MUSIC IN THE LIFE AND POETRY

OF EMILY DICKINSON

APPROVED:

Imogene B. Dickey
Major Professor

J. Wm. Turner
Minor Professor

E. S. Clifton
Chairman of the Department of English

Robert B. Toulouse
Dean of the Graduate School

LBD

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The problem with which this study is concerned is the importance of music in the life and poetry of Emily Dickinson. The means of determining this importance were as follows: (1) determining the experiences which the poet had in music as the background for her references to music in the poems, (2) revealing the extent to which she used the vocabulary of music in her poems, (3) explicating the poems whose main subject is music, (4) investigating her use of music in the development of certain major themes, and (5) examining other imagery in her poetry which is related to music.

The most often quoted sources of information are The Letters of Emily Dickinson, edited by Thomas H. Johnson, and The Poems of Emily Dickinson, also edited by Thomas H. Johnson. A third work which is of great importance to this study is A Concordance to the Poems of Emily Dickinson by Samuel P. Rosenbaum.

The study reveals significant facts about Emily Dickinson's life including a description of the village of Amherst, the members of her family, her schooling, her withdrawal from community life, the fact that she was a private poet, her death, the finding of the hoard of poems by her sister Lavinia, the circumstances surrounding the first publications

of poems and letters, and the events which led to a cessation in their publication. Attention is directed to the fact that no previous study has been made of the importance of music in Emily Dickinson's life and poetry, although several studies have been made showing the relationship between her poetry and hymns.

The study reveals many details about Emily Dickinson's experiences with music, including her piano and singing lessons, the selections she played, the concerts she heard, the people who played and sang for her, and the hymns she knew. Listed are 118 words of her poetic vocabulary which derive from music together with the number of times that she used each word and the number of the poem or poems in which the word appears. No such listing has been previously made. The poems whose subject is music reveal that music affected her greatly, but she could not explain her reaction; music was beyond her ability to report or to define. The poet's use of music imagery is evident in the development of her major themes of nature, poetry and the poet, love and friendship, death, and the reality of the abstract. She often used just one word or a short phrase in her poems to refer to music, and she trusted the reader to make the full association. In addition to her references to music in the development of the

major themes listed above, other poems which refer to music are cited because of their striking images and the great ideas the poet was able to express in a few lines.

Emily Dickinson's lifelong experiences in music, her music vocabulary, the poems which she wrote about music, and the music imagery which she used in her poems prove that music was important in her life and poetry.

The significance of this study lies in the fact that it presents a view of Emily Dickinson and her poetry that has not been presented before. The study reveals that music is one of the special sources of her poetic vocabulary, and that music is an important auxiliary theme in her poetry.

As a poet, she expressed many different emotions; and it is entirely appropriate that she should have referred so many times to music, which is itself pre-eminently an expression of the emotions.

# MUSIC IN THE LIFE AND POETRY OF EMILY DICKINSON

THESIS

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By

Louise Winn Reglin, B. A.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

Emily Elizabeth Dickinson was born on December 10, 1830, in Amherst, Massachusetts, the second of three children born to Edward Dickinson and Emily Norcross Dickinson. The Dickinson family occupied a place of prominence in Amherst.[1] Emily Dickinson's grandfather, Samuel Fowler Dickinson, had been instrumental in the founding of both Amherst Academy and Amherst College; her father, Edward Dickinson, practiced law and maintained an active interest in the affairs of the College. Her brother Austin also became a lawyer, remained in Amherst, and worked in the interest of the College. It has been said that Edward and Austin Dickinson together ruled the little kingdom of Amherst for a span of seventy years.[2]

The village of Emily Dickinson's time was a tiny cluster of houses and farms whose people practiced plain living and high thinking.[3] People were religious and on Sunday attended church services both in the morning and afternoon. Six generations of Calvinistic teaching had borne fruit in a high

[1] George F. Whicher, This Was a Poet (New York: Scribner's, 1939), pp. 3-20.

[2] Ibid., p. 31.

[3] Ibid., pp. 3-20.

sense of personal responsibility, and upon each individual rested the supreme duty of self-improvement of mind and character. It was a conservative community, yet changes were creeping in. Though nearly always resisted, changes did come about, as in the case of the installation of chandeliers and an organ in the village church. The community was economically independent, little indebted to the outside world for its needs. It had few outlets for emotional release. Card games, dancing, and the reading of novels were frowned upon; but people enjoyed teas, informal suppers, and the practice of visiting about in the evenings. Housework was a very demanding occupation, and women had little respite from its routine.

George F. Whicher says of Emily Dickinson and Amherst College:

> Emily Dickinson and Amherst College grew up together. There was only nine years difference in their ages. The College, almost as literally as she, could claim to be a child of the Dickinson family, for her grandfather was one of the most zealous of its working founders and her father and brother between them held the office of College Treasurer for sixty years. She, almost as literally as the College, was an emanation of the region. Inbred in each was the Calvinistic insistence on perfection to be won by mental striving. Both College and poet were nurtured in Puritan orthodoxy, and both turned from beliefs that had become familiar and dear to engage in an unprejudiced and clear-eyed scrutiny of the world about them. It was not for nothing that Emily Dickinson was brought up in a New England college town.[4]

[4] Ibid., pp. 20-21.

Emily Dickinson spent almost her entire life in her father's house, her absences being a year that she spent at Mount Holyoke Seminary at South Hadley, Massachusetts, a short trip to Washington and Philadelphia when she was twenty-three years of age, and several trips to Boston.[5] During the latter part of her life, for reasons of her own, she secluded herself at home. To her friends she wrote vivid letters and occasional bits of verse, but not even the members of her family knew of the vast number of poems which she was writing secretly.

Emily Dickinson was intensely loyal to her family.[6] Edward Dickinson was the dominant figure in the household and in her life. Her character was firmly rooted in his, and with the passing of the years her allegiance to him deepened to a profound and unspoken tenderness. "His Heart was pure and terrible," she wrote after his death, "and I think no other like it exists."[7] Emily Dickinson's mother was a gentle and submissive woman who reverenced her husband and devoted

[5] Ibid., p. 21.

[6] Ibid., p. 23-38.

[7] Emily Dickinson, The Letters of Emily Dickinson, ed. Thomas H. Johnson (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1960), II, 528. Subsequent references to the letters will be indicated by Letters, followed by the volume, page number, and number of the letter in parentheses following the reference in the text.

her life to making his home what he wished it to be. Emily Dickinson found it difficult to be aware of her unassertive mother, saying at one time, "I never had a mother. I suppose a mother is one to whom you hurry when you are troubled" (Letters, II, 475, #342b).

There was a strong bond of affection between Emily Dickinson and her brother Austin;[8] and before Austin married in 1856, Emily Dickinson accepted her future sister-in-law, Sue Huntington Gilbert, with enthusiasm and without reserve. The relationship continued for a number of years, and it was to Sue Gilbert Dickinson that Emily Dickinson often turned for suggestions about improving some of her verses.

Emily Dickinson's sister, Lavinia Norcross Dickinson, was her lifelong companion and trusted confidante. Neither ever married; both remained in the family home until they died. Lavinia indulged Emily Dickinson in her wish for privacy and spared her the slightest inconvenience, and ultimately it was Lavinia's faith in the importance of Emily Dickinson's verses that brought about the first publications of the poems.

Emily Dickinson was a private poet. During her lifetime, only seven of her poems were published, and these were printed

[8] Whicher, pp. 22-38.

anonymously.[9] Soon after Emily Dickinson's death on May 15, 1886, Lavinia found a hoard of poems. Determined that they should be published, Vinnie asked Sue Dickinson to prepare the poems for publication.[10] Sue, at first enthusiastic, became indifferent about the project; and Vinnie turned to Mabel Loomis Todd for help. Mabel Todd had come to Amherst in 1881 when her husband became director of the college observatory (Johnson, in Letters, III, 956); and soon after the Todds' arrival in the village, Vinnie had asked Mabel Todd to come to the Dickinson home to play the piano.[11] With Mabel Todd's repeated visits in the Dickinson home, an association of many years began, the details of which are related by Millicent Todd Bingham in Ancestors' Brocades.

Mabel Todd embarked upon the project of preparing the poems for publication. Previous to Mrs. Todd's involvement with the poems, Vinnie had asked the help of Thomas Wentworth Higginson, a prolific writer and critic to whom Emily Dickinson herself had sent some poems for evaluation (Johnson, in Letters, III, 945). Higginson, too busy to help with the

[9] Thomas H. Johnson, Notes on the Present Text, in Emily Dickinson, The Poems of Emily Dickinson, ed. Thomas H. Johnson (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1955), p. lx.

[10] Millicent Todd Bingham, Ancestors' Brocades: The Literary Debut of Emily Dickinson (New York: Harper & Bros., 1945), p. lx.

[11] T. H. Johnson, Emily Dickinson: An Interpretive Biography (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1955), p. 55.

actual work of preparing the poems, had agreed to consider them if someone else would do the necessary work.[12] Thus it was that Emily Dickinson made her literary debut in 1890 with the publication of Poems by Emily Dickinson, edited by Mabel Loomis Todd and T. W. Higginson.[13] The book was so successful that by 1896, ten years after Emily Dickinson's death, two other volumes of poems and two volumes of Emily Dickinson's letters had also been published. Then publication ceased.[14]

Millicent Todd Bingham explains in Ancestors Brocades[15] the circumstances that prevented further publication of the poems. There was a clash of interests and feelings involving the three persons most closely connected with Emily Dickinson's poems--Lavinia Dickinson, Sue Dickinson, and Mabel Loomis Todd. The three-way split was a result of these facts:

(1) Lavinia Dickinson claimed complete ownership of all of the poems, even those which the poet had sent with notes to Sue Dickinson and others.[16]

[12] Bingham, p. 18.

[13] Ibid., p. 412.

[14] Ibid., Preface, p. vii.

[15] Ibid., Prologue

[16] Ibid., p. 117.

(2) Sue Dickinson asserted her own ownership of the poems which Emily Dickinson had sent to her.[17] The difference in these claims was the basis for the split between Lavinia and Sue.

(3) Sue Dickinson was not on speaking terms with Mabel Todd.[18] She had shown increasing opposition to the work which was being done on the poems.[19] Furthermore, town gossip had linked the names of Mabel Todd and Austin Dickinson.[20]

(4) The breaking of ties between Mabel Todd and Lavinia Dickinson was a result of their failure to establish a business arrangement for Mabel Todd's work on the poems.[21] Austin Dickinson wanted to give Mabel Todd a strip of land as recompense for her work.[22] Though Lavinia acquiesced to Austin's wishes and signed the deed to the land,[23] she later changed her mind and brought suit to recover possession of the land.[24]

[17] Ibid., p. 118.

[18] Ibid., p. 331.

[19] Ibid., p. 82.

[20] Ibid., p. 352.

[21] Ibid., p. 109.

[22] Ibid., p. 326.

[23] Ibid., p. 339.

[24] Ibid., p. 347.

Lavinia won the lawsuit,[25] but the Todds filed an appeal and took the case to the Supreme Court.[26] Lavinia won the appeal also.[27] The main result of the lawsuit was the permanent alienation of Mabel Todd; and upon Mabel Todd had depended further publication of the poems.[28]

Publication of the poems was not resumed until 1914, when Martha Dickinson Bianchi, the daughter of Sue and Austin Dickinson, published The Single Hound. According to the preface of the book, the poems in The Single Hound were poems which Emily Dickinson had sent to Sue.[29] Subsequent books by Martha Bianchi include The Life and Letters of Emily Dickinson (1924), The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson (1924), The Poems of Emily Dickinson (1930), and Emily Dickinson Face to Face (1931).[30]

Charles R. Anderson, author of Emily Dickinson's Poetry: Stairway of Surprise, writes of these publications in the preface of his book:

[25] Ibid., p. 360.

[26] Ibid., p. 360.

[27] Ibid., p. 368.

[28] Ibid., p. 370.

[29] Ibid., p. 376.

[30] Ibid., pp. 376-95.

> During the first half century after her [Emily Dickinson's] death the poems were published piecemeal and inaccurately in a bewildering series of installments--probably the most unfortunate publication history in modern literary annals. . . . Then at long last, in 1955, a complete scholarly edition was issued that resolves the problems of a definitive text as well as can be hoped for.[31]

Of course, Anderson is referring to the three-volume variorum edition of The Poems of Emily Dickinson, edited by Thomas H. Johnson. In the preface to this work, Thomas J. Wilson, director of the Harvard University Press, states:

> The publication of this edition of the poems of Emily Dickinson is an epoch-making event, the culmination of more than a half century of efforts by Dickinson students, and thus a source of pride to all concerned. Here in these three volumes are united all the poems known to have been written by Emily Dickinson, with all their variants and with the poet's own preferred text of each poem identified. The years spent by Thomas H. Johnson on this undertaking have resulted in an outstanding work of literary scholarship, indispensable for students of American intellectual history and forever to be cherished by lovers of poetry. [32]

Also appearing in 1955 was Emily Dickinson: An Interpretive Biography by Thomas H. Johnson.[33] In this work, Johnson interprets Emily Dickinson against the background of

[31] Charles R. Anderson, Emily Dickinson's Poetry: Stairway of Surprise (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), Preface, p. ix.

[32] Thomas J. Wilson, Preface in The Poems of Emily Dickinson, ed. Thomas H. Johnson (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1955), p. xi.

[33] Thomas H. Johnson, Emily Dickinson: An Interpretive Biography (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1955).

her own times. He explains the impulses that stirred her mind and spirit, and he allows her poetry to speak for itself as he explains how, seventy years after her death, she has commanded a place in the world of letters which her contemporaries never dreamed she would achieve.

Students of Emily Dickinson are also indebted to Thomas H. Johnson for his work in editing the three-volume The Letters of Emily Dickinson, published in 1958.[34] The letters are arranged chronologically. Each is numbered and is followed by data concerning manuscript and publication history and by explanatory notes about things mentioned in the letters themselves.

S. P. Rosenbaum compiled A Concordance to the Poems of Emily Dickinson, published in 1964. Rosenbaum says of his work:

> For some time it was not even possible to find the poems as she wrote them but with the publication in 1955 of Thomas H. Johnson's definitive three-volume variorum edition, The Poems of Emily Dickinson, they became fully available. The purpose of this concordance is to make "the words to every thought" in the poems of that edition equally available.[35]

[34] Emily Dickinson, The Letters of Emily Dickinson, ed. Thomas H. Johnson (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1958).

[35] S. P. Rosenbaum, A Concordance to the Poems of Emily Dickinson (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1964), Preface, p. vii.

In 1960, Jay Leyda published The Years and Hours of Emily Dickinson in two volumes.[36] This work presents facts about the life and works of Emily Dickinson without attempting to build them into an interpretation or biography. As a reference to the intimate, day-by-day happenings in her life, the work has great value for those who wish to understand her writings.

Studies have been made about many aspects of Emily Dickinson's art. Charles R. Anderson in Emily Dickinson's Poetry: Stairway of Surprise selected the poems that he considers truly fine (about a hundred) and the ones that he considers great (about twenty-five) for his anthology of her poems.[37] The poems, grouped according to subject matter, concern art, nature, the self, death and its sequel. Albert J. Gelpi, author of Emily Dickinson: The Mind of the Poet, uses both the letters and the poems to understand Emily Dickinson fully and richly as a poet and to suggest her place in American letters.[38] Thomas W. Ford considers the subject

[36] Jay Leyda, The Years and Hours of Emily Dickinson (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1960).

[37] Charles R. Anderson, Emily Dickinson's Poetry: Stairway of Surprise (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960).

[38] Albert J. Gelpi, Emily Dickinson: The Mind of the Poet (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1965).

of death in Heaven Beguiles the Tired: Death in the Poetry of Emily Dickinson;[39] and Clark Griffith, author of The Long Shadow: Emily Dickinson's Tragic Poetry, is concerned with the poems presenting man's tragic lot that is "other" than himself--that is, the tragedies over which man has no control.[40]

Volumes of selected criticism have also been published, such as The Recognition of Emily Dickinson (1965), edited by Caesar R. Blake and Carlton F. Wells.[41] This volume contains criticisms that date back to 1890 with two selections by T.W. Higginson. Richard B. Sewall is the editor of Emily Dickinson: A Collection of Critical Essays (1963)[42] and the author of The Lyman Letters: New Lights on Emily Dickinson and Her Family (1965).[43] This tiny volume presents nine excerpts from letters which Emily Dickinson wrote to Joseph Lyman, one

[39] Thomas W. Ford, Heaven Beguiles the Tired: Death in the Poetry of Emily Dickinson (University, Ala., Univ. of Ala. Press, 1966).

[40] Clark Griffith, The Long Shadow: Emily Dickinson's Tragic Poetry (Princeton, Princeton Univ. Press, 1964).

[41] Caesar R. Blake and Carlton F. Wells, ed., The Recognition of Emily Dickinson (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Univ. of Mich. Press, 1964).

[42] Richard B. Sewall, ed., Emily Dickinson: A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1963).

[43] Richard B. Sewall, The Lyman Letters: New Lights on Emily Dickinson and Her Family (Amherst, Mass.: Univ. of Mass. Press, 1965).

of Austin Dickinson's classmates at Williston Seminary and a frequent visitor in the Dickinson home during at least one school term. While the original letters have not turned up, Lyman did copy some portions of them. The Lyman Letters presents these copied excerpts against the background of the events that prompted them.

Books and articles have been written in profusion about Emily Dickinson's poetry. Emily Dickinson: A Bibliography (1968) by Sheila T. Clendenning lists 945 studies.[44] Of these, none investigates Emily Dickinson's total experience in music and the importance of music in her life and poetry. Several articles, however, do point out her indebtedness to hymn writers.

James Davidson, writing in the Boston Public Library Quarterly (1954), points out her indebtedness to Isaac Watts, an eighteenth century English clergyman and hymn writer.[45] Emily Dickinson used the Wattsian forms almost exclusively and also used the same sort of half rhymes that Watts used. One of Watts's favorite rhyming combinations, "given" and "heaven," occurs in Emily Dickinson's poems no less than seven times. The two writers differed about man's relationship to God. Watts had clear directions from God and hoped for the

[44] Sheila T. Clendenning, Emily Dickinson: A Bibliography (Kent, Ohio: Kent State Univ. Press, 1968).

[45] James Davidson, "Emily Dickinson and Isaac Watts," Boston Public Library Quarterly, 6(1954), pp. 141-49.

strength to follow them, while Emily Dickinson denied that God had given her any help. Both Watts and Emily Dickinson frequently used the words "God," "heaven," and "death." Watts treated the death process with enthusiasm and attention to details not given in the Bible, whereas Emily Dickinson emphasized more the mystery of death and the life beyond.

