VISIONS OF LIGHT IN THE POETRY OF
WILLIAM BLAKE AND EMILY DICKINSON

DISsertation

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
University of North Texas in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOsophy

By
Rosa Turner Nuckels, M. A.
Denton, Texas
December, 1996
VISIONS OF LIGHT IN THE POETRY OF
WILLIAM BLAKE AND EMILY DICKINSON

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
University of North Texas in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By

Rosa Turner Nuckels, M. A.
Denton, Texas
December, 1996
Parallels between William Blake and Emily Dickinson were first pointed out in 1890 in essays by Thomas Wentworth Higginson, who at that time was helping to introduce Dickinson's poems to the reading public. Since then, brief comparisons between Blake and Dickinson have become commonplace in Dickinson criticism, but no comprehensive study of Blake-Dickinson parallels has previously been made.

In this study I compare the broad outlines of Blake's and Dickinson's thought, pointing out evidence of decisive Biblical influence not only on the content of their thought but on their attitude toward language as well. I argue that both poets assumed the philosophical position of Job as they interpreted the Bible independently and as they explored many dimensions of experience in the fallen world. I represent their thought not as a fixed system but as a faith-based pattern of Christian/Platonic questing for truth. In the first chapter, I survey the critical record on Blake-Dickinson comparisons. In Chapter II, I argue that a typological interpretation of the Book of Job was the controlling influence on parallel Blake-Dickinson beliefs about perceptual limitation and about experience as it leads
to visionary breakthrough, revelation, regeneration, and growth toward wisdom. In Chapter III, I discuss parallels between Blake's concept of fourfold vision and Dickinson's concept of compound vision, drawing specific parallels between Blake's "single vision" and Dickinson's "broken mathematics." In Chapter IV, I argue that Blake and Dickinson placed their recognition of linguistic indeterminacy within a visionary context, and I discuss the double perspective of their compound vision as it gives to their poetry its prophetic character. From my study I conclude that the kinship between Blake and Dickinson so often noted in criticism extends beyond superficialities and includes all essentials of their thought.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NOTE ON REFERENCES</td>
<td></td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER I:</td>
<td>The Critical Record on Blake-Dickinson Parallels</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER II:</td>
<td>Fear, Hope, and Vision in the Poetry of Blake and Dickinson</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER III:</td>
<td>Toward Fourfold Vision: Spiritual Growth by Processes of Size</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER IV:</td>
<td>The Spirit of Prophecy in Works by Blake and Dickinson</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td></td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WORKS CITED</td>
<td></td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
NOTE ON REFERENCES

Unless otherwise indicated, quotations from William Blake's writings are taken from The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake, ed. David V. Erdman, rev. ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1988) and are cited parenthetically with E and the page number, followed by an abbreviated title with Blake's plate and line number when the quotation is from one of the works that Blake published in illuminated printing.

Quotations from Emily Dickinson's poetry are taken from The Poems of Emily Dickinson, ed. Thomas H. Johnson, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955) and are shown parenthetically as P with the poem number designated in this edition. Quotations from Dickinson's letters are taken from The Letters of Emily Dickinson, ed. Thomas H. Johnson and Theodora Ward, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Belknap-Harvard University Press, 1958) and are shown parenthetically as L with the letter number designated in this edition.
INTRODUCTION

BELIKE, DICKINSON, AND THE PROBLEM OF CRITICAL METHOD

Parallels between Emily Dickinson and William Blake were pointed out as early as 1890 in essays by Thomas Wentworth Higginson, who at that time was helping to introduce Dickinson's poems to the reading public. According to Richard B. Sewall, "it can be said with some assurance" that Higginson owed his insight about Blake-Dickinson parallels to Mabel Loomis Todd, with whom he collaborated in editing and publishing the first two series of Dickinson's poems (*Life* 1.226). Since that time, comparisons of the two poets have become commonplace in Dickinson criticism. Included among the diverse group of writers who have commented on similarities between these two poets are Christina Rossetti, William Dean Howells, Hart Crane, Amy Lowell, Louise Bogan, Northrop Frye, Thomas Johnson, Harold Bloom, and Camille Paglia. Although Blake-Dickinson comparisons abound, however, they are scattered throughout Dickinson studies, with each comparison usually consisting of only a few remarks. The most sustained Blake-Dickinson comparison I know of is in Camille Paglia's
chapter on Dickinson in Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson (623-73), where Paglia argues that Dickinson is an "American Sade" counterpart of "the British Sade," William Blake (270).

The clear consensus among Dickinson scholars that Dickinson shares a close kinship with Blake partly explains why Blake-Dickinson parallels have never received more than passing attention in criticism: the parallels usually noted are obvious and beyond dispute, belonging to a set of commonly acknowledged affinities with Blake among many writers of the American Renaissance, and noticed particularly in the poetry of Walt Whitman. But beyond the general agreement about obvious Blake-Dickinson affinities, critics have expressed widely differing interpretations of the writings of each poet. Ongoing critical confusion about these two poets is perhaps the main reason why Blake-Dickinson parallels have received so little close attention: with so many different Blakes and Dickinsons represented in criticism, one wonders which, if any, of these poets to compare. Even now, after several decades of lively critical debate about each poet, confusion remains so great that many critics still feel compelled to preface their commentaries with elaborate disclaimers about discontinuity and ambiguity in the poems. Much of the commentary on Blake is in itself so difficult to comprehend that, as Joseph Natoli observes, students need "commentary for the commentary" (xxiii). In
studies of each poet, narrow appropriations are common, and much recent criticism is based on the claim that, anticipating poststructuralist thought, Blake and Dickinson wrote their poetry without the traditional expectation of a shared common ground with and among their readers.

About Blake there is still no consensus; there is not even a consensus about whether to seek a consensus on Blake. Although Dickinson scholars encounter Blakean levels of hermeneutical complexity, Dickinson has fared better than Blake at the hands of her interpreters: Dickinson criticism has remained fairly free of the kind of cultic adulation that has sometimes biased Blake studies, and it has also remained fairly free of the angst and drift characterizing Blake criticism of the past two decades. But Dickinson critics have not yet achieved consensus on such central issues in Dickinson's poetry as the nature and extent of her religious skepticism, the degree of militant feminism in her career as a poet, and the connections between Master, Father, Lover, and God in her poems.

In this study I explore the framework of thought supporting superficially apparent Blake-Dickinson affinities that have been widely acknowledged during the past century. With the goal of further illuminating both poets, I focus on parallels between the two poets' interconnected religious beliefs, philosophical views, and poetic purposes. In arguing that these two poets are alike in the broad outlines
of their thought, I do not mean to deny obvious and important differences between them. Dickinson did not create an elaborate myth and then tirelessly etch, print, and color the text with designs, by-passing the book-publishing establishment in a bid to reach the public directly. Dickinson was never personally engaged in the kind of social, economic, and political debates forming the background and providing much of the subject matter for Blake's revolutionary writings. Dickinson enjoyed insulating aristocratic privileges that contrast sharply with the everyday turbulence of Blake's career as an engraver among the tradesmen of turn-of-the-century London, and her protected environment helped to support her development of a much broader lyric range than Blake's.

I limit this study to the exposition of Blake-Dickinson parallels without regard to any possibility that Blake served as source or influence for Dickinson. The Blake-Dickinson parallels I discuss seem to me to be adequately accounted for by shared affinities predisposing them toward similar responses to the cultural upheavals that set reason in opposition to revelation. Although I believe that Dickinson's achievement was in no way dependent on any Blakean influence, I want to point out three ways in which a Blakean influence might have reached her.

First, included in the Dickinson Homestead library was a copy of The Household Book of Poetry, edited by Charles
Anderson Dana (6th ed. New York and London, 1860). This volume of poetry included five of Blake's best known poems from *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*: "The Tiger," "The Chimney Sweeper," "The Little Black Boy," "The Garden of Love," and "On Another's Sorrow" (Letter to author from Jennie Rathbun, Houghton Library of Harvard). The pages containing these poems bear no pencil markings, so there is no direct evidence that Dickinson herself read them, but given her love for books and poetry, it seems safe to assume that she read these poems and perhaps knew them well. The five poems taken together constitute a brief outline of all Blakean thought.

Second, a diffused Blakean influence may well have reached Dickinson through Emerson. From Dickinson's letters we know that she read and admired the works of Emerson, and from Emerson's late journals and essays we know that he included William Blake among the many authors whose works he knew and admired. Emerson's influential early essays include some clear Blakean parallels, but early Emersonian nature philosophy is distinctly non-Blakean, and we have no direct evidence that Emerson knew of Blake before 1848. In view of Emerson's importance to Dickinson, however, I will briefly outline evidence showing that during his second visit to England in 1848, Emerson probably thoroughly absorbed all of the essentials of Blakean thought, not from reading Blake's poems but from hearing about Blake.
personally from Henry Crabb Robinson. Also, I do not rule out the possibility that Emerson knew about Blake before 1848. My position on the subject of a possible Blakean influence on Emerson runs counter to opinions expressed by R. A. Yoder, Armida Gilbert, and Richard R. O'Keefe, who rule out significant Blakean influence on Emerson altogether, citing either 1861 or 1863 as the earliest time when Emerson is known to have read anything by Blake (Yoder 34-38; Gilbert 56-63; O'Keefe 4).

Emerson's first journey to England in 1833 following his resignation as a minister provided him a limited opportunity to become acquainted with Blake's works. Blake had died in obscurity six years before Emerson first arrived in England, but especially during the first three years following Blake's death, his memory was kept alive among artists and literati by a small circle of devoted Blake admirers who called themselves "the Ancients" (Bentley, Blake Books 20-23). Thirty years old at the time of his first trip to England, Emerson eagerly sought out the intellectual community there, visiting both Wordsworth and Coleridge in England and Carlyle in Scotland. Given the general circumstances of this visit, and given the range of Emerson's interests, it seems to me unlikely that he would not have heard something about Blake at this time.

Whether or not Emerson heard of Blake during his first journey to England in 1833, there can be no doubt that he
heard about Blake frequently during the year he spent in England from October 1847 to July 1848. His chief source of information about Blake was Henry Crabb Robinson, who had known Blake personally and whose diaries now provide "reminiscences of Blake [that] are of the very first importance" (Bentley, Blake Books 21). Robinson, a tireless promoter of Blake for over three decades, is known to have "talked about Blake with many of his friends such as Wordsworth, Flaxman, Coleridge, Hazlitt, and Lamb" (Bentley, Blake Books 21). According to G. E. Bentley, Jr., "Crabb Robinson reported in his Reminiscences that at a party at the Fields' on 16 April 1848, Emerson, Wilkinson, Chapman, Field, and Robinson 'talked only abo[t] Blake'" (Critical Heritage 245). Bentley continues: "In his 'Journal Gulistan [?April] 1848', Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote: 'I cannot remember J.[ones] Very without being reminded of Wordsworth's remark on William Blake, 'There is something in the madness of this man that interests me more than the sanity of Lord Byron and Walter Scott'" (Critical Heritage 246).²

Given the nature of Emerson's literary and theological interests, and given Robinson's well documented commitment to perpetuating Blake's memory, one may reasonably suppose that Robinson brought up the subject of Blake frequently during numerous other social occasions when, according to Robinson's diaries, Robinson engaged Emerson in conversation
(Scudder 74, 137-44). Although Robinson's diaries document frequent social contacts with Emerson in the spring of 1848, it should be noted that Emerson makes no reference either to Robinson or to Blake in his reminiscences of this visit in *English Traits* (1856). But in *English Traits* Emerson does recall frequent associations with another great admirer of Blake, J. Garth Wilkinson, who edited the 1839 print publication of Blake's *Songs of Innocence* and of *Experience*, a copy of which Emerson later owned (*English Traits* 190; *Letters* V, 246n; *Journals*, vol. 16, Appendix II, 543). Thus, by the spring of 1848 Emerson knew Blake's ideas, and he probably knew them well, whether or not he ever read Blake's poetry; in fact, through personal conversation with Henry Crabb Robinson, Emerson was possibly in a better position to understand Blakean thought than he would have been with the poetry alone.

Emerson's interest in Blake is evidenced by the fact that in 1863 he borrowed from the Boston Athenaeum the Alexander Gilchrist two-volume *Life of William Blake* just after its publication (*Journals* 16.544). In Emerson's late essay, "Poetry and Imagination," Emerson quotes from Blake's *A Descriptive Catalogue* (1809) and *A Vision of the Last Judgment* (1810) in a passage extolling Blake as one of those rare individuals whose "insight, or second sight, has an extraordinary reach which compels our wonder" (450-51).

The third possible way that a Blakean influence may
have reached Dickinson is that Thomas Wentworth Higginson may have sent Dickinson his personal copy of Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. According to Edward J. Rose, who examined two copies of the second issue of Wilkinson's edition of *Songs* in the Houghton Library of Harvard, Dickinson "may well have known [Blake's] work through Higginson" (80). One of the two copies that Rose examined was owned by Emerson and the other one was owned by Higginson. According to Rose, Higginson had made several notations inside his copy, including the remark that "I read these about 1842" (80). All of these notations taken together indicate that as a young man, Higginson was acquainted with the printed songs and knew the opinions about them expressed by Robinson, Wordsworth, and Coleridge. But as Rose points out, if Higginson ever lent Dickinson his copy of *Songs*, she makes no reference to Blake or to his poems in any of her letters (80).

The parallels I draw between William Blake and Emily Dickinson are based on my initial inference from textual and biographical material that both poets, in response to personal crises in adulthood, gradually exchanged a predominantly secular outlook for an overriding religious faith based primarily on their highly personal and independent interpretations of New Testament scripture. Thus, I begin this study with the presupposition that the canons of both poets span a range including both secular and religious
thought, but given both poets' increasing interest in religious experience from early in their careers until their deaths, I place all of their poems, including the secular poems, within the context of spiritual questing.

Critics have varied widely in their descriptions of the religious thought of these two poets, but in general, most critics until recently have perceived Blake and Dickinson as religious poets and have willingly admitted into the field of critical inquiry the task of describing the religious content of their poetry. In 1968, when Ted Hughes expressed the opinion that Dickinson "became 'the greatest religious poet America has produced'" (159), few if any scholars would have found anything surprising or objectionable about his expression of this opinion. This is not to say that everyone agreed with Hughes; it is only to say that everyone seemed to agree on the importance of the question and on the difficulty of answering it. But in the criticism of both poets during approximately the past two decades, one finds a growing reluctance and sometimes an outright refusal to analyze the content of their religious thought. It seems that their incisive critiques of conventional Christianity are increasingly being taken as the basis for wholly secular interpretations of their poetry, as if their rejection of institutionalized Christianity could be automatically equated with agnosticism or atheism. But in my view, the fact that Blake and Dickinson objected to much—perhaps
most--of what passes for Christianity does not automatically make them non-theists; it does not even necessarily make them non-Christian. Indeed, one might reasonably argue that their anguished critiques of conventional Christianity are partial evidence of their remarkable spiritual vitality and their authentic Christianity.

This growing reluctance among many critics to analyze the religious content in poetry by Blake and Dickinson is evidence of the trend outlined by Jenny Franchot in "Invisible Domain: Religion and American Literary Studies" (1995). Disparaging an "academic orthodoxy" in which religious thought is viewed as "deviant" and is therefore considered "unmentionable" (837), Franchot describes what she regards as the prevailing approach in Americanist criticism:

Scholars are everywhere quietly expected to perform precisely [an] act of translation or "demystification" to avoid being seen in the wrong light; they must resituate a particular sacred or an individual's interior life into an understanding of culture that denies transcendence--a colonizing move as disturbing in its way as the anthropological translation of another culture's "weak" language into the "strong" language of anthropology. (840)

According to Franchot, "intellectual and cultural historians have continued to produce fine studies of American religion," and "scholars on divinity school faculties and in religion, anthropology, and art history departments are
contributing rich and complex studies of various spiritual traditions," studies in which they are "demonstrably engaged by the seriousness and splendour of their topic" (837-38). But "this level of engagement" is "signally lacking among Americanist literary scholars" (838), whose unwillingness "to engage intensively with the religious questions of the topic at hand as religious questions" is producing a "singularly biased scholarship" (839). Foucault's "politics of truth might have stimulated interesting work on how the interior life, as private religious experience, interacts with other 'technologies of the self' and with public culture at large," but "what it has actually produced is a studied neglect of religion" (835). In Franchot's view, many literary scholars seem to be using the "valuable perspectives" provided by poststructuralist thought "to not question" (841), and she asks American literary scholars collectively whether they really "want to continue believing that philosophical critiques of Western Christendom and of Western liberalism have invalidated religion as a subject of serious inquiry" (834).

In my opinion, Franchot's charges apply more to American scholars authoring Blake studies than they apply to Dickinson scholars. In a 1984 bibliographic essay about critical works that focus on Dickinson's religious thought, Regina Siegfried shows that up to the mid 1980s, Dickinson scholars worked diligently to define her faith, "some
concentrating on what they consider her 'loss of faith,' others focusing with assurance on her 'faith of loss'" (32). Since Siegfried's essay was written, several excellent scholarly studies of Dickinson's religious thought have been published, including those by Jane Donahue Eberwein and Dorothy Huff Oberhaus. Also, a quick glance at dissertation topics of the past several years will prove that Dickinson's religious thought is attracting much interest from new scholars.

Although Franchot's charges do not apply without exception to Dickinson studies, they apply with startling accuracy to Blake studies, for Blake is now undergoing rapid transformation into a secular saint and soul-mate of such non-theistic thinkers as Nietzsche, Marx, Freud, Jung, Derrida, and the Marquis de Sade. But if objectivity is valued as the appropriate stance in academic criticism, then a simple, disinterested acknowledgment of when and for how long Blake wished to be known as a Christian should be cautiously qualifying the now familiar sweeping associations of Blake with these distinctly non-theistic thinkers.

In reality, Blake's religious "enthusiasm" was so transparent that it led to his reputation as a madman; and Nietzsche, Marx, Freud, Jung, Derrida, and the Marquis de Sade would probably be embarrassed to be associated with a struggling tradesman like Blake, who chose to identify himself as a "Soldier of Christ" (E 724), who drew practi-
cally his entire prophetic vocabulary from the Bible, and who thanked God that he was never sent to school (E 510). In attempting to delineate and compare the religious thought in works by Blake and Dickinson, I am agreeing with those traditionalists who claim that literary scholarship properly includes a consideration of "religious expression as the creative project of a singular person with sufficient free will to produce work outside the predictions of contemporary ideological theory" (Franchot 834). But I also believe that poststructuralist theories describe much of the mental terrain that Blake and Dickinson themselves explored in their spiritual quests, and for this reason I think that Blake and Dickinson studies can benefit from poststructuralist insights. Certainly Blake would have no quarrel with poststructural theorists for describing the limitations of language systems or for condemning dictatorial literary hermeneutics. But to whatever extent poststructural critical theories enshrine skepticism or nihilism, Blake would doubtless vehemently oppose them since he consistently equated skepticism with what he denounced as "atheism" in such men as Bacon, Newton, and Locke.

The relentlessly skeptical approach of poststructuralism seems to be rooted in an overriding concern for integrity in criticism, but as Franchot argues, there is no proof that this approach provides greater authenticity of any kind than has been derived from previous critical
approaches. In my opinion, an exclusively poststructuralist approach to Blake's canon actually strains critical integrity, since it imposes on Blake's composite art a theory of literature at war with the theory of literature by which he lived and worked. The canon Blake created as he worked out his own theory of literature is characterized by a richness and an organicism that strenuously resists confinement within any theory other than his own comprehensive theory of literature and life.

Since Blake's prophecies are marked by extreme ambiguity and discontinuity, deliberately forcing active reader participation in and responsibility for the construction of meaning, many poststructuralist critics find in Blake's works an early instance of their own preoccupation with linguistic indeterminacy. But although Blake clearly understood the implications of linguistic indeterminacy as well as modern theorists do, he was never fixated on the limitations of language any more than he was ever fixated on any other specific limitation of time-bound human life. As I will discuss throughout this study, the limitation that Blake wished to address in insisting on active reader participation was not the isolated problem of linguistic indeterminacy but the inclusive problem of darkened spiritual vision, within which all of the interconnected processes of perception and language are restricted and distorted. In my view, Dickinson addressed
the same problem in much the same way, with the important exception that Dickinson focused directly on her own inner life, never projecting it into a comprehensive mythology with universal dimensions.

