might refer to Emily’s relationship with him. One suggestion would be that Lord has been staying for a few days at the Homestead. While he was there, she took ‘the Summer’ of his presence for granted. Only now that he has gone down the road to catch the train does she recognise what she is going to miss. Hastily she puts on her coat, dashes down the road, but the train has just left the station with Lord ‘unconscious of [her] smartness.’

Poem 1774 F1182  ‘Too happy Time dissolves itself’
This quatrain is the last of four quatrains included in the letter (L353) of October 1870 sent to Thomas Higginson, the other three being poems 1222, 1770 and the last stanza of poem 1039.

Happiness easily flies away leaving nothing behind. It is featherless Anguish which has ‘too much weight to fly.’

Poem 1775 F895 ‘The earth has many keys’

Charles Anderson says that these lines are the end of another version of poem 1068. In this second version, lines 1-8 of poem 1068, describing the Mass sung by the crickets, are followed by 4 lines saying how the song of the crickets is still audible at dusk, and then by the 8 lines of poem 1775 commenting on the meaning of their song.

In poem 1775 Emily says that earth has many songs, and it is only the ‘unknown peninsula’ of heaven which has no songs for us. Beauty is to be found in nature. Land and sea are both witnesses to that beauty, but the finest witness to beauty is the elegy of the song of the cricket.