William E. Stephenson, writing in English Language Notes, points out resemblances between Emily Dickinson's verses and Watts's phenomenally popular Divine Songs Attempted in Easy Language for . . . Children.[46] He states that certain vocabulary similarities could have derived from Divine Songs as well as from Watts's hymns for adults. Likewise, the psalm meters which Emily Dickinson used throughout her poetry are the meters of Divine Songs. Her preference for Common Meter and Short Meter, together with her avoidance of Long Meter, reflects Watts's practice in Divine Songs. Also, all through Divine Songs, Watts presents the picture of a child who is a young, wondering, light-hearted and innocent being. It is the same kind of child-figure that Emily Dickinson used again and again to represent her spiritual attitude.

Martha Winburn England, in New York Public Library Bulletin, states that Emily Dickinson wrote her poems to existing hymn tunes, the favorite of which was "Dundee," and

[46] William E. Stephenson, "Emily Dickinson and Watts's Songs for Children," English Language Notes, 3(June 1966), pp. 278-81.

that she got both her tunes and her meters from the hymns of Isaac Watts.[47] Martha England also points out the differences in theological beliefs of the two writers. She also lists the hymn books that Emily Dickinson used during the years when she went to church.

Among the many studies made of Emily Dickinson's poems are those which analyze her vocabulary. Two which have already been mentioned in this study, those by James Davidson and William E. Stephenson, note certain similarities between Emily Dickinson's vocabulary and that of Isaac Watts. George F. Whicher in This Was a Poet calls attention to several vocabulary classifications by indicating the number of poems which treat a particular subject.[48] For example, thirty-three poems are on the change of the seasons or particular months; twenty-five are on aspects of day and night; fifty-eight deal with living creatures. William Howard in Publications of the Modern Language Association (March 1957) lists words which Emily Dickinson drew from special sources, some of which are the medical profession (12 words), grammar (15 words), mathematics (17 words), and law and politics (60 words).[49]

[47] Martha Winburn England, "Emily Dickinson and Isaac Watts: Puritan Hymnodists," New York Public Library Bulletin, 69(1966), pp. 83-116.

[48] Whicher, This Was a Poet, p. 252.

[49] William Howard, "Emily Dickinson's Poetic Vocabulary," Publications of the Modern Language Association of America, 72, No. 1(March 1947), p. 230.

R. P. Blackmur, in The Recognition of Emily Dickinson, points out some conventional types of vocabulary items that occur often and conspicuously in the poems, but he does not indicate how many words are in each.[50] In her vocabulary are words that pertain to romance and chivalry, sewing and the kinds of cloth used in women's clothing, jewelry, the Civil War, seaborne commerce, the names of distant places, and the transcendental theology of her time.

None of the scholars whose works are quoted in this thesis have discussed Emily Dickinson in relation to music except those who have discussed the similarities of the poems to the hymns and the difference between Emily Dickinson's theology and the theology proclaimed by the hymns. No one has compiled Emily Dickinson's music vocabulary.

There being available no similar study, this thesis is devoted to the importance of music in the life and poetry of Emily Dickinson. The study will (1) ascertain the experiences which Emily Dickinson had in music as the background for her references to music in the poems, (2) reveal the extent to which she used the vocabulary of music in her poems, (3) explicate the poems whose main subject is music, (4) investigate her use of music in the development of the themes of nature, poetry

[50] R. P. Blackmur, "Emily Dickinson: Notes on Prejudice and Fact," in The Recognition of Emily Dickinson, ed. Caesar R. Blake and Carlton F. Wells (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Univ. of Mich. Press, 1964), pp. 218-19.

and the poet, love and friendship, death, and the reality of the abstract, and (5) examine other imagery which is related to music.

Two publications have provided most of the information for Chapter II and Chapter III of this study. The first is The Letters of Emily Dickinson, edited by Thomas H. Johnson and published in three volumes. This work was the main source of information about Emily Dickinson's experiences in music, and the Subject Index on pages 1214-1226 was the source for the identification of the poems whose main subject is music. The second publication is A Concordance to the Poems of Emily Dickinson by S. P. Rosenbaum. This work was the source of Emily Dickinson's music vocabulary. After the music terms were determined from the concordance, the poems containing these terms were studied to be sure that the terms have meaning which relates to music. For example, "solo" may or may not relate to music. Poem #1 has the line "Thou art a human solo, a being cold, and lone."[51] Because "solo" here means "lone" or "lacking a partner," this use of "solo" has not been enumerated. Further, since The Poems of Emily Dickinson is a variorum edition which includes all known variants of the poems, only that version which immediately follows the poem

[51] Emily Dickinson, The Poems of Emily Dickinson, ed. Thomas H. Johnson (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1955), I, 1, #1. Subsequent references to the poems will be indicated by Poems, followed by the volume, page number, and the number of the poem in parentheses following the reference in the text.

number was considered. For example, one of the four variants of Poem #1068 contains the line "But terminates in tune" (Poems II, 754, #1068). Since "tune" does not occur in the version of the poem immediately following the poem number, this use of "tune" is not included in the enumeration of music terms.

This study is not exhaustive; for in the investigation of Emily Dickinson's use of music in her poems, only selected poems which develop the themes of nature, poetry and the poet, love and friendship, death, and the reality of the abstract were considered.

While the capitalization, punctuation, and grammar of the quotations from Emily Dickinson's poems and letters may seem faulty or inconsistent, they are reproduced as given in the quoted source.

In this study, it is assumed that every reference in the poems to music was intentional and that none was accidental or thoughtless. Poem #1126 describes the difficulty the poet experienced in thinking of the exact word needed to convey a thought.

> Shall I take thee, the Poet said
> To the propounded word?
> Be stationed with the Candidates
> Till I have finer tried--
>
> The poet searched Philology
> And was about to ring
> for the suspended Candidate
> There came unsummoned in--
>
> That portion of the Vision
> The Word applied to fill
> Not unto nomination
> The Cherubim revealed--
>
> (Poems, II, 790-91, #1126)

As a poet, she often wondered which word to use from the possible "Candidates" that she had in mind for a particular situation. As she searched philology and was about to make up her mind, the appropriate word came to her "unsummoned." It was as though angels communicated it to her, "The Cherubim revealed," so that she did not have to consider further the possibilities she had been pondering. Her care in composition is evident with Poem #1545, which begins "The Bible is an antique volume." It contains the line "Had but the Tale a warbling Teller," and Emily Dickinson chose the word "warbling" from thirteen alternatives (Poems, III, 1065-66, #1545).

Poem #1452 reveals that words for her thoughts came inexplicably and infrequently but that the right words, once found, seemed appropriate enough to be "native," or to have grown simultaneously with the idea itself.

> Your thoughts dont have words every day
> They come a single time
> Like signal esoteric sips
> Of the communion Wine
> Which while you taste so native seems
> So easy so to be
> You cannot comprehend its price
> Nor it's infrequency
>
> (Poems, III, 1005, #1452)

A study of Emily Dickinson's time, her education, and her family reveals that music was a part of her life. The studies that have been made of her poetry show her concern with many subjects, but there is no study that shows her concern with music. It is the purpose of this study to reveal the importance of music in her life and her poetry.

## CHAPTER II

From her earliest years, Emily Dickinson was exposed to music and responded to it.[1] Her aunt, Mrs. Loring Norcross, reported that at the age of two and a half Emily Dickinson learned to play the piano and called the sounds "moosic."[2] In 1840 before she was eleven, Emily Dickinson began to attend Amherst Academy in her home-town of Amherst, Massachusetts.[3] The school year there was divided into four terms of eleven consecutive weeks each with two weeks of vacation time between. Since each term formed a complete block of study, the system tolerated irregular attendance; and when Emily Dickinson had to remain at home because of poor health, she concentrated on exercise, piano lessons, occasional language and singing lessons, and other lady-like pursuits.[4]

[1] John B. Pickard, Emily Dickinson: An Introduction and Interpretation (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), p. 12.

[2] Emily Dickinson, The Letters of Emily Dickinson, ed. Thomas H. Johnson (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1960), I, 33. Subsequent references to the editor's explanations will be indicated by Johnson, followed by in Letters, volume, and page number in parentheses following the reference in the text.

[3] George Frisbie Whicher, This Was a Poet (New York: Scribner's, 1939), p. 40.

[4] Polly Longsworth, Emily Dickinson: Her Letter to the World (New York: Crowell, 1965), p. 27.

Emily Dickinson shared an interest in the piano with Abiah Root, a classmate at Amherst Academy during 1843-44 (Johnson, in Letters, III, 953); and after Abiah's one year there, the girls began a long correspondence. In the spring of 1845, they were both studying piano; and Emily Dickinson expressed her pleasure because Abiah was taking lessons on the "piny." After admonishing Abiah not to get ahead of her, she said, "Father intends to have a piano very soon" and expressed pleasure at the prospect of having "one of my own" (Letters, I, 12, #6). A letter from Emily Dickinson to Abiah in August of the same year reveals the fact that Emily Dickinson had been taking music lessons from Aunt Selby,[5] who was spending the summer with the Dickinsons. The summer had been unusually happy for Emily, and one reason for her happiness was the fact that the Dickinsons had acquired a piano which she claimed as her own.

She even offered to let Abiah practice on it if Abiah would come for the end-of-term acitvities at the Academy. The girls were using the same instruction book, one by Bertini, and Emily claimed to be getting along in it quite well. Aunt Selby did not plan for Emily to have "many tunes" at that time, wanting her to "get over in the book a good ways first" (Letters, I, 16, #7). Though Abiah apparently did not come for the

[5] There is no information in any of the letters or in any of the works listed in the bibliography for this paper which identifies Aunt Selby.

Commencement exercises, Emily attended and heard the "stately final music" which was a part of the program.[6]

The Dickinsons acquired their piano sometime between May and August of 1845. Though Emily Dickinson's father had expressed his preference for a rosewood piano with matching stool,[7] her niece, Martha Dickinson Bianchi, describes the piano as an "old-fashioned square piano in an elaborately carved mahogany case."[8] Whicher gives the make as a Hallet & Davis;[9] but when T. W. Higginson[10] was in Amherst in August, 1870, he reported seeing "an open piano--Malbone & O D (Out Door) Papers among other books" (Letters, II, 473, #342a). W. H. Bond, librarian of the Houghton Library at Harvard University, makes the following comment about Emily Dickinson's piano and T. W. Higginson's remark:

[6] Longsworth, p. 6.

[7] Jay Leyda, The Years and Hours of Emily Dickinson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), I, 86-87.

[8] Martha Dickinson Bianchi, Emily Dickinson Face to Face (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1932), p. 34.

[9] Whicher, p. 318.

[10] It was to Thomas Wentworth Higginson that Emily Dickinson wrote for criticism of her verses in April 1862. A prolific writer, he had published "Letter to a Young Contributor" as the lead article in the Atlantic Monthly for April 1862, offering practical advice to beginning writers (Johnson, in Letters, II, 403). The correspondence between Emily Dickinson and Higginson is of first importance in the history of American literature (Johnson, in Letters, III, 945).

> Emily Dickinson's piano is now in this library, and it is a large, square Hallet & Davis piano, just as Professor Whicher says. I wonder if Higginson might not have been referring to music on the piano rack. There is a French song dating from the time of Queene Anne in which the Duke of Marlborough appears as Malbone. I have never heard of an "out door" piano.[11]

Emily Dickinson's letters indicate that she continued to practice. In September 1845, she mentioned taking lessons and getting along well, again referring to her own piano and to her happiness (Letters, I, 21, #8). In January 1846, she informed Abiah that she was practicing two hours a day and said that for Christmas Santa Claus had left her a sheet of music along with some other things (Letters, I, 24, #9). In March, Emily Dickinson learned that Abiah had acquired a new piano, and she rejoiced with her friend over this good fortune (Letters, I, 33, #11). In June, Emily Dickinson was still practicing two hours a day and was learning a beautiful thing which she longed for Abiah to hear (Letters, I, 34, #12). Perhaps it was difficult for her to maintain a regular schedule of practice, for in the autumn she wrote to Abiah that

[11] This information is contained in a letter from W. H. Bond, librarian, The Houghton Library of Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts. The letter is dated June 2, 1971, and is addressed to Mrs. F. Reglin, Jr., 200 Harbin Street, Waxahachie, Texas. See Appendix.

for once in her life she had kept her good resolution and had been sewing, practicing upon the piano, and assisting her mother in the household affairs (Letters, I, 40, #14). She did not attend school during the fall term, and in the winter of 1846 her studies were limited to German and music.[12]

Though ill health kept her from attending consecutive terms, she remained in Amherst Academy for nearly seven years, practicing the piano and receiving instruction in German, Latin, biology, geology, history, and philosophy.[13]

Following her years of study in Amherst Academy, Emily Dickinson spent the year from September 1847 through August 1848 in Mount Holyoke Seminary at South Hadley, Massachusetts, only ten miles from home (Johnson, in Letters, I, 44). While it was a period of hard mental discipline under stimulating conditions, she proved that she could more than keep abreast of her classmates even though she sang in one of the two choirs and kept up her practice on the piano.[14] Her letters to Abiah reveal her continued interest in her music. She describes her routine in a letter of November 6, 1847, saying,

[12] Theodora Ward, The Capsule of the Mind (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1961), p. 21.

[13] Pickard, p. 13.

[14] Whicher, p. 69.

"from 1 1/2 until 2 I sing in Seminary Hall. From 2 3/4 until 3 3/4 I practice upon the Piano" (Letters, I, 54, #18). She comments on a visit at home, saying that she played and sang a few tunes at her father's request, "much to his apparent gratification" (Letters I, 59, #20). During the latter part of her year at Mount Holyoke, she was practicing only one hour a day (Letters, I, 67, #23).

Her letters also reveal an interest in singing. In the autumn of 1844 shortly before her fourteenth birthday, Emily Dickinson wrote to her brother Austin, who was in school at Easthampton (Johnson, in Letters, I, 4), about the fine singing school which Mr. Woodman was conducting on Sunday evenings at the church and presumed that Austin would want to attend (Letters, I, 8, #4). Martha Winburn England makes this comment about the singing schools:

> In 1838 the church adopted a hymnbook edited by Lowell Mason. Under the sponsorship of the Handel and Haydn Society of Boston, Mason was establishing schools of church music. Henry Ward Beecher and his organist John Zundel were launching changes laid down by Mason. The entire Dickinson family attended the singing schools at the church.[15]

Emily Dickinson's interest in the singing school continued, for she wrote to Abiah Root in the spring about attending on Sabbath evenings "to improve my voice" (Letters, I, 10, #5).

[15] Martha Winburn England, "Emily Dickinson and Isaac Watts: Puritan Hymnodists," New York Public Library Bulletin, 69 (1966), p. 100.

Her later interest in singing is evident by her participation in one of the choirs while she attended the seminary at South Hadley from September 1847 until August 1848.

After her school days were over, she participated in a local musical group, for she wrote to her brother in April 1853 about it, saying, "The girls 'Musical' met here on Tuesday evening, and we had as pleasant a time as could have been expected, in view of the individuals composing the society" (Letters, I, 238, #113). According to Johnson, there were other meetings such as the one Emily Dickinson mentioned in this letter, for he says that Emily Dickinson and her friends occasionally gathered for an evening of music (Johnson, in Letters, I, 239).

A few years before her death, Emily Dickinson again referred to music lessons. To Mrs. Elizabeth Carmichael, mother-in-law of an Amherst College professor (Johnson, in Letters, III, 935), she wrote, "We often think of your evening circle--Mr. Skeel presiding at the piano, and Mrs. Skeel and yourself taking mutual lessons. I am studying now with the jays, and find them charming artists" (Letters, III, 674, #665).

It is from Emily Dickinson's letters that we also know the piano selections that she played, for her interest in her music led her to mention them from time to time in letters to

her friends and relatives. Most of the compositions in her early music books are popular marches, waltzes, and quick-steps (Johnson, in Letters, I, 19). With the help of Aunt Selby,[16] she learned to play such songs as "Maiden, Weep No More," "Wood Up," "Lancers Quickstep," and "The Grave of Bonaparte" (Letters, I, 18, #7), for which Lyman Heath wrote the music and Henry S. Washburn the words:

> The lightnings may flash, and the loud thunders rattle,
> He heeds not, he hears not, he's free from all pain;
> He sleeps his last sleep, he has fought his last battle,
> No sound can awake him to glory again.[17]

Eventually Emily Dickinson rose to the heights of "The Battle of Prague," but there was no one to guide her beyond this.[18]

Emily Dickinson's sister Vinnie learned to play the piano also, though Emily Dickinson is said to have played better.[19] Early in 1846, Emily Dickinson gave Vinnie a "first piano piece" entitled "Home on a Waltz," an arrangement of "Home Sweet Home."[20]

[16] Whicher, p. 56.

[17] Leyda, I, 94.

[18] Whicher, p. 56.

[19] Millicent Todd Bingham, Emily Dickinson's Home (New York: Harper, 1955), p. 153.

[20] Leyda, I, 104.

Emily Dickinson wrote to her brother Austin in June 1851:

> We are enjoying this evening what is called a "northeast storm"--a little north of east, in case you are pretty definite. Father thinks "it's amazin raw," and I'm half disposed to think that he's in the right about it, tho' I keep pretty dark, and dont say much about it! Vinnie is at the instrument, humming a pensive air concerning a young lady who thought she was "almost there." Vinnie seems much grieved, and I really suppose I ought to betake myself to weeping; I'm pretty sure that I shall if she dont abate her singing.
> (Letters, I, 110-111, #42)

Emily Dickinson had long been familiar with the poem "Are We Almost There," for she had written to Abiah in June 1846, "Have you seen a beautiful piece of poetry which has been going through the papers lately? Are we almost there? is the title of it" (Letters, I, 34, #12). Johnson makes these comments about the poem and song:

> The poem "Are we almost there" had appeared in newspapers as early as 1833. Written by Florence Vane, it was published as a song by Oliver Ditson in 1845, with music by the author. On the sheet, the story of its origin is told thus: "A young lady had visited the South for her health, but finding she hourly grew worse, her friends hurried her home. On the journey she was very much exhausted and continually inquired 'Are we almost there?' A friend, who accompanied her, wrote the song after her death."
> (Johnson, in Letters, I, 35)

It is evident that Emily Dickinson had a penchant for musical sketches and decorations. While attending Mount Holyoke, she sealed a letter with a diamond-shaped sticker

printed with the words, "Believe me," and a bar of music, the first notes of "Believe me if all those endearing young charms."[21] In October 1853 in a note to Susan Gilbert, who married Emily Dickinson's brother Austin in July 1856 (Johnson, in Letters, III, 939), Emily Dickinson wrote, "I send you a little air--The 'Music of the Spheres.' They are represented above as passing thro' the sky" (Letters, I, 265, #134). And sketched on the letter are ascending musical notations and puffs of ascending clouds (Johnson, in Letters, I, 265). During the first part of 1853, Emily Dickinson's cousin John L. Graves (Johnson, in Letters, III, 944) made for the Dickinsons an aeolian harp which, Emily said, "plays beautifully, alone, whenever there is a breeze" (Letters, I, 242, #115). She sent her cousin some wristlets, together with a note, in appreciation for his gift. At the top of the note are the words "In memory of AEolus" (Letters, I, 267, #137) and also a sketch of a grave with head and foot stones (Johnson, in Letters, I, 267). Evidently this was her way of letting him know that she would remember the aeolian harp as long as she lived.