In Jerusalem, Blake credits "the wondrous art of writing" with divine origin in the source of creative power, "that God from whom [all books are given,]" (E 145, 3.1-5). Since the Bible allows no image of God other than Messiah or Christ, and since Blake conceives of imagination as the doorway to the infinite, Blake equates Christ with that doorway. Thus, when Blake speaks of Imagination, he also speaks of "Jesus our Lord, who is the God [of Fire] and Lord [of Love]. . . . The Spirit of Jesus" (E 145, 3). For Blake, the efficacy of language, like the efficacy of paint on paper or canvas, is a function of the user's level of vision and skill; it is not a function of any inherent power or limitation in the medium itself. Blake believed that in interpretative disputes, "the Fault is not in Words. . . . Locke's Opinions of Words & their Fallaciousness are Artful Opinions & Fallacious also" (Annotations to The Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds, E 659). He repeatedly affirmed--and acted on--his belief that the creative power of Imagination enables humans to employ the raw material of language for communicating meaning at the highest possible level of vision. That is, he believed that through Imagination, the writer could find the "minutely Appropriate Words" to
express his ideas without distortion (Public Address, E 576). He also believed that through Imagination, the writer's audience could understand those ideas without distortion: "Truth can never be told so as to be understood, and not be believ'd" (The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, E 36, 10.69). Blake's claim that Jerusalem was "dictated" to him (E 145) seems linked to these beliefs and to related Biblical teachings about the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Thus, in Blake's view, the confusion that results when one person reads the Bible (or any other book) "black" (without any light) while another person reads it "white" (with the light) evidences a system of differences originating not in the raw material of language but in spiritual perception (The Everlasting Gospel, E 524). Blake believed that all human misery results ultimately from darkened spiritual vision, but he also believed that this darkened vision could be opened to infinite potential through the power of imagination and faith. He considered it his own "great task" as a poet to use language to "open the Eternal World, to open the immortal Eyes / Of Man inwards into the Worlds of Thought: into Eternity / Ever expanding in the Bosom of God, the Human Imagination" (Jerusalem, E 147, 5.18-20).

Emphasizing the limitations of language, poststructural literary criticism brings to the interpretation of literature an unprecedented level of skepticism toward
textual integrity, ostensibly freeing readers from the futile quest for an illusory shared, objective meaning. Emphasizing the potentiality in language, Blake extends to every reader one end of "a golden string" (E 231), personally inviting his readers to join him in the quest for a communal level of vision in which shared meaning is made possible. Given Blake's unequivocally announced prophetic agenda, and given his aggressive strategies for subverting reader passivity, I think it is oxymoronic to speak of "a healthy skepticism toward Blake's prophetic intentions" (Rosso 11), although I am well aware that to take Blake at his word is to be considered part of what Joseph Natoli refers to as "the 'lunatic fringe,' those hapless souls who 'believe in' Blake's vision" (Natoli xxv).

Literary critics have always been and will continue to be free to choose skepticism as one among several possible stances for analyzing language and literature, but critics who imply that skepticism is a Blakean attitude either inadvertently or deliberately falsify Blake. That skepticism in itself is "healthy" is a concept venerated by many late twentieth-century intellectuals in what is perhaps a culmination of the Enlightenment thought that Blake despised. Belief that skepticism is healthy seems to me a form of faith in "the power of negative thinking"; as such, it is merely an inversion of Norman Vincent Peale's "power of positive thinking," and it is equally crass.
Exactly what it is that criticism is gaining by this "healthy skepticism" is not yet apparent to me. The problem is that, as Stephen Cox writes, "few contemporary critics interrogate their framework assumptions as skeptically as they interrogate their primary texts" (102), a problem which leads back to Blake's point about the relativity of perception. What criticism might be losing by this "healthy skepticism" is suggested in the irony that, were it not for the spiritual support that Mabel Loomis Todd was open to finding in Dickinson's poetry, critics today probably would not have any Dickinson poems to deconstruct.8

Dickinson herself apparently remained at times skeptical to the point of despair, but since both her poems and her letters record a profound desire for and a gradual development of religious faith, her poetry requires a critical approach broad enough to admit the experience of faith into the spectrum of thought to be analyzed. Blake's position is most consistently that of Christian antinomianism, as many critics have argued.9 On the question of whether or not Blake qualifies to be known as a Christian, I agree with Martha Winburn England:

He cited the Bible as final proof of all he alleged. He placed the Hebrew and the Greek Testaments together at the very height of art and sanctity. He did not claim to be a mystic. . . . He claimed to be a visionary, an enthusiast, and a Christian, and defined the terms carefully. I have read, and now am reading in newspapers, statements of literary critics and those who call
themselves "atheistic theologians" to the effect that Blake had no god but man. . . . On this subject, as on other statements about himself, Blake seems clear enough. He said always and passionately that he was a Christian, and I know only One who has a better right to an opinion on that subject. (74)

Given the present climate of reassessment, transition, and pluralism in literary criticism, it seems to me that students must, in the best Blakean sense, create their own critical systems. The day of compartmentalizing literary theory seems to have passed, for it is increasingly evident from the issues raised by poststructuralism that any comprehensive theory of literature amounts to a theory of life.10 I think that Blake and Dickinson both considered enduring literature to be a reliable representation of lived experience, a representation that has been conveyed with sufficient fidelity to serve as an intellectual workshop for readers' testing and refining of their own theories of life. Blake might have had this idea in mind when he wrote, "Blessed are those who are found studious of Literature" (E 717-18). This Blakean attitude is also evident throughout Dickinson's poems about her "Kinsmen of the Shelf" (P 604).

Although Northrop Frye's vision of Blake's works as a coherent whole remains under fire, I continue to rely on Frye's method of treating each separate poem by Blake as a small unity mirroring the larger unity of Blake's canon (Fearful Symmetry 5-14). In practice, this means treating each poem like a riddle, the clues to which are provided
within the larger riddle of the entire canon. It is precisely this method that I find most useful in reading Dickinson, whose interrelated riddle poems may indicate her conscious provision for organicism in her canon. For clues to meaning outside the poetry, I depend primarily on the poets' own prose writings. Finally, I try to synthesize the widest possible range of critical commentary and to employ this synthesis in evaluating and developing my own understanding of the poems. I make no claims of infallibility for this method, but I believe that it approximates the combined methodology that David V. Erdman describes for his plate-by-plate commentary on Blake's illuminated works: "Just looking carefully, inch by inch, was half the work. The other half was in effect a borrowing of the eyes of enthusiastic collaborators, at every stage of the project" (The Illuminated Blake 14).

In separate chapters following the Introduction I discuss fundamental Blake-Dickinson similarities in what I take to be the parallel patterns of their visionary thought. Chapter I, "The Critical Record," is an overview of the numerous Blake-Dickinson comparisons scattered throughout Dickinson criticism. I try to provide a varied sampling of these comparisons, focusing particularly on comparisons drawn by influential critics like Thomas Wentworth Higginson, William Dean Howells, Northrop Frye, and Harold Bloom. Also, I identify important areas of agreement and
disagreement among these critics in their Blake-Dickinson comparisons. Since Camille Paglia's chapter on Emily Dickinson in Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson is currently the most fully developed Blake-Dickinson comparison of which I am aware, I briefly summarize her argument and state my objections to her conclusions.

In the remaining three chapters I develop an overall comparison between Blake's "fourfold vision" and Dickinson's "compound vision," referencing the Book of Job and questions of epistemology as the philosophical framework for both poets' explorations of human perception. I argue throughout this study that in spite of both poets' lifelong quarrel with conventional Christianity and in spite of their frequent frustration in interpreting the Bible, they never abandoned the Bible as their essential frame of reference.

In Chapter II, "Fear, Hope, and Vision in the Poetry of Blake and Dickinson," I argue that both poets placed their explorations of perception and visionary expansion within the context of revelation as described in the Book of Job, connecting loss with the painful process of perceptual renovation and spiritual growth through experience. In Chapter III, "Toward Fourfold Vision: Growth by Processes of Size," I relate Dickinson's concept of spiritual growth "By Processes of Size" (P 802) to Blake's concept of fourfold vision. Arguing that Blake's Fourfold Vision is comparable
to Dickinson's Compound Vision, I discuss Dickinson's poems about "broken mathematics" and compare this concept with Blake's use of mathematical terminology. Also, I explore the two poets' thought-based ethic and contrast it with the behavior-based ethic of institutionalized Calvinism.

In Chapter IV, "The Spirit of Prophecy in Works by Blake and Dickinson," I examine what Blake and Dickinson considered to be the highest level of vision, that level of vision wherein the poet, like Job, experiences inspiration, a leap from confusion and despair to poetic fruition. I discuss this and other Blake-Dickinson interpretations of the Biblical concept of Logos, relating this concept to the Blake-Dickinson view of poetry as prophecy or sacrament.

Throughout this study I try to be as guilty as possible of the particular form of "bourgeois idealism" in which a reader of Blake finds and follows Blake's "end of a golden string" (E 231, J 77), and in which a reader of Dickinson gathers every "Blossom of the Brain" (P 945) she offers. Toward that end I have drawn the title of this study from the following lines by Blake and Dickinson:

My first Vision of Light
In particles bright
Distinct shone & clear--
Amazed & in fear
I each particle gazed
Astonished Amazed
For each was a Man
Human formd.

William Blake
Letter to Thomas Butts
October 2, 1800 (E 712)

Image of Light, Adieu——
Thanks for the interview——
So long——so short——
Preceptor of the whole——
Coeval Cardinal——
Impart——Depart——

Emily Dickinson
(P 1556)
Notes

1 But see Richard B. Sewall's discussion about the Emily Dickinson cult phenomenon (Life 2.706-707).

2 Discussing the Transcendentalists' acceptance of Very, Perry Miller remarks that "The Transcendental theory of genius practically demanded one or two mad poets; most Transcendentalists were not quite prepared to sacrifice themselves, and Very vindicated the theory by proving a willing victim" (342).


4 Adrienne Rich was among those who disagreed with Hughes. About Hughes' conception of Dickinson as a religious poet, Rich wrote the following: "This seems to me to miss the point on a grand scale. . . . Dickinson did not become a religiously dedicated woman; she was heretical, heterodox, in her religious opinions, and stayed away from church and dogma" (185).

5 Mary Lynn Johnson describes the currently emerging Blake as "more fearful than symmetrical" (249).

6 George Anthony Rosso, Jr. sums up what seems to be the currently prevailing attitude in Blake studies: "The prophetic of course is now under erasure. For some, it remains an embarrassing residue of . . . the poet's late eighteenth-century Christianity" (12; emphasis added). Expressions of embarrassment over the religious content in literature is not uncommon in recent critical commentary. For example, in "Lace, Lance, and Pair," Jonathan Culler, in discussing a poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins, expresses "acute discomfort at 'the comfort of the resurrection' announced in the poem's title," and finds the "embarrassing sentimentality" in the poem to be "an issue of considerable importance" (7; emphasis added). For Culler, the poem "is painfully embarrassing because it depends so utterly on the doctrine of the Resurrection of the Body" (8; emphasis added).

7 For example, in Jerusalem Satan is identified as "this Body of Doubt" in a passage associating Bacon, Newton, and Locke with "The God of This World" (E 253-54, 93.20-25). On
the title page of Blake's copy of Bacon's Essays Moral, Economical and Political, dated 1798, Blake wrote, "Good Advice for Satan's Kingdom" (E 620). His marginalia elsewhere in the book include the following comments: "Bacon put an End to Faith" (E 621) and "Bacon was a Contemplative Atheist" (E 626). Blake's annotations to The Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds include the following comment: "Such is . . . Newtonian Philosophy [sic] it is Atheism" (E 660).

According to Richard B. Sewall, "it is . . . safe to say (with Jay Leyda) that without the spiritual kinship she felt with the poet and with the poems we might have had no poems (or letters) at all" (Life 1.218-19). Mabel was "first drawn by Emily's strange power and then, as she immersed herself in the editing, found spiritual support 'as if a Kingdom cared'" (Life 1.226).


In The Visionary Company Harold Bloom makes the following observation: Wallace Stevens "seems to have known best among the poets of our time, that the theory of poetry is the theory of life" (3).

In Emily Dickinson and Riddle (DeKalb: Northern Illinois UP, 1969), Dolores Dyer Lucas suggests this idea as follows: "Through an inspired use of the riddle, Emily Dickinson managed to rejuvenate the language, embody the ambiguity of her subject in a concrete form and maintain the type of audience she required" (134). Dickinson's "complex version of the ancient ordeal became . . . a quest, a search for the essential meaning of existence" (134).
CHAPTER I

THE CRITICAL RECORD ON BLAKE-DICKINSON PARALELLES

The century-long critical consensus about a Blake-Dickinson poetic kinship represents ongoing agreement among scholars that remarkable similarities exist between the two poets in their visionary insight, in their artistic purposes, and in their exceptional gifts for verbal compression. Beyond these generalizations, however, critics have expressed widely diverging views about each poet separately and about specific points of comparison between them. Also, of the many critics who have noted Blake-Dickinson parallels, only Harold Bloom and Camille Paglia have discussed these parallels at length. This chapter surveys the critical record on Blake-Dickinson parallels and then focuses on the Blake and Dickinson commentary written by Harold Bloom and his protégée, Camille Paglia.

In 1890 Thomas Wentworth Higginson wrote two essays introducing the first edition of Dickinson's poetry. In his first essay, "An Open Portfolio," published two months before Poems by Emily Dickinson first appeared, Higginson commented that Poem 449 ("I died for Beauty") is "weird
enough for William Blake, and one can no more criticise a faulty rhyme here and there than a defect of drawing in one of Blake's pictures" (7). This left-handed compliment defended the "strangely impersonal" poems (9) of "this lonely woman" (7), poems that "with some misgiving" her sister and her friends had finally decided to publish (10). But in his Preface to the book of poems, Higginson wrote less apologetically:

This selection from her poems is published to meet the desire of her personal friends, and especially of her surviving sister. It is believed that the thoughtful reader will find in these pages a quality more suggestive of William Blake than of anything to be elsewhere found,—flashes of wholly original and profound insight into nature and life; words and phrases exhibiting an extraordinary vividness of descriptive and imaginative power, yet often set in a seemingly whimsical or even rugged frame. (11)

Higginson's bafflement about Dickinson on one hand and the astute pairing of Dickinson with William Blake on the other hand apparently provided the evidence many decades later for Richard B. Sewall's conjecture that Higginson's Blake-Dickinson comparisons actually originated with Mabel Loomis Todd (Life 1.226).

Higginson's remarks initiated the sometimes undignified debate during the early 1890s over the merits of Dickinson's poetry. During the course of this debate, a number of critics repeated Higginson's Blake-Dickinson comparisons,
perpetuating the opinion that Dickinson belongs in a category with Blake. But many of the early critics on Blake and Dickinson were severely limited in their understanding of one or both of these poets, and at this time, one of the major points of comparison between the two poets seems to have been that of shock in encountering Blake-Dickinson levels of verbal complexity and compression.

Predictably, during this period it was among other poets that the most enthusiastic supporters of both Blake and Dickinson were to be found. Interest in Blake within the mid-Victorian Pre-Raphaelite circle is well known. Against the background of Pre-Raphaelite interest in Blake, Christina Rossetti registered her first reaction to Dickinson's poems in a letter to William Rossetti dated 6 December 1890:

There is a book too I might have shown you, if I had remembered: Poems by Emily Dickinson, lately sent me from America—but perhaps you know it. She had (for she is dead) a wonderfully Blakean gift, but therewithal a startling recklessness of poetic ways and means. (176-77)

Among Dickinson's earliest critics, William Dean Howells was perhaps her strongest and most perceptive advocate. Howells repeated Higginson's Blake-Dickinson comparison but complicated it by adding Emerson to the equation:
[Higginson] notes "the quality suggestive of the poetry of William Blake" in her, but he leaves us the chance to say that it is a Blake who had read Emerson who had read Blake. The fantasy is as often Blakian as the philosophy is Emersonian; but after feeling this again and again, one is ready to declare that the utterance of this most singular and authentic spirit would have been the same if there had never been an Emerson or a Blake in the world. (19)

Without the resources of accumulated textual and critical scholarship on Blake and Dickinson, Howells could not substantiate his intuition that in Dickinson, a purely Blakean imagination had been mediated by Emerson's earth-bound adaptation of Blakean thought, but his suggestion that Emerson may have read and absorbed Blake sufficiently for Dickinson to assimilate a Blakean influence through him describes a possibility that deserves more critical recognition than it has yet received.

An anonymous British reviewer's scathing response to Howells' review disdained not only Dickinson's poetry specifically but also Howells and American literary efforts collectively ("The Newest Poet" 24-27):

. . . the world cannot but be interested in hearing what the strains of the Tenth Muse are like. . . . What is a Blake who had read Emerson who had read Blake? Is it at all like a Howells who had read Dickinson who had read Howells? ("The Newest Poet" 24-25)

The 1891 publication of Dickinson's poetry, Poems: Second Series, was strongly condemned by Thomas Bailey
Aldrich, who in 1881 had succeeded Howells as editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* (C. Blake and Wells 54): "Miss Dickinson's versicles have a queerness and a quaintness that have stirred a momentary curiosity in emotional bosoms. Oblivion lingers in the immediate neighborhood" (56). With no intention of complimenting Dickinson, Aldrich modified Howells' Blake-Emerson-Dickinson connections as follows: Dickinson "was deeply tinged by the mysticism of Blake, and strongly influenced by the mannerism of Emerson" (55).

But Aldrich was badly mistaken: neither Blake nor Dickinson were mystics, and Dickinson was already clearly headed in the opposite direction of "oblivion," for the first edition of her poems had outsold every other first edition produced by the respected press that printed it (Carman 61-62), and soon after the publication of a second series of poems in 1891, Mrs. Todd brought out a two-volume edition of Dickinson's letters (1894). In 1896, *Poems of Emily Dickinson: Third Series* appeared. Bliss Carman summed up public reception of the third edition of Dickinson's poems as follows: "[I]t is safe to say that the publication of a new volume of poems by Emily Dickinson is the literary event of the season" (61).

In 1893 William Butler Yeats and E. J. Ellis published their edition of Blake's works, reviving the interest in Blake that had developed thirty years earlier from Alexander Gilchrist's biography of Blake (Bentley, *Critical Heritage*)
By the time that S. Foster Damon ushered in twentieth-century Blake criticism with his William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols in 1924, both Blake and Dickinson were well on their way to eminence among the English-speaking poets, and critical comparisons of the two poets continued as additional Dickinson poems and letters were being published. Increasingly, however, Dickinson came to be compared not only with Blake and Emerson but also with Christina Rossetti, Emily Bronte, the metaphysical poets, Keats, Walt Whitman, and even Melville and Dostoevsky.

Among the first major critics to describe Dickinson as a great poet was Robert Hillyer, Harvard professor and Pulitzer Prize poet, who in 1922 wrote that "she followed Blake's injunction 'To see a world in a grain of sand'" (99). In 1923, Martin Armstrong, associate editor of the Spectator, echoed Hillyer's praise, showing that Dickinson's stature was rising not only in America but in Britain as well (C. Blake and Wells 105): "Like Blake, whom so often she recalls, she sees a world in a grain of sand, and a heaven in a wild flower" (106). This idea reverberates in Hart Crane's comparison of the two poets in a 1928 letter to Gorham Munson:

I still stake some claims on the pertinence of the intuitions; indeed some of Blake's poems and Emily Dickinson's seem more incontrovertible than ever since Relativity and a host of other ideologies, since evolved, have come into recognition. (324)
Amy Lowell's *Poetry and Poets* (1930) included a section on Dickinson containing several references to Blake. Representing Dickinson as a precursor of the Imagists, Lowell emphasized Dickinson's descent "[d]own from Blake through Coleridge" (76), and praised one of Dickinson's poems for "that acid quality of biting satire which we remarked in Blake's 'Songs of Experience'" (75). Strongly sympathizing with Dickinson for lacking a worthy public audience during her lifetime, Lowell forgot that Blake, too, had for an audience only a small circle of personal friends and admirers:

... conceive of William Blake sending the 'Songs of Experience' to the 'Springfield Republican'! Emily Dickinson lived in an atmosphere of sermons, church sociables, and county newspapers. ... The direct descendant of Blake (although she probably never heard of him) lived in this surrounding. The marvel is that her mind did not give way. (72)

In 1932, anthologist A. C. Ward included Dickinson in his *American Literature: 1880-1930*, proclaiming Dickinson "a major American poet—perhaps next to Whitman the greatest American poet of the last century" (145). According to Ward, "it is ridiculous to attempt to find parallels to her" (150), but he included in his essay the following obvious Blake-Dickinson comparison: "her apparent simplicity is as delusive as Blake's" (152).
In his 1938 biography of Dickinson, *This Was a Poet: A Critical Biography of Emily Dickinson*, George Frisbie Whicher noted that although Dickinson apparently never read Blake, "she would certainly have enjoyed" reading him (212). He also observed that "Blake is her only rival in the faculty of making a little count for much, but the superstructure of visionary mythology that Blake conjured into being is so huge and obscure that only the most elaborate scholarship can discern its connection with reality" (291).