Among the many people to whom Emily Dickinson wrote letters was Joel Warren Norcross of Boston, youngest brother of her mother (Johnson, in Letters, III, 952). In January 1850,

[21] Bingham, pp. 77-78.

Emily Dickinson wrote him a long letter, addressing him as "Dearest of all dear Uncles" and saying in part, "Have you found Susannah yet? 'Roses will fade--time flies on--Lady of Beauty,'--the whole hymn is too familiar to you now for me to repeat it." She continued with some of the social activities in Amherst that winter and then wrote, "Oh, a very great town is this! Chorus--a 'still greater one is this.' 'Now for the jovial bowl,' etc. You are fond of singing--I think--and by close, and assiduous practise may learn these two before I see you again. Exertion never harmed anybody--it wont begin now" (Letters, I, 80, #29).

From time to time, Austin Dickinson bought music for his sisters. On one occasion, Vinnie wrote to him: "I wish you'd get me a song called 'Blanche Alpine' and bring it with you for Cattle show. . . . I think the words to Nelly Bly are exquisite, and thank you again and again."[22] On another occasion, when Austin bought a duet for his two sisters, Emily Dickinson wrote him: "Thank you for the music, Austin. . . . I shall learn my part of the Duett, and try to have Vinnie her's" (Letters, I, 161, #65). However, a month later she asked a favor of him: "You sent us the Duett, Austin. Vinnie cannot

[22] Ibid., p. 186.

learn it, and I see from the outside page, that there is a piece for two hands. Are you willing to change it. Dont be in haste to send it; any time will do!" (Letters, I, 172, #71).

At another time, Austin got the wrong selection for Vinnie and received from her the following request:

> The song, "Merry Days When We Were Young" is not the one I sent for, and I want to have you exchange it, if you will, the one I want you to get is sung by Mrs. Wood and not by Mr. Leffler. I do not want this one, any how. Remember that tis sung by Mrs. Wood and no other. The tune begins with these words "Oh! the merry days, the merry days when we were young," and I should also like two other pieces, "You and Me," and "The Ossian Serenade."[23]

And in another communication, Vinnie told Austin that Emily Dickinson wanted "cousin E to get the Polka which she plays, for her, and send it by Father."[24]

Emily Dickinson's letters reveal her knowledge of various musical selections. Always aware of the sounds around her, she reported in a note to her Norcross cousins that she "hered" a bluebird and that the cat, Tabby, was singing Old Hundred (Letters, II, 523, #410). She also knew "America," for she wrote to Mrs. James S. Cooper[25] in the latter part

[23] Ibid., p. 210.

[24] Ibid., p. 234.

[25] James S. and Abigail Cooper moved to Amherst in 1866. He died in 1870, and his widow remained in order to educate their sons in Amherst College. The older son became a law partner of Emily Dickinson's brother; the younger was the Dickinson family physician for a time. There was a neighborly attachment and Emily Dickinson, until a month or so before her death, sent frequent notes to Mrs. Cooper (Johnson, in Letters, III, 936).

of the 1870's, "'My Country, 'tis of thee,' has always meant the Woods--to me--'Sweet Land of Liberty,' I trust is your own" (Letters, II, 586, #509). This letter is thought to have been sent on the Fourth of July (Johnson, in Letters, II, 586). She quoted again from "America" in a letter to Mabel Loomis Todd[26] in the summer of 1885, saying, "'Sweet Land of Liberty' is superfluous Carol till it concern ourselves" (Letters, III, 882, #1004). In addition to having given Vinnie an arrangement of "Home Sweet Home," she mentioned the song in connection with her nephew to Mrs. J. G. Holland:[27] "'Home--sweet Home'--Austin's Baby sings--'there is no place like Home--'tis too--over to Aunt Vinnie's'" (Letters, II, 604, #542). In the same letter, she commented on the death of their friend, Mr. Samuel Bowles, editor of the Springfield Daily Republican for many years and a highly esteemed friend of all the Dickinsons (Johnson, in Letters, III, 934). She sent her love to Dr. Holland and added, ". . . tell him the 'Bee' is a reckless Guide. Dear Mr Bowles found out too late, that Vitality costs

[26] Mabel Loomis Todd came to Amherst in 1881 with her husband, David Peck Todd, director of the observatory at Amherst College from 1881 until 1920. She had a large part in editing the poems and letters of Emily Dickinson; an account is given in Millicent Todd Bingham's Ancestors' Brocades (Johnson, in Letters, III, 956).

[27] Dr. and Mrs. Josiah Gilbert Holland were among Emily Dickinson's closest friends, and Emily Dickinson had no friendship which was more enduring than her friendship with Mrs. Holland (Johnson, in Letters, III, 945).

itself. How mournful without him! I often heard the Students sing--delicious Summer nights, 'I've seen around me fall--like Leaves in wintry weather'--This was what they meant" (Letters, II, 604, #542). Emily Dickinson also knew the lullaby, "Rock a Bye Baby"; for in a gay and happy letter to Susan Gilbert in 1853, she stated that hers was a "'Rock a bye baby' conscience" as far as revealing anything about the many letters Sue was receiving (Letters, I, 229, #107). In addition to writing letters to Susan herself, Emily Dickinson was forwarding letters for her brother Austin (Johnson, in Letters, I, 230), who married Susan three years later. In notes to various friends as she reminisced about former times she mentioned "Auld Lang Syne" (Letters, I, 38, #13; Letters, I, 237, #111; Letters, II, 328, #184). She also knew "The Last Rose of Summer" by Thomas Moore both as a poem and a musical arrangement.[28]

In a letter to Mrs. Holland in the autumn of 1884, Emily Dickinson echoed the words of the song "When the swallows homeward fly" by Franz Abt. Remembering the third anniversary of Dr. Holland's death, she wrote, "Upon the presumption that the 'Swallows homeward' flew, I address to their Nest, as

[28] Jack L. Capps, Emily Dickinson's Reading (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1966), p. 81.

formerly--I trust 'the Airs were delicate' the Day they made their flight, and that they still sing Life's portentous Music" (Letters, III, 849, #950).

Emily Dickinson's relationship with her cousins, Louise and Frances Norcross, was very close. She wrote to them often and in 1864 stayed in their home in Cambridge for several months while she was being treated for an eye condition by a Boston doctor. She was planning to return for further treatments about the first of April. Louise Norcross, wanting to visit the Dudleys in Middletown, Connecticut, had written Emily Dickinson to ask if she would have time to go before Emily Dickinson came back to Cambridge (Johnson, in Letters, II, 439). In her answer, Emily Dickinson rejoiced that Louise could make the trip, saying, "I am glad to the foot of my heart that you will go to Middletown. It will make you warm. Touches 'from home,' tell Gungl, are better than 'sounds' (Letters, II, 438, #302). The Dudleys were the "touches from home." John L. Dudley, who was an 1844 graduate of Amherst College (Johnson, in Letters, III, 940), had married Emily Dickinson's close friend Eliza Coleman, whose father had served as principal of Amherst Academy during 1844-46 (Johnson, in Letters, III, #936). Since the Norcross cousins had always been welcome in the Dickinson home, it is reasonable to assume

that Louise understood the reference to Emily Dickinson's music, the set of waltzes entitled Sounds from Home by the Hungarian composer Josef Gung'l (Johnson, in Letters, II, 439).

In April 1856, Emily Dickinson wrote to her cousin John Graves, who was serving as principal of an academy in Orford, New Hampshire (Johnson, in Letters, II, 328). She knew him well, for he had always been welcome in the Dickinson home during his undergraduate years at Amherst College (Johnson, in Letters, III, 943-44). The letter is long, containing several references to music, and saying in part: ". . . all have gone to church . . . and I have come out in the new grass to listen to the anthems." She mentions robins, crows, jays, and a bumblebee before mentioning the solemnity of the passing of time. The letter continues:

> We, too, are flying--fading, John--and the song "here lies," soon upon lips that love us now--will have hummed and ended. . . . It is a jolly thought to think that we can be Eternal--when air and earth are full of lives that are gone--and done--and a conceited thing indeed, this promised Resurrection! Congratulate me--John . . . that we have each a pair of lives, and need not chary be, of the one "that now is"--
> Ha--ha--if any can afford--'tis us a roundelay. . . .
> I play the old, odd tunes yet, which used to flit about your head after honest hours--and wake dear Sue, and madden me, with their grief and fun--
>
> (Letters, II, 327-28,#184)

Emily Dickinson's background in music was the source of a nickname which she gave to her nephew Ned. In September 1871 when Ned and his mother were visiting relatives in Geneva, New York, Emily Dickinson wrote to the boy's mother and included a message for ten-year-old Ned: "Tell Neddie that we miss him and cherish 'Captain Jinks'" (Letters, II, 489, #364). Another letter to Sue Dickinson while she and Ned were still in Geneva had a similar message: "My love to 'Captain Jenks' [sic] who forbore to call" (Letters, II, 512, #397). Johnson explains that Captain Jinks was associated with the horse marines in popular song (Johnson, in Letters, II, 490).

Not only did Emily Dickinson play the popular tunes of her time but she also was in the habit of improvising melodies.[29] MacGregor Jenkins, son of the Reverend Jonathan Leavitt Jenkins who was pastor of the First Church in Amherst from December 1866 until 1877 (Johnson in Letters, III, 947), recalls that Emily Dickinson often went across the lawn to her brother Austin's house, where she would fly to the piano and, if the mood required, thunder out a composition of her own which she laughingly but appropriately called "The Devil."[30]

[29] W. Connelly, "Emily Dickinson in Her Life, Letters, and Poetry," Essays by Divers Hands (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1947), No. 23, p. 15.

[30] MacGregor Jenkins, Emily Dickinson: Friend and Neighbor (Boston: Little, Brown, 1930), p. 36.

Catherine Scott Anthon[31] recalled with awe and sadness the evenings in Austin's home when Emily Dickinson played enchanting melodies which she improvised.[32]

A number of years after Emily Dickinson's death, Mrs. Maria Avery Howard[33] noted that she was a fine musician.[34] Millicent Todd Bingham claims that it is difficult to say whether or not Emily Dickinson was really musical.[35] Whicher makes a more positive statement, declaring that the piano playing of her girlhood was her nearest approach to a merely ornamental accomplishment, that it was no more than a pastime, and that it was discontinued in later life.[36]

Emily Dickinson's attainment at the piano and her exposure to music in the concert hall were both extremely limited. While "The Battle of Prague" and her own improvisations were

[31] Catherine Scott Anthon first knew Susan Dickinson when both were attending Utica Female Seminary. She visited Sue in 1859, at which time Emily Dickinson met her, and the acquaintance was continued when Kate made subsequent visits to Amherst during the sixties. Kate married John Anthon in 1866, and there is no record that her friendship with Emily Dickinson was pursued after that date (Johnson, in Letters, III, 933).

[32] Rebecca Patterson, The Riddle of Emily Dickinson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1951), p. 10.

[33] Maria Avery Howard, in relating her conversation with Emily Dickinson, stated that she used to visit in Amherst quite often and that she knew all of the Dickinsons well (Leyda, II, 121). On Maria Howard's departure from Amherst after a visit, Emily Dickinson sent Poem #996 to her (Johnson, in Poems, II, 720).

[34] Leyda, II, 121.

[35] Bingham, p. 153.

the height of her accomplishment, there was little to inspire or challenge her, for concerts in Amherst were indeed rare.[37] Van Loon says that Emily Dickinson was not spoiled as far as music was concerned, for she did not hear much that was downright bad or much that had any particular merit either.[38] There simply was not much for her to hear.

In August 1846, Emily Dickinson noted with appreciation the choir of young people that provided music for the exhibition at Amherst Academy. She thought the group sang beautifully and felt that the singing was more appropriate for the occasion than band music would have been.[39]

From Boston in September 1846, Emily Dickinson wrote to Abiah Root about an exhibit at the Chinese Museum. There she heard some native music performed by a Chinese musician and commented to her friend:

> Two of the Chinese go with this exhibition. One of them is a Professor of music in China & the other is teacher of a writing school at home. . . . The Musician played upon two of his instruments & accompanied them with his voice. It needed great command over my risible faculty to enable me to keep sober as this amateur was performing, yet he was so very polite to give us some of his native music that we could not do otherwise than to express ourselves highly edified with his performances.
>
> (Letters, I, 37, #13)

[37] Whicher, p. 13.

[38] H. W. Van Loon, "Emily Dickinson and Frederic Chopin," Van Loon's Lives (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1942), p. 734.

[39] Leyda, I, 120.

While she was in Boston she also heard Haydn's Creation,[40] but she merely mentioned "2 concerts" to Abiah and went on to a description of Mount Auburn Cemetery (Letters, I, 37, #13).

Lavinia Dickinson's diary gives information about a concert in Amherst which she, Emily, and Austin attended in May 1851. The event was announced in advance by the Express as a "grand musical olio" by the celebrated musicians, the Kendalls. Appearing with the Kendalls were a Mr. Mayter and a Mr. Proctor, pianist and dramatist respectively.[41] The quality of the program and the reaction of the young Dickinsons to it can only be surmised, as comments about the event are lacking in Lavinia's diary and Emily's letters.

Two months later, Emily Dickinson went with her parents and her sister to Northampton to hear Jenny Lind.[42] The Hampshire Gazette of July 8, 1851, provides certain details about the program.

> The first piece was a solo on the violin by Mr. [Joseph] Burke . . . [and a] song by Belletti. Then came Jenny . . . in the first song--"I know that my Redeemer liveth"--she did not seem to get that hold upon the audience which was anticipated.

[40] England, p. 85.

[41] Leyda, I, 198.

[42] Bianchi, p. 110.

> But "Casta Diva" was received with great applause. . . . The "Bird Song"--a wild, bird-like melody, that nobody but Jenny could sing--was loudly encored, as was also "Home Sweet Home." . . . The Scotch Melody, "Coming thro' the Rye," and the "Echo Song" . . . closed the programme.[43]

Emily Dickinson's comments are more spirited and detailed than those of the newspaper:

> . . . we walked in silence to the old Edwards Church and took our seats in the same, how Jennie came out like a child and sang and sang again, how boquets fell in showers, and the roof was rent with applause--how it thundered outside, and inside with the thunder of God and of men--judge ye which was the loudest--how we all loved Jennie Lind, but not accustomed to her manner of singing did'nt fancy that so well as we did her--no doubt it was very fine--but take some notes from her "Echo"--the Bird sounds from the "Bird Song" and some of her curious trills, and I'd rather have a Yankee.
>
> Herself, and not her music, was what we seemed to love--she has an air of exile in her mild blue eyes, and a something sweet and touching in her native accent which charms her many friends--"Give me my thatched cottage" as she sang grew so earnest she seemed half lost in song and for a transient time I fancied she had found it and would be seen "na mair," and then her foreign accent made her again a wanderer--we will talk about her sometime when you come--Father sat all the evening looking mad, and silly, and yet so much amused you would have died a laughing--when the performers bowed, he said "Good evening Sir"--and when they retired, "very well--that will do," it was'nt sarcasm exactly, nor it was'nt disdain, it was infinitely funnier than either of those virtues, as if old Abraham had come to see the show, and thought it was all very well, but a little excess of Monkey!
>
> (Letters, I, 121, #46)

[43] Leyda, I, 205.

A second musical group, the Germanians, appeared in Amherst at the Spring Exhibition of the college on April 19, 1853; and Emily Dickinson and her sister attended. Emily Dickinson's comments to Austin provide a good description of the event: "The Germaians gave a concert here, the evening of Exhibition day. Vinnie and I went with John. I never heard such sounds before. They seemed like brazen Robins, all wearing broadcloth wings, and I think they were, for they all flew away as soon as the concert was over" (Letters, I, 245, #118). Emily Dickinson did not forget the group; for years later, possibly in 1859, in response to an invitation from Sue Dickinson to an evening of amateur music, she wrote, "I should love dearly to spend the Evening with the girls--Love for the Germanians" (Letters, II, 347, #201).

During the spring of 1854, Emily Dickinson visited in Washington while her father was serving in Congress. Theodora Ward states that the Dickinsons and Ole Bull, the Norwegian violinist, were guests at the same hotel; but there is no record that the Dickinsons heard him play.[44]

From Washington, Emily Dickinson went to Philadelphia, where she attended the Arch Street Presbyterian Church, whose pastor, the Reverend Charles Wadsworth, is often mentioned in

[44] Emily Dickinson, Emily Dickinson's Letters to Dr. and Mrs. Josiah Gilbert Holland, ed. Theodora Van Wagenen Ward (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1951), p. 39.

accounts of her life. The church had a pipe organ, and the Reverend G. Hall Todd, who is now serving as minister, has supplied information about it and about the organist who was serving at the time of Emily Dickinson's visit.[45] The organist was a Mr. Emerick, about whom there was considerable dissatisfaction within the church. Because of the dissatisfaction, a committee interviewed Mr. Emerick, who informed the group that he would resign shortly. The Reverend Mr. Todd states that Emily Dickinson's visit to Philadelphia and to the Arch Street Presbyterian Church evidently coincided with this time of dissatisfaction with the music on the part of some members of the congregation.

While Emily Dickinson does not refer specifically to any music that she heard in Washington or Philadelphia, she did report to the Hollands that she had heard much that was wonderful.[46]

Emily Dickinson's letters also reveal her awareness of certain people in the world of music. In May 1873, she wrote to Frances Norcross: "Glad you heard Rubinstein. Grieved Loo could not hear him. He makes me think of polar nights Captain Hall could tell! Going from ice to ice! What an exchange of

[45] This information is contained in a letter dated May 17, 1971, and addressed to Mrs. Frederick Reglin, Jr., 200 Harbin Street, Waxahachie, Texas. It is from the Rev. G. Hall Todd, minister of the Arch Street Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. See Appendix.

[46] Emily Dickinson's Letters to Dr. and Mrs. Josiah Gilbert Holland, p. 40.

awe!" (Letters, II, 507, #390). Johnson notes that Anton Rubinstein, the pianist, had played in Boston during April; and he identifies Captain Hall as the Arctic explorer Charles F. Hall, who died in Greenland in 1871 (Johnson, in Letters, II, 507).

Years later, she wrote to Maria Whitney, a relative of her good friend Mrs. Samuel Bowles (Johnson, in Letters, II, 957). In the letter Emily Dickinson spoke of Mr. Bowles's death and referred to his gentleness by mentioning a thornless rose: "In a brief memoir of Parepa, in which she was likened to a Rose--'thornless until she died,' some bereaved one added--to miss him is his only stab, but that--he never gave" (Letters, III, 662, #643). Johnson identifies Madame Parepa-Rosa as an English soprano singer of oratorio and opera who first sang in the United States in 1866. She was the wife of the impressario Carl Rosa (Johnson, in Letters, III, 662).

In one of the poems, Emily Dickinson mentions "the Composer--perfect Mozart"--as the only one who could play for the second time the unusual music which he had composed. She knew that this "Keyless Rhyme" would perish with him because no one else would be able to reproduce it.[47]

[47] Emily Dickinson, The Poems of Emily Dickinson, ed. Thomas H. Johnson (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1955), II, 386, #503. Subsequent references to the poems will be indicated by Poems, followed by the volume, page number, and number of the poem in parentheses following the reference in the text.

In mid-July of 1871 many years after her withdrawal from community life, Emily Dickinson wrote to Louise Norcross about a chime of bells that had just been installed in Amherst. The chime had been given in memory of Frazar Stearns, a local youth killed in the Civil War (Johnson, in Letters, II, 488). The conflicting emotions that Emily Dickinson felt when she heard the bells are evident in her letter: sadness about the death of the young man but pleasure in the sound of the bells. She wrote to her cousin, "Oh! Cruel Paradise! We have a chime of bells given for brave Frazer [sic]. You'll stop and hear them, won't you?" (Letters, II, 488, #362).

Though Johnson states that Jenny Lind was the only singer or musician of note that Emily Dickinson ever heard (Johnson, in Letters, I, 122), Leyda cites one person who indicates that she might have heard Rubinstein. Clara Bellinger Green[48] comments: "She [Emily Dickinson] told us of her early love for the piano and confided that, after hearing Rubinstein--I believe it was Rubinstein--play in Boston, she had become convinced that she could never master the art and had forthwith abandoned it once and for all, giving herself up then wholly to literature."[49]

[48] Clara Bellinger Green was the sister of Nora Green. The two went to the Dickinson home on one occasion so that Nora could sing for Emily Dickinson (Leyda, II, 273).

[49] Leyda, II, 273.

Not only did Emily Dickinson and her sister hear concerts and miscellaneous music away from home, but others came from time to time to perform in the Dickinson home for them. When Martha Dickinson was a little girl, Emily Dickinson professed interest in her progress and appeared quite "rapt" as Martha played her simple little pieces all the way up to Mendelssohn and Beethoven.[50] Emily Dickinson also discussed the difference between Martha's selections and the ones which had been set before her own childish fingers.[51] Martha Dickinson Bianchi makes this point but offers no explanation of the differences in their selections. At other times, little friends accompanied Martha into the closed double parlors to sing for Emily Dickinson. One of the musical lads who oftenest sang there said in later life that singing in that old parlor to Miss Emily awed him so that he used to tiptoe all the way across the lawn to the Austin Dickinson house afterward.[52]

Emily Dickinson commented about the death of her mother in terms of the music at the funeral service. To her friend Maria Whitney she wrote in the summer of 1883, " I was never certain that mother had died, except while the students were singing. The voices came from another life" (Letters, III, 794, #860).

[50] Bianchi, p. 33.

[51] Ibid., p. 159.

[52] Ibid.; p. 34.

As Emily Dickinson's self-imposed seclusion became rigid, the only music that she heard was provided by people who came to the Dickinson home. On February 11, 1877, Lavinia heard Nora Green sing "The Twenty-Third Psalm" in church; and Emily Dickinson, highly impressed by Lavinia's account, asked that Mrs. Green come and sing it for her.[53] Mrs. Green recalled being left in the long colonial drawing room with her brother and sister while Lavinia joined Emily Dickinson on the upper floor. The three clustered around the old piano at the end of the room, feeling themselves to be "the choir invisible." At the close of her solo, Mrs. Green heard a light clapping of hands; then Lavinia came downstairs to state that Emily Dickinson would see the visitors in the library. "Except for the birds, she said, "yours is the first song I have heard for many years. I have long been familiar with the voice and laugh of each of you, and I know, too, your brother's whistle as he trudges by the house." After telling them of her own early love for the piano, Emily Dickinson stated that she had abandoned her music after becoming convinced that she could never master the art.

The son of the J. Howard Sweetsers also sang for Emily Dickinson at home. After one such performance, Emily Dickinson wrote to Mrs. Sweetser, saying, "I had felt some uncertainty

[53] Leyda, II, 273.

as to my qualification for the final Redemption, but the delightful Melody has entirely fitted me" (Letters, III, 832, #920). It is evident that Emily Dickinson enjoyed Howard's singing, for she referred a second time to the experience: "I still recall your Son's singing, and when the 'Choir invisible' assemble in your Trees, shall reverently compare them" (Letters, III, 850, #951).

Martha Dickinson Bianchi mentions a Mrs. Dole who went to the Dickinson home to play for the two sisters.[54] An accomplished pianist, she had studied widely and had a large repertoire of selections which were respectfully called "classical"; and she often played publicly for charitable projects. She always enjoyed her private performances for Emily Dickinson in the solitude of the Dickinson home.

Of the people who played for Emily Dickinson, Martha Dickinson Bianchi states that the one who gave her the most constant delight was Fred Bliss, son of her girlhood friend Abbie Wood.[55] Martha Bianchi describes Fred as a musician of rare natural gifts who played Beethoven's sonatas, Schubert's songs, selections by Schumann and Chopin, and bits of oratorio

[54] Bianchi, p. 35.

[55] Ibid., p. 35.

and opera that flitted through his head and fingers. Particularly does Martha Dickinson Bianchi recall two selections: "I well remember how the 'Moonlight Sonata' sounded through the silence of the old house, or the 'Erl King,' which was always twice as spectral in effect as he played it to his transported listener." All during Fred's years in Amherst until his graduation in 1880, he shared his music with Emily Dickinson; and as long as she lived, he never returned to Amherst without playing for her.

The town of Amherst gained a talented musician in 1881 when Mabel Loomis Todd arrived with her husband, the new director of the college observatory. Not long after their arrival, Vinnie urged David Peck Todd to bring his young bride to the Dickinson home.[56] Mrs. Todd, a former student at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston,[57] proved to be a charming and able musician who played the Dickinson piano as generously as both sisters could wish.[58] Evening after evening, Mrs. Todd sat at the square pinao in the drawing-room, playing Beethoven, Scarlatti, Chopin, Haydn, and Bach while Emily Dickinson listened upstairs.[59] According to an

[56] Johnson, An Interpretive Biography, p. 55.

[57] Bingham, Ancestors' Brocades, p. 5.

[58] Johnson, Biography, p. 55.

[59] Virginia Moore, Distinguished Women Writers (New York: Hutton, 1934), p. 147-48.

entry in Mrs. Todd's journal, Vinnie wanted her to sing and play in the Dickinson home at regular times;[60] and her own comments show that she complied with the request:

> I can never forget the twilight seclusion of the old drawing-room, the square piano in its corner, the ancient mahogany furniture, and Emily just outside the door, her dress a spot of white in the dim hall. With the waning afternoon, I would play one thing and another, or sing melodies which often sounded too light and modern and sunshiny for surroundings so like a dreamy corner of the past. At first it seemed to me as if a visitor from another world had alighted for a time, wishing, for some inscrutable reason, to be entertained on a foreign planet. Later, it became not only entirely natural, but so much a habit that I should have missed my solitary recitals quite as much as my often invisible auditor.[61]

Emily Dickinson also prevailed upon her cousin, Clara Newman Turner, to play for her from time to time; and Mrs. Turner recorded the experience:

> After she became more reclusive, and gave up the piano entirely I had the pleasure of playing for her and quite often would come to me just some little word as "Emily is tired, and the sweet voice in the parlor cannot speak to her alone," or "There's a voice in the down-stairs; I call but it does not answer." I answered the summons when I could and never without some acknowledgement. Sometimes a flower on the piano stool, again a little plate of fresh cookies.[62]

[60] Leyda, II, 376.

[61] Emily Dickinson, Letters of Emily Dickinson, ed. Mabel Loomis Todd (New York: World, 1951), p. 369.

[62] Leyda, II, 481.

The most pervasive musical influence in Emily Dickinson's life and art was the church hymns.[63] While there is no direct reference to her presence at church services after 1854,[64] she did not have to attend after that date in order to know the hymns and to be influenced by them. She had known them from early childhood, for they were commonly used in school exercises and social events as well as for church services and funerals.[65]

In connection with the music which Emily Dickinson heard at church, there are conflicting reports about the use of a pitch-pipe. Rebecca Patterson states that during Emily Dickinson's childhood a pitch-pipe was used;[66] Whicher states that the practice had been discontinued by the time the Dickinsons were in attendance.[67] The presence or absence of this device evidently did not matter to Emily Dickinson, for she has made no comment about it.

Until the late 1830's, the music in her church, though sung without accompaniment, was harmonic and not unisonous;[68]

[63] England, p. 88.

[64] Emily Dickinson's Letters to Dr. and Mrs. Josiah Gilbert Holland, p. 36.

[65] England, p. 84.

[66] Patterson, p. 60.

[67] Whicher, p. 7.

[68] England, p. 100.

and a choir of ten or fifteen persons sat in the balcony to support the congregational singing.[69] In 1839, the parish acquired its first musical instrument, a double bass viol; and Austin, who was about ten at the time, experienced a marked reaction to the song service. Years later, he wrote:

> With my first recollection Josiah Ayres managed it [the bass viol], and the tones he drew from its lower chords in his accompaniment to the singing of some of Watts's Favorite Hymns, haunt me even now. Such lines as
>
> That awful day will surely come,
> or
> That last great day of woe and doom
> and
> Broad is the road that leads to death
>
> seemed to me sufficiently depressing in plain print; sung with the accompaniment they were appalling--to a boy.[70]

The effect on Emily Dickinson could hardly have been less than on Austin; and years later, she commented on the bass viol. A note to Susan Gilbert in January 1854 gives many details about a church service that she had just attended and then says, "The singing reminded me of the legend of 'Jack and Gill,' allowing the Bass Viol to be typified by Gill, who literally tumbled after, while Jack--i e the choir, galloped insanely on, 'nor recked, nor heeded' him" (Letters, I, 284-85, #154). While a violin and flute were used with the bass

[69] Whicher, p. 7.

[70] Bingham, Emily Dickinson's Home, p. 35.

viol in church services,[71] it is the bass viol that made a lasting impression on both Austin and Emily Dickinson.

From the use of three instruments for the musical accompaniment, the church changed to one when it installed an organ in 1850.[72] Though some of the members bitterly resisted the innovation,[73] the parish voted to pay the sum of two hundred and fifty dollars, together with what could be obtained from the sale of the bass viol, for an organ.[74] Since Emily Dickinson attended services at least until 1854, she must have heard the organ and remembered how it sounded; for she commented on it in a note to Mrs. Holland early in 1884: "The Organ is moaning--the Bells are bowing. I ask Vinnie what time it is, and she says it is Sunday" (Letters, III, 814, #888). Perhaps she was remembering the organ she heard in Philadelphia when she wrote on a scrap of paper the words "Undertow of the Organ" (Letters, III, 929, prose fragment #118), and she might have planned to use the phrase in a letter or a poem.

It is the words and the melodies of the hymns, however, and not the instrumental accompaniment, that were important to Emily Dickinson; and the hymns most widely used in her day

[71] Whicher, p. 7.

[72] England, p. 100.

[73] Patterson, p. 60.

[74] Leyda, I, 171.

were those by Isaac Watts. While his hymns were considered old-fashioned by the time Emily Dickinson completed her year of study at Mount Holyoke Seminary in 1848,[75] they were immensely popular during her earlier life. For many decades, her native area had been steeped in a traditional love of Watts and a widespread use of his hymns to such an extent that his influence extended from the cradle to the grave.[76] Martha Winburn England states that his hymns became involved with Emily Dickinson's vocal cords, fingers, diaphragm, and lungs very early in her life.[77]

Emily Dickinson had access to several hymnals by Isaac Watts, and the three that she used during the years when she went to church are the chief source of information about her knowledge of church songs. These are Watts's Christian Psalmody, his The Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs, and a tiny volume entitled Village Hymns.[78] Not only were these hymnals used at church, but they were also available to her at home in her father's library.[79] The last two were even recommended in the Seminary catalogue for the personal

[75] England, p. 85.

[76] Ibid., p. 84.

[77] Ibid., p. 85.

[78] Ibid., p. 95.

[79] Capps, p. 73.

libraries of the young ladies attending Mount Holyoke, as reflection upon hymns was recommended as an edifying tonic for the devout.[80] In addition to the three hymnals used at church, Emily Dickinson had access to her mother's copy of Watts's Hymns (1810).[81] Other hymnals in the Dickinson home were Henry Ward Beecher's Plymouth Collection (1850), Edward A. Parks' Sabbath Hymn Book, and John Keble's The Christian Year (1847).[82]

A letter to Austin in March 1853 was an answer to one from him in which he had sent her a poem to be sung to the hymn tune "Greenville" (Johnson, in Letters, I, 236). She referred to his "psalm" and said of her letter, "You needn't laugh at my letter--it's a few Variations of Greenville I thought I would send to you" (Letters, I, 234-36, #110).

A hymn by Isaac Watts was traditionally used at the commencement exercises of Amherst Academy;[83] and since she attended the academy irregularly for seven years, she must have heard and known it:

[80] Ibid., p. 73.

[81] James Davidson, "Emily Dickinson and Isaac Watts," Boston Public Library Quarterly, 6(1954), p. 143.

[82] England, p. 97.

[83] Whicher, p. 242.

Let children hear the mighty deeds
  Which God perform'd of old;
Which in our younger years we saw,
  And which our fathers told.

He bids us make his glories known.
  His works of power and grace;
And we'll convey his wonders down,
  Through every rising race.

Several hymns that were used in services while Emily Dickinson was at Mount Holyoke Seminary are mentioned in the Mount Holyoke Journal, which was written by Susan L. Tolman for missionaries who had previously attended the school.[84] The Journal mentions "From Greenland's icy mountains," which the girls sang to close a "Miss[ionary] meeting" on October 5, 1847.[85] The words are:

What though the spicy breezes
  Blow soft o'er Ceylon's isle;
Though every prospect pleases,
  And only man is vile . . .

Whicher notes that Emily Dickinson heard a missionary, who had returned from Burma, sing the hymn in Burman and says that Emily Dickinson's words "The Splendor of a Burmah" in the poem about an oriole (Poems, III, 1016, #1466) were the result of this experience.[86]

[84] Leyda, I, 122.

[85] Leyda, I, 123.

[86] Whicher, p. 20.

An entry in the Mount Holyoke Journal on December 28, 1847, reveals the fact that Mary Lyon, one of Emily Dickinson's teachers, had talked to the girls on "Salvation by Grace."[87] They had sung:

> Grace! 'tis a charming sound!
> Harmonious to mine ear!
> Heaven with the echo shall resound,
> And all the earth shall hear.

An entry in the Mount Holyoke Journal on February 24, 1848, indicates that the Mount Holyoke girls met in the hall for devotions at the usual time and sang:

> Alas! and did my Saviour bleed
> And did my Sovereign die?
> Would he devote that sacred head
> For such a worm as I.[88]

In May, according to the Mount Holyoke Journal, one of the students, Emma Washburn, died; and after Miss Lyon told the girls of her death, they had a silent meal and then sang:

> Jesus can make a dying bed
> Feel soft as downy pillows are,
> While on his breast I lean my head,
> And breathe my life out sweetly there.[89]

The Mount Holyoke Journal notes further that the girls "met in Sem. Hall for a short funeral service, conducted by

[87] Leyda, I, 133.

[88] Ibid., p. 139.

[89] Ibid., pp. 145-46.

Mr. Hawks. The 586th hymn of the Village Collection was sung . . .

> Through sorrow's night, and danger's path,
> Amid the deep'ning gloom,
> We, foll'wers of our suff'ring Lord,
> Are marching to the tomb."[90]

Emily Dickinson's letters contain numerous references to hymns. Twice she quoted from the familiar hymn, "Jerusalem! My happy home!" In June 1851, when Austin was in law school at Harvard (Johnson, in Letters, III, 940), Emily Dickinson wrote, "Mother consoles herself by thinking of several future places 'where congregations ne'er break up,' and Austins have no end!" (Letters, I, 111, #42). The William Burkitt version of the hymn introduced the word congregation at the end of the second stanza so that this stanza concluded with the words, "Where congregations ne'er break up / and Sabbaths have no end" (Johnson, in Letters, I, 112). Again expressing her loneliness for her brother, she wrote him in March 1853: "I was just this moment thinking of a favorite stanza of your's, 'where congregations ne'er break up, and Sabbaths have no end'" (Letters, I, 235, #110).

In early December 1852 when Susan Gilbert was teaching school in Baltimore (Johnson, in Letters, III, 939), Emily

[90] Ibid., p. 146.

Dickinson wrote to her about a snow storm which Amherst had experienced (Letters, I, 216-17, #97), and referred to a hymn to express her lack of understanding of God's ways:

> I regret to inform you that at 3 oclock yesterday, my mind came to a stand, and has since then been stationary.
>
> Ere this intelligence reaches you, I shall probably be a snail. By this untoward providence [the storm] a mental and moral being has been swept ruthlessly from her sphere. Yet we should not repine--"God moves in a mysterious way, his wonders to perform, he plants his foot upon the sea, and rides upon the storm," and if it be his will that I become a bear and bite my fellow men, it will be for the highest good of this fallen and perishing world. If the gentleman in the air, will please to stop throwing snowballs, I may meet you again.

Her quotation from William Cowper's "Light shining out of darkness," with which she was familiar from its hymn setting, seems to have been quoted from memory since it alters the third line. According to Johnson, Cowper's third line reads "He plants his footsteps in the sea" (Johnson, in Letters, I, 217).

In late 1854, Emily Dickinson wrote to Susan Gilbert, who was visiting relatives in Grand Haven, Michigan (Johnson, in Letters, I, 305). The letter contains bits of news about happenings in Amherst and dwells at length upon Emily Dickinson's loneliness for Susan. It is almost a plea for a letter from Susan. Near the close she wrote: "'Little Children, love one another.' Not all of life to live, is it, nor all of death to die" (Letters, I, 311, #176). This part of

her letter is a paraphrase of two lines of a hymn by James Montgomery:

> The world can never give
> The bliss for which we sigh;
> 'Tis not the whole of life to live;
> Nor all of death to die.
> (Johnson, in Letters, I, 312)

Emily Dickinson wrote to her girlhood friend Emily Fowler the week after Emily Fowler had married and moved from Amherst. The letter shows Emily Dickinson's loneliness, for she realized that her friend would return to Amherst only for occasional visits. A hymn stanza which she included reveals her feeling of solemnity in the presence of such a change:

> "So fades a summer cloud away,
> So smiles the gale when storms are o'er
> So gently shuts the eye of day,
> So dies a wave along the shore."
> (Letters, I, 277, #146)

This stanza which she quoted is from a hymn by Anna L. Barbauld which begins "How blest the righteous when he dies." According to Johnson, Emily Dickinson evidently quoted from memory since the second word of the second line is actually sinks (Johnson, in Letters, I, 278).