Northrop Frye's *Fearful Symmetry* (1947) and Thomas Johnson's three-volume *variorum* edition of Dickinson's poems (1955) fostered half a century of frenetic scholarship and criticism on these two poets, during which time Blake-Dickinson comparisons multiplied, became more specific, reflected a wider range of viewpoints about the poets, and sometimes misrepresented one or both poets. For example, in his 1951 *Emily Dickinson*, Richard Chase developed a Blake-Dickinson comparison over three pages, citing specific quotations and pointing out parallels not only in form but also in content (219-221). But Chase additionally pointed out some surprising differences between Blake and Dickinson:

It seems curious at first that Emily Dickinson, who lived with one eye on the beyond, was not the equal of Blake in describing the poignant longing of natural organisms for eternity. Yet the few poems in which this may be said to be her purpose, such as "Longing is like the seed," fail to catch
more than a little of the magnificence of "Ah! Sunflower." But we must recall that Blake's pantheistic tendencies made it easy for him to attribute human emotions to nature (since God is in man as well as in nature); whereas Emily Dickinson, who delves a deep abyss between man and nature, does not usually invest nature with powerful human emotions. (219-20)

But Blake abhored "pantheistic tendencies," and like Dickinson, he considered the "deep abyss between man and nature" to be the defining circumstance of mankind's temporal existence. Here, Chase may have understood Dickinson, but he misunderstood Blake. Also, Chase mistakenly denied any "dialectical cast of mind" in Dickinson, contrasting her with Blake: "She had certain visionary qualities in common with Blake, and she invented a poetically imagined eschatology. But this is no evidence that she developed a dialectic of contraries" (123-24). Here, Chase understood Blake, but he misunderstood Dickinson.

In *Emily Dickinson: An Interpretive Biography* (1955), Thomas H. Johnson compared Dickinson's symbolic method with that of Blake:

Emily Dickinson personified Death, but her method of doing so reverses the usual procedure. She started with a symbol which she altered into a reality. The method is inherently necessary when the symbol is personified, but there are few writers who . . . have the artist's endowment whereby the substance is made flesh. In respect to that ability, as in other ways already noted, she calls to mind William Blake who, like her, began with a symbol which demanded from the artist a concrete form. Thus Death as Emily Dickinson
conceived and delineated him is a protean figure, part element of nature, part erlking, part Grendel, but mostly country squire. . . . (218-19).

Johnson's brief but instructive comparison of Blake-Dickinson symbolism is informed, I believe, by Northrop Frye's helpful explanation of Blake's transformation of the Lockian simile (Fearful Symmetry 123).

Northrop Frye's Fables of identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology (1963) is a collection of Frye's essays, most of which were written after Frye had completed Anatomy of Criticism (1957). Introducing the essays, Frye pointed out Dickinson's likeness to Blake within the Romantic movement:

The Romantic movement in English literature seems to me now to be a small part of one of the most decisive changes in the history of culture. . . . One feature of this change that particularly interests me is the way in which the forms of human civilization come to be regarded as man-made rather than as God-made. . . . This aspect of the change gives a peculiar significance to two poets of that period, Blake and Byron. Blake raises most insistently the question of the reality of the poetic vision, a reality which is . . . brought into being through creation itself. . . . Of the four modern authors dealt with here, two, Stevens and Emily Dickinson, represent particularly the Blakean preoccupation with the reality of what is created. (3)

Unfortunately, this promising beginning comes to naught in Frye's essay on Dickinson. The essay, a reprint from his Major Writers of America (1962), is a thin and derivative overview of Dickinson's life and work, including a brief
summary of the "unedifying family squabbles" (200) that complicated early efforts to publish her poetry. If Frye discovered significant parallels between Blake and Dickinson in their religious or philosophical thought, this essay does not reveal them. In fact, Frye seems at times to deny Blakean characteristics in Dickinson altogether:

For the thousands of people, most of them women, who make verse out of a limited range of imaginative experience in life, love, nature, and religion, who live without fame and without much knowledge of literature beyond their schoolbooks, Emily Dickinson is the literary spokesman. . . . She does not--like, for example, D. H. Lawrence--try to get inside the bird's skin and identify herself with it; she identifies the bird with the human consciousness in herself. (201-202)

Frye appears to have ignored the fact that Blake does not "try to get inside the bird's skin" either, but instead, like Dickinson, Blake "identifies the bird [or the lion, tyger, lamb, flea, etc.] with the human consciousness"--just as Frye had explained earlier in Fearful Symmetry (123). His passing remark later in the essay that "Like Blake . . . Emily Dickinson shows us two contrary states of the human soul" (213) added little to what critics had been saying for decades. In representing Dickinson as an oddly spinsterish Huckleberry Finn (206), Frye echoed Whicher's already distant but far more eloquent closing comments in This Was a Poet.
Louise Bogan's "A Mystical Poet" (1960) outlined the following resemblances between Blake and Dickinson:

Both took over the simplest forms of the song and the hymn and turned this simplicity to their own uses. Both seemed to work straight from almost dictated inspiration . . . but we now know . . . that both worked over their original drafts with meticulous care. Both had to struggle against hampering circumstances: Blake against poverty and misunderstanding, and Dickinson against a lack of true response in the traditionally stiffened society in which she found herself. To both poets, limitation and boundary finally yielded originality and power; they were sufficiently outside the spirit of their times so that they were comparatively untouched by the vagaries of fashion; they both were able to wring from solitary contemplation sound working principles and just form. (140)

Near the end of her essay Bogan juxtaposed Blake's "My business is to create" and Dickinson's "My business is circumference" (143) as a comment on the two poets' shared sense of poetic purpose.

Inder Nath Kher, in The Landscape of Absence (1974), also noticed the parallel purposes signified by Blake's "My business is to create" and Dickinson's "My business is circumference" (29). Additionally, Kher compared Dickinson's conception of time and eternity to Blake's, citing Poem 624 beginning "Forever--is composed of Nows--" (24, 82). Kher also discussed Dickinson's theory of perception, pointing out how it bears "marked resemblances to the ideas of several creative writers and thinkers of the
past as well as to those of poets and phenomenologists of today" (95), and placing Blake among the writers whom Dickinson most closely resembles in her theory of perception (96).

In Lyric Time: Dickinson and the Limits of Genre (1979), Sharon Cameron focused entirely on Dickinson's conceptions of temporality, scattering Blake-Dickinson comparisons throughout her study. All of Cameron's Blake-Dickinson comparisons belong to the following line of thought:

Perhaps of all the Romantics, Blake most directly conceives the problematic object relations that follow from temporality. In his unqualified temporal division between unlapsed and fallen states, the Songs of Innocence and Experience . . . , we see Blake as a true Dickinsonian progenitor. (213)

Roland Hagenbüchle has also discussed similarities in the way Blake and Dickinson conceive of time and eternity. Citing John F. Lynen's 1966 study of Dickinson's treatment of time, Hagenbüchle comments on Dickinson and Blake as follows: "'Eternity' for Dickinson as for Blake is 'obtained--in Time' (800), it is achieved now or never, and yet, as an experience of the numinous this 'now' is itself part of eternity. Finite life is our unique chance to experience the eternal, and in that sense life is eternal!" ("Emily Dickinson's Poetic Covenant," 19).
In his two-volume *Life of Emily Dickinson* (1974), Richard B. Sewall told of trying to answer a skeptic who had asked about Dickinson, "Just how good is she?" (2.706). In answering this question (2.706-725), Sewall discussed Dickinson's resemblances to a number of poets and concluded with a judicious evaluation of Higginson's Blake-Dickinson comparison:

Higginson was perhaps closest when he suggested her affinity with Blake, presumably the Blake of the *Songs of Innocence* and of *Experience*; but her moods and rhythms are more varied than his, she is at once more introspective as she explores the "Cellars of the Soul" and yet more objective and precise, as in her nature poems, with their Hitchcockian respect for fact. She was closer to nature than was Blake, the city poet, and though his use of the ballad form to achieve varying effects may have encouraged her as she reduced her complicated meanings to fit Watts's simple structures, perhaps it was this regenerative source, always available in rural Amherst, that kept her from the somber sense of political and social injustice that Blake (and many of the other English Romantics) saw all about him. (2.714)

Blake-Dickinson comparisons abound in the critical works of Harold Bloom and Camille Paglia, whose recent commentary on these two poets has not only broadened the scope of critical debates about them but has also, in my opinion, compounded already existing confusion about them. After helping to create the Blake industry in the 1960s with *The Visionary Company* (1961) and *Blake's Apocalypse* (1963),
in 1987 Bloom repudiated his influential early work on Blake:

Blake's Bible is indistinguishable from Frye's Blakean Great Code, and I now repudiate my youthful efforts to Judaize William Blake in a book called Blake's Apocalypse and in an earlier work The Visionary Company. The Hebrew Bible is canceled, not fulfilled, in the Christian mythology of Blake and Frye. (Ruin the Sacred Truths 123)

Here Bloom acknowledges a reversal in his understanding of Blake's religious thought. His early works had described Blake as a non-theist whose poetry "reaches further into the present than that of Wordsworth, and may be more prophetic of the future" (The Visionary Company 5-6); similarly, in Blake's Apocalypse, Bloom described Blake as "an apocalyptic humanist" (372), pointing out that "if Blake is a Christian (and he insisted always that he was) then the vast majority of Christians are not" (371).3 By 1987, however, Bloom was describing a different Blake and a different Wordsworth:

[Blake] could not ruin the sacred truths. . . .

Blake is one of the last of an old race of poets; Wordsworth was the very first of the race of poets that we have with us still. Blake is archaic, as perhaps he wanted to be. Wordsworth is more modern than Freud, more postmodern than Samuel Beckett or Thomas Pynchon, because Wordsworth alone found the new way, our way alas, to ruin the sacred truths. (Ruin the Sacred Truths 129-30)
Finally recognizing Blake's essential Christianity, Bloom apparently lost interest in Blake as his interest in Emily Dickinson grew. In *Ruin the Sacred Truths*, Bloom identified Dickinson and Whitman as "the strongest poets our country has engendered" (131), and in *The Western Canon* (1994), Bloom elevated Dickinson to a position of eminence slightly below Shakespeare and higher than Blake:

Except for Shakespeare, Dickinson manifests more cognitive originality than any other Western poet since Dante. Her nearest rival might be Blake, who also reconceptualized everything for himself. But Blake was a systematic mythmaker, and his system helps to organize his speculations. Dickinson rethought everything for herself, but she wrote lyrical meditations rather than stage dramas or mythopoeic epics. Shakespeare has hundreds of personae and Blake, dozens of what he called Giant Forms. Dickinson kept to the capital letter *I* while practicing an art of singular economy. (272)

Against the background of his gloomy introductory remarks on the death of the Western canon (15-39), Bloom focuses on "Blanks, Transports, the Dark" in his chapter on Dickinson (272-88). According to Bloom, Dickinson meets "one of the prime requirements for entrance into the Canon," the requirement of "strangeness," but although Bloom finds Dickinson "as strange as Dante or Milton" (273), he denies that she is spiritual: "... I cannot think of any writer who has expressed desperation as powerfully and as constantly as Dickinson. ... Her anguish is intellectual
but not religious, and all attempts to read her as a devotional poet have crashed badly" (275-76). Her poetics is "a grand unnaming, an act of negation as dialectical and profound as any essayed by Nietzsche or Freud" (285).

Quoting from Nietzsche, Bloom asserts that both Emerson and Dickinson were ahead of Nietzsche himself in achieving what Nietzsche proposed as a kind of "double stance" in which we "recognize the contingency of our own perceptions, and yet find a new direction for those perceptions, as though no one had perceived and described them before us" (285).

Bloom implies that, in spite of the fact that Blake's level of "cognitive originality" ("strangeness") makes him Dickinson's "nearest rival" to a position of eminence close to Shakespeare (272), greater affinities exist between Dickinson, Emerson, and Nietzsche than between Dickinson and Blake or any other poet (283-88). If Dickinson's poetry indeed records an original, post-Christian (280), Nietzschean attempt to "alert us to the bewilderments of perspectivism" and "to hint at a beyond" based solely on a sustainable dialectic (286) as Bloom contends, then Dickinson is not as close to Blake as critics have previously supposed, and Bloom's wholly secular readings of her poetry may be said to advance Dickinson scholarship. But if Dickinson's poetry records instead an original search for the Christian God outside the limitations and distortions of provincial Puritanism as I argue in this
study and as many students of Dickinson before me have argued, then Bloom's Dickinson-Nietzsche comparisons grievously mislead, and we may reasonably expect that Bloom will eventually reverse his position on Dickinson's poetry just as he has reversed his position on Blake's.

Bloom's erudition and broad critical expertise command respect. He appropriately cautions that "[w]hatever our own policies or purposes, we must be very wary not to confuse our stances with [Dickinson's]" (285-86). But I am not convinced that Bloom heeds his own good advice in his series of comparisons between Dickinson and Nietzsche, for when I am stumbling over dozens of Biblical allusions throughout Dickinson's poetry and letters; or recalling the level of authority that her lexicon represented to her; or finding in her poetry and letters recurring references to "Savior," "Lord," "Redeemer," "Christ," and "Jesus," as well as kennings like "Tender Pioneer," "docile Gentleman," "Largest Lover," and "Man that knew the News";5 or studying what eminent Dickinson scholars of the past four decades have said about her poetry, the name of Nietzsche does not come easily to my mind, and I begin to wonder if Bloom considers "strangeness" to be "one of the prime requirements" for criticism as well as for art.

In Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson (1990), Camille Paglia develops an extended comparison of Blake and Dickinson in her chapter on
Dickinson, "Amherst's Madame de Sade" (623-73), completing her portraits of the two poets as British and American counterparts of the Marquis de Sade (230-47, 270-99). Here "strangeness" clearly wins out over the kind of objectivity valued in traditional scholarship: "My largest ambition is to fuse Frazer with Freud. . . . My method is a form of sensationalism: I try to flesh out intellect with emotion and to induce a wide range of emotion from the reader" (xiii). But "sensationalism" in books as in pulpits, in newspapers, and in political sound-bites is a notoriously manipulative method of argumentation, and it is both unnecessary and counterproductive as a method of imparting knowledge. Neither Frazer nor Freud resorted to it.

Paglia sees the history of Western culture as a record of oscillations between the two extreme views of nature represented by Rousseau and Sade. Her theory of cultural history rests on two assumptions: first, that Darwinian nature is the only reality, and second, that within this reality, all human thought is governed by the naturalistic principle that weakness will be punished. Throughout her book Paglia writes from the point of view of Sade (2), whom she describes as correcting, through satire, Rousseau's weak representation of unspoiled nature as a benevolent Eden; Sade shows nature as hell (230-35). But it is never clear what Paglia means by her characterization of Sade as a satirist of Rousseau (2, 235, 242). Satire is generally
understood to be a form of intentional criticism by means of ridicule, arising from social, intellectual, or moral objection to the subject receiving ridicule. Authorial intent to correct or persuade through ridicule, effectively carried out, differentiates satire from other forms of narrative. But in viewing man as a brute animal entirely subject to natural laws within an amoral universe (236-37), Sade rules out the assumption of that free will on which the persuasive function of satire depends, and therefore his novels detailing fantasies of sexual psychopathology can only burlesque his own limited view of human life. Although "Sade's Dionysian modes" (242) may be grimly humorous in their exaggerations, sarcasm, and cynicism, a satiric intent to criticize and correct through ridicule is an element that apparently only Paglia and perhaps a few late decadent Romantics (247) have been able to see.

Paglia ties her case for Sade as "a great writer and philosopher" to her characterization of him as a satirist of Rousseau, indirectly ascribing to him the corrective motive of satire (235). But throughout most of her discussion of Sade's writings, she represents Sade as the actual psychopath he is generally assumed to have been, apparently in the belief that Sade's perversions in themselves make of him a satirist of Rousseau. So ambiguous is she on this point that the reader can never be certain about what position she intends to occupy when she "takes the point of
view of Sade" (2) throughout the book in her analysis of "modernism's neurotic nihilism" (31). In my opinion, her imprecise use of the term satire and the resulting ambiguity in her central argument and in her authorial viewpoint place in question all of her subsequent claims about Sade-Blake-Dickinson parallels.

Sexual Personae endorses Sadean skepticism for its uncompromisingly materialistic recognition of the brutality of Darwinian nature:

Integration of man's body and mind is a profound problem that is not about to be solved by recreational sex or an expansion of women's civil rights. Incarnation, the limitation of mind by matter, is an outrage to imagination. Equally outrageous is gender, which we have not chosen but which nature has imposed upon us. Our physicality is torment, our body the tree of nature on which Blake sees us crucified. (3)

According to Paglia, our most reliable defense against incarnation's "outrage to the imagination" is an unlimited freedom to exercise the art-impulse of imagination through objectification, or "thing-making," individually and collectively (28-39). Arguing that nature controls human life to an extent we cowardly refuse to admit, and emphasizing that nature is an overwhelming enemy who will have the last word anyway (1-28), Paglia posits human imagination as a defense against nature, without ever explaining how human imagination escaped nature's designs
sufficiently to become an effective "weapon" (28) against nature. In Paglia's theory of life, imagination inexplicably sets humans apart from nature, enabling them to achieve the semblance of order necessary for sanity within "the flux of nature" (28) and enabling them also to devise vicarious forms of cruelty for satisfying blood lust within the structures of civilized life (29-30).

Paglia's definition of art is elastic enough to encompass every conceivable kind of "thing-making" (30). Art as Paglia conceives it is simply unlimited personal and social imaginative expression, without regard to moral or aesthetic standards of any kind, since standards impose limits on the most reliable defense we have against the hostile forces of nature. Paglia's artistic free enterprise system has its corollary in pure capitalism. Unlimited imaginative freedom brought us George Washington Bridge (37) within "capitalism . . . an art form" (38) that belongs to "the Darwinian line of Sade" (37). Paglia sees "a giant crane passing on a flatbed truck" and pauses "in awe and reverence, as one would for a church procession" (38).

Thus, although the uncontrolled production and exchange of "things" promotes the interests of predatory power, art as Paglia defines it is our "most effective weapon against the flux of nature" (28). For Paglia, art is that which replicates nature; art mirrors and participates in Darwinian predation.
Against this background of Sadean-inspired art theory, Paglia attempts to establish Blake as "Sade's British brother" (231) in her chapter on Blake (270-99). This chapter explicitly as well as implicitly asserts that Blake participates in the Sadean nihilism outlined in previous chapters of Sexual Personae:

... Blake ... sees nature with Sade's eyes. 
... Brother to Sade ... Blake revives the bloodthirsty goddess of ancient mystery religion, sensational with Asiatic barbarism. He longs to defeat her. But by attacking her, he creates her and confirms her power. Ironically, he becomes her slave and emissary, a voice crying in the wilderness. Nowhere else in literature is the Great Mother as massively, violently eloquent as she is in Blake. (271)

But incredibly, on the last page of the same chapter, Paglia compares Blake to St. Augustine: "In his indictment of the Great Mother, Blake writes like St. Augustine, as if she were an immediate threat" (299). Perhaps Paglia is asking her reader to contemplate the possibility that St. Augustine, too, is a "Brother to Sade," her point being that every human is a brother to Sade. Or perhaps Paglia is backing away from the Sade-Blake parallels she insisted on in previous pages. Either way, she evokes "a wide range of emotions" from her reader.

This chapter is focused on the "irreconcilable contradictions" (298) between Blake's obsessive desire for "the bounding line" (293) and his equally obsessive desire
for free energy (289-98). Paglia emphasizes the dialectical character of Blakean thought; he always "answers himself, his voices of experience devouring his voices of innocence" (231, 281). Thus, if Blake sometimes speaks with the voice of Rousseau (270, 271, 279), he invariably answers himself with the voice of Sade. But Paglia's elaborate explanation of Blake's dialectics can hardly be said to substantiate her claim that Blake is "the British Sade" since Sade's writings are not dialectical:

Sade's multisexed hybrid is like Scylla or Hydra or other chthonian horrors of Greek myth. Such grotesques in Spenser and Blake are always negative. But not in Sade, who substitutes sexual for social relations. (241)

Crucial to Paglia's argument is Sade's attack on Christianity:

Sade meshes his case against Rousseau with his case against Christianity. Like Nietzsche, whom he clearly influenced, Sade attacks Christianity's bias for the weak and outcast. By preserving the lowly, Christian pity "disrupts the natural order and perverts the natural law." Dominance is the right of the strong. . . . Judeo-Christianity elevates man above nature, but Sade, like Darwin, assigns him to the animal kingdom, subject to natural force. Vegetable too: man is soulless, "an absolutely material plant." (236-37)

But "Sade's British brother," William Blake, never "meshes his case against Rousseau with his case against Christianity." Instead, Blake contrasts his own radical
Christianity not only with Rousseau's optimistic nature philosophy, which Blake associated with Deism, but also with the actual reality of Darwinian nature itself.\textsuperscript{6}

Paglia is similarly confused in her generalization that "Blake rejects Judeo-Christian morality" (288). This simplistic generalization about Blake, popular among students in the protest movements of the 1960s, will not withstand an objective reading of any of the numerous witnesses to his life, including his letters, recorded reminiscences about him by men who knew him personally, the Alexander Gilchrist and Mona Wilson biographies of him, and the miscellaneous collection of records relating to him in G. E. Bentley, Jr.'s Blake Records.\textsuperscript{7}

What Blake rejected all his life was the Old Testament-inspired Puritan moral legalism which fosters the illusion that morality can be imposed or externally motivated. Blake's argument with the church for its perpetuation of moral legalism appears to have cost him considerable anguish, but it did not make of him a hedonist, an anarchist, a nihilist, or a sexual psychopath.