After her father died on June 15, 1874, Emily Dickinson shared with her Norcross cousins some of the details about his sudden illness and death. At the end of the letter, she wrote, "Almost the last tune that he heard was, 'Rest from thy loved employ'" (Letters, II, 526, #414). Johnson states

that Emily Dickinson had evidently played this hymn for her father (Johnson, in Letters, II, 526). Written by James Montgomery, the words are:

> Servant of God, well done!
> Rest from thy loved employ.
> The battle fought, the victory won,
> Enter thy Master's joy!

When Mrs. J. G. Holland was away from Amherst, Emily Dickinson missed her keenly, for the two women enjoyed a very close and enduring friendship (Johnson, in Letters, III, 945). During the summer of 1877 when Mrs. Holland was visiting in Pittsfield, Emily Dickinson wrote: "I miss my little Sanctuary and her redeeming ways. . . . Come again, and go not--which when a faithful invitation, is the sweetest known. . . . How precious Thought and Speech are! 'A present so divine,' was in a Hymn they used to sing when I went to Church" (Letters, II, 593, #521). Johnson states that no hymn in Emily Dickinson's collection contained the phrase "a present (or presence) so divine" but that she might have been referring to Watts's hymn "When I survey the wondrous cross":

> Were the whole realm of nature mine,
> That were a present far too small;
> Love so amazing, so divine,
> Demands my soul, my life, my all.
>
> (Johnson, in Letters, II, 594)

She paraphrased two lines of the Watts hymn "There is a land of pure delight" in her poem "Where bells no more affright

the morn" (Poems, I, 83, #112). The words of the hymn are given, followed by the words of the poem:

> Could we but climb where Moses stood
> And view the landscape o'er,
> Not Jordan's stream nor death's cold flood
> Should fright us from the shore.
> (Johnson, in Poems, I, 83)

> "Oh could we stand where Moses stood
> And view and Landscape o'er"
> Not Father's bells--nor Factories,
> Could scare us any more!

Perhaps the two most important influences of the hymns on Emily Dickinson's life and poetry were their meter and their message. Jack L. Capps states that the singing of the hymns did much to establish in her mind the rhythms of hymn meter and that the relation of her prosody to the various types of hymn meter is an established fact.[91] R. P. Blackmur says, "It would not be claiming too much to say that nine-tenths of her own poetry was written in meters made familiar to her by their use in the village hymnal."[92] John Pickard states that Watts's Christian Psalmody became Emily Dickinson's verse primer and that its standard hymnal or ballad meter, four iambic lines, alternating three and four stresses a line with the second and fourth lines rhymed, was her favorite pattern.[93] Martha England states that Emily Dickinson's poems

[91] Capps, p. 73.

[92] R. P. Blackmur, "Emily Dickinson: Notes on Prejudice and Fact," in The Recognition of Emily Dickinson, ed. Caesar R. Blake and Carlton F. Wells (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Univ. of Mich. Press, 1964), p. 238.

[93] Pickard, p. 51.

were written to existing hymn tunes, just as hymns are written,[94] and that "Dundee," a common measure tune, was her basic tune.[95] "I think the longest hour of all" (Poems, II, 488, #635) and "Within my garden rides a bird" (Poems, II, 383, #500) are written in this pattern, and both could be sung to "Dundee." A stanza of each is quoted.

Then I--my timid service done--
Tho' service 'twas of Love--
Take up my little Violin--
And further North--remove.

Within my Garden, rides a Bird
Upon a single Wheel--
Whose spokes a dizzy Music make
As 'twere a travelling Mill

Three of the hymns already mentioned in this paper follow the pattern of the ballad stanza: "Let children hear the mighty deeds" on page 55, "Alas! and did my Saviour bleed" on page 56, and "Through sorrow's night and danger's path on page 57.

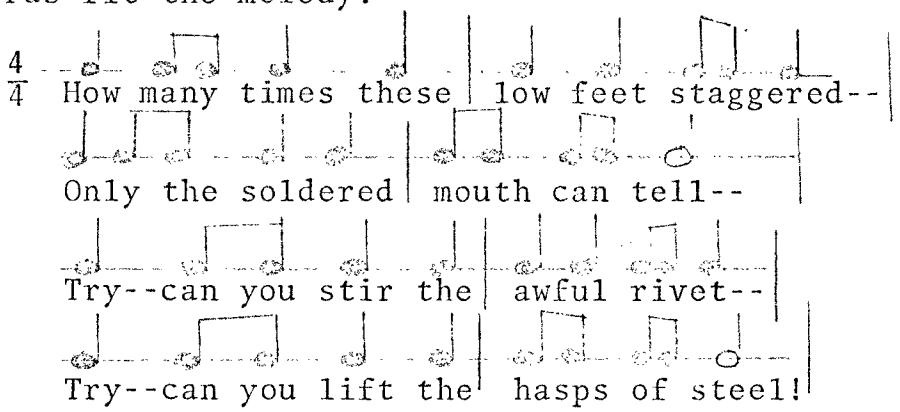
Martha England also states that the poem "How many times these low feet staggered" (Poems, I, 135-36, #187) was written to fit the hymn tune "Greenville."[96] Musical notes which

[94] England, p. 88.

[95] Ibid., p. 100.

[96] Ibid., p. 100.

match those of "Greenville" are superimposed to show how the words fit the melody:




"Dundee" and "Greenville" have remained in use and are found in the Baptist Hymnal, which is currently in use in Baptist churches in the Southern Baptist Convention.[97]

The poet was influenced not only by the meters of the hymns but also by their message. She rejected much of the traditional thology which the hymns embodied.[98] She did not embrace such beliefs as "That awful day will surely come," "That last great day of woe and doom," and "Broad is the road that leads to death." In contrast, she wrote to Susan Gilbert in February 1852 about "the church within our hearts, where bells are always ringing and the preacher whose name is love" (Letters, I, 181, #77). Indicating her preference for a God who was friendly rather than punitive toward his children, she

[97] Walter Hines Sims, ed., The Baptist Hymnal (Nashville, Tenn.: Convention Press, 1956), pp. 398,390.

[98] William E. Stephenson, "Emily Dickinson and Watts's Songs for Children," English Language Notes, 3(June 1966), p. 280.

wrote to Mrs. Holland after Dr. Holland's death, "I shall never forget the Doctor's prayer, my first morning with you--so simple, so believing. That God must be a friend" (Letters, III, 713, #731). It has already been pointed out that there are no known references which show that she attended church after 1854, and a note to her Norcross cousins in 1863 after the death of their father (Johnson, in Letters, III, 952) indicates that she could not pray. She said, "Let Emily sing for you because she cannot pray" (Letters, II, 421, #278). The song is the poem which begins "It is not dying hurts us so,-- / 'Tis living hurts us more."

Martha Winburn England says of Emily Dickinson, "Through every avenue of life, she learned from the Father of English hymnody how she would never write. That is an important thing for an author to learn."[99] Emily Dickinson, however, did not acknowledge even this indebtedness to Isaac Watts. Writing to T. W. Higginson in April 1862, she said, "You inquire my Books--For Poets--I have Keats--and Mr and Mrs Browning" (Letters, II, 404, #261). Since there were copies of Watts's hymnals in her father's library and since she had been familiar with Watts's hymns since early childhood, she could have mentioned Isaac Watts; but she did not. Possibly she did not mention him along with Keats and Mr. and Mrs. Browning because

[99] England, p. 89.

she had rejected the message of the hymns even though she used the patterns of the hymns.

The letters reveal many details about Emily Dickinson's experiences with music. These begin with her aunt's statement that Emily Dickinson had made "moosic" at the age of two and one-half and continue through the references to people who came to the Dickinson home to sing and play for Emily Dickinson during the years of her seclusion. The letters tell of the piano and singing lessons which she had, the selections with which she was familiar, the concerts that she heard, the people who played and sang for her at home, and the hymns she knew. It is evident from the letters that music was important in Emily Dickinson's life.

# CHAPTER III

## MUSIC VOCABULARY IN THE POETRY

From a perusal of Emily Dickinson's poems, it is evident that she used many music terms; yet no study has been made of her music vocabulary. In this study, music terms that are listed in her music vocabulary are those which have a musical denotation and connotation. William Howard states she used 10,800 different words in the 19,100 lines of her poems; but, in his list of special sources from which her poetic vocabulary came, he does not mention music.[1] From Poem #1 with its ten music terms--"muses," "sing," "strain," "humming," "tune," "singeth," "song," "fife," "trumpet," and "drum"--to the last, Poem #1775, with its three music terms--"keys," "melody," and "elegy"--she often relied on the language of music.

S. P. Rosenbaum in A Concordance to the Poems of Emily Dickinson, which is based on the three-volume variorum edition of The Poems of Emily Dickinson edited by Thomas H. Johnson, lists alphabetically "the words to every thought" in the poems.[2] The concordance indexes every word that Emily

[1] William Howard, "Emily Dickinson's Poetic Vocabulary," Publications of the Modern Language Association of America, 62, No. 1 (March, 1957), p. 228, p. 235.

[2] S. P. Rosenbaum, A Concordance to the Poems of Emily Dickinson (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1964), Preface, p. vii.

Dickinson used in the poems; and with each word itself, the concordance supplies the line or lines in which that word occurs. The poem number or poem numbers are also given. According to the concordance, Emily Dickinson used the word "psalm" only twice. Under the word "psalm," for example, are given the two lines which contain the word: "Sobbing--will suit--as well as psalm" and "A too presumptuous psalm." The numbers of the poems in which these lines occur are also given: #261 and #513.

Since the variorum edition of The Poems of Emily Dickinson includes all known versions of the poems, A Concordance to the Poems of Emily Dickinson includes all of the words in all versions of the poems; for example, The Poems of Emily Dickinson contains four versions of Poem #1068, and the concordance contains all of the words that she used in the four versions. Rosenbaum, however, indicates which words are found in the variant forms of the poems; for example, the line "But terminate in Tune," together with the poem number, is listed under "tune" but is marked "V" to indicate its occurrence in a variant form of the poem. For this study, only that version of the poem which immediately follows the poem number was considered, and only the music terms occurring in that version were enumerated.

Some terms that would appear to belong on the list of words in Emily Dickinson's music vocabulary are not included because it was found that they do not have music connotation or denotation. The word "harmony," for example, would appear to be a musical term, but its occurrence in Poem #668 shows otherwise:

> "Nature" is what we see--
> The Hill--the Afternoon--
> Squirrel--Eclipse--the Bumble bee--
> Nay--Nature is Heaven--
> Nature is what we hear--
> The Bobolink--the Sea--
> Thunder--the Cricket--
> Nay--Nature is Harmony--
> Nature is what we know--
> Yet have no art to say--
> So impotent Our Wisdom is
> To her Simplicity

In this poem, however, "harmony" means "the appropriate combination of the elements in a whole." It does not mean "musical consonance; tuneful sound; combination of tones into a chord." Thus, "harmony" in Poem #668 is not listed in Emily Dickinson's music vocabulary.

The poems that contain music terms have been studied to be sure that the terms have denotative and connotative meaning which relates to music. In Poem #261, "strain" refers to music and has been listed; in Poem #275, "strain" does not refer to music and has not been listed.

If Emily Dickinson repeated a music term in a poem, the poem number itself is repeated in the listing. For example, the word "carolled" occurs twice in Poem #83, and the listing reads "carolled (2) 83, 83."

Since it is the purpose of this study to reveal the importance of music in the life and poetry of Emily Dickinson and since no listing has been made of her music vocabulary, the study includes a list of the words in her music vocabulary together with the number of times that she used each word and the number of the poem or poems in which the word appears.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| ballad | (3) | 83, 746, 1059 |
| ballad's | (1) | 1524 |
| ballads | (2) | 23, 1466 |
| band | (3) | 157, 545, 783 |
| bands | (1) | 321 |
| banjo | (1) | 620 |
| bass | (2) | 630, 928 |
| baton | (1) | 1574 |
| bell | (10) | 142, 148, 280, 286, 317, 324, 378, 392, 947, 1593 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| tunes | (8) | 258, 333, 364, 436, 503, 593, 639, 1418 |
| vespers | (1) | 250 |
| violin | (3) | 302, 635, 1576 |
| warbled | (1) | 1235 |
| warbling | (1) | 1545 |
| whistle | (2) | 617, 1449 |
| whistled | (3) | 83, 198, 1524 |
| whistling | (1) | 83 |

While these are the words of Emily Dickinson's music vocabulary, she sometimes used non-music words to refer to music in her poems. The non-music terms can not be considered a part of her music vocabulary, but this study would be incomplete if these references were not mentioned. In Poem #157 she speaks of the "silver strife" that she heard in the air (Poems, I, 113, #157). In Poem #783, she refers to the singing of birds early in the morning as "The Miracle that introduced [the day]" (Poems, II, 591, #783). Emily Dickinson describes a robin in Poem #634, saying:

> You'll know Her--by Her Voice--
> At first--a doubtful Tone--
> A sweet endeavor--
> (Poems, II, 487, #634)

In Poem #864, Emily Dickinson pictures a robin which, after receiving a crumb, recorded a lady's name "In Silver

Chronicle" (Poems, II, 645, #864). In Poem #1084, Emily Dickinson describes the song of a bird as "Her silver Principle" (Poems, II, 766, 1084). As she depicts an oriole in Poem #1466, she mentions his "badinage divine" (Poems, III, 1015, #1466). And in Poem #606, in which she describes a storm, Emily Dickinson says that a bird "gossipped in the Lane" after the storm had passed (Poems, II, 464-65).

These are the words which comprise Emily Dickinson's music vocabulary. The long list reveals that music was one of the special sources of her poetic vocabulary. Because of the extent to which she used the vocabulary of music in her poems, it is evident that music was important in Emily Dickinson's life and poetry.

# CHAPTER IV

## POEMS ABOUT MUSIC

Before any poems or parts of poems are presented and discussed in the remaining chapters of this study, a word of explanation is necessary about what might be considered errors or carelessness. The poems are quoted as they are given in the three-volume work The Poems of Emily Dickinson, edited by Thomas H. Johnson, who says in Notes on the Present Text that the poet's irregularities of spelling, punctuation, and capitalization have been retained (Vol. 1, pp. lxii-lxiii). In Poem #1480, for example, she wrote "ecstasy"; in Poem #653, "extasy"; and she sometimes used "it's" as the possessive form of "it," as in Poem #505. Her favorite punctuation mark was the dash, which she often used instead of a comma or period; and she was also inconsistent in the use of capital letters. Inasmuch as some of the poems which are presented in the remaining chapters of this study contain such irregularities, it is important to point out that they are the poet's and should not be construed as carelessness in the preparation of this study.

Since this study is devoted to the importance of music in the life and poetry of Emily Dickinson, it is important to

see what she said in the poems whose subject is music. Because of the importance of this group of poems to this study, each poem is explicated in detail.

The poems which are presented in this part of the study are listed under "Music" on page 1221 of the Subject Index in the third volume of The Poems of Emily Dickinson, edited by Thomas H. Johnson.[1] Johnson says of the Subject Index: "It is a classification based principally on key words in the poems themselves. . . . Under each main heading will be found first the numbers of the poems whose entire contents are clearly on the subject given. . . . Following these, under separate subheadings, are the poems that represent special aspects of the main subject and those in which only a part of the content can be so classified."[2] The poems are explicated in numerical sequence.

In the first poems to be analyzed, Emily Dickinson tells us her reaction to music. In Poem #83 she writes about a boy who passed her window on his way home late in the evening whose heart was "not so heavy as mine," for the boy

[1] Emily Dickinson, The Poems of Emily Dickinson, ed. Thomas H. Johnson (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1955).

[2] Ibid., p. 1213.

whistled to himself

a tune--
A careless snatch--a ballad--
A ditty of the street--

and yet his whistling was an "Anodyne" to her "irritated Ear." It was

so sweet--
It was as if a Bobolink
Sauntering this way
Carolled, and paused, and carolled--
Then bubbled slow away!
It was as if a chirping brook
Upon a dusty way--
Set bleeding feet to minuets
Without the knowing why!

The whistle cheered her, but she anticipated that she perhaps would be "weary and sore" again the next night; so she says, "Ah Bugle! By my window / I pray you pass once more." Her desire to hear the whistling again is evident by her use of the bugle metaphor. Just as she could not fail to hear the sound of a bugle, she would not fail to hear the boy's whistling because she would be listening so intently for it.

It is reasonable to assume that Poem #83 is the result of an actual experience. When Nora Green went to the Dickinson home in 1877 to sing "The Twenty-Third Psalm," she was accompanied by her sister and brother. Miss Dickinson said to Nora Green, "I have long been familiar with the voice and laugh of each of you, and I know too, your brother's whistle

as he trudges by the house."[3] According to Johnson, the poem was written "about 1859" (Johnson, in Poems, I, 67). Since it was eighteen years later that Emily Dickinson made this remark to Nora Green, it is evident that the boy's whistling had meant much to the poet. Genevieve Taggard, in commenting upon the poet's notice of and reaction to the boy's whistling, said, "What crumbs kept her alive!"[4]

She also reveals her reaction to music in Poem #157. Of this poem, David T. Porter comments, "Emily Dickinson writes of the cosmic music of revelation, a 'silver strife' without discernible origin."[5]

> Musicians wrestle everywhere--
> All day--among the crowded air
> I hear the silver strife--
> And--waking--long before the morn--
> Such transport breaks upon the town
> I think it that "New Life"!
>
> It is not Bird--it has no nest--
> Nor "band"--in brass and scarlet--drest--
> Nor Tamborin--nor Man--
> It is not Hymn from pulpit read--
> The "Morning Stars" the Treble led
> On Time's first Afternoon!
>
> Some--say--it is "the spheres"--at play!
> Some say--that bright Majority
> Of vanished Dames--and Men!
> Some--think it service in the place
> Where we--with late--celestial face--
> Please God--shall Ascertain!

[3] Leyda, II, 273.

[4] Genevieve Taggard, The Life and Mind of Emily Dickinson (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1930), p. 133.

[5] David T. Porter, The Art of Emily Dickinson's Early Poetry (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1966), pp. 149-50.

The poet speaks of her "transport" and eliminates possible sources of the music, saying it is not a bird, a band, a tamborin, a man, a hymn, or the morning stars. Then she gives possible sources of the music: the spheres at play, vanished men and women, or a service in heaven.

William Robert Sherwood says that in Poem #157 she is referring to "a mysterious force which is apparently transmitted through nature; and the corroborative 'evidence' of the birds that had returned must have led her tentatively to assume that certain natural phenomena might be emblematic of immortality."[6]

Though Johnson lists Poem #183 under "Organ" and not under "Music," the poem is included in this discussion because it relates entirely to music. In this poem, also, she relates her reaction to music.

> I've heard an Organ talk, sometimes--
> In a Cathedral Aisle,
> And understood no word it said--
> Yet held my breath, the while--
>
> And risen up--and gone away,
> A more Bernardine Girl--
> Yet--know not what was done to me
> In that old Chapel Aisle.

The poem reveals the tremendous feeling that the poet experienced when she heard "an Organ talk." Though she "understood no word it said," she "held her breath, the while."

[6] William Robert Sherwood, Circumference and Circumstance: Stages in the Mind and Art of Emily Dickinson (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1968), p. 25.

After she heard the organ, she did not know exactly what had happened to her; but she had "risen up--and gone away, / A more Bernardine Girl." Since "Bernardine" means "of or pertaining to the Cistercians, the order of monks reformed by Saint Bernard in 1115," she seems to suggest she felt a deeper reverence or religious awe for having heard the music of the organ.

In Poem #261, Emily Dickinson talks about music and is startled by the idea of putting up her lute, meaning her poetry.

> Put up my lute!
> What of--my Music!
> Since the sole ear I cared to charm--
> Passive--as Granite--laps my Music--
> Sobbing--will suit--as well as psalm!
>
> Would but the "Memnon" of the Desert--
> Teach me the strain
> That vanquished Him--
> When He--surrendered to the Sunrise--
> Maybe--that--would awaken--them!

She will not put up her lute, though she says sobbing will suit as well as song since the only ear she wanted to charm is "Passive--as Granite." Then she refers to a Greek myth, the story of Memnon, who was king of the Ethiopians.[7] Memnon was killed in battle by Achilles and then was buried in a tomb on the banks of the river Esepus. Unlike most marvels of ancient

[7] Thomas Bullfinch, The Age of Fable, or Beauties of Mythology (Philadelphia: David McKay, 1898), pp. 258-59.

mythology, there still exist some memorials to Memnon. On the banks of the Nile River are two colossal statues, one of which is said to be the statue of Memnon. According to ancient writers, when the first rays of the rising sun fall on this statue, a sound comes forth which they compare to the snapping of harp strings. Emily Dickinson must have been referring to this story. If she could learn the tune that overcame Memnon when he "surrendered to the Sunrise," perhaps she could awaken the dead with her music.

In Poem #503, Emily Dickinson relates an ecstatic revelation which she presents in music terms. Here is an expe-rience which she says is better even than music!

> Better--than Music! For I--who heard it--
> I was used--to the Birds--before--
> This--was different--'Twas Translation--
> Of all tunes I knew--and more--
>
> 'Twas'nt contained--like other stanza--
> No one could play it--the second time--
> But the Composer--perfect Mozart--
> Perish with him--that Keyless Rhyme!
>
> So--Children--told how Brooks in Eden--
> Bubbled a better--Melody--
> Quaintly infer--Eve's great surrender--
> Urging the feet--that would--not--fly--
>
> Children--matured--are wiser--mostly--
> Eden--a legend--dimly told--
> Eve--and the Anguish--Grandame's story--
> But--I was telling a tune--I heard--

Not such a strain--the Church--baptizes--
When the last Saint--goes up the Aisles--
Not such a stanza splits the silence--
When the Redemption strikes her Bells--

Let me not spill--it's smallest cadence--
Humming--for promise--when alone--
Humming--until my faint Rehearsal--
Drop into tune--around the Throne--

Her ecstasy comes from the realization of a great truth, and the truth transports her. She has realized that the story of Eve, Eden, and "Eve's great surrender" is simply a legend. Even children, when "told how Brooks in Eden-- / Bubbled a better Melody," sensed that the story was not true; and their feet "would--not--fly," that is, their feet would not take them down the church aisle for a public announcement of their faith. When children matured, they were wiser and were able to accept the truth of the story of Eden, "a legend--dimly told," a "Grandame's story." This truth which came to Emily Dickinson was not "contained--like other stanzas"--that is, it was not written anywhere. Hence, "No one could play it--the second time." Like a composer of music, such as Mozart, who had melodies in his mind that were known only to himself, Emily Dickinson had a truth in her mind known only to herself, a "Translation-- / Of all tunes I knew--and more." The church had no comparable tune when it baptized or when "the last Saint--goes up the Aisles." Moreover,

there was "not such a stanza" at the time of redemption. In order not to lose this idea or "it's smallest cadence," Emily Dickinson kept reviewing it in the quiet of her mind, kept "humming--for promise--when alone" and would hum throughout her life until her "faint Rehearsal-- / Drop into tune--around the Throne."

Another poem in which Emily Dickinson states her ideas about music is Poem #505.

I would not paint--a picture--
I'd rather be the One
It's bright impossibility
To dwell--delicious--on--
And wonder how the fingers feel
Whose rare--celestial--air--
Evokes so sweet a Torment--
Such sumptuous--Despair--

I would not talk, like Cornets--
I'd rather be the One
Raised softly to the Ceilings--
And out, and easy on--
Through Villages of Ether--
Myself endued Balloon
By but a lip of Metal--
The pier to my Pontoon--

Nor would I be a Poet--
It's finer--own the Ear--
Enamored--impotent--content--
The License to revere,
A privilege so awful
What would the Dower be,
Had I the Art to stun myself
With bolts of Melody!

In his discussion of the poet, Albert J. Gelpi says, "Emily Dickinson saw that beauty was a quality of Nature and a part

of man's inherent capacity, and that in both its manifestations beauty was ultimately associated with Being Itself. She could distinguish between the Dionysian seer (or listener) and the Apollonian poet (or speaker)."[8] The poet equates art, music, and poetry. She says there are three things she would not choose to do: paint a picture, talk like cornets, or be a poet. She would rather dwell on the "bright impossibility" of a picture, be "Raised softly to the Ceilings" by music, or be "enamored" of poetry. She prefers the inherent capacity to appreciate beauty rather than the capacity to create it. However, in the conclusion of the poem, she wonders what the "Dower" would be, what natural talents she would possess, if she did have "the Art to stun myself / With bolts of Melody!"

In Poem #755, Emily Dickinson talks about the bobolink and his song.

> No Bobolink--reverse His Singing
> When the only Tree
> Ever He minded occupying
> By the Farmer be--
>
> Clove to the Root--
> His Spacious Future--
> Best Horizon--gone--
> Whose Music be His
> Only Anodyne--
> Brave Bobolink--

The bird sang to relieve the anguish it felt when the farmer cut down its favorite tree. The little bird did not stop

[8] Albert J. Gelpi, Emily Dickinson: The Mind of the Poet (Cambridge, Harvard Univ. Press, 1965), p. 131.

singing because of the loss of the tree but found its own music to be its only relief from the pain.

In Poem #1003, Emily Dickinson suggests in light vein that she is bored with her piano practice.

> Dying at my music!
> Bubble! Bubble!
> Hold me till the Octave's run!
> Quick! Burst the Windows!
> Ritardando!
> Phials left, and the Sun!

She is impatient to finish practicing the scales, "the Octave's run." She wants to finish quickly and throw open the windows to the sun. "Quick! Burst the Windows!" By using the word "ritardando," a music term which means "gradually slowing down in tempo," she is saying that she must be slow about obeying her impulse.

Emily Dickinson, in poem #1048, uses musical language to say that not all people respond in the same way to "Reportless Subjects."

> Reportless Subjects, to the Quick
> Continual addressed--
> But foreign as the Dialect
> Of Danes, unto the rest.
>
> Reportless Measures, to the Ear
> Susceptive--stimulus--
> But like an Oriental Tale
> To others, fabulous--

The poet says that sensitive people continually hear "Reportless Subjects," things that are beyond the range of report.

To insensitive persons, however, these same "Reportless Subjects" are incomprehensible, "as the Dialect of Danes." The poet indicates two responses that sensitive persons make to music. Some find music stimulating; others find it fabulous "like an Oriental Tale."

Emily Dickinson's reaction to music was almost the same as her reaction to poetry, which was described by T. W. Higginson after he called on Emily Dickinson in Amherst in August 1870. Regarding poetry she had said to him, "If I read a book and it makes my whole body so cold no fire ever can warm me I know <u>that</u> is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know <u>that</u> is poetry. These are the only way I know. Is there any other way" (<u>Letters</u>, II, 473-74, #342a). She says of music in Poem #1480:

> The fascinating chill that music leaves
> Is Earth's corroboration
> Of Ecstasy's impediment--
> 'Tis rapture's germination
> In timid and tumultuous soil
> A fine--estranging creature--
> To something upper wooing us
> But not to our Creator--

She speaks of "The fascinating chill that music leaves" and shows a strong reaction to music, almost as strong as her reaction to poetry. She feels a chill when she reads poetry or hears music. She finds that music is an "estranging

creature" that is wooing her "to something upper . . . But not to our Creator." She reveals her intense, ecstatic reaction to music.

Whether Emily Dickinson was actually hearing music or hearing it only in the recesses of her mind, she used glowing terms when she referred to music. When she wanted to explain an ecstatic experience, she used the language of music. Though the realization of truth was better than music, she found no better way to express her feelings than to refer to music. Though music was important to her, it was "reportless," for she wrote:

> Can the Dumb--define the Divine?
> The Definition of Melody--is--
> That Definition is none--
> (Poems, II, 603, #797)

# CHAPTER V

## MUSIC IMAGERY IN CERTAIN MAJOR THEMES

That music was important in Emily Dickinson's poetry can be seen by her use of music imagery in the development of her major themes of nature, poetry and the poet, love and friendship, death, and the reality of the abstract. Some of the music images, however, depend for their effectiveness upon the reader's knowledge of music and the associations that the reader will make with music. In writing about Emily Dickinson's imagery, Suzanne Wilson says in the November 1964 issue of American Literature: "Many of Emily Dickinson's images rely for their meaning and aesthetic effect upon the reader's awareness of a host of associations suggested by the image rather than upon his understanding of the terms of a comparison or analogy. Hence, the poems in which these multiple-meaning or suggestion images appear depend for their full comprehension and effect upon the reader's intuition, that direct perception of meaning referred to in twentieth century as sensibility."[1] One image that depends for its effectiveness upon the reader's knowledge is the word "cadence" in Poem #216. Persons who do not associate the word with music fail to see

[1] Suzanne M. Wilson, "Emily Dickinson and the Twentieth-Century Poetry of Sensibility," American Literature, 36, No.3 (Nov. 1964), p. 350.

its peculiar aptness in the poem and miss some of the meaning of the poem. A full explanation is given later in connection with the discussion of Poem #216.

In this study, poems are analyzed which show Emily Dickinson's use of music imagery in connection with five major themes, the first of which is nature; and five poems have been selected to show her use of music imagery in the development of this theme.

Birds are a part of nature, and the poems about birds are a development of her theme of nature. In Poem #653, Emily Dickinson, in a gay and happy mood, compares a bird to fine, soft, fluffy feathers with the distinction being "a Wake of Music" which accompanies the bird as an expression of ecstasy. The poem is given in full.

> Of being is a Bird
> The likest to the Down
> An Easy Breeze do put afloat
> The General Heavens--upon--
>
> It soars--and shifts--and whirls--
> And measures with the Clouds
> In easy--even--dazzling pace--
> No different the Birds--
>
> Except a Wake of Music
> Accompany their feet--
> As did the Down emit a Tune--
> For extasy--of it

More than the bird resembles anything else, it resembles down which floats in the heavens. Responsive to the breeze, the

down "soars--and shifts--and whirls"--and stays even with the clouds. The difference between the down and the bird is the music which comes from the bird.

Birds are also the subject of #1420, the second poem which is presented to show Emily Dickinson's use of music imagery in the development of her theme of nature. In terms of music, she reveals her sensitivity to the songs of the birds:

> One Joy of so much anguish
> Sweet nature has for me
> I shun it as I do Despair
> Or dear iniquity--
> Why Birds, a Summer morning
> Before the Quick of Day
> Should stab my ravished spirit
> With Dirks of Melody
> Is part of an inquiry
> That will receive reply
> When Flesh and Spirit sunder
> In Death's Immediately--

The experience of hearing the birds is joyful for her, but her joy is so intense that she shuns it just as she shuns despair or iniquity. She does not understand why the birds at daybreak "Should stab my ravished spirit / With Dirks of Melody." "Stab" and "dirk" are words with strong meaning, and by their use she helps to reveal the intensity of her own response to the singing of the birds. She does not understand her profound reaction but will ask about it when "Flesh and Spirit sunder," or when she dies.

In Poem #348, the third poem cited as an example of her use of music imagery in the development of her theme of nature, Emily Dickinson refers to the coming of the first robin and, by the use of music imagery, reveals the exquisite pain that she experienced at his arrival, which announces the coming of spring.

I dreaded that first Robin,so,
But He is mastered, now,
I'm some accustomed to Him grown,
He hurts a little, though--

I thought if I could only live
Till that first Shout got by--
Not all Pianos in the Woods
Had power to mangle me--

I dared not meet the Daffodils--
For fear their Yellow Gown
Would pierce me with a fashion
So foreign to my own--

I wished the Grass would hurry--
So--when 'twas time to see--
He'd be too tall, the tallest one
Could stretch--to look at me--

I could not bear the Bees should come,
I wished they'd stay away
In those dim countries where they go,
What word had they, for me?

They're here, though; not a creature failed--
No Blossom stayed away
In gentle deference to me--
The Queen of Calvary--

Each one salutes me, as he goes,
And I, my childish Plumes,
Lift, in bereaved acknowledgement
Of their unthinking Drums--

In the first stanza, Miss Dickinson states that her feelings have been mastered and are now under control. She had dreaded the coming of spring. She had thought that if she could only live until the first sounds of spring passed, she would be all right and "Not all Pianos in the Woods / Had power to mangle me." With the phrase "Pianos in the Woods" she is referring to the songs of many birds. A piano makes sounds of various pitch, and it is the combined sounds that provide harmony and contrast. The image in the poem is that of a vast number of birds, all singing at the same time and singing at various levels or pitches.

She had dreaded also the daffodils, the grass, and the bees. They came, however. None of these signs of spring failed to appear; none stayed away in consideration of her feelings. In the last stanza of the poem, she sadly acknowledges their "unthinking Drums." By the use of the word "Drums," Emily Dickinson symbolizes time and its inexorable progress, with which she was greatly concerned. With the coming of spring, time had passed; hence, she makes a "bereaved acknowledgement" of the arrival of the new season.

The fourth poem using music imagery as a development of her theme of nature is Poem #321, whose subject is the wind and in which the poet described the music that wind makes in the trees. The entire poem follows:

Of all the Sounds despatched abroad,
There's not a Charge to me
Like that old measure in the Boughs--
That phraseless Melody--
The Wind does--working like a Hand,
Whose fingers Comb the Sky--
Then quiver down--with tufts of Tune--
Permitted Gods, and me--

Inheritance, it is, to us--
Beyond the Art to Earn--
Beyond the trait to take away
By Robber, since the Gain
Is gotten not of fingers--
And inner than the Bone--
Hid golden, for the whole of days,
And even in the Urn,
I cannot vouch the merry Dust
Do not arise and play
In some odd fashion of it's own,
Some quainter Holiday,
When Winds go round and round in Bands--
And thrum upon the door,
And Birds take places, overhead,
To bear them Orchestra.

I crave Him grace of Summer Boughs,
If such an Outcast be--
Who never heard that fleshless Chant--
Rise--solemn--on the Tree,
As if some Caravan of Sound
Off Deserts, in the Sky,
Had parted Rank,
Then knit, and swept--
In seamless Company--

"Of all the Sounds despatched abroad," or of all the out-of-door sounds, there is no other that causes her the "Charge," or the excitement, that the music of the wind does. To her the music of the wind is a "phraseless Melody." "Phrase" is a music term which means "a segment of a composition," and the music of the wind was not divided into segments but was

continuous. The wind would "quiver down--with tufts of Tune," or vibrate with clusters of melody. The poet, together with the gods, was permitted to hear the sound of the wind. She considers the music of the wind an inheritance. It cannot be earned or stolen, and it lasts "for the whole of days," or throughout life. Even when she is "in the Urn," or buried, she cannot be certain that the wind will not cause the dust to rise "in some odd fashion of its own" when the winds go in bands "and thrum upon the door." "Thrum" is a music term which means "to play idly by plucking the strings of an instrument." Birds will be the orchestra for the winds. For anyone who has not heard "that fleshless Chant," she craves grace, or the unmerited gift. In other words, she wants that person, too, to hear the music as the wind rises solemnly in the tree.

The fifth and last poem used to show Emily Dickinson's use of music imagery in connection with her theme of nature is Poem #258, in which she expresses a different feeling about nature. She does not dwell on the beauty of nature but rather on the anguish she experiences on a winter afternoon, an anguish which she reveals in terms of music.

> There's a certain Slant of light,
> Winter Afternoons--
> That oppresses, like the Heft
> Of Cathedral Tunes--

Heavenly Hurt, it gives us--
We can find no scar,
But internal difference,
Where the Meanings, are--

None may teach it--Any--
'Tis the Seal Despair--
An imperial affliction
Sent us of the Air--

When it comes, the Landscape listens--
Shadows--hold their breath--
When it goes, 'tis like the Distance
On the look of Death--

The poet finds something depressing in the slant of light on winter afternoons. It oppresses her "like the Heft / Of Cathedral Tunes." Since "heft" means "weight" or "heaviness," the light was as crushing to her spirits as the "Cathedral Tunes," or church hymns, had been. The source of her pain is heaven, or God himself since He has ordered the coming of the winter afternoons. The lifelessness of the season reminds her of death and of her own ultimate death. No one can teach the meaning of the "Heavenly Hurt" that is "Sent us of the Air." It is pain sent by God. Clark Griffith says of the poem, "The situation is one in which the speaker, contemplating the dying day and the death-like season, is reminded by both of her own ultimate extinction."[2] Richard Adams, writing in Tulane Studies in English, says of the poem, "The general effect, maintained for the most part successfully, is a subtle

[2] Clark Griffith, The Long Shadow: Emily Dickinson's Tragic Poetry (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1964), p. 27.

balance of beauty with pathos, expressing that peculiar keenness of a departing joy which was one of Emily Dickinson's most cherished emotions."[3]

Inasmuch as the present study is limited and not exhaustive, no other examples of music imagery in the development of the poet's theme of nature will be given. The five poems which have been presented reveal both the joy and the anguish that Emily Dickinson experienced in her response to nature: her joy as she compared a bird to down, her joy and anguish as she heard the songs of birds early on a summer morning, her anguish as she recognized the coming of spring and the passing of time, her joy as she heard the sound of the winds, and her anguish as she noticed the slant of light on winter afternoons and was reminded of death.

The poet's second major theme to be considered in this study is that of poetry and the poet, and three poems have been selected to show her use of music imagery in the development of this theme. It is significant that she referred to her compulsion, not "to express myself" or "to write," but "to sing." There is such a reference in her second letter to T. W. Higginson, written in April 1862: "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" (Letters, II, 404, #261).

[3] Richard P. Adams, "Pure Poetry: Emily Dickinson," Tulane Studies in English (New Orleans: Tulane University), 7(1957), p.146.

Sometimes she refers to herself as a bird and to her poetry as the song of the bird, as in Poem #250, in which she states her determination to "keep singing," or to keep writing poems.