Repudiating moral legalism, Blake fully embraced the radical Gospel message which teaches that externally enforced conformity is not morality at all. This view holds that, since authentic morality begins in the mind and heart, and since birth into nature imprints all mental faculties with nature's agenda, nothing less than a reprogramming of
the heart and mind can ever lift a human life beyond the predeterminations of nature. This view, Blake's view, encompasses a full recognition of human weakness against the forces of Darwinian nature, and it also encompasses a belief that reprogramming for freedom from nature is possible through Christ. This radically Christian view is the basis of Blake's theory of perception.

For Blake, the Gospels are heralds of freedom from the unforgiving, cause-and-effect moral legalism on which the system of "the Accuser," or Satan, depends. Blake associated "the Accuser's" kind of moral legalism with Darwinian nature and its requirement of a blood sacrifice as the price for weakness. Thus, Blake sees Satan as "The God of this World" (E 523), and thus, it is in a spiritual sense as well as in a physical sense that Blake conceives of the crucifixion as death upon the tree of nature. But by neutralizing the Accuser's power through forgiveness made freely available, and by fostering the desire for integrity rather than conformity, Christ abrogates the entire system (E 518-525).

Blake's revulsion against Old Testament moral legalism and its perpetuation by the church, his claim to intellectual and artistic freedom and empowerment through Christ, and his lifelong "energetic exertion" (E 145) of his talents "for the Building up of Jerusalem" (E 232) characterize Blake as a radical Christian who looked beyond
matter for answers to the problem of the mind's entrapment in matter. In his lifetime of confronting and spurning Darwinian nature through his art, this self-described "Enthusiastic, hope-fostered visionary" (E 715) is anything but a "British Sade."

Unconvinced by Paglia's argument that Blake writes from a Sadean viewpoint, I cannot agree with any of her comparisons between Blake and Dickinson in her chapter on Dickinson, "Amherst's Madame de Sade" (623-73). Furthermore, Paglia's use of biographical material about Dickinson to support her argument about Sade-Blake-Dickinson parallels seems to me a particularly flagrant example of special pleading. Since Paglia makes no use of biographical material about Blake in her Sade-Blake comparisons, I assume she means for her reader to understand that Blake's exemplary public and private lives are independent of his kinship with Sade; but Paglia then asks the reader to accept that Dickinson's reclusive private life, which according to Paglia's argument somehow supported a wide range of imaginative and actual sadomasochistic experience, is reflected in the alleged sadomasochism in the poetry. The deranged Dickinson Paglia describes bears no resemblance to the merely eccentric social, artistic, and intellectual aristocrat known to students through her poetry and letters and through the labors of eminent Dickinson scholars such as Thomas H. Johnson, Richard B. Sewall, and Jane Donahue
Eberwein. Unfortunately, Paglia cites no major scholarship on Dickinson since the mid-1960s, not even the essential Dickinson biography by Richard B. Sewall. In my opinion, Dickinson "still waits" (673) for Paglia to know her.
Notes

1 About Lowell's claim that Dickinson was a precursor of the imagists, Karl Keller has this to say: "Emily Dickinson was . . . used to support an experimental poetics she would not easily have recognized and an assertive circle she would not easily have joined. Amy Lowell . . . had to radicalize her considerably to get a precursor in her." The Only Kangaroo among the Beauty (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1979), 298.

2 "Mark Twain may be credited with inventing the master-symbol of nineteenth-century America in the image of a small boy floating down the Missippi on a raft, uncertain of his destination, but confident of meeting any emergency with pluck and ingenuity. Emily Dickinson without leaving her sheltered garden had drifted on a vaster stream than Huckleberry Finn ever knew, and her watchword was like his: 'Trust in the Unexpected'" (Whicher 308).

3 See also The Ringers in the Tower (61).

4 In my opinion, Bloom is unjust in his claim that "all attempts to read her as a devotional poet have crashed badly." Among the several studies that I know to be holding up very well are those by Dorothy Huff Oberhaus, who has written intelligently and convincingly on Dickinson as a devotional poet, bringing to her close analysis of the poems a knowledge of the relationship between Dickinson's poetics and the metaphysical traditions of George Herbert.

5 Dorothy Huff Oberhaus discusses these kennings in "'Tender Pioneer': Emily Dickinson's Poems on the Life of Christ" and lists them in her closing paragraph (358).

6 For a concise explanation of Blake's attitude toward Rousseau, see S. Foster Damon's A Blake Dictionary, 351-52.

7 For a synopsis of the views about Blake's character expressed by several persons who knew him, see G. E. Bentley, Jr.'s William Blake: The Critical Heritage (42-43). The portrait that emerges from this synopsis clearly fulfills Christian ideals, for the portrait is that of a passionate man beloved by men, women, and children for his warm humanity and admired for the intellectual and spiritual vibrancy he maintained in the midst of poverty.
FEAR, HOPE, AND VISION IN THE POETRY OF

BLAKE AND DICKINSON

During his lifetime William Blake was known primarily as an engraver, or an illustrator-for-hire, the approximation of today's commercial artist. Although financial need tied him to this tradesman's occupation throughout his life, Blake always thought of himself as an artist and poet working in the combined Biblical and artistic traditions of such predecessors as Raphael, Michelangelo, Spenser, and Milton. Whether he was illustrating scenes from the Bible, from English history, or from works by Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Dante, Edward Young, or Robert Blair, Blake drew and engraved his own highly original interpretations of his source material, disregarding or freely adapting familiar iconography and traditional exegesis. Most Blake scholars see his elaborate mythology as a daring, comprehensive illustration-in-progress of his ongoing synthesis of the Bible, history, and the public and private worlds of his immediate experience. But critics generally concede that Blake's greatest achievement as an illustrator is the series of twenty-one
illustrations of the Book of Job that he executed and engraved near the end of his life. With a level of condensation and clarity unparalleled in his previous works, these illustrations convey the culmination of Blakean thought, for through them Blake interpreted the Job story typologically as a "microcosm" of the entire Bible (Frye, "Blake's Reading of the Book of Job," 221), and he represented Job as Everyman in the process of recognizing Christ as the incarnation of God.¹

The Jobean concept of spiritual growth through suffering was well established in Blake's mind as early as 1788, when he included the following statement among his annotations to Swedenborg's Divine Love and Divine Wisdom: "Understanding or Thought is not natural to Man [;] it is acquired by means of Suffering & Distress i.e. Experience" (E 602). The Job story itself occupied Blake in various ways throughout his life (Lindberg 36-44), but in the Job illustrations, he summarized and refined all of the ideas he had tortuously worked out through his cumbersome mythology. Accordingly, the Job illustrations set forth the great themes present in all of Blake's art: vision, revelation, and regeneration. Thus, if there is such a thing as a definitive version of Blakean thought, it is surely that body of thought conveyed through the Job illustrations.

Throughout this study I rely on the Job illustrations as my principal guide to Blakean thought. Specifically, I
look upon the Job illustrations as the most fitting context in which to consider Blake's explorations of human perception. And, as I explain in the following pages, I also look upon the Job story, interpreted typologically, as the appropriate context in which to consider Dickinson's studies of human perception, although this opinion sets me apart from an apparent majority of Dickinson scholars, who generally place her poems within the context of a romantic quest. Throughout this study I explore evidence that both Blake and Dickinson regarded the Job story as an archetypal Biblical narrative of perceptual enclosure followed by visionary breakthrough to revelation. I devote the present chapter to positing the Book of Job as this microcosmic Biblical context for Blake-Dickinson explorations of human perception. Thus, in this chapter, I highlight foundational parallels between the Book of Job and writings by both Blake and Dickinson.

Believing that Biblical truths must be "Spiritually Discerned" (Job Illustrations, Pl. 1), Blake sets the entire narrative within Job's consciousness, thereby representing all of the story elements, including Job's presumed innocence, the afflictions by Satan, the friends' accusations, and the revelation from God, as a perceptual progression in which disaster forces Job to relinquish the false security of externally imposed orthodox legalism and
to search for the true God beyond the theological boundaries of the religious system he has inherited. This progression of mental experiences follows what Blake believed to be the archetypal Biblical pattern of a fall from innocence followed by suffering, revelation, and regeneration, a pattern evidencing itself within the consciousness of individuals as well as in the history of mankind (Davis 451-52). Strongly influenced by Blake, Northrop Frye summarizes the Job story as follows: "Job seems to have gone the entire circuit of the Bible's narrative, from creation and fall through the plagues of Egypt, the sayings of the fathers . . . , the flash of prophetic insight . . . , and on to the final vision of presence and the knowledge that in the midst of death we are in life" (The Great Code 197).

According to Blake's interpretation, the speeches of Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar represent perceptual entrapment in a primitive moral legalism, an entrapment in which one naively assumes predictable and verifiable connections between behavior and reward in the chaotic world of temporal experience. The friends' facile theology implies a ready-made explanation for all human suffering, and before his disasters, Job had piously carried out the religious prescriptions of this theology. But his personal suffering eventually compelled him to admit that religious people sometimes suffer while ruthless people thrive, contrary to his religious indoctrination. As Northrop Frye points out,
the friends cannot comprehend Job's point: "he is not protesting innocence but saying that there is a vast disproportion between what has happened to him and anything he could conceivably have done. In other words, the situation cannot be contained within the framework of law and wisdom, and no causal explanation is good enough" (The Great Code 194).

Confronted with the contradictions of a theology he had formerly accepted without question, Job is forced to seek God beyond the discredited orthodoxy by which he had formerly lived. According to Blake's interpretation of the Job story, then, the point of the story is that unless God is encountered personally, he is not encountered at all, and when he is encountered personally, he is recognized as Christ (Lindberg 275-325). That this recognition is the result of a dramatic perceptual renovation is the import of Job's response to the divine revelation when he says that "I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you" (Job 42.5 NRSV). Thus, in Blake's interpretation, the Job story sets forth the Biblical paradigm of visionary expansion and liberating revelation, and it is within the context of this paradigm that Blake developed his conception of fourfold vision.

Blake's concept of fourfold vision delineates expanding levels of perception from the lowest level of purely sensory perception to the highest level of fully developed spiritual
vision. Progress toward spiritual vision is, for Blake as for Dickinson, a process by which "The Finite" in the world of experience becomes "furnished / With the Infinite" (Dickinson, P 906). This progress toward spiritual vision is carried out not by withdrawal from experience but by immersion in experience, for innocence maintained as a virtue at the expense of experience is dangerously misleading. In Songs of Innocence and of Experience as well as in the prophecies, Blake represents children, the truly innocent, as lambs before the slaughter, just as Job does: "There are those who snatch the orphan child from the breast, and take as a pledge the infant of the poor. They go about naked . . . ; though hungry, they carry the sheaves" (Job 24.9-10 NRSV). And Blake always connects the pretended innocence of hypocrites with predatory motives. This is the connection he seems to be making in his exceptionally tame drawing for "The Tyger": in spite of the tiger's "fearful symmetry," Blake makes the animal appear gentle and harmless, reminding the reader that deadly discrepancies between appearance and reality characterize human experience in the temporal world. Because experience in the temporal world is inherently lawless and chaotic, originating as it does in a departure from ideality, the route of experience back to God leads inevitably "Through the strait pass of suffering--" (Dickinson, P 792). Thus, following Biblical tradition, Blake conceives of human
experience itself as the "furnaces of affliction" (Isaiah 48.10) in which human souls are refined.6

A number of critics have noticed Blake's strong personal identification with the Job character, finding in the Job illustrations valuable clues to the trend of thought in the difficult prophecies. But as Bo Lindberg points out, many critics have missed or ignored the obvious conclusion to which all of Blake's poetic and pictorial art points, that visionary expansion is an opening of the enclosed finite mind to the transcendent reality existing beyond it (80-81). Many Blake critics deny his theism, in spite of his agreement with Swedenborg that "there is but one Omnipotent Uncreate & God" (E 604). In the Job series, Blake asserts that God is not merely the humanistic reflection of "Job's inner self" but is, in fact, the creator of the world, including Job and Behemoth (Lindberg 80-81). The voice from the whirlwind brings about Job's recognition that "God is within & without" (E 155, Jerusalem 12.15): "God is the vision of God within man's soul ... but he is also the creator outside man and outside the world. ... What man possesses of God, is God; and what man perceives of God, is God; but man cannot possess or perceive more than a part of God" (Lindberg 81).

Job's theophany liberates him from perceptual entrapment within the self and within nature, the kind of perceptual entrapment that Blake considered to be death
itself (Lindberg, 339-51). Conflating within the trope "Imagination" all of the Biblical teachings about God's saving interventions in human life, Blake conceives of perceptual liberation through Imagination as an enactment of grace. Thus, Job's revelation, liberation, and regeneration manifest themselves in his sudden capacity to forgive his friends for their false accusations, to accept alms from his neighbors graciously, and to live creatively, creativity being represented by the arts of music, poetry, and painting (Lindberg, 325-51).

Although Peter Otto does not discuss the Job illustrations in his Constructive Vision and Visionary Deconstruction, in my opinion his insights strengthen Lindberg's argument that Blake's Job illustrations convey distinctly theistic views about language and reality (81-90). For Blake, the term vision signifies "an openness of the temporal to the eternal" (Otto 96). Originating in experience, "[v]ision does not deny its temporal base and, therefore, always must place truth at one remove from the self, always outside our grasp" (96): vision is made possible not "by a naive or innocent turning away from the realities of existence" but by experience itself (27). Experience always brings loss, but in Blake's poetry, "the universe of loss . . . is the ground necessary for visionary expansion" (27), as the Job illustrations show.

As Otto points out, Blake associated the Lockean/
Derridean concept of enclosed language and reality with "single vision" (18-26), the most restricted level of human perception. Blake's argument is not that this view is incorrect, for it is correct as far as it goes: "[f]allen existence is a retreat into the closet, a separation of the self from the living world in which others are found. Fallen existence is a world in which one isolated self is pitted against another" (19). Blake's argument with Bacon, Newton, Locke and their intellectual progeny is that they do not tell the whole story:

Their influence is pernicious . . . because they contend that the world that they (correctly) trace is the only world. Blake, on the other hand, is a prophetic visionary who attempts to reveal the relationships in which this world is grounded, who tries to open the closed world of the self to others, and by these means hopes to open the possibility of transformation and regeneration. (19)

To borrow Otto's phraseology, the Job illustrations show "what happens to the semiotic system in which we are enclosed when . . . it is distended by the emotions of fear and hope" (24-25). Blake's Job illustrations connect suffering, and the fear and hope it induces, with the visionary expansion that brings spiritual growth. In For the Sexes: The Gates of Paradise, Blake condensed this idea in the epigram, "Fear & Hope are—Vision" (E 266). To borrow Otto's phraseology again, suffering, and the fear and
hope that accompanies it, "can bring us to the very edge of our linguistic world" (25). In fact, the name of Blake's central character, Los, suggests a close connection between loss and Logos (27-31, 227n), the connection being that suffering makes possible the empathic identification with another that opens the self for discourse, as Dickinson knew: "Affliction feels impalpable / Until Ourselves are struck—" (P 799), and "Unto a broken heart / No other one may go / Without the high prerogative / Itself hath suffered too" (P 1704). The discourse necessary for any life "grounded in relationship" depends on an ongoing perceptual opening of the self to an other (28). Furthermore, "that the world of the self, the discourses which we use to generate the voice of ourselves and of others, can in fact be opened is without doubt the belief which underlies the major part of Blake's artistic production" (4).

Like Blake, Emily Dickinson extensively explored perceptual enclosure in the temporal world, and like Blake, she explicitly connected suffering with the visionary expansion that brings spiritual growth:

A Death blow is a Life blow to Some
Who till they died, did not alive become—
Who had they lived, had died but when
They died, Vitality begun.
(P 816)

Her explorations of human suffering imply a Blakean recognition that innocence maintained at the cost of
experience is always deceptive, since "Woe" always awaits
the innocent:

As old as Woe—
How old is that?
Some eighteen thousand years—
As old as Bliss
How old is that
They are of equal years

Together chiepest they are found
But seldom side by side
From neither of them tho' he try
Can Human nature hide

{{P 1168}}

Thus, Dickinson's explorations of experience most often
emphasize its tragic dimensions:

Experience is the Angled Road
Preferred against the Mind
By—Paradox—the Mind itself—
Presuming it to lead

Quite opposite—How Complicate
The discipline of Man—
Compelling him to Choose Himself
His Preappointed Pain—

{{P 910}}

Choosing one's "Preappointed Pain" is the process by which
one gets "that precarious Gait" called experience:

I stepped from Plank to Plank
A slow and cautious way
The Stars about my Head I felt
About my Feet the Sea.
I knew not but the next
Would be my final inch—
This gave me that precarious Gait
Some call Experience.
(P 875)

Although very little has been written about resonances of the Book of Job throughout Dickinson's poetry and letters, I think her writing clearly expresses not only the spiritual anguish of Job's quarrel with God but it expresses also the great personal courage and intellectual honesty of Job's "heretical" questioning of orthodox teachings, for like both Job and Blake, Dickinson challenged an entrenched theology, those beliefs of "The gray-haired and the aged . . . those older than your father" (Job 15.10 NRSV). According to Richard B. Sewall, Dickinson may have been joined in her theological questioning by her brother, Austin, and by Joseph Lyman:

Apparently, [Austin's] heterodoxy was a real obstacle in his early relations with Sue; he, a Dickinson, had to plead with her not to dismiss him as an atheist. Emily spoke of at least one theological discussion she had with him, and it is likely that the nocturnal talks that both she and Joseph Lyman referred to when "the ancient people" were away, or asleep, covered many such problems. They discussed their difficulties in a way not recorded of their elders, who presumably found their answers in church—or, if not, kept up appearances in silence (1.237).

Like Blake, Dickinson possibly identified personally with Job, for she clearly embraced the Biblical concept of spiritual growth through suffering, referring to it as
preparation "By Processes of Size" for the "Stupendous Vision / Of His diameters---" (P 802).\footnote{11} Richard B. Sewall has pointed out that this concept of spiritual growth through suffering may be related to Dickinson's wearing of white dresses (Lyman Letters 66-67).\footnote{12} Among her many poems connecting suffering with spiritual maturation is Poem 332:

```
There are two Ripenings—one--of sight--
Whose forces Spheric wind
Until the Velvet product
Drop spicy to the ground--
A homelier maturing--
A process in the Bur--
That teeth of Frosts alone disclose
In far October Air.
```

This theme of spiritual maturation is developed similarly in Poem 483 ("A Solemn thing within the Soul"), but this poem emphasizes God's grace rather than the suffering itself (Farr 62-63). In other poems, Dickinson, like Blake in his Job illustrations and elsewhere, linked suffering and visionary expansion with creativity in the arts--music, poetry, and painting (P 544, P 760, P 755).

"If a man die, shall he live again?" Job asks early in the debate with his "comforters" (Job 14.14 KJV). This question constitutes Dickinson's "flood subject," and the passage in Job from which this question is taken is among several Biblical passages that apparently remained ever present in her mind. As Jack Capps (151) and Jerry A. Herndon (50) have pointed out, the passage is echoed in a
Dickinson letter of 1881: "Vinnie is picking a few seeds--for if a pod 'die, shall he not live again' . . . " (L 727). But Dickinson alluded to a closely related passage in Job much earlier, in an 1858 letter to Samuel Bowles (L 193), in which she asks, "Do you think we shall 'see God'?" quoting Job 19.26 KJV: "And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God."

Dickinson's poems and letters are filled with passages that recall Job's insistence on arguing his case before God, an insistence followed by vacillation between hope of being heard and despair for apparently being ignored. "I desire to reason with God . . . let come on me what will," Job declares (Job 13.3,13 KJV). This attitude characterizes Dickinson in her relentless search for ultimate answers:

> Were the Statement "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed," made in earthly Manuscript, were his Residence in the Universe, we should pursue the Writer till he explained it to us. (L 568)

Like Job, Dickinson alternates between a tentative intimacy with and a sense of abandonment by the deity, never denying the existence of God, but always rejecting orthodox theology when it contradicts her intuition and personal experience, since "By intuition, Mightiest Things / Assert themselves--and not by terms--" (P 420). In trusting her intuition above orthodoxy, she stands with Job in contrast to Job's Calvinistic comforters, who insist that he should accept all
of his suffering as justifiable punishment even though he can see no logical connection between his behavior and the suffering he endures. Like Job and like Blake, who refused to think of mankind as "worms," Dickinson abhored the "majestic tastes" of orthodox theologians who say that "we are a 'Worm,'" for "How is that reconciled?" (L 193). In Jerusalem, it is Vala, "vegetated" as "a hungry Stomach & a devouring Tongue," who cries that "The Human is but a Worm" (E 215, J 64.8-12).