> I shall keep singing!
> Birds will pass me
> On their way to Yellower Climes--
> Each--with a Robin's expectation--
> I--with my Redbreast--
> And my Rhymes--
>
> Late--when I take my place in summer--
> But--I shall bring a fuller tune--
> Vespers--are sweeter than Matins--Signor--
> Morning--only the seed of Noon--

Other poets will pass her on their way to "Yellower Climes," or to recognized success as poets; but when she does take her place "in summer," she will have a fuller tune, or better verses. The poem closes with the thoughts that even-songs are sweeter than morning songs and that morning is a time of preparation for noon. Perhaps she means that the verses she will write in later life will be better than the ones she wrote early in life, for "Morning," or early life, is a preparation for "Noon," the high point of achievement.

The second poem about poetry and the poet is Poem #326, which reveals her belief in the role of enthusiasm in art. Of this belief, Henry Wells says:

> With her idealistic faith as her support, Emily Dickinson emphatically believed in the role of enthusiasm in art. One of her most charming fancies shows the esteem in which she held this essential factor in the aesthetic experience. "I cannot dance upon my toes" describes a troupe of toe dancers which the poet had somewhere seen. Emily Dickinson was not over favorably impressed with the antics of the dancers, which she found often to be awkward, stiff, and affected. Yet she did perceive in their aim true ardor. Such esprite she had seldom, perhaps, witnessed, and it impressed her. Recognizing a certain puritan austerity as a surface quality of her own verses, she knew also that their reticence quietly held fires far fiercer than any which the ballet dancers had remotely conceived."[4]

Before the poem is analyzed, the events which preceded Emily Dickinson's sending it to T. W. Higginson need to be stated. When she began her correspondence with Higginson in April 1862, she sent him four poems (Johnson, in Letters, II, 403) and asked, "Are you too deeply occupied to say if my Verse is alive?" (Letters, II, 403, #260). In his reply, according to George F. Whicher, "he [Higginson] mingled unstinted praise with his admonitions, but he was positive in pronouncing her verses uncontrolled, sporadic, and wayward."[5] In her fifth letter to Higginson, Emily Dickinson sent two poems and asked, "Are these more orderly? I thank you for

[4] Henry W. Wells, Introduction to Emily Dickinson (Chicago: Packard, 1947), p. 206.

[5] Whicher, p. 228.

the Truth" (Letters, II, 414, #271). One of the two poems which she sent at that time was Poem #326, and it is quoted in its entirety.

> I cannot dance upon my Toes--
> No Man instructed me--
> But oftentimes, among my mind,
> A Glee possesseth me,
>
> That had I Ballet knowledge--
> Would put itself abroad
> In Pirouette to blanch a Troupe--
> Or lay a Prima, mad,
>
> And though I had no Gown of Gauze--
> No Ringlet, to my Hair,
> Nor hopped for Audiences--like Birds,
> One Claw upon the Air,
>
> Nor tossed my shape in Eider Balls,
> Nor rolled on wheels of snow
> Till I was out of sight, in sound,
> The House encore me so--
>
> Nor any know I know the Art
> I mention--easy--Here--
> Nor any Placard boast me--
> It's full as Opera--

By this poem, Emily Dickinson gave clear notice to Higginson of the possession of the artistic faculty by demonstrating her ability as a poet. David T. Porter says of her and of the poem:

> Emily Dickinson seemed to confirm Higginson's low assessment of her ability . . . [while] affirming her own awareness of a mature talent. Her apparent acquiescence to Higginson's opinion provides the initial tone.
>
> The contrary attitude, the clear notice of possession of the artistic faculty--together with disdain for mannerisms which pass for fine performance in a theater concerned with frills--charges

> the closing stanzas. Though not a public performer, she says her "art" is filled to capacity.
>
> This speaker, contemptuous even as she vividly describes the costumes and gestures on the public stage, possesses more than a faint regard for her own ability. Emily Dickinson realizes that Higginson was baffled by her extraordinary performance, yet she neither wanted to malign his critical intelligence nor minimize her own talents.[6]

The poem is included in this study because of Emily Dickinson's use of the word "opera." When she wanted to let Higginson know what she thought of her own poetic ability, she said that her "art" was "full as opera." And opera is a music form which has story, singing, costumes, stage settings, orchestra--everything.

The third and last poem in this category is Poem #1059, in which she identifies the bird with the poet and the "Tune" with poetry.

> Sang from the Heart, Sire,
> Dipped my Beak in it,
> If the Tune drip too much
> Have a tint too Red
>
> Pardon the Cochineal--
> Suffer the Vermillion--
> Death is the Wealth
> Of the Poorest Bird.
>
> Bear with the Ballad--
> Awkward--faltering--
> Death twists the strings--
> 'Twas'nt my blame--

[6] David T. Porter, The Art of Emily Dickinson's Early Poetry (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1966), p. 11.

Pause in your Liturgies--
Wait your Chorals--
While I repeat your
Hallowed name--

Charles R. Anderson says of Emily Dickinson and Poem #1059, "Sometimes it was the surge of ecstasy, though usually with the implication of fulfillment denied. More often it was the pain of love that wrung the poems from her. In the poem quoted, she explicitly relates the inadequacy of her form to the overmastering power of such emotions."[7] She expresses her fear that her poems are over-stated, are too red or colorful. The lines "Death is the Wealth / Of the Poorest Bird" hint that the red, cochineal, and vermillion represent the blood extracted from her as she produced her poems. She could not help these excesses in her poems, and she asks that the "Sire" in the poem, by which designation she possibly means the reader, bear with her awkward and faltering efforts.

The use of music imagery in the three poems about poetry and the poet can be summarized as follows: in the first, she states that she will keep on singing; in the second, that her poetry is as full as opera; in the third, that her tune may be emotionally uncontrolled.

[7] Charles R. Anderson, "Center," in The Recognition of Emily Dickinson, ed. Caesar R. Blake and Carlton F. Wells (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Univ. of Mich. Press, 1964), p. 296.

The third major theme to be considered in this study is love and friendship, and three poems will be used to demonstrate Emily Dickinson's use of music imagery in the development of this theme. Sometimes there is an overlapping of Emily Dickinson's images. In two of the poems presented earlier in this study to demonstrate her use of music imagery in connection with her theme of poetry and the poet, the poet herself was the bird and her poetry the song of the bird. However, in Poem #5, which follows, a friend who had gone away for a while is the "bird" or the "Robin," and the poem reveals the poet's loneliness for this friend.

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

Yet do I not repine
Knowing that Bird of mine
Though flown--
Learneth beyond the sea
Melody new for me
And will return.

Fast in a safer hand
Held in a truer Land
Are mine--
And though they now depart,
Tell I my doubting heart
They're thine.

In a serener Bright,
In a more golden light
I see
Each little doubt and fear,
Each little discord here
Removed.

Then will I not repine,
Knowing that Bird of mine
Though flown
Shall in a distant tree
Bright melody for me
Return.

Emily Dickinson sent this poem to Susan Gilbert when Susan was spending several months in Grand Haven, Michigan, with her brothers (Johnson, in Letters, I, 305). John Pickard says that this poem "is an interesting tyro attempt to transmute personal feelings into poetry. Although woodenly phrased with repetitious imagery, the poem conveys her grief over the feared loss of Sue's friendship. Her pathetic search for consolation is touching when she finally states her hope that the flown bird will sing for her again some day."[8] By use of the terms "sing" and "melody," Emily Dickinson reveals the joy which her friendship with Susan Gilbert had afforded. In November 1854, Emily Dickinson closed a letter to Dr. and Mrs. Holland with the words of the last stanza of the poem, though she did not write the words in the form of a stanza. She

[8] Pickard, p. 20.

said, "Then will I not repine, knowing that bird of mine, though flown--learneth beyond the sea, melody new for me, and will return" (Letters, I, 310, #175). Dr. and Mrs. Holland were friends who lived in Springfield, Massachusetts,[9] who often corresponded with Emily Dickinson.

Mrs. Holland herself is the subject of Poem #1568, and is described in the poem.

> To see her is a Picture--
> To hear her is a Tune--
> To know her an Intemperance
> As innocent as June--
> To know her not--Affliction--
> To own her for a Friend
> A warmth as near as if the Sun
> Were shining in your Hand.

Mrs. Holland had sent photographs of her son and her two sons-in-law to Emily Dickinson (Johnson, in Letters, III, 761). When the poet replied to Mrs. Holland's letter, she enclosed Poem #1568 and asked, "May I present your Portrait to your Sons in Law?" (Letters, III, 761, #802). In the poem, her use of the music term "tune" helps to convey the deep joy which Emily Dickinson experienced in having Mrs. Holland for a friend.

Poem #1072 is the third and last poem which will be cited to show Emily Dickinson's use of music imagery in the development of her theme of love and friendship. Though Emily

[9] Bingham, Ancestors' Brocades, p. 124.

Dickinson never married, she wrote about love and marriage in this poem.

> Title divine--is mine!
> The Wife--without the Sign!
> Acute Degree--conferred on me--
> Empress of Calvary!
> Royal--all but the Crown!
> Betrothed--without the swoon
> God sends us Women--
> When you--hold--Garnet to Garnet--
> Gold--to Gold--
> Born--Bridalled--Shrouded--
> In a Day--
> "My Husband"--women say--
> Stroking the Melody--
> Is <u>this</u>--the way?

John Pickard says of the poem, "Here the actual marriage without the human bridegroom is so fully developed that one can almost feel the human passion being transformed into divine love."[10] And George F. Whicher speaks of the "pain and wistful longing so poignantly expressed at the close."[11] The word "Melody" expresses the rapture of a new bride repeating to herself the words "My Husband."

Three poems have been presented to show Emily Dickinson's use of music imagery in the development of her theme of love and friendship. The first two concern friendship; the third, love. The music imagery of the poems can be summarized as follows: In the first, the poet's "bird" had "flown"; in the second, the poet said of a friend "To hear her is a tune"; in the third, a bride considers the words "my husband" a melody.

[10] Pickard, pp. 92-93.

[11] Whicher, p. 280.

The fourth major theme under consideration in this study is the theme of death, and three poems are presented to show Emily Dickinson's use of music imagery in the development of this theme.

In Poem #1445, Emily Dickinson gives a definition of death. Apparently she liked to define abstract ideas, for, according to Henry W. Wells, about 160 of her poems are definitions of abstract concepts.[12] As she states her definition of death, she personifies death as "the supple Suitor."

Death is the supple Suitor
That wins at last--
It is a stealthy Wooing
Conducted first

By pallid innuendoes
And dim approach
But brave at last with Bugles
And a bisected Coach

It bears away in triumph
To Troth unknown
And Kinsmen as divulgeless
As throngs of Down

Here death carries on a courtship which is cautious at first. A suitor who comes with "pallid innuendoes / And dim approach" can be ignored; a suitor who comes "with Bugles" cannot be ignored. And at last, death becomes bold and enters with bugles and a coach and bears the person away. The poem is included in this discussion because of Emily Dickinson's use of the word "bugles."

[12] Wells, pp. 71-72.

There is a difference of opinion among literary critics about the nature of the experience about which Emily Dickinson writes in Poem #315. George F. Whicher states that the poet is describing the preaching of the Reverend Charles Wadsworth.[13] Charles R. Anderson states that she was describing a hell-fire preacher.[14] Richard Chase claims that the "He" of the poem might be God bestowing the ravishment of grace, a lover consummating their love, the cosmos encroaching upon her unto death, or even death itself.[15] In this study, the subject of the poem is interpreted to be death.

He fumbles at your Soul
As Players at the Keys
Before they drop full Music on--
He stuns you by degrees--
Prepares your brittle Nature
For the Etherial Blow
By fainter Hammers--further heard--
Then nearer--Then so slow
Your breath has time to straighten--
Your Brain--to bubble Cool--
Deals--One--imperial--Thunderbolt--
That scalps your naked Soul--

When Winds take Forests in their Paws--
The Universe--is still--

The poet makes an analogy of musicians and death. Musicians often execute a few runs or chords before they really

[13] Whicher, p. 101.

[14] Anderson, Stairway of Surprise, p. 17.

[15] Richard Chase, Emily Dickinson, The American Men of Letter Series (New York: Sloane Associates, 1951), p. 204.

begin to play. Death, too, hints and intimates his coming before he deals "the Etherial Blow." Emily Dickinson continues the analogy by referring to the hammers of the musical instrument. First she mentions "fainter Hammers--further heard," or hints of death. Next the sound of the hammers is nearer and then is so close that "Your Breath has time to straighten" for the "One--imperial--Thunderbolt."

The third poem used to show Emily Dickinson's use of music imagery in the development of her theme of death is Poem #216, "Safe in their Alabaster Chambers," which is probably one of the poet's best-known poems. While the reference to music in the poem is slight, it is so effective that the poem is included in this study.

> Safe in their Alabaster Chambers--
> Untouched by Morning
> And untouched by Noon--
> Sleep the meek members of the Resurrection--
> Rafter of satin,
> And Roof of stone.
>
> Light laughs the breeze
> In her Castle above them--
> Babbles the Bee in a stolid Ear,
> Pipe the Sweet Birds in ignorant cadence--
> Ah, what sagacity perished here!

In the poem, Emily Dickinson combines the themes of death and the indifference of nature to man. The indifference is shown by the fact that the breeze, the bee, and the birds continue

to do as they have always done in utter disregard of the dead. Especially is the indifference shown by the fact that the birds sing "in ignorant cadence." "Cadence" is a music term which means "the harmonic sequence of chords indicating conclusion." Singing above the dead, the birds were ignorant of the fact that the dead had come to the conclusion of life.

The music imagery in the three poems about death can be summarized as follows: In the first, death as a supple suitor woos stealthily at first but comes at last with bugles; in the second, death fumbles at the soul as players do at the keys before they begin their actual performance; in the third, birds are ignorant of the fact that they sing above the graves of the dead.

The final theme under consideration in this study is the reality of the abstract, and four poems have been chosen to show Emily Dickinson's use of music imagery in the development of this theme. In the first, Poem #526, the poet ponders a question about the beauty of the oriole's song.

To hear an Oriole sing
May be a common thing--
Or only a divine.

It is not of the Bird
Who sings the same, unheard,
As unto Crowd--

The Fashion of the Ear
Attireth that it hear
In Dun, or fair--

So whether it be Rune,
Or whether it be none
Is of within.

The "Tune is in the Tree--"
The Skeptic--showeth me--
"No Sir! In Thee!"

The poet wonders whether the song itself is beautiful or whether she as the listener determines its beauty. She decides that she is the determining agent. In other words, beauty exists within a person; it is not an external thing. George F. Whicher comments on the poem: "The song of the oriole, she says, may appear a common thing or it may strike us as divine. The difference is not owing to the bird, which sings precisely the same whether there are listeners or not."[16] And Martin Armstrong, in his essay "The Poetry of Emily Dickinson," says, "She holds that nature gains all its significance from mind. The oriole sings from the tree, but the reality of its song is only in the mind of the listener."[17]

In Poem #673, Emily Dickinson considers divine love.

The Love a Life can show Below
Is but a filament, I know,
Of that diviner thing
That faints upon the face of Noon--
And smites the Tinder in the Sun--
And hinders Gabriel's Wing--

[16] Whicher, p. 237.

[17] Martin Armstrong, "The Poetry of Emily Dickinson," in The Recognition of Emily Dickinson, ed. Caesar R. Blake and Carlton F. Wells (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Univ. of Mich. Press, 1964), p. 107.

'Tis this--in Music--hints and sways--
And far abroad on Summer days--
Distils uncertain pain--
'Tis this enamors in the East--
And tints the Transit in the West
With harrowing Iodine--

'Tis this--invites--appalls--endows--
Flits--glimmers--proves--dissolves--
Returns--suggests--convicts--enchants--
Then--flings in Paradise--

Charles R. Anderson says that the poet, in the above poem, is concerned with the vastly superior glory of divine love but can describe it only in terms taken from "Below."[18] Earthly love, earthly beauty, and earthly music help her to imagine divine love. Heavenly love, she says, can be compared to that in music which "hints and sways" and "Distils uncertain pain." That Emily Dickinson reacted strongly to music is evident by her reference to music in this poem.

In the third poem about abstract concepts, Emily Dickinson is concerned with the question of immortality. Poem #501 is quoted in full.

This World is not Conclusion.
A species stands beyond--
Invisible, as Music--
But positive, as Sound--
It beckons, and it baffles--
Philosophy--dont know--
And through a Riddle, at the last--
Sagacity, must go--
To guess it, puzzles scholars--
To gain it, Men have borne
Contempt of Generations

[18] Anderson, p. 187.

And Crucifixion, shown--
Faith slips--and laughs, and rallies--
Blushes, if any see--
Plucks at a twig of Evidence--
And asks a Vane, the way--
Much Gesture, from the Pulpit--
Strong Hallelujahs roll--
Narcotics cannot still the Tooth
That nibbles at the soul--

The poem begins with a flat statement that this world is not the end of existence. Then she considers the fact that philosophers, scholars, and saints have tried to prove that there is such a thing as immortality. John Pickard makes this comment about the poem: "Her comparison of immortality with music increases the doubt, for invisible and intangible sounds are hardly proof."[19] Though her opening statement expresses belief in immortality, her final statement is one of doubt. The poem is included in this study because of the lines "Invisible, as Music-- / But positive, as Sound."

In the last poem to be presented in this study, Emily Dickinson again ponders the question of immortality. Marianne Moore, writing for Poetry, said that Emily Dickinson saw no comfort in refusing to question that about which she wished to be sure;[20] and, although Poem #1576 is not in the form of a question, the poet's curiosity about immortality is evident.

[19] Pickard, p. 116.

[20] Marianne Moore, "Emily Dickinson," Poetry, 41(Jan.1933), 225.

The Spirit lasts--but in what mode--
Below, the Body speaks,
But as the Spirit furnishes--
Apart, it never talks--
The Music in the Violin
Does not emerge alone
But Arm in Arm with Touch, yet Touch
Alone--is not a Tune--
The Spirit lurks within the Flesh
Like Tides within the Sea
That make the Water live, estranged
What would the Either be?
Does that know--now--or does it cease--
That which to this is done,
Resuming at a mutual date
With every future one?
Instinct pursues the Adamant,
Exacting this Reply--
Adversity if it may be, or
Wild Prosperity,
The Rumor's Gate was shut so tight
Before my Mind was sown,
Not even a Prognostic's Push
Could make a Dent thereon--

Emily Dickinson says that the spirit exists within the body just as tides exist within the sea. Separately, what would either be? Just as music does not exist apart from a violin, so does the spirit not exist apart from the body. She equates music and soul, violin and body. Music is intrinsic within the violin, and the violin gives forth music under the impulse of the performer. The soul exists within the body, and the body moves upon the impulse of the soul.

The music imagery of these four poems about abstract concepts may be summarized as follows: In the first, she realizes that she determines the beauty of the oriole's song;

in the second, she compares divine love to earthly love by saying that divine love is like that which in music "hints and sways"; in the third, she asserts her belief in immortality, which is "Invisible, as Music-- / But positive, as Sound"; and in the fourth, she equates music and the soul, violin and the body, saying that as music does not exist apart from the violin, the soul does not exist apart from the body.

All of these poems have been presented to show Emily Dickinson's use of music imagery in the development of her major themes of nature, poetry and the poet, love and friendship, death, and the reality of the abstract. The references to music are now given in summary. In the poems about nature, there are the following ideas: (1) A bird and down are alike except for the "Wake of Music" which accompanies the bird. (2) The songs of the birds stabbed her "ravished spirit / With Dirks of Melody." (3) After she mastered the first sounds of spring, "Not all Pianos in the Woods / Had the power to mangle me." (4) Of the wind in the trees she said:

> When Winds go round and round in Bands--
> And thrum upon the door,
> And Birds take places, overhead,
> To bear them Orchestra.

(5) The slant of light on winter afternoons "oppresses, like the Heft / Of Cathedral Tunes."

In the verses about poetry and the poet, Emily Dickinson made the following references to music: (1) She would "keep singing," that is, keep writing poetry. (2) She claimed that her "art" was "full as Opera." (3) She wondered if her "tune drip too much," that is, if her poetry was over-stated.

As she wrote about love and friendship, the poet used music imagery in these ways: (1) A "bird," that is a friend, had gone away. When the friend returned, there would be "melody new" for the poet--that is, there would be new happiness. (2) The poet wrote of a friend, "To hear her is a Tune." (3) A bride said to herself the words "My Husband" and thought them melody.

As the poet wrote about death, she employed music imagery in the following ways: (1) Death is the "supple Suitor" who comes at last "with Bugles." (2) "He [death] fumbles at your Soul / As Players at the Keys / Before they drop full Music on--" (3) Birds sing "in ignorant cadence" about the graves of the dead.

As Emily Dickinson considered abstract concepts, she found uses for music imagery in the following ways: (1) She realized that the listener determined the beauty of the oriole's song. (2) She recognized the existence of divine love, though it is ineffable like that which "in Music--hints and sways." (3) She stated that the spirit exists within the

body just as music exists in a violin and that neither spirit nor music exists apart.

Repeatedly in her poems, by use of a word, a phrase, or a statement, Emily Dickinson conveys an image by referring to music. Sometimes she does so with one word, such as the word "Bugles" in Poem #1445, which begins "Death is the supple Suitor." Sometimes she uses a phrase, such as the phrase "like the Heft / Of Cathedral Tunes" in Poem #258, which begins "There's a certain Slant of light." And at other times she makes a statement, such as "A Species stands beyond-- / Invisible as Music-- / But positive, as Sound" in Poem #510, which begins "This World is not Conclusion." It is evident that music was important to Emily Dickinson because of the numerous uses she made of music imagery as she developed her themes of nature, poetry and the poet, love and friendship, death, and the reality of the abstract.

# CHAPTER VI

## OTHER POEMS WHICH REFER TO MUSIC

In addition to the poems about music discussed in Chapter IV and the poems which show the use of music imagery relating to certain themes discussed in Chapter V, there are other poems which refer to music and sometimes to the themes that are important because of the striking images and great ideas Emily Dickinson was able to express in a few lines. In order to show the importance of music in Emily Dickinson's poetry, it is necessary to call attention to these additional poems.

Louis Untermeyer, in Modern American Poetry, writes of Emily Dickinson: "Although the poet often indulged herself by retreating into a style cryptic and wayward, her tiny quatrains are lavish with huge ideas and almost overpowering figures. . . . Her lightest phrases bear the accent of finality. Without striving to be clever, she achieves one startling epigram after another; no poet ever existed with a more aphoristic mind. . . . Her swift condensations--surpassed by no writer of any age--win the most reluctant."[1]

[1] Louis Untermeyer, ed., Modern American Poetry, Mid-century Edition (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1950), pp. 92-93.

In this chapter are presented some of these overpowering figures and startling epigrams.

In Poem #512, "The Soul has Bandaged moments," Emily Dickinson tells of an awful fear which grips the soul at the approach of an enemy. The soul's first reaction is to escape, and it does so momentarily and dances frenziedly. It is soon recaptured, however, and is

> Felon led along,
> With shackles on the plumed feet,
> And staples, in the Song

Another startling phrase is found in the final stanza of Poem #616, "I rose--because He sank." She speaks of the "Thews of Hymn," that is, the "muscular power or strength" of the hymn.

> And so with Thews of Hymn--
> And Sinew from within--
> And ways I knew not that I knew--till then--
> I lifted Him--

In several poems about memory, there are some striking lines that contain music imagery. In Poem #367, "Over and over, like a Tune," she says:

> Over and over, like a Tune--
> The Recollection plays--
> Drums off the Phantom Battlements
> Cornets of Paradise--

Still on the subject of memory, she says in Poem #1578, "Memory like Melody / Is pink Eternally." And as she remembers

the joys of a summer season, she says in Poem #302, "Like Some Old fashioned Miracle":

> Her Memories like Strains--Review--
> When Orchestra is dumb--
> The Violin in Baise replaced--
> And Ear--and Heaven--numb--

Emily Dickinson had an appreciation for silence, for she knew that entremes of emotion cannot be expressed and that words, though powerful, are inadequate beyond a certain point.[2] In Poem #1750, she says:

> The words the happy say
> Are paltry melody
> But those the silent feel
> Are beautiful--

In the next two poems, she describes contrasting experiences. In Poem #297, she depicts a mystical experience and uses music imagery to convey her ecstasy:[3] "It's like the Bee-- / A dateless--Melody." She relates a terrible experience in Poem #410, saying that she was thankful at the end of the day to have endured it. She found, however, that her "Strings were snapt-- / Her Bow--to Atoms blown."

There are many music images in her nature poems, nature being, perhaps, her favorite subject. In Poem #593, "I think I was enchanted," she says of nature's sounds:

[2] Donald E. Thackrey, "The Communication of the Word," in Emily Dickinson: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Richard B. Sewall (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963), p. 66.

[3] Wells, Introduction to Emily Dickinson, p. 162.

> And just the meanest Tunes
> That Nature murmured to herself
> To keep herself in Cheer--
> I took for Giants--practising
> Titanic Opera--

In the four lines of Poem #1389, she gives some advice to those who would write about nature:

> Touch lightly Nature's sweet Guitar
> Unless thou know'st the Tune
> Or every Bird will point at thee
> Because a Bard too soon--

And in Poem #64, "Some Rainbow--coming from the Fair," she writes of "Lethargic pools" that "resume the whirr / Of last year's sundered tune!"

There are some striking music images about the wind in Emily Dickinson's poems. In Poem #1008, when steeple bells began to respond to the wind, she said, "They leap upon their silver feet / In frantic Melody!" And in Poem #606 she described a summer storm by saying:

> There seemed to rise a Tune
> From Miniature Creatures
> Accompanying the Sun
> Far Psalteries of Summer--
> Enamoring the Ear

In Poem #1418, she writes of the wind "Stepping to incorporeal Tunes"; in Poem #304 she says that "The Happy Winds--their Timbrels took"; and in Poem #794, she states that "The Breezes brought dejected Lutes."

Birds were of special concern to the poet, and in the poems about birds are found some striking examples of music imagery. In Poem #606, as she relates the aftermath of a storm, she says that "One [a bird] gossipped in the Lane-- / On silver matters." In Poem #285, she claims that "The Robin's my Criterion for Tune-- / Because I grow--where Robins do." In Poem #500, she writes of the humming bird "Whose spokes a dizzy Music make." The jay, in Poem #1177, is "Bold as a Bailiff's Hymn"; in Poem #1635, she says that "The Jay his Castanet has struck." She takes note of a black bird in Poem #620, saying "No black bird bates his Banjo." She writes at length of a robin in Poem #1483, and the description ends with the robin

> Cajolling Consternation
> By ditties to the Enemy
> And Sylvan Punctuation

In Poem #81, as she noted the approach of spring and anticipated the return of the birds, she said, "So silver steal a hundred flutes / From out a hundred trees." Her oriole, in Poem #1466, was so drunk that he was reeling; however, he denied his drunkenness "With badinage divine." He is also described as "Betimes an Oratorio-- / An ecstasy in chief." Another robin, in Poem #634,

> squanders on your Head
> Such Threnodies of Pearl--
> You beg the Robin in your Brain
> To keep the other--still.

In Poem #1102, Emily Dickinson shows her indignation that one of her sister's cats had killed a bird:

> Assassin of a Bird
> Resembles to my outraged mind
> The firing in Heaven,
> On Angels--squandering for you
> Their Miracles of Tune--

These additional uses of music further demonstrate the importance of music in the poetry of Emily Dickinson. Repeatedly she turned to music in order to convey emotions ranging from ecstasy to despair, from cheerfulness to quiet thoughtfulness, from fear to indignation. When she wanted the superlative statement, she found it in music.

# CHAPTER VII

## CONCLUSION

From early childhood through the last years of her life, Emily Dickinson showed a love for music. During her years of schooling in Amherst Academy and her one year at Mount Holyoke Seminary, she practiced regularly and revealed a joy in playing the piano. Though she never achieved a high degree of proficiency, she continued for a number of years into adulthood to play the piano and often improvised melodies of her own. Her love for music is evident further by her desire to have musicians come to her home to perform for her. It was through the interest and efforts of one of these musicians, Mabel Loomis Todd, that the first volumes of her poems and letters were published.

Her love for music, however, did not extend to the church hymns, although the hymns exerted a three-fold influence upon her life and poetry: (1) She used the hymn meters in her poems, and it is not an overstatement to say that nine-tenths of her poetry was written in meters made familiar to her by their use in the village hymnal. (2) She rejected the idea of a punitive God as proclaimed by the hymns and in her poems presented a benign God. (3) She wrote her poems to fit existing hymn tunes with "Dundee" being her favorite.

From her experiences in music, Emily Dickinson gained a music vocabulary extensive enough to justify the inclusion of music along with other special sources from which she drew her poetic vocabulary. The present study shows that 118 words of her poetic vocabulary derived from music. In spite of this large number, neither William Howard nor R. P. Blackmur lists music as a special source of her poetic vocabulary, although William Howard does list the medical profession from which she derived twelve words, grammar from which she derived fifteen, mathematics from which she derived seventeen, and law and politics from which she derived sixty. Surely a source from which she derived 118 words should be included in a list of special sources of her poetic vocabulary. The present study also shows that she used these terms 353 times in her poems. From this large number of references to music in the poems, it is evident that music was important in her life and poetry.

She wrote only ten poems whose subject is music. In the first, she shows her delight in the tunes a boy whistled as he passed under her window; in the second, her transport over "silver strife" which she heard at dawn; in the third, her deep response to organ music; in the fourth, the possibility of awakening the dead with a certain strain of music; in the

fifth, a great truth which, she said, was better even than music; in the sixth, the equating of art and music and poetry; in the seventh, a bobolink whose only "Anodyne" was its singing; in the eighth, her boredom with piano practice; in the ninth, the responses which sensitive people make to music; and in the tenth, Emily Dickinson found music fabulous, for she wrote of "The fascinating chill that music leaves." Perhaps she would have written more poems on the subject of music had music not been for her a "Reportless Subject." Though she had unusual ability to put into words the thoughts and emotions that she experienced, she could not define music. Of it she said simply, "The Definition of Melody--is-- / That Definition is none" (Poems, II, 603, #797).

This study has pointed out images and figures of speech relating to music that she used in connection with her major themes of nature, poetry and the poet, love and friendship, death, and the reality of the abstract. Her use of music imagery in connection with these themes can be summarized theme by theme as follows: by showing her delight in nature in the fanciful poem which distinguishes between a bird and a bit of down, the distinction being the "Wake of Music" that accompanies the bird; by showing a mixture of joy and pain as she wonders why the birds early on a summer morning "Should stab my ravished spirit / With Dirks of Melody"; by revealing

her anguish over the coming of spring, saying that if she could live through the first sounds of spring "Not all Pianos in the Woods / Had power to mangle me"; by pointing out her love for the sound of the wind when she says:

> When Winds go round and round in Bands--
> And thrum upon the door,
> And Birds take places, overhead,
> To bear them Orchestra.

and in the last nature poem presented in this study by depicting her anguish as she writes about "a certain Slant of light" during the winter afternoons "That oppresses, like the Heft / Of Cathedral Tunes."

The second major theme considered in this study is that of poetry and the poet. When she referred to the writing of poetry, she often did so in music terms, identifying herself as a singer and her poetry as a song. The first of the three poems cited in this study reveals her intention to continue writing, or as stated in the poem, to "keep singing." In the second poem, which she sent to T. W. Higginson to demonstrate her poetic ability, she claims that her poetry is "full as Opera." And in the third poem, the poet speaks of herself as a bird whose tune might "drip too much." These three poems reveal ways in which she used music as she wrote about poetry and the poet.

The third major theme considered in this study is the theme of love and friendship. Though Emily Dickinson lived in seclusion for many years, she maintained correspodence with a number of friends; and these friends meant much to her. During the months that Susan Gilbert once spent in Michigan, Emily Dickinson expressed her loneliness for Susan by writing:

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

However, the poet knew that the bird--that is, Susan Gilbert--was learning a new "Melody" and would return. In the second poem which relates to love and friendship, Emily Dickinson describes her friend Mrs. Holland, and one line of the poem has the words "To hear her is a Tune." In the third and last poem presented in this part of the study, Emily Dickinson speaks of marriage and pictures a bride "stroking the Melody" as she says to herself the words "My Husband."

The fourth major theme considered in this study is the theme of death, and three poems are cited to show Emily Dickinson's use of music imagery in connection with this theme. In the first of the three poems, she defines death as "the supple Suitor" who woos stealthily at first but who

is "brave at last with Bugles." In the second poem, she shows the grdual approach of death, saying:

> He fumbles at your Soul
> As Players at the Keys
> Before they drop full Music on--

And in the third poem with death as its theme, she blends the ideas of the beauty of nature and the unconcern of nature by having birds which sing "in ignorant cadence" above the dead.

The fifth and last theme considered is the reality of abstractions, and three poems are cited to show Emily Dickinson's use of music imagery in connection with this theme. As she heard an oriole sing, she wondered whether the song itself was beautiful or whether she as the listener determined its beauty; and she came to the conclusion that she made the determination. In the second poem which is presented, she compares divine love to earthly love. Just as there is something in music which hints and sways, she says, so are there things around her which hint of divine love. In the third poem which is cited, she affirms her belief in immortality, which is "Invisible, as Music / But positive, as Sound." Both music and immortality, though invisible, are real.

In addition to the poems which Emily Dickinson wrote about music which are presented in Chapter IV of this study and the selected poems which contain music imagery in connection with certain major themes which are presented in Chapter

V, in Chapter VI still other examples of music imagery are presented because of their effectiveness and the great ideas which she was able to express in a few lines or words. The music imagery cited in Chapters V and VI is not a complete presentation of Emily Dickinson's music imagery; however, enough examples are given to establish the fact that music was important in her poetry.

Therefore, because of Emily Dickinson's lifelong experiences in music, her music vocabulary, the poems which she wrote about music, and the music imagery which she used in her poems, it can now be stated that music was important in her life and poetry.

The significance of this study lies in the fact that it presents a view of Emily Dickinson and her poetry that has not been presented before. At this time, there is great interest in all information about her life and poetry, and this is another study designed to reveal further one of America's greatest poets. The study has explained the importance of music as a theme in her poetry--not a major theme comparable in importance with her themes of nature, poetry and the poet, love and friendship, death, and the reality of the abstract--but an auxiliary theme by which she made many revealing statements about her major themes and other ideas.

As a poet, she expressed many different emotions; and it is appropriate that she refer so many times to music, which is pre-eminently an expression of the emotions. In a statement packed with emotion, she once said to T. W. Higginson, "I find ecstasy in living--the mere sense of living is joy enough" (Letters, II, 474, 342a). She recorded this ecstasy, and those who read her poems can experience this feeling, at least temporarily. Perhaps some will be able to say with her:

> The earth has many keys.
> Where melody is not
> Is the unknown peninsula.
> Beauty is nature's fact.
> (Poems, III, 1186, #1775)

# APPENDIX

THE HOUGHTON LIBRARY
HARVARD UNIVERSITY
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS
02138

2 June 1971

Mrs. F. Reglin, Jr.
200 Harbin Street
Waxahachie, Texas 75165

Dear Mrs. Reglin,

Emily Dickinson's piano is now in this library, and it is a large, square Hallet & Davis piano, just as Professor Whicher says. I wonder if Higginson might not have been referring to music on the piano rack. There is a French song dating from the time of Queen Anne in which the Duke of Marlborough appears as Malbone. I have never heard of an "out door" piano.

Very truly yours,

W.H. Bond

W.H. Bond
Librarian

WHB/kbb

ARCH STREET PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
EIGHTEENTH and ARCH STREETS
PHILADELPHIA

G. HALL TODD, D.D., LL.D., Minister

ADDRESS MAIL TO:
1724 ARCH STREET
PHILADELPHIA, PA. 19103

May 17, 1971

Mrs. Frederick Reglin, Jr.,
200 Harbin Street
Waxahachie, Texas, 75165

Dear Mrs. Reglin:-

I am in receipt of your letter. In the twenty-seven years of my pastorate here I have had much interest in the Emily Dickinson story.

The Church in which we are now located was originally the West Arch Street Church, built in 1853-5. In 1897 the old Arch Street Church, connected with the Dickinson-Wadsworth story, united with this Church and in 1900 their edifice erected in the 1820's was razed.

I have not been able to discover the kind of pipe organ that they had, but we do know that they had a pipe organ. It was a prominent city church and had a succession of eminent ministers, including the celebrated Dr. Wadsworth.

In an historical sermon delivered in June 12, 1883, Dr. John Scott Sands, then pastor of the Arch Street Church said: "Its organ still responds to the magical touch of Professor James N. Beck, whose musical fingers have played on its keys in this dear old house for twenty-nine long years."

I had supposed that Beck, who had a musical publishing house in the city, had been organist at the time of the Emily Dickinson visit. I have consulted the minutes of the Session for that period and have discovered that in about the time of her visit, there was considerable dissatisfaction with the then organist, who is listed only as "Mr. Emerick".

The Church from 1850 until 1854 had at least three organists. On June 19, 1854 the Session acted on a resolution from the Board of Trustees, reminding them of their responsibility for oversight of the music, with particular reference to the organist. The resolution alluded to "many complaints made by valued members of this congregation in regard to the style of our instrumental music." A committee of the Session was appointed to interview Mr. Emerick, who informed them he would resign at the end of the present quarter." This report was received in October 1854. James N. Beck seems to have come upon the scene at that same time.

Evidently Emily Dickinson's visit coincides with a time of dissatisfaction with the music on the part of some of the congregation.

If I find further data, I shall communicate with you.

Sincerely,

G. Hall Todd.

GHT/R

P.S. I have discovered that there was a George Emerick,

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