Echoes of Job's experience are detectable in Poems 101, 128, 376, and 1005, as Jerry A. Herndon has pointed out (45). To Herndon's list I would add numerous other poems, particularly Poem 497, which is doubtless an extended allusion to the Book of Job:

He strained my faith--  
Did he find it supple?  
Shook my strong trust--  
Did it then--yield?

Hurled my belief--  
But--did he shatter--it?  
Racked--with suspense--  
Not a nerve failed!

Wrung me--with Anguish--  
But I never doubted him--  
Tho' for what wrong  
He never did say--

Stabbed--while I sued  
His sweet forgiveness--  
Jesus--it's your little "John"!  
Dont you know--me?
Dickinson's manuscript for this poem shows the alternative final line, "Why--Slay--Me?". This alternative line alludes to Job 13.15 KJV: "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." Another poem summarizing a Job-like experience is Poem 430, which in thirty-three lines recalls a life of "bliss" followed by sudden, unexplainable, life-changing disaster:

I put my pleasure all abroad--
I dealt a word of Gold
To every Creature--that I met--
And Dowered--all the World--

When suddenly--my Riches shrank--
A Goblin--drank my Dew--
My Palaces--dropped tenantless--
Myself--was beggared--too--

I clutched at sounds--
I groped at shapes--
I touched the tops of Films--
I felt the Wilderness roll back
Along my Golden lines--

The Sackcloth--hangs upon the nail--
The Frock I used to wear--
But where my moment of Brocade--
My--drop--of India?

In Job's speeches as in many of Dickinson's poems and letters, tones of bitterness, despair, grief, anger, and sarcasm are frequently heard. In the ninth chapter of Job, for example, Job angrily implies that God is a thief: "He snatches away; who can stop him? Who will say to him, What are you doing?" (Job 9.12 NRSV). Job's God-as-thief is
Dickinson's "Burglar, Banker--Father!" (P 49). Also, in the 1881 letter which I pointed out previously (L 727), Dickinson includes a closing comment that "When we think of the lone effort to live, and its bleak reward, the mind turns to the myth 'for His mercy endureth forever,' with confiding revulsion" (L 727). This reference to an apparent discrepancy between the reality of human suffering and Biblical claims about God's mercy recalls the irony in Job's lament: "I must appeal for mercy to my accuser. . . . He will not let me get my breath, but fills me with bitterness" (Job 9.15-18 NRSV). Also, several of Dickinson's poems echo the kind of sarcasm that sometimes erupts in Job's speeches. Poem 1601 is one example: "Of God we ask one favor, / That we may be forgiven-- / For what, he is presumed to know-- / The Crime, from us, is hidden--." Poem 1461 is another example: "'Heavenly Father'--take to thee / The supreme iniquity / Fashioned by thy candid Hand / In a moment contraband." As Peggy Anderson observes, many of Dickinson's interpreters misread Dickinson by failing to place such poems of doubt and despair within the context of Dickinson's extensive Bible knowledge (2): "St. Thomas's doubt and St. Peter's denial show that her similar feelings are nothing new to the Christian life" (9).

In her poetry and letters Dickinson often directly asserts or strongly implies the typological identifications between Christ and suffering humanity that are present in
Blake's Job illustrations. Richard B. Sewall explains how these typological identifications were represented vividly for Dickinson in the person of Charles Wadsworth, whom she described as a "Man of Sorrow[s]" (2.453-61). Near the end of her life, she summarized her religious thought in two sentences, emphasizing these typological identifications:

> When Jesus tells us about his Father, we distrust him. When he shows us his Home, we turn away, but when he confides to us that he is "acquainted with Grief," we listen, for that also is an Acquaintance of our own. (L 932)

This "Queen of Calvary," who claimed that she "was Formed—a Carpenter" (P 488), wrote that although "One Crucifixion is recorded—only— / . . . As many be / As persons—or Peninsulas—" (P 553). Many of Dickinson's poems convey the idea that "Gethsemane— / Is but a Province—in the Being's Centre—" (P 553).

Poem 341 recalls the shock and numbness that come "After great pain," and although this poem probably does not allude to Job, it eloquently describes that "Hour of Lead" when Job sat mute for an entire week, before his friends began insinuating that he somehow deserved his suffering. Poem 599 also describes "a pain—so utter— / It swallows substance up— / Then covers the Abyss with Trance." In these and in other poems, Dickinson examines the shock experienced by "the Soul / That gets a Staggering Blow—" (P 618).
Suffering is accompanied by fear, but it is also accompanied by hope, that "thing with feathers" that "never, in Extremity . . . asked a crumb" (P 254). In connecting suffering with spiritual growth, Dickinson agrees with Blake that "Fear & Hope are--Vision" (E 266):

When I hoped I feared--
Since I hoped I dared
Everywhere alone
As a church remain--
Spectre cannot harm--
Serpent cannot charm--
He deposes Doom
Who hath suffered him--
(P 1181)

In Poem 770 Dickinson speaks of fear as "a Spur--upon the Soul--." Another way that Dickinson relates suffering, or fear and hope, to visionary expansion and spiritual growth is seen in Poem 974:

The Soul's distinct connection
With immortality
Is best disclosed by Danger
Or quick Calamity--

As Lightning on a Landscape
Exhibits Sheets of Place--
Not yet suspected--but for Flash--
And Click--and Suddenness.

Yet another way in which Dickinson relates fear and hope to visionary expansion may be seen in Poem 928:
The Heart has narrow Banks
It measures like the Sea
In mighty--unremitting Bass
And Blue Monotony

Till Hurricane bisect
And as itself discerns
Its insufficient Area
The Heart convulsive learns
That Calm is but a Wall
Of unattempted Gauze
An instant's Push demolishes
A Questioning--dissolves.

In Poem 564 Dickinson narrates a Job-like revelation
that followed a "period . . . for Prayer--" when "No other
Art--would do--." Although she "stepped upon the North" to
seek "Infinitude," God remained inaccessible, until
suddenly,

The Silence condescended--
Creation stopped--for Me--
But awed beyond my errand--
I worshipped--did not "pray"--

Rebecca Patterson has shown an apparent allusion to the Book
of Job in Poem 564 quoted above:

Not surprisingly, it is in the North that this
child of the Puritans located God. . . . Here
may be a partial reminiscence of lines from [a]
book she apparently knew well, Job 26:6-7: "Hell
is naked before him, and destruction hath no
covering. He stretcheth out the north over the
empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing."
. . . "By the breath of God frost is given,
reads Job 37:10; and the "Approving God" of Emily
Dickinson oversees the assassin frost at its work
of beheading human flowers (1624). (185-86)
In the poems quoted above and in many other poems as well, Dickinson shows that "A nearness to Tremendousness-- / An agony procures--" (P 963). But perhaps Dickinson's best known expression of the idea that "Fear & Hope are--Vision" is in Poem 906:

The Admirations--and Contempts--of time--
Show justest--through an Open Tomb--
The Dying--as it were a Height
Reorganizes Estimate
And what We saw not
We distinguish clear--
And mostly--see not
What We saw before--

'Tis Compound Vision--
Light--enabling Light--
The Finite--furnished
With the Infinite--
Convex--and Concave Witness--
Back--toward Time--
And forward--
Toward the God of Him--

Dorothy Huff Oberhaus notes that "[i]t may or may not be significant that parts of the Book of Job's account of God's words from the whirlwind are among several passages that have been cut out of Dickinson's Bible--another passage is from the first two verses of Revelation's twenty-first chapter, which is of central import to F-40" (14).

In spite of the alienation and bitterness that so often characterize Dickinson's poetry, her poetry includes many passages affirming a Job-like conviction that ultimately she will be vindicated in rejecting the theology of an
incomprehensible orthodox legalism, because "a hypocrite shall not come before him" (Job 13.16 KJV). Poem 968 is a particularly forceful expression of faith that God's love truly combines justice with mercy,\textsuperscript{17} for this poem affirms the belief that after "the long Hindrance" and "The Waiting," "The Love . . . will array me right / I shall be perfect--in His sight." In the Book of Job, this faith in a final reconciliation with God seems linked with the belief that human language bridges time and eternity, since Job repeatedly voices a desire to argue his case before God, and after his initial despair, he finally affirms his belief that if he were permitted to speak directly with God, God himself would validate the integrity of his words (Job 23.3-7). In my opinion, this faith that human language can carry meaning is evidenced throughout the writing careers of both Blake and Dickinson, two poets who apparently longed to have their words permanently "inscribed in a book" or "engraved on a rock forever" (Job 19.23-24 NRSV), whether or not their writing ever reached a public audience.
Notes

1 Bo Lindberg provides a detailed analysis of Job's revelation as represented in the Blake illustrations (275-323).

In discussing the Job illustrations I am indebted to three studies: Bo Lindberg's William Blake's Illustrations to the Book of Job, Patricia Elizabeth Davis's "Revelation in Blake's Job," and Northrop Frye's "Blake's Reading of Job."

2 Greg Johnson, in Emily Dickinson: Perception and the Poet's Quest, is an example. He sets out to describe Dickinson's approach to the problem of "a spiritual identity from which the mind perceives itself as mysteriously estranged" (2), but he refers more often to Emerson and Transcendentalism than to the Bible, in spite of Dickinson's well-documented immersion in scripture.

3 Richard B. Sewall draws connections between the Job story and the early development of Christianity in The Vision of Tragedy (50). In his chapter entitled "Tragedy and Christianity" (50-56), Sewall explains that "[i]n point of doctrine, Christianity reverses the tragic view and makes tragedy impossible" (50).

4 As Bo Lindberg points out, "We can never understand Blake's view of God, unless we realise two things. First, that Blake never . . . asked the question 'Is there a God?' Secondly, that he never answered the question he did ask: 'Who is God?' . . . there is no such thing as a theology of William Blake" (84).

5 But see Bo Lindberg's discussion of Blake's emendation to "I have heard thee," in which Blake omits of, following the Vulgate (322).

6 The image of Los's furnaces dominates the prophecies. Blake sometimes refers to them as the "furnaces of affliction" in Jerusalem (E 152, J 9.34; E 205, J 55.59; E 228, J 73.25; E 240, J 82.79; E 245, J 86.49).

7 Peter Otto explains that "[t]he Vision that is the result of . . . Imagination is . . . not the reduction of others to the world of the self, but a power of opening that world. It is, therefore, not simply a matter of grasping vision, but of being open to its appeal. It is the power to hear and respond to this appeal that enables the visionary
deconstruction of the Bard to be followed by the visionary construction of Jerusalem" (97).

8 In A Vision of the Last Judgment Blake represents the arts as "Poetry Painting & Music the three Powers <in Man> of conversing with Paradise which the flood did not Sweep away" (E 559). See also The Laocoon (E 274).

9 To the question of theism in Blake, Leopold Damrosch responds as follows: "If Blake had wanted to say only that the human imagination is our sole experience of the divine, it would not have cost him so many years of brooding and such tortuous formulations to say so. . . . Among Blakeans, however, it is customary to deny the existence of a transcendent realm and to assert that God or Jesus is wholly human. . . . But . . . we cannot describe his poetry fairly or do justice to its peculiar emphases if we suppose that he simply grounds in man all the values that used to be grounded in God" (246).

10 Jerry A. Herndon surveys the meager scholarship on this subject through 1981 in "A Note on Emily Dickinson and Job," and he points out "distinct . . . echoes" from Job in Poems 101, 128, 376, and 1005. Herndon cites Richard B. Sewall and Clark Griffith as the two critics who seem to have most clearly recognized in Dickinson's poems the "resonances of certain passages in Job" (45). As Herndon explains, Jack Capps's list of allusions in Emily Dickinson's Reading, 1836-1886 omits all allusions to the Book of Job in Dickinson's poetry, citing only five allusions in her letters (L 678, L 737, L 808, L 727, and L 461). In addition to other allusions to Job in the poetry that I discuss in this study, I believe that Letter 36 and Letter 193 should be added to the lists of writings containing Job allusions as compiled by Capps and Herndon.

11 In the commentary Blake wrote to accompany his illustration of St. John's Revelation, Blake uses the phrase "Stupendous Vision" to describe the Last Judgment: "The Hebrew Bible & the Gospel of Jesus are not Allegory but Eternal Vision or Imagination of All that Exists. . . . The Last Judgment is one of these Stupendous Visions [.] I have represented it as I saw it [.]" (E 554-55).

12 Here Sewall merely suggests this possibility, connecting her wearing of white with a Biblical passage quoted by Joseph Lyman in a letter to his fiancee. Perhaps Sewall also had in mind poetry passages such as the
following from Poem 325: "Of Tribulation, these are They, / Denoted by the White—."

In his chapter on Charles Wadsworth in the Dickinson biography (2.444-62), Sewall discusses Dickinson's admiration of Wadsworth for "the spiritual insight and integrity that she was coming to believe only suffering could give" (460).

13 In Letter 200, dated 13 February 1859, Dickinson writes that "Mr S. preached in our church last Sabbath upon 'predestination,' but I do not respect 'doctrines,' and did not listen to him, so I can neither praise, nor blame."

14 I am agreeing with Dorothy Huff Oberhaus and many other critics that "Emily Dickinson treats the Bible typologically—that is, she portrays biblical events as prefigurations of events that take place in the lives of Christ's followers (J 1545)" (12).

15 Richard B. Sewall makes this observation in Life 2.461.

16 According to the apostle Paul, it is through saving faith that one is "crucified with Christ": "For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Gal. 2.19-20 NRSV). See also Galatians 5.24 and 6.14.

17 Dorothy Huff Oberhaus discusses this poem at length throughout Emily Dickinson's Fascicles: Method and Meaning.
CHAPTER III

TOWARD FOURFOLD VISION: SPIRITUAL GROWTH

BY PROCESSES OF SIZE

Emily Dickinson's "compound vision" and "compound manner" are among the most frequently analyzed concepts in her poetry, but no commentary I know of develops a comparison between her "compound vision" and Blake's "fourfold vision." In this chapter I compare theories of visionary expansion in works by Blake and Dickinson, showing that these poets held parallel beliefs about vital connections between suffering, perceptual expansion, and spiritual growth. Blake's conviction that immersion in experience is a necessary part of spiritual growth is seen equally in Dickinson's poems about growth as it occurs "By Processes of Size" (P 802, "Time feels so vast that were it not"). Both poets based their theories of perception on the belief that visionary expansion, or growth toward wisdom, is an unavoidably painful process by which "The Finite," through experience in the fallen world, becomes "furnished / With the Infinite" (Dickinson, P 906). The similarities I discuss between Blake's and Dickinson's concepts of visionary expansion suggest that, although Dickinson was less systematic than Blake in her study of perception, she
may have been more systematic about it than scholars have yet realized.

The most obvious and important parallel between Blake and Dickinson in their conceptions of visionary expansion is both poets' traditional associations of truth with eternity, and error with temporality. These associations appear with growing frequency throughout the works of both poets as they increasingly set a New Testament-inspired thought-based ethic in opposition to the predominantly behavior-based ethic of institutionalized Christianity. In accordance with this thought-based ethic, Blake and Dickinson placed integrity, wisdom, and understanding above visible sainthood as the essential goals of Christian life.1

Blake-Dickinson associations of absolute truth with eternity partake of Job's revelation that even the most pious orthodoxy of humans falls short of the truth of God. As Richard B. Sewall explains, in the Book of Job and in the genre of tragedy generally, "truth is not revealed as one harmonious whole; it is many-faceted, ambiguous, a sum of irreconcilables--and that is one source of its terror" (The Vision of Tragedy 13). Job seeks truth as one seeks truth whose very sanity depends upon finding it, but he assumes that the truth he seeks may be contained within a rational explanation of human experience. He never receives this "truth"; that is, he never receives a rational explanation of his suffering. In fact, although the entire Bible is
filled with stories of human suffering, not even in the New Testament does the Bible ever give the kind of rational explanation that Job seeks following his disasters. Indeed, the mystery of human suffering is deepened in the Gospels' account of God's incarnation in a man born to suffering as an obscure carpenter among an oppressed people, and this mystery is compounded by his execution at the hands of persons who claim for themselves the certainty of truth. What Job finally receives instead of the rational explanation that he sought is a revelation about the nature of truth, but it is a revelation that teaches him more about God and about God's relationship to human life than any rational explanation could have contained.

Perhaps Blake's most succinct expression of his views on this subject is found in his description of his design for the Last Judgment: "Error is created []; Truth is Eternal" (E 565). According to Blake, fallen consciousness is a perceptual labyrinth: Blake speaks of "the infinite labyrinth of another's brain" (E 294, FZ 190), Rahab's "Brain" that "enlabyrinths the whole heaven" (E 224, J 70.29), the "labyrinithine arches" erected by "Mighty Urizen the Architect" (E 218, 66.4), and the souls that are "no longer . . . puzzling themselves in Satan's . . . Labyrinth" following the Last Judgment (E 562)." In the labyrinth of fallen consciousness, "the Eye altering alters all (E 485)," disorienting man spiritually and rendering him incapable of
objectively assessing his position within the maze where he is lost. As much as Blake exalts human imagination and creativity, his elaborate investigations of the errors of fallen perception rule out the conclusion that Blake ever deluded himself into thinking that mankind creates truth. I cannot agree with Jerome McGann and a host of other recent critics who have argued that "[t]ruth, for Blake does not exist, it has to be created" (Towards a Literature of Knowledge 32), for Blake never tired of showing that, enclosed within the labyrinth of his mind, man merely creates more labyrinths: he reproduces to repopulate the earth, and he replicates the labyrinthine processes of his mind in his external creations—great, clattering eighteenth-century machines of cogs and wheels (E 159, J 15.14-20) or noiseless twentieth-century computers, weaving the web of the internet. Collectively, man's creations constitute great Golgonooza, City of Man. But man's labyrinthine creations and his city of Golgonooza do not represent the kind of truth that Blake associates with the City of God, Jerusalem. Blake clearly states in A Vision of the Last Judgment that "Error is Created" and Truth is what remains after error and the present creation no longer exist (E 565).

In Blake's Christian cosmology, every human is born into the labyrinth of perceptual subjectivity and relativity. Whatever objective truth man is capable of perceiving, if not innate, must come to him from outside the
labyrinth directly from Imagination or indirectly from Imagination through "the Advice of a Friend" (E 563), that "Advice" including the literary and artistic productions of other men. Blake states on Plate 3 of Jerusalem that "We who dwell on Earth can do nothing of ourselves" (E 145), and then he credits his writing of the poem to dictation from "the Savior" (E 146, J 4.4-5). Leopold Damrosch belongs to an apparent minority of Blake critics who acknowledge Blake's differentiation between perception in eternity and perception in the fallen world: perception in eternity "is not the kind of subjectivity we now know"; Frye says that "'there are exactly as many kinds of reality as there are men,' [but] that is true only in the fallen world, where reality is smothered by the veil of illusion" (33).

Dickinson, too, associates truth with eternity and error with temporality. In Poem 1056 she describes a seasonless "Zone" where "Consciousness--is Noon" because it has a "perpetual" sun. This is the zone where "there shall be no night" (Rev. 21.25; 22.5 KJV) and where in the pure and uninterrupted illumination of absolute Truth all mysteries are solved. As in Blake's vision of the Last Judgment, it is a spiritual zone made free from error. Dickinson echoed and extended this idea in many of her poems, particularly Poem 836: "Truth--is as old as God-- / His Twin identity / And will endure as long as He / A Co-Eternity--." In another poem, Dickinson says that "Truth,
outlasts the Sun—" (P 1455); it is "good Health--and Safety, and the Sky" (P 1453), for it is "stirless" and holds "every man / That trusts Her--boldly up--" (P 780).

Like Blake, Dickinson conceived of fallen consciousness as a perceptual labyrinth:

From Blank to Blank--
A Threadless Way
I pushed Mechanic feet--
To stop--or perish--or advance--
Alike indifferent--
If end I gained
It ends beyond
Indefinite disclosed--
I shut my eyes--and groped as well
'Twas lighter--to be Blind--
(P 761)

Dickinson's poetry often shows how "The Brain has Corridors" more terrifying than any "Material Place" (P 670). Like Blake, Dickinson believed that truth comes to mankind only from outside the labyrinth: "The Maker of the soul / Its Caverns and its Corridors / Illuminate--or seal--" (P 777). Judith Farr and many other critics have connected Dickinson's relentless pursuit of this Truth with her wearing of white, with her belief in the Biblical principle of spiritual growth through suffering, and with her "snow" metaphor:

Genuinely shy, militant about telling the truth, opposed to anything she thought vulgarly ostensible, Emily Dickinson wore white to affirm her true nature and her membership in a spiritual
company. That was the company of those who suffered for the sake of truth and thus overcame the world... There are those, like herself, in white or 'snow'--a word she uses of her own nature in poems and letters; and there are those dressed in spangled gowns. The latter, she says decisively, are of 'a lesser Rank / Of Victors" (40-41).

Farr's opinion on this subject by no means reflects a critical consensus. Two decades ago Roland Hagenbüchle expressed the alternate view still held by many Dickinson critics that "Truth in the strict sense of the term does not exist for this poet. . . . " ("Precision and Indeterminacy in the Poetry of Emily Dickinson" 50). But in "Emily Dickinson's Poetic Covenant" (1993), however, Hagenbüchle appears to be qualifying his earlier views:

Critics have repeatedly commented on the skeptical core of Dickinson's art. Although skepticism is viewed by her as an alternative, both metaphysically and epistemologically, it is not her last word. Her final attitude is one of faith, faith in the creative power of poetic language. Unlike Melville, who despaired of language as a Nietzschean mask of lies and self-deceptions, Dickinson kept her faith not least because her creativity remained virtually undiminished to the end of her life. . . . Is it not amazing that the same woman who deliberately withdrew from social life had the courage to pioneer into realms we all shy back from: our mortality and the divine gift in us! To have embodied in her verse America's Westering Spirit in a deeper sense than any other nineteenth-century poet is Dickinson's crowning achievement (36-37).
If Dickinson did not believe in the existence of "Truth in the strict sense," then she did not believe her own declarations about truth. What she rejected, though, was not the existence of truth but the uncritical attitude reflected in the conventional assumption that truth can be known as easily available and passively absorbed certainty:

He preached upon "Breadth" till it argued him narrow—
The Broad are too broad to define
And of "Truth" until it proclaimed him a Liar—
The Truth never flaunted a Sign—

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

(P 1207)

To disregard the distinction between Dickinson's Jobean vision of truth, and truth viewed merely as the passively absorbed certainties of church dogma and scientific demonstration, is to miss entirely the complexity and range of her thought:

All Circumstances are the Frame
In which His Face is set—
All Latitudes exist for His
Sufficient Continent—

The Light His Action, and the Dark
The Leisure of His Will—
In Him Existence serve or set
A Force illegible.

(P 820)
Truth according to this concept can be perceived only through spiritual vision and through faith. That is why Blake once wrote, "God forbid that Truth should be Confined to Mathematical Demonstration" (E 659), and Dickinson once wrote that "Faith is Doubt" (L 912). Both Blake and Dickinson looked upon Truth as God's "Twin identity" (P 836), and therefore they thought of Truth as nothing less than the source of meaning, or "light," in language and in life. This Truth, then, is the source of a wisdom granted only to those who are willing to live and to die for it, or as Dickinson once wrote, "All—is the price of All" (P 772):

What is the price of Experience [?] do men buy it for a song
Or wisdom for a dance in the street? No it is bought with the price
Of all that a man hath his house his wife his children
Wisdom is sold in the desolate market where none come to buy
And in the witherd field where the farmer plows for bread in vain
(E 325, FZ 35.11-15)

For Blake and Dickinson, imagination, vision, and truth are inseparable. Blake's Annotations to The Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds constitute an impassioned defense of Blake's view that truth comes to man through imagination from eternity. Among these annotations is the following Blakean assertion: "Inspiration & Vision was then & now is & I hope will always remain my Element my Eternal Dwelling place" (E
Dickinson said much the same thing in a letter to Joseph Lyman: "So I conclude that space & time are things of the body & have little or nothing to do with our selves. My country is Truth" (Lyman Letters 71). Also, in a somber, straightforward letter to her Norcross cousins dated about December of 1870, Dickinson wrote that "the quicker deceit dies, the better for the truth, who is indeed our dear friend" (L 357). That these comments by Dickinson express her religious and artistic creed is proven, in my opinion, by the whole of her life and career. To generalize that "truth in the strict sense does not exist for this poet" is to focus on the indeterminacy in her poetry while ignoring her many straightforward, often passionate, declarations about truth accessible through imagination and intuition. Many of Dickinson's poems directly celebrate imagination/vision/truth, as for example Poem 575 and Poem 774.

For Blake and Dickinson, "error" is defined as anything that falls short of absolute truth, including not only casual dishonesty and deliberate deception but all forms of perceptual confusion as well. Both poets treat as self-evident the fact that error suffuses human life. The definition of error as anything falling short of absolute truth is reflected in the following line from Blake's The Book of Los: "Truth has bounds. Error none" (E 92, 4.30). Blake repeatedly characterized error as indefinite, indeterminate, murky, hidden, and changeable, referring to
error in its most extreme form as "Mystery Babylon the Great: the Abomination of Desolation / Religion hid in War: a Dragon red, & hidden Harlot (E 231, J 75.19-20). Error is insidious because it masquerades as truth or it blends with truth. Both Blake and Dickinson believed that although humans can perceive truth, their capacity to separate appearance from reality is so limited that truth in human life is rare and precious, like gold. Thus, both poets make frequent use of the traditional figurative comparison between truth and precious metals. Truth is rare like gold; like gold, one must seek it to find it; when it is found, it must be separated through a refining process from the impurities blended with it; like gold, truth serves as a value standard for the currency of words in a language.

Included in the memoranda in Blake’s Notebook is the following entry: "23 May 1810 found the Word Golden" (E 695). Annotating Lavater’s Aphorisms on Man, Blake identifies the aphorisms he takes to be true with comments like "a golden sentence" (E 584), "All Gold (E 584, 590), and "Sterling" (E 587). Dominating Blake’s prophecies is the image of Los laboring at his furnaces, an image that combines the metaphors of truth as a precious metal, and suffering as "furnaces of affliction."

Dickinson, too, uses "gold" to represent the standard of truth by which value in human language may be measured. An intellectual aristocrat, Dickinson never knowingly kept
"plated wares" upon her "Silver shelf" (P 747). Dickinson combines the metaphors of truth as precious metal and suffering as the "furnaces of affliction" in much the same way that Blake does with his image of Los at his furnaces:

Dare you see a Soul at the White Heat?
Then crouch within the door--
Red--is the Fire's common tint--
But when the vivid Ore
Has vanquished Flame's conditions,
It quivers from the Forge
Without a color, but the light
Of unanointed Blaze.
Least Village has its Blacksmith
Whose Anvil's even ring
Stands symbol for the finer Forge
That soundless tugs--within--
Refining these impatient Ores
With Hammer, and with Blaze
Until the Designated Light
Repudiate the Forge--
(P 365)

Poem 806 combines comparisons between truth and gold and between the metal refining process and the process of spiritual growth through suffering:

A Plated Life--diversified
With Gold and Silver Pain
To prove the presence of the Ore
In Particles--'tis when

A Value struggle--it exist--
A Power--will proclaim
Although Annihilation pile
Whole Chaoses on Him--

In Letter 913 to Sue, Dickinson praised the candor in a note from Sue as follows: "No Words ripple like Sister's-- /
Their Silver genealogy is very sweet to trace— / Amalgams are abundant, but the lone student of the Mines adores Alloyless things—." This idea is repeated, with a slightly different emphasis, in Poem 1117:

A Mine there is no Man would own
But must it be conferred,
Demeaning by exclusive wealth
A Universe beside—

Potosi never to be spent
But hoarded in the mind
What Misers wring their hands tonight
For Indies in the Ground!

Poem 1477 is another poem that expresses pity for the "destitute" person "Whose Gold is firm / Who finds it every time / The small stale Sum—." Claiming great mental and spiritual wealth, Dickinson gives herself the title of "Prince of Mines" (P 466), a title very close to the title Blake gave himself: "I William Blake a Mental Prince" (E 580). Since Blake's and Dickinson's concept of truth is inseparable from their attitude toward language, I will return to this subject in my next chapter as I discuss their view of poetry as prophecy.

Contrasting truth with error, Blake characterized truth as precise, particular, clear, un Concealed, and permanent. He held passionately to the belief that truth differs so vastly in character from error as to be unmistakable: "no man can take darkness for light" (E 614), and "He who does
not Know Truth at Sight is unworthy of Her Notice" (E 659). Although fallen consiousness may be enlightened by truth, fallen consiousness by definition is incapable of containing the entirety of absolute truth. In the closing passages of Jerusalem, Blake describes the ultimate victory of truth over error as a form of discourse in which all humans relate to each other as "One Man," with all persons "reflecting each in each & clearly seen / And seeing" (E 258, J 98.39-40). This ultimate victory of truth over error is a victory in which truth has set man free from the perceptual labyrinth of subjectivity and relativity: "Jerusalem is named liberty among the sons of Albion" (E 171, 26, in capital letters).

Thus, Blake always insisted on "Minute Particulars" in life as in art (E 205, J 55.51,60; E 251, J 91.20-21). In all of his commentary on painting, he waged war on the "Blots & Blurs" of artists like Rubens, Rembrandt, Titian and Reynolds: "[A]s Poetry admits not a Letter that is Insignificant so Painting admits not a Grain of Sand or a Blade of Grass <Insignificant> much less an Insignificant Blur or Mark>" (E 560). According to Blake,

The great and golden rule of art, as well as of life, is this: That the more distinct, sharp, . . . and wirey the bounding line, the more perfect the work of art; and the less keen and sharp, the greater is the evidence of weak imitation, plagiarism, and bungling. . . . The want of this determinate and bounding form
evidences the want of idea in the artist's mind, and the pretence of the plagiarism in all its branches. What is it that distinguishes honesty from knavery, but the hard and wiry line of rectitude and certainty in the actions and intentions. Leave out this line and you leave out life itself; all is chaos again, and the line of the almighty must be drawn out upon it before man or beast can exist. (E 550)

Since Dickinson drew subjects for writing primarily from personal experience, excluding almost entirely any consideration of the broad range of cultural issues that engaged Blake's attention, her examination of error is limited to an exploration of the everyday personal experiences of loss, perceptual relativity, interpersonal deceptions, and religious doubt and confusion. Within this highly personal context, Dickinson contrasted "The Myrrhs, and Mochas, of the Mind" with "Candor" (P 1537). Dickinson's insistence on candor in interpersonal relationships is the same attitude reflected in Blake's indignation toward his colleagues' plagiarism and toward their misrepresentations of his personal friends or of cherished books and art. Dickinson's disdain for the sewing circle ladies' "Dimity Convictions" was matched by Blake's disdain for the Venetian and Flemish painters' "Blots & Blurs." So repulsed by all forms of dishonesty was Dickinson that she could value "a look of Agony" merely for its authenticity: "Men do not sham Convulsion, / Nor simulate, a Throe--" (P 241). In her obsession with the kind of verbal integrity that Blake, too,
insisted on, she relied on her lexicon in the way that another person might rely on a trusted friend, and her working drafts reveal the careful and thoughtful revisions of one who, like Blake, paid close attention to "minute particulars." Asserting that "sheen must have a Disk / To be a sun--" (P 1550), she drew connections between light, truth, definition, and circumference that consistently accord with Blake's pursuit of the defining bounding line. This "disk" or "pattern of the sun" in Poem 1550 may refer to Christ as Truth or Logos, but since the poem appears to be among those poems written following the death of Charles Wadsworth in 1882, the "disk" may also refer to Wadsworth as an example one who followed the "pattern" of Christ, for she always closely related Wadsworth to Christ as a "Man of Sorrows" (Sewall 2.460-61). This "disk" is possibly the "Image of Light" referred to in Poem 1556, which according to Johnson's date, was written about the same time as Poem 1550. Thus, the "Image of Light" in Poem 1556, like the "disk" of Poem 1550, may refer to any follower of Christ. I interpret "Cardinal" in Poem 1556 as a reference to the cardinal points of the compass designating the direction of sunrise ("Impart") and sunset ("Depart").

Blake-Dickinson associations between truth and eternity, and between error and temporality, are derived partly from the belief that, from a temporal vantage point, one may extrapolate the existence of truth from an awareness
of error, an awareness that develops along with the growing recognition that suffering is the inescapable, permanent, and universal experience of man. As Roland Hagenbüchle has pointed out, "Dickinson's poetic method is . . . a method of inference, of surmise, itself, of course, a profoundly Romantic element" ("Sign and Process" 146). Suffering results in a heightened awareness of limitation: "The Life we have is very great. / The Life that we shall see / Surpasses it, we know, because / It is Infinity" (P 1162):

Of Paradise' existence
All we know
Is the uncertain certainty--
But its vicinity infer,
By its Bisecting
Messenger--

(P 1411)

In Poem 673, Dickinson in the same way infers divine love from human 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--
. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
'Tis this--in Music--hints and sways--
And far abroad on Summer days--
Distils uncertain pain--
. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
'Tis this--invites--appalls--endows--
Flits--glimmers--proves--dissolves--
Returns--suggests--convicts--enchants--
Then--flings in Paradise--

(P 673)
Among the many other Dickinson poems that develop related inferences are Poem 1518 ("Not seeing, still we know—") and Poem 1052 ("I never saw a moor"). In There is No Natural Religion, Blake infers infinity from the fact that man imagines far more than he can know through the senses: since man "percieves [sic] more than sense . . . can discover," and since "[t]he desire of Man [is] Infinite," then "the possession is Infinite & himself Infinite" (E 2-3).

Inferring truth, infinity, and perfection from error, temporality, and perceptual limitation is, according to both poets, a function of the human imagination, the single mental faculty not bound by sense perception. Like Blake, Dickinson filled her poetry with references to this kind of inferential and intuitive knowledge. For example, in Poem 827, she announces that the "Only News" she receives is the "Bulletins all Day / From Immortality," conveying the idea that "News" is sudden insight which finite consciousness receives from outside its boundaries. In Poem 800 she speaks of "Eternity--obtained--in Time--," enabling "our ignoble Eyes" to conceive "The quality . . . / Of Paradise superlative--." In Poem 797 she describes intuitions drawn from the sound of the wind through a pine tree outside her window, intuitions that suggest to her a realm of the divine: "Apprehensions--are God's introductions-- / To be hallowed--accordingly--." In these and in many other poems, she assumes a temporal vantage point from which her finite
consciousness, trapped in time and space, becomes "furnished with the infinite."

Blake-Dickinson associations between truth and eternity, and between error and temporality, are derived also from the awareness that one may freely exchange the temporal vantage point for an imaginary vantage point outside of time and space, viewing human life as it is perceived beyond death in the eternal world of the spirit. In many of Dickinson's best known poems, the persona speaks from an imagined posthumous existence. Like Blake, Dickinson apparently felt that during her life, she had "died several times" (E 698) through suffering, and Poem 906 is but one among many Dickinson poems expressing the idea that "Dying . . . / Reorganizes Estimate." In Poem 627 Dickinson refers to both the temporal and the imagined eternal vantage points: the "Graspless manners" of intuitions "mock us-- / Until the Cheated Eye / Shuts arrogantly--in the Grave-- / Another way--to see--." Poem 242 also apparently refers metaphorically to the exchange of an earthly vantage point for the vantage point of eternity: "When we stand on the tops of Things-- / And like the Trees, look down-- / . . . The Perfect, nowhere be afraid--."

In the view of both poets, then, humans' incapacity on their own to identify or to agree on what is true proves only their "Finity" (P 802); it does not prove that no absolute Truth exists. Both poets, in seeking visionary
expansion and enlightenment throughout their lives, constantly reiterated the belief that "Not 'Revelation'--'tis--that waits, / But our unfurnished eyes--" (Dickinson, P 685).

Trapped in the perceptual labyrinth of finite consciousness, Job is initially limited to a level of vision by which he interprets experience entirely from the vantage point inside the labyrinth. He has no way of knowing, short of personal experience, that the belief system by which he interprets life is not the guarantee against suffering that he had assumed it was. When disaster comes, Job's belief system cannot account for his material, physical, and spiritual devastation, nor can it assist him in remedying his plight, for he realizes that, although he is willing to repent of possible hidden sins, doing so would be lying unless he understands the charges against him, and this understanding is denied to him. Not only are his friends incapable of grasping his predicament and sympathizing with him, but they add to his suffering by implying that he deserves it. Each character, including Job, lives out a separately perceived reality, completely unaware of the cosmic drama in which he plays a part. Physically ill, psychologically weakened, intellectually disoriented, and socially isolated by his suffering, Job cannot expect enlightenment from tradition, from his community, or from his family, and he cannot make sense out of his situation on
his own: "It was too late for Man-- / But early, yet, for
God-- / Creation--impotent to help / But prayer remained
. . ." (Poem 623).

Job knows that he can be helped by nothing less than
the personal encounter with God that he waits for and yearns
for. His is "The Loneliness" and "The Horror not to be
surveyed-- / But skirted in the Dark-- / With Consciousness
suspended-- / And Being under Lock--" (Dickinson, P 777).
Anyone familiar with the prevailing images in Blake's
prophecies will recognize how closely those images parallel
Dickinson's condensed description in Poem 777 of the
loneliness and horror of "Consciousness suspended-- / And
Being under Lock--."

Although Job never gets the explanation he sought,
God's personal response to him from the whirlwind so
radically alters his consciousness that his former questions
are rendered irrelevant. Job remains in the labyrinth, but
he finally recognizes the labyrinth for what it is, and as
he places his suffering in the context of a creation mystery
too vast for his comprehension, he learns to trust the God
of that creation. He had sought a rational explanation that
would restore his confidence in a facile and familiar
theology, an explanation that might have instructed him in
fail-proof ways to appease the angry, jealous God of that
theology. With these fail-proof ways to appease an angry
deity, Job could preserve the illusion that all of the
circumstances of his life were entirely under his own control.

The direct, personal revelation of the living Creator-God to Job not only provided the healing reassurance he sought, but it also revealed the distortions and limitations—the errors—of his former orthodoxy. The difference between his former understanding of God and his new understanding of God is the difference between passively absorbed indoctrination and actively pursued revelation, and it is this kind of radical adjustment in perceptual orientation that I believe Blake and Dickinson describe in their analyses of visionary expansion.

In a two-part letter to his most loyal patron, Thomas Butts, dated November 22, 1802, Blake speaks of having "Emerged into the light of Day" after traveling through a period of personal "Perils & Darkness" (E 720). According to this letter and a lengthy poem appended to the letter, these experiences marked a turning point in Blake's ability to see both "with" and "through" the eye, or to see with the "double vision" of an outward eye and an "inward Eye" (E 721, lines 27-30). As usual, with the "outward" eye he recognized the uninterpreted object world of nature; with the "inward Eye" he interpreted data from the external world. Blake concludes this poem by describing a sudden flash of insight in which he realized that this "double vision" incorporates a multileveled "fourfold vision":

"Blake concludes this poem by describing a sudden flash of insight in which he realized that this "double vision" incorporates a multileveled "fourfold vision":"
Now I a fourfold Vision see
And a fourfold vision is given to me
Tis fourfold in my supreme delight
And three fold in soft Beulahs night
And twofold Always. May God us keep
From Single Vision & Newtons sleep

The "Single Vision" referred to in these lines is outward
vision by itself, or perception that is restricted to purely
sensory perception and that is, as a result, a form of
cognition in which the intellect is completely passive.

Since single vision is devoid of influence by the
imagination, it amounts to death because it "leads you to
Believe" the lie that dead matter constitutes reality (E
520). Accordingly, in Blake's view, the scientific
viewpoint represents single vision carried to the extreme,
for scientific instruments amplify the processes of purely
sensory perception, and the scientific method glorifies
doubt as a necessary approach to knowledge. Associating
these elements in the scientific method with Bacon, Newton,
and Locke, Blake conceives of single vision as "Newton's
sleep" of death. Consciousness at this level of vision, in
which one seeks reality in dead matter, constitutes the
barren lower hell that Blake called Ulro, an elemental hell
of pure matter, nature, reason (calculation), and memory
(Frye, Fearful Symmetry 135). Ulro is the consciousness of
nature alone, with an emphasis on death.

Within Blake's scheme, twofold vision is a level of
fallen perception sufficiently influenced by imagination to
register the reality of Darwinian nature as the life-within-death of an upper hell that Blake called Generation (Frye, *Fearful Symmetry* 234-35, 254-55). Generation is the consciousness of nature alone, with an emphasis on life. Thus, Blake claims that his own vision is at least "twofold Always," for the recognition of life as the controlling principle in the material world is a recognition that Blake held as the minimal requirement for visionary expansion. As I understand Blake and Dickinson, Blake's "twofold vision" parallels Dickinson's "Compound Vision," a state of consciousness in which "The Finite" is open to becoming "furnished / With the Infinite--" (P 906).

In Blake's scheme, Threefold vision is fallen perception empowered by Imagination to recognize a transcendent reality beyond nature. Through the power of Imagination, one crosses from the life-within-death of Generation into regeneration, a realm of consciousness that Blake called Beulah,9 drawing on prototypes from the Bible, Spenser, and John Bunyan (Frye, *Fearful Symmetry* 228-34). Beulah represents "a stage intermediate between spiritual and physical existence" (Frye, *Fearful Symmetry* 232), a stage of consciousness in which contrariety is experienced, including sexuality, but in which the contraries are happily and fruitfully married. Beulah is "the highest state possible in the fallen world and at the same time a portion of Eternity" (Otto 65). It is the perceptual realm in which
love and artistic creativity flourish. Thus, according to Blake, Imagination makes possible the "double vision" in which one sees simultaneously with both the outward eye and the inward eye into the worlds of Generation and Beulah.

Beulah is superior to the world of Generation, but it is inferior to the highest level of consciousness, Eden, which according to Biblical tradition, is the realm of unfallen human perception. Thus, in Blake's scheme, Beulah and Eden constitute lower and upper levels of heaven. Fourfold vision is the perceptual capacity to transcend the limits of fallen consciousness. With fourfold vision, humans exist in Eden, "in perfect harmony in . . . the land of life, / Giving, receiving [sic], and forgiving each others trespasses" (E 180, Jerusalem 34 [38].21-22).

According to Blake's illustrations of the Book of Job, Job's revelation constitutes a leap from the single vision of Job's former unexamined orthodoxy to the fourfold vision of perfect harmony that Blake describes in the closing passages of Jerusalem. In the category of single-vision religions, Blake included not only the pagan religions of antiquity and the religion of Job's comforters, but also the false official Christianity in which Priest and King collude to subjugate their populations and to wage wars of territorial possession. For Blake, single-vision religions include any version of Christianity that obscures the New Testament Gospel of forgiveness:
Every Religion that Preaches Vengeance for Sin is the Religion of the Enemy & Avenger; and not the Forgiver of Sin, and their God is Satan, Named by the Divine Name. . . . But the Religion of Jesus, Forgiveness of Sin, can never be the cause of a War nor of a single Martyrdom. . . . The Glory of Christianity is, To Conquer by Forgiveness. (E 201, J 52)

Blake connected single-vision religion with the sky-god Urizen, whom he depicted emerging from darkness with flowing beard and a compass in the frontispiece to Europe. According to Blake's myth, Urizen in his fallen form is Satan, as Blake explains in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell:

And the original Archangel or possessor of the command of the heavenly host, is call'd the Devil or Satan and his children are call'd Sin & Death
But in the Book of Job Milton's Messiah is call'd Satan. (E 34, 5)

Thus, Urizen symbolizes that part of human consciousness that objectifies, calculates, regulates, and controls, and thus, he is associated with materiality, with logic, with legalism, and with tyranny. Always the enemy of energy and desire, he appears as a dominant character throughout Blake's prophecies, but his story is told most fully in The Four Zoas, where, according to S. Foster Damon, "the grand outline of Urizen's career parallels that of Milton's Satan" (422). When worshipped as the deity, Urizen represents a perception of God as a cosmic ruler concerned exclusively with the reward or damnation of humans according to their
obedience to moral law. This restricted perception of God, by failing to acknowledge New Testament teachings about God's saving grace, belongs to the range of thought that Blake called "Newton's sleep."

In connecting the moral law with Urizenic tyranny, Blake was repudiating theocratic appropriations of the moral law for the purpose of consolidating political power; he was not repudiating the moral law itself. Indeed, Blake's insistence on the defining boundary line in all matters of life and art implies a clear recognition of the necessity for definition in morality. Also, the concept of forgiveness, which Blake considered the "glory" of Christianity, presupposes a moral standard against which error may be recognized, forgiven, and cast out. Furthermore, in A Vision of the Last Judgment, Blake directly acknowledges the importance of the moral law as follows:

> Above Noah is the Church Universal represented by a Woman surrounded by Infants. There is such a State in Eternity it is composed of the Innocent <civilized> Heathen & the Uncivilized Savage who having not the Law do by Nature the things containd in the Law. (E 559)

Blake's explicit differentiations between various levels of fourfold vision are represented implicitly in the writings of Dickinson. Dickinson describes visionary expansion as a growth toward wisdom that occurs "By Processes of Size" (P 802) or by a "process in the Bur" (P
"Blossoms' gradual process--" in Poem 567 and "My process" in Poem 1103 also refer to this growth toward wisdom. Since the terms process and processes in these phrases belongs to the clearly religious context of Poem 802 ("Time feels so vast that were it not"), these terms apparently designate the full range of experiences by which "the finite" becomes "furnished with the infinite." In some of her poems she refers to these "processes" as growth (P 968, P 750, P 563); in other poems she describes adjustments occasioned by these processes (P 63, P 419, P 483, P 493, P 527, P 574, P 765, P 821, P 1022, P 1099, P 1142).

Functioning as catalysts for these "processes" are the "Bulletins all day from immortality," or the intuitions and artistic inspirations promoting her interconnected spiritual and artistic development. These are "The Soul's Superior instants / . . . Eternity's disclosure / . . . Of Immortality" (P 306). References to spiritual growth are found also throughout Dickinson's correspondence, as in her very Blakean lines in Letter 388: "The career of flowers differs from ours only in inaudibleness. I feel more reverence as I grow for these mute creatures whose suspense or transport may surpass my own."

Although Dickinson does not explicitly delineate the various levels of vision as Blake does, her poems about "broken mathematics" obviously describe Blake's "single" and "twofold" levels of vision. Both poets associated
purely mathematical calculations with the sterility of reason when it is divorced from imagination, and both poets contrasted this mathematics with a mathematics of eternity. As George Mills Harper explains, "Throughout Jerusalem Blake clearly differentiates between two conceptions or functions of mathematical science: one, the bad, is experimental and demonstrative; the other, the good, is the 'sweet science' of intellectual warfare . . . " (238). The scope of my discussion here does not permit a full explanation of Blake's extensive and complex use of mathematical concepts.12 For purposes of this discussion, I wish merely to emphasize what is already obvious and familiar in Blake studies, his detestation of "Rational Philosophy and Mathematic Demonstration" (E 207, J 58.13). In Blake's view, the rational, mathematical demonstrations of Newtonian physics are insidious because they displace truth by focusing attention exclusively on fact, creating the illusion of wisdom through faith in "Satan's Mathematic Holiness, Length, Bredth & Highth" (E 132, Mil 32.18). According to Blake, scientific knowledge of the material world can never substitute for the faith-based wisdom that man needs.

Dickinson said much the same thing: "Too much of Proof affronts Belief" (P 1228). "The Missionary to the Mole / Must prove there is a sky" (P 1228), but among humans, belief in God and immortality is not assisted by the kind of "proof" forced on congregations by "enabled" preachers like
the one in Poem 1207. Both Blake and Dickinson point out the subjectivity and relativity of all measurements, valuations, and demonstrations in the temporal world: "Reason or the ratio of all we have already known. is not the same that it shall be when we know more" (E 2, E 659). Thus, even the scientific "proofs" of single vision are subject to revision "when we know more."

In Poem 769 Dickinson clearly differentiates between the math of single vision and the math of compound vision. The math of single vision is "Well enough for Schools," but in compound vision, "One and One--are One--," for only three distinct possibilities exist: "Life--just--Or Death-- / Or the Everlasting." According to Poem 802, God's "diameters" cannot be measured with the broken mathematics of temporal life. Dickinson's poems show that the measurements and valuations of single vision/broken mathematics fail to provide the certainty and contentment that humans long for:

As by the dead we love to sit,
Become so wondrous dear--
As for the lost we grapple
Tho' all the rest are here--

In broken mathematics
We estimate our prize
Vast--in its fading ratio
To our penurious eyes!

(P 88)

As this poem explains, "broken mathematics" is a mathematics of loss, for in the economy of fallen perception, an object
gains its full value only after it is irretrievably lost. Dickinson's poems of loss imply that broken mathematics was imprinted in the human mind by the initial loss of paradise: Eden is "that Old-fashioned House" we live in without ever "suspecting" it is truly Eden "Until we drive away," but after leaving it, we "discover it no more" (P 1657). Since loss of an object causes one to perceive value in it that he could not perceive before its loss, then to some extent, every loss recapitulates the loss of Eden:

Perception of an Object costs
Precise the Object's loss--
Perception in itself a Gain
Replying to its Price--

The Object Absolute--is nought--
Perception sets it fair
And then upbraids a Perfectness
That situates so far--
(P 1071)

The whole arrangement seems absurd because it amounts to a forced exchange of paradise for wisdom at the very moment one finally perceives that it was paradise he had:

Denial--is the only fact
Perceived by the Denied--
Whose Will--a numb significance--
The Day the Heaven died--

And all the Earth strove common round--
Without Delight, or Beam--
What Comfort was it Wisdom--was--
The spoiler of Our Home?
(P 965)
"Broken mathematics," then, is the perceptual level in which God is perceived as the Urizenic "Burglar, Banker—Father!" of Poem 49, or as "The Mighty Merchant" of Poem 621, who "sneered" and rejected Dickinson's reasonable request for "Brazil." It is the perceptual level in which Job, too, accuses God of theft: "He snatches away; who can stop him? Who will say to him, 'What are you doing?'" (Job 9.12 NRSV). It is the perceptual level in which one calculates losses according to a "keen and quivering ratio" that exists between "each ecstatic instant" and its opposite "anguish" (P 125). This "ratio," the operative principle in broken mathematics, ensures misery by enhancing or cancelling value according to the scarcity of an object. As Blake wrote in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, one must "[b]ring out number weight & measure in a year of dearth" (E 36, 7.14). The economy in Blake's Ulro and Generation is controlled by the equations of Dickinson's broken mathematics:

Success is counted sweetest
By those who ne'r succeed.
To comprehend a nectar
Requires sorest need.

(P 67)

"Heaven"—is what I cannot reach!
The Apple on the Tree—
Provided it do hopeless—hang—
That—"Heaven" is—-to Me!

(P 239)
Delight is as the flight--
Or in the Ratio of it,
As the Schools would say--
The Rainbow's way--

(P 257)

Undue Significance a starving man attaches
To Food--
Far off--He sighs--and therefore--Hopeless--
And therefore--Good--

(P 439)

We see--Comparatively--
The Thing so towering high
We could not grasp its segment
Unaided--Yesterday--

This Morning's finer Verdict--
Makes scarcely worth the toil--
A furrow--Our Cordillera--
Our Apennine--a Knoll--

(P 534)

Best Gains--must have the Losses' Test--
To constitute them--Gains--

(P 684)

I had a daily Bliss
I half indifferent viewed
Till sudden I perceived it stir--
It grew as I pursued

Till when around a Height
It wasted from my sight
Increased beyond my utmost scope
I learned to estimate.

(P 1057)

We learn in the Retreating
How vast an one
Was recently among us--
A Perished Sun
Endear in the departure
How doubly more
Than all the Golden presence
It was--before--
(P 1083)

The lines quoted above are typical of numerous Dickinson poems setting forth the equations of broken mathematics. All of these poems point toward one conclusion: when Dickinson poses the question of whether the Bee would "hallow" the harebell "Did the Harebell loose her girdle / To the lover Bee" (P 213), the "ratio" governing desire and possession or fulfillment dictates that the answer be "no." This ratio is what keeps humans stranded between heaven and hell:

I should have been too glad, I see--
Too lifted--for the scant degree
Of Life's penurious Round--
My little Circuit would have shamed
This new Circumference--have blamed--
The homelier time behind.

I should have been too saved--I see--
Too rescued--Fear too dim to me
That I could spell the Prayer
I knew so perfect--yesterday--
That Scalding One--Sabachthani--
Recited fluent--here--

Earth would have been too much--I see--
And Heaven--not enough for me--
I should have had the Joy
Without the Fear--to justify--
The Palm--without the Calvary--
So Savior--Crucify--

Defeat--whets Victory--they say--
The Reefs--in old Gethsemane--
Endear the Coast--beyond!
'Tis Beggars—Banquets--can define--
'Tis Parching--vitalizes Wine--
"Faith" bleats--to understand!

(P 313)

The broken mathematics of unfulfilled desire is a theme that dominates not only Dickinson's poetry but her letters as well. As Dickinson points out in Letter 359, science does not explain why life is tied to this ratio between "Sweetness" and scarcity: "Why the Thief ingredient accompanies all Sweetness Darwin does not tell us. . . . That Possession fairest lies that is least possest."

Dickinson's use of mathematical terms is an extension of one of her homely, practical, partly humorous, sometimes sarcastic New England metaphors: fallen man as urchins in God's schoolroom of earthly life, where each "peevish Student" must learn to cipher according to the individualized assignments given by the great Urizenic Schoolmaster in the sky (P 545). This figure of a stern schoolmaster probably occurred quite naturally to Dickinson, but since she was well acquainted with the letters of Paul, she might have drawn the metaphor from the following passage in Galatians as a way to differentiate between single vision as it corresponds to law and compound vision as it corresponds to faith and revelation:

But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we
might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3.23-26 KJV)

Thus, in Poem 167 ("To learn the Transport by the Pain--"), Dickinson represents souls existing in heaven as the more accomplished scholars and souls existing on earth as "the duller scholars / Of the Mysterious Bard!"

According to the laws governing single vision and broken mathematics, a Puritan "fair schoolroom in the sky" would be a heaven where "Christ will explain each separate anguish" long after we "have ceased to wonder why" (P 193). Poem 545 is another of several Dickinson poems that push broken mathematics so far as to question whether the heaven to come can actually be experienced as heaven once it has been possessed. Poems 234 and 1408 are among the poems that treat this subject ironically, and Poems 237, 930, and 1012 pose further complex questions about perceptual relativity in time as it may influence perception in eternity. But through her dialectical strategy of representing both single and compound vision in her poems, Dickinson replies to single-vision questions by pointing out that, since "Heaven is . . . of the mind" (P 370), the fallen mind must undergo a radical perceptual renovation before it can experience heaven. This renovation is accomplished through visionary expansion into compound vision, a process by which "The
Absolute" eventually removes "The Relative away--" (P 765).

The sarcasm in Poem 193 about the "fair schoolroom of the sky--," and the lighthearted satire of Puritanism in Poem 545, in which the "urchins" represent the Puritan view of man as wretched, unclean, ignorant, and dependent potential criminals, indicate that Dickinson imaginatively distanced herself from "broken mathematics" enough to examine it in all of its unreliability; that is, she examined "broken mathematics" from a visionary viewpoint. But she was never a mystic and always habitually referred to herself as only a "scholar":

Low at my problem bending,
Another problem comes--
Larger than mine--Serener--
Involving statelier sums.

I check my busy pencil,
My figures file away.
Wherefore, my baffled fingers
Thy perplexity?
(P 69)

Dickinson's poetry reveals many other ways that the mathematics of fallen human perception is "broken." For example, humans often ask the wrong questions, seeking that which is ephemeral or irrelevant, like the "Arc of a Lover's conjecture" or the "Cube of the Rainbow" (P 1484). Another way this math is "broken" is that each "peevish Student" has to do his own homework: he must carry out his individualized assignment from the great Schoolmaster in the isolation of
his own limited consciousness, and this isolation not only alienates individuals from each other, but it also prevents a sharing of wisdom by which the painful processes of learning through experience might be eased or circumvented. Each one is required to expand the circumference within his own consciousness:

His mind of man, a secret makes
I meet him with a start
He carries a circumference
In which I have no part--

Or even if I deem I do
He otherwise may know
Impregnable to inquest
However neighborly--
(P 1663)

Within the isolation of individual consciousness, one values most that which best meets his fundamental human needs, regardless of external circumstances. To a prisoner, it is "A Geometric Joy" to hear the sound of a key opening a lock as the prison guard opens the door to bring what is "stated as . . . food" (P 652). Isolated within individual consciousness, humans are just such prisoners as this, measuring value by whatever brings comfort in the circumstances imposed on them by what appears to be random chance. Finally, a prison "gets to be a friend--" because "We learn to know the Planks-- / That answer to Our feet-- / So miserable a sound--at first" (P 652). Dickinson's images of isolation and imprisonment in Poem 1663, in Poem 652, and
in other poems vividly recall the images of isolation and entrapment that appear throughout Blake's illuminated books. Since Dickinson shows the broken mathematics of fallen consciousness to be a math of perceptual enclosure, subjectivity, and relativity, one misses her meaning entirely by supposing that she intends to convey any special knowledge or certainty as the result of her obsessive measurements and mathematical valuations. As if to make certain that readers avoid this mistake, she employs a variety of devices to prevent it, often resorting to the subjunctive mood, unconventional punctuation, fractured syntax, oxymorons, ambiguity, and riddle. In fact, Dickinson's poems themselves often dramatically replicate the "broken mathematics" of human perception, as E. Miller Budick explains:

The various kinds of fragmentation revealed in the poems—the disparities that constitute the divine creation, our discontinuous, broken perceptions of that universe, and the autonomous, divisive aspects of language—are not ... incidental cohabitators of the same poem. Nor do they represent three parallel, semidetached interests. Rather, they are fundamentally interconnected elements in a clearly developed, highly sophisticated description of cosmological, perceptual, and artistic interrelations. ... It is as if the human eye, capable of seeing only discrete, discontinuous frames of reality when it looks out at the world, can relay back to consciousness only still more isolated flashes and fragments of reality, which are then broken down even further into the tiny linguistic daguerreotypes of arrested poetic vision that we call poems. (19-20).
Like Blake, Dickinson devoted most of her poetry to examining the perceptual dilemmas of fallen consciousness. Like Blake, she understood the sterility of reason divorced from imagination, and like Blake, she affirmed man's potential for growth toward wisdom through the visionary expansion that imagination makes possible. Like Blake, she affirmed through her poetry a belief that the misery of broken mathematics is obviated by the kind of compound vision described in the climactic chapters of the Book of Job: "To have lived is a Bliss so powerful—we must die—to adjust it—but when you have strength to remember that Dying dispels nothing which was firm before, you have avenged sorrow" (L 523).
Notes

1 Blake's A Vision of the Last Judgment (E 554-66) provides a summary of Blake's New Testament-inspired thought-based ethics. Jerusalem is a far more comprehensive and complex expression of these ideas, all of which point toward the following Blakean injunction: "I care not whether a Man is Good or Evil; all that I care / Is whether he is a Wise Man or a Fool. Go! Put off Holiness / And put on Intellect. . . . " (E 252, J 91.54-55).

2 Emerson's Nature includes a partial parallel to Blake's labyrinth: "Idealism is a hypothesis to account for nature by other principles than those of carpentry and chemistry. Yet if it only deny the existence of matter, it does not satisfy the demands of the spirit. It leaves God out of me. It leaves me in the splendid labyrinth of my perceptions, to wander without end. Then the heart resists it, because it balks the affections in denying substantive being to men and women" (953). Emerson associates the labyrinth with excessive "idealism," but Blake associates the labyrinth with Wordsworthian (and Emersonian) nature philosophy and with Deism.

3 McGann may be correct in saying that "Blake's idea was . . . that poetry gives a body to falsehood, not a body to truth" (130), but the concept of falsehood is inseparable from an inferred or an actually realized truth.


5 Roland Hagenbüchle has provided a thorough and comprehensive analysis of Dickinson's attitude toward language in three articles, "Precision and Indeterminacy in the Poetry of Emily Dickinson," "Sign and Process: The Concept of Language in Emerson and Dickinson," and "Emily Dickinson's Poetic Covenant." I am indebted to all three of these articles.

6 Cris Miller's "Terms and Golden Words: Alternatives of Control in Dickinson's Poetry" provides a related view of Dickinson's concept of "Golden words."

7 Dickinson makes this differentiation in Poem 451 beginning "The Outer--from the Inner / Derives its
Magnitude—". This distinction appears also in Letter 192, in which she tells her correspondent that although "you seem to outward eye, to be travelling from us," it is the "prerogative of the left behind" to keep those who are absent always present in the heart.

Blake's Jerusalem tells "Of the Sleep of Ulro! and of the passage through / Eternal Death! and of the awakening to Eternal Life" (E 146).

Blake includes an extensive description of Beulah in Milton: Book the Second (E 129-44). For a brief overview of Blake's concept of Beulah, see Peter Otto's Constructive Vision and Visionary Deconstruction, 65-67.

See Blake's annotations to Watson's An Apology for the Bible (E 611-20).

As Stephen Cox writes, "[e]thical relativists may pursue their line of reasoning to the boundaries of paradox, and beyond, without ever being able to lose the sense of obligation that inheres in the basic concept of ethics. Even orthodox and dogmatic moralists, however, ordinarily recognize the fact that fundamental moral obligations need to be fulfilled in different ways by different individuals. Jesus preached generosity and simplicity as general principles, but he did not tell everyone he met, 'Sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor' (Luke 18.22)" (101).

For a detailed discussion of Blake's use of mathematical concepts, see George Mills Harper's "The Divine Tetrad in Blake's Jerusalem."

One can only guess how closely this Urizenic image of God parallels the character of Edward Dickinson, Dickinson's father, but existing portraits of him and Dickinson's own descriptions of him suggest that as a lawyer and a father he was sternly Puritanical—a New England version of Urizen. George Monteiro discusses echoes of the Book of Job in Dickinson's Poem 49 ("I never lost as much but twice"). According to Monteiro, "[h]er own situation is a latter-day approximation of Job's, she implies; her losses, suffered centuries later, echo his losses" (7).

Greg Johnson's instructive discussion of Dickinson's "broken mathematics" in Emily Dickinson: Perception and the Poet's Quest (1985) has greatly influenced and stimulated
all of my thinking on this subject. Building on criticism by Charles Anderson and Robert Weisbuch, Johnson concludes, correctly I think, that "perception is [Dickinson's] true 'flood subject'" (4). But it seems to me that the oxymoron in "broken mathematics" is meant to signal considerably less than what Johnson claims for it.
CHAPTER IV

THE SPIRIT OF PROPHECY IN WORKS

BY BLAKE AND DICKINSON

Romantic thought is tied to an assumption that the inescapable confusion arising from perceptual distortions and linguistic indeterminacy is ultimately a spiritual problem requiring a spiritual solution. As M. H. Abrams explains in Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature (1971), a study of the spiritual dimensions of Romanticism, the English Romantic poets and the Transcendentalists generally were engaged in a secular appropriation, reformulation, and transmission of waning religious traditions. But although Blake and Dickinson have now emerged as perhaps the two most prominent poets among this group of poets, one may reasonably argue that they were the least secular of them all, for neither of them ever abandoned the Bible as a frame of reference for all of their thought about religion, art, and language. The influence of the Bible on Blake and Dickinson was at least as great as its influence on Spenser, Milton, and the seventeenth-century metaphysical poets.

According to John Thomas Smith, whom G. E. Bentley,
Jr. describes as a "reliable" source of first-hand knowledge about Blake (Blake Records 455), "Through life, his Bible was every thing with him" (Blake Records 458). For Dickinson, too, the Bible was the single most important book in her life, with the plays of Shakespeare next in importance. Both Jack L. Capps and Richard B. Sewall, as well as numerous other critics, have shown that "biblical quotations in her letters and poems far exceed references to any other source or author" (Capps 30); "the frequency in her letters of phrases . . . from the Bible amount[s] almost to saturation" (Sewall 2.721-22).

The evidence of decisive Biblical influence in the works of both poets is so pervasive that the question of the Bible's importance to them is beyond dispute. Subject to critical interpretation, however, is the attitude Blake and Dickinson expressed toward the Bible, the nature and level of supernatural authority that they attached to the Bible, and the uses they made of specific Biblical allusions. Current critical opinion about these matters is mixed, with some critics believing that Blake and Dickinson attached no special authority to the Bible and many critics believing that they remained ambivalent about Biblical authority to the end of their lives. Much recent commentary has been devoted to arguments that Blake and Dickinson freely plundered the Bible for their own creative purposes. But although these critical views may accurately reflect the
attitude of either poet at a given time, they do not account for the easily recognizable Christian faith that is expressed in the later works of both poets.

Intellectually, both poets appear to have been constantly in motion, but much textual and biographical evidence supports the conclusion that both poets at some point in their careers embraced an overriding religious faith. Regarding the question of their attitude toward Biblical authority, my position is that the canons of both poets reflect changing attitudes toward Biblical authority, attitudes that move from rebellion through ambivalence toward increasing reliance on the authority of scripture. But for both poets, the question of Biblical authority was integral with the question of how to interpret the Bible. Dismissing interpretations of the Bible as projected by the record of institutional Christianity, attracted by the revolutionary romantic thought then sweeping the culture, but unwilling to abandon the Bible itself, Blake and Dickinson were forced to read the Bible anew. The tensions generated in this process of independently interpreting the Bible probably account for much of the innovative spirit and poetic power in Blake's and Dickinson's poetry.

Near the end of his life, Blake described the Bible as "the Great Code of Art" (E 274), characteristically condensing all of his thought into a single memorable phrase. Near the end of her life, Dickinson did much the
same thing in describing the Bible as a compass, or "Card," in Letter 912 to her sister-in-law, Sue:

Morning might come by Accident--Sister--
Night comes by Event--
To believe the final line of the Card would
foreclose Faith--
Faith is Doubt.

As David Sullivan has explained, Dickinson's use of the term card in line three above combines two of her favorite traditional metaphors: life as sea travel, and direction in life as a course guided by the mariner's compass:

A "card of the sea" is a circular piece of cardboard marked with the points of a mariner's compass and used in navigation. "The / final line of / the Card" refer[s] to the completion of marking the circumference of the circle. This means that all the points on the larger circumference of the horizon can be calculated from the smaller circumference of the card. This activity "foreclose[s] Faith" by closing the circle. If we believe in the scientific mapping of the world to determine our place in it, we eliminate the need for faith. ... The Bible is the "great card and compass" of Christian faith, and indeed, faith and doubt are the subject of the line that follows. (Sullivan 52-53)

Metaphorically, then, the "final line of the Card" is the final line of prophecy in Revelation (Sullivan 52), a line that combines recorded vision with an affirmation of faith in the content of that vision: "He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22.20 KJV). The circular symbolism of the
compass discussed above is apparently repeated in another important Dickinson image, the "pattern of the sun" (P 1550) as the example of Logos.¹

Although Blake and Dickinson rejected institutional Christianity, the importance that the Bible always retained for them sets them opposite Wordsworth and Emerson, two poets who reflected and who overtly promoted secularization by exalting nature as a non-verbal representation of transcendent reality. Along with Wordsworth and Emerson, other important figures in Romanticism and in the American Renaissance either ignored the Bible or freely adapted its message to an emerging radical humanism grounded in the temporal world, selectively appropriating and reinterpreting such traditional Christian symbolism as the sun symbolism for Logos.² Blake and Dickinson are foremost among the poets of their time who extensively re-examined and reinterpreted scripture for its spiritual import as they assimilated contemporary Romantic thought.

In this chapter I argue that although Blake and Dickinson were fully attuned to the full range of Romantic interest in human perception and language, and although they shared with the Romantic poets increasingly commonplace associations between imagination and visionary expansion, they departed significantly from most of the Romantic poets in retaining a Biblical concept of language. Neither Blake nor Dickinson entertained for long, if ever, the idea of
systematic symbolic correspondences between the natural and spiritual worlds, an idea underlying much Romantic speculation about language. The overriding concepts of "truth," "error," and "vision" in works by Blake and Dickinson are more likely to be tied to Biblical teachings about perception and language than to any other single source or influence. As I discuss in the following pages, Blake and Dickinson, in maintaining always their Biblical frame of reference, embraced what I prefer to describe as a "Logos-centered" concept of language (Jeffrey 39). Their "Logos-centered" concept of language is not to be confused with logocentrism as this term is now used in linguistic theory and literary criticism, for this term misleads by subtly (and sometimes not so subtly) attributing to the Bible simplistic claims of universally guaranteed referentiality and plenitude in the language of fallen man (Jeffrey 38). But the comprehensive view of human language that the Bible presents and the cultural force that the Bible itself has exerted for two millenia show that the Biblical concept of human language in no way corresponds to the naive views of language that poststructural theorists have been at pains to disprove. Exalting language as the essence of God is not automatically a denial of the obvious arbitrariness of signs in the language of fallen man.

The Book of Job is as much about the limitations of human perception and language as it is about human
suffering, since the writer of Job clearly connects suffering with perceptual limitation and linguistic indeterminacy. By framing the story in a reality beyond Job's capacity to perceive, the writer of Job focuses on Job's perceptual limitations from the outset. As Robert Frost once wrote, "it was of the essence of the trial / [Job] shouldn't understand it at the time. / It had to seem unmeaning to have meaning" (208-09). But Job is never the patient, passive sufferer he is sometimes seen to be. The writer of Job shows Job to be desperately seeking understanding; it is understanding rather than a restoration of material comfort that he is shown to be constantly longing for.

Without the understanding he seeks, Job engages in a long and acrimonious debate with his friends about causes and circumstances that none of them understands or controls. Although the comforters sincerely believe their perceptions to be theologically aligned with God's truth, their perceptions are gradually shown to be aligned with Satan's soon-to-be disproved charge that God's system of reward and punishment motivates Job: when Job prospers, Satan claims that God had bribed Job, and when Job suffers, the comforters merely invert Satan's claim by saying that God had punished Job for insufficient devotion. In the course of their debate, Job and his friends repeatedly accuse each other of uttering meaningless, "windy" words, and the men's
earnest but "windy" speeches are followed by the speech of God to Job from the whirlwind, a speech comprised of magnificently rhetorical questions rather than declarations that depend for their meaning upon undeviating referentiality. By the end of God's speech from the whirlwind, Job realizes that his own words had in fact been "wind": "Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know" (Job 42.3). Finally, Job uses the term "seen" to describe his revelation, contrasting his theophany with a theology formerly "heard" (Job 42.5).

Thus, even as he illustrates perceptual limitation and linguistic indeterminacy, the writer of Job uses language to affirm human dignity and to describe the inscrutable and awesome Creator. In spite of apparent editorial changes made in the original text, and in spite of subtleties lost in translation, the Book of Job has retained sufficient poetic power to endure for two millenia and to demonstrate even now that meaning in language is primarily a function of vision and faith. This view of language, a view that acknowledges indeterminacy even as it manifests faith in sufficiency, is the view that I believe Blake and Dickinson shared. It is a view derived from that "compound vision" in which the conditions of fallen existence are considered from a vantage point outside of time and space. This is the view that I describe as "Logos-centered" because of its faith-
based claim to a level of meaning and sufficiency that is independent of referentiality in the temporal world.

Neither Blake nor Dickinson suffered from any illusions about language. Given the obviously intentional ambiguity, discontinuity, and indeterminacy in their poetry, and given the critical attention paid to these features of their poetry during the past two or three decades, it seems unlikely that any serious student of Blake or Dickinson could suffer from any illusions about language. But criticism about both poets remains heavily devoted to arguments like a recent one asserting that Dickinson's choice not to give titles to her poems is evidence of her "modern linguistic skepticism . . . itself a form of a larger epistemological skepticism" (Mulvihill 74). The main problem with this conclusion is that not all untitled poems are skeptical: the Bible does not include titles for the Psalms and for other poetic passages embedded in it, and the individual sonnets within Renaissance sonnet cycles do not have titles. This inference of linguistic skepticism in Dickinson's poetry is problematic also because it contradicts the content of many of Dickinson's untitled poems, and it also contradicts Dickinson's well-documented reliance on her lexicon. Furthermore, it leaves unexplained the clearly therapeutic role of poetry in Dickinson's life. It also leaves unexplained her habit of personifying words,
a habit that calls to mind Blake's personifications of letters and words.⁴

According to at least one Dickinson critic, there is some evidence that this view of Dickinson as "the poet who deconstructed and eluded" may be giving way to a more balanced view that takes into account the evidence of Dickinson's religious faith (Gerlach 121). With the goal of balance in mind, scholars might wish to consider Eleanor Wilner's comments in "The Poetics of Emily Dickinson" (1971):

It is . . . usual for critics to call Emily Dickinson modern, to see her poetic innovations as precursors of a new world vision, as well as modern departures in poetic style. It would seem, however, that this conclusion is too neat, and that innovation may serve interests which are quite the converse of moving the consciousness in an evolutionary forward motion. Innovation is, of course, subversive of the vision of its day, but that subversion may be reactionary rather than radical. Cast in a conservative Christian-Platonic mold of mind, in an age in which the traditional vision was disintegrating, Emily Dickinson uses innovation to break the convention of her day, in order to force the mind, not forward, but back. Her attempt was imaginatively to repossess and reconstruct an old order, and if to do so, she was led to innovations which later were to serve the cause of modernism, this is historical irony, rather than intention. (145)

In critical approach and in focus of interest, three recent influential studies of Blake suggest that Blake criticism, like Dickinson criticism, may be moving beyond
fixation on indeterminacy. Vincent Arthur De Luca in *Words of Eternity: Blake and the Poetics of the Sublime* (1991) argues "that Blake indeed evolved a poetics based on the premises and strategies of the sublime, and that this poetics governed his aims and practices as a working poet" (4). I was pleasantly surprised to find in De Luca's book the recognizably eighteenth-century and devoutly spiritual Blake who has been missing in much recent Blake criticism: De Luca's Blake is the Blake whose *Jerusalem* includes rhetorical patterns comparable to Bach's *B Minor Mass*, Haydn's *Creation*, and Mozart's symphonies (61). De Luca's Blake is not interchangeable with Nietzsche, Marx, Freud, or Derrida. Peter Otto, in *Constructive Vision and Visionary Deconstruction* (1991), and Robert Essick, in *William Blake and the Language of Adam* (1989), also challenge the view that Blake anticipates the postmodern conception of language as a hopelessly relativistic and inherently meaningless component of enclosed consciousness.

Blake and Dickinson were doubtless much interested in the widespread speculations about perception and language that developed during their lifetime from archaeological discoveries and the Higher Criticism of the Bible. With the independence of mind that characterizes all of their thought, they may have welcomed these investigations into language and possibly drew encouragement from them as they experimented with their own new forms of poetry. But they
were clearly less interested in theories about language than in their own imaginative uses of language. I want to note, however, that Richard B. Sewall apparently sees Dickinson's reaction to the Higher Criticism as a negative one:

... she summed up in two sentences her attitude toward the controversy then raging about the Higher Criticism of the Bible: "Science will not trust us with another World. / Guess I and the Bible will move to some old fashioned spot where we'll feel at Home [L 395]." (2.619-20)

Blake reiterated throughout his prose writings that the Bible, being "filld with Imagination & Visions from End to End" (E 664), contains truth that can be discerned only through "Imagination" and "Vision"; that is, he believed that the truth of the Bible can be known only by spiritual discernment, and he gave special emphasis to this idea in his Job illustrations. The first illustration includes as part of its design a small altar inscribed with the words of Paul: "The Letter Killeth The Spirit giveth Life" (II Cor. 3.6) and "It is spiritually discerned" (I Cor. 2.14): "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God . . . because they are spiritually discerned"). In the margin below the seventeenth illustration, Blake inscribed the words, "I have heard thee with the hearing of the Ear but now my Eye seeth thee," drawing attention to Job's new capacity for spiritual discernment, or visionary understanding. According to Blake's interpretation, then,
Job progresses perceptually from the single vision of fixation on the external "letter of the law" to the fourfold vision in which the law is understood in its spiritual sense; that is, it is internalized.

The brief chapter of I Corinthians 2 contrasts natural understanding (Blake's single vision) with spiritual understanding (Blake's fourfold vision), and several verses from this chapter echo throughout the canons of both poets. As Jack Capps' list of Biblical allusions in Dickinson's writings shows, Dickinson was very familiar with both of Paul's letters to the Corinthians, and she frequently quoted I Corinthians 2.9 ("Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard"): 

"Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God." (I Cor. 2.9-10 KJV)

Dickinson returned to the idea in this passage again and again. For example, in PF 44 (Letters 918), Dickinson wrote, "Spirit cannot be moved by Flesh--It must be moved by spirit--." Also, in Poem 1241 Dickinson contrasts understanding based on the letter of the law with understanding based on spiritual discernment. Like Blake, Dickinson considered anyone to be spiritually blind who expects to know truth by single vision, which is limited to
the letter of the law and the proofs of scientific demonstration:

The Lilac is an ancient shrub
But ancients than that
The Firmamental Lilac
Upon the Hill tonight--
The Sun subsiding on his Course
Bequeaths this final Plant
To Contemplation--not to Touch--
The Flower of Occident.
Of one Corolla is the West--
The Calyx is the Earth--
The Capsules burnished Seeds the Stars
The Scientist of Faith
His research has but just begun--
Above his synthesis
The Flora unimpeachable
To Time's Analysis--
"Eye hath not seen" may possibly
Be current with the Blind
But let not Revelation
By theses be detained--

Blake and Dickinson believed that the kind of "Revelation" referred to in the poem quoted above is available to anyone with sufficient vision and faith to pursue it actively. Believing that eternity is coexistent with time, Blake and Dickinson affirmed through their poetry a conviction that with "compound vision," humans can glimpse the truth of eternity in time. Directly and indirectly, both poets constantly emphasized the necessity of an active, open, and inquiring mind, for they knew that compound vision is never imposed on a passive intellect. According to Dickinson, "Growth of Man--like Growth of Nature-- / Gravitates
within-- / . . . Effort--is the sole condition" (P 750), and Blake, too, continually challenged his readers "to Build up Jerusalem" through "Labour in Knowledge" (E 232, J 77). From their viewpoint, intellectual passivity of any kind implies a mindless reliance on illusive certainties, and this passivity guarantees perceptual and linguistic enclosure in selfhood--the hell of single vision.

An attitude of intellectual openness and expectancy in the search for truth requires faith that truth exists and is accessible. This attitude is the spirit of prophecy that characterizes all the poetry of Blake and Dickinson, including the poetry about suffering and limitation. In all of their poetry, "eternity" refers to the realm of absolute truth: to "Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand / And Eternity in an hour" (E 490) or to receive "Bulletins all Day / From Immortality" (P 827) is to grasp some of the truth of eternity. To equate God with absolute truth is to acknowledge both the limitations and the potentialities of finite consciousness. Humility arising from awareness of limitation is one condition for knowing truth; a sense of dignity arising from awareness of divinely-ordained human potential is an equally important condition for knowing truth. Neither poet had much to say about the orthodox concept of personal salvation as a single, transforming moment of truth, although there is textual and biographical evidence that both poets may have had such conversion
experiences. But in their poetry, both poets increasingly emphasized ongoing revelation, or the process of spiritual growth itself, as a process dependent on a continuing influx of the light of truth from eternity, an influx carried by language. Thus, Blake described in Milton a vision of "The Divine Revelation in the Litteral expression" (E 143, 42.24), and Dickinson wrote of "A Word made Flesh" that is partaken according to "our specific strength" (P 1651). The spirit of prophecy in poetry by Blake and Dickinson is the spirit of questing for truth—in spite of perceptual limitation and linguistic indeterminacy.

Blake and Dickinson saw the poet's role as that of prophet, one who imparts revelation and who thereby repeats in time a pattern belonging to eternity, a pattern established by the Lord/Truth/Logos, who "in the Zones of Paradise / . . . alone is burned--" and who throughout the universe "a Candle entertains / Entirely for Thee--" (P 871):

The Poets light but Lamps--
Themselves--go out--
The Wicks they stimulate--
If vital Light

Inhere as do the Suns--
Each Age a Lens
Disseminating their
Circumference--
(P 883)
Prophetic vision, then, enables poets to "light . . . lamps," that is, to impart to humans in time a portion of the truth that belongs to eternity. Anyone's ability to "light . . . lamps" is a gift from God:

Elijah's Wagon knew no thill
Was innocent of Wheel
Elijah's horses as unique
As was his vehicle--

Elijah's journey to portray
Expire with him the skill
Who justified Elijah
In feats inscrutable--

(P 1254)

"Who justified Elijah" is, according to Blake as well as Dickinson, "that God . . . / Who in mysterious Sinais awful cave / To Man the wond'rous art of writing gave" (E 145, J 3.2-4). Dickinson's Poem 569, written about two years before Poem 883 ("The Poets light but Lamps"), less clearly conveys the view of poet as prophet, and in fact, many critics see in this poem an outright rejection of religious values:

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

But, looking back--the First so seems
To Comprehend the Whole--
The Others look a needless Show---
So I write--Poets--All--
Their Summer--lasts a Solid Year--
They can afford a Sun
The East--would deem extravagant--
And if the Further Heaven--

Be Beautiful as they prepare
For Those who worship Them--
It is too difficult a Grace--
To justify the Dream--

Reading this poem with Dickinson's concept of compound vision in mind, one realizes that she is contrasting two visions of life and the two sets of values based on those visions. In the first stanza, the speaker views life with the single vision, or broken mathematics, by which one "reckons" and "counts" the assets of temporal life: poetry, the sun, summer, and the expectation of heaven in the afterlife. Beginning with stanza two, the speaker describes the universe of Poets, who in "looking back," see life from the vantage point of eternity. Poets inhabit a superior realm where "Summer--lasts a Solid Year--," a realm whose "Sun / The East--would deem extravagant--." Implying that poets already belong to this realm of transcendent truth, the speaker concludes the poem by scoffing at the conventional concept of heaven, seeing it as a sham that is "too difficult a Grace-- / To justify the Dream--." This poem restates an idea set forth in Poem 448, in which the Poet is said to represent "a Fortune-- / Exterior--to Time--." Thus, I see no contradiction between Poem 569 and Poem 883.
In discussing Blake's attitude toward language, Leopold Damrosch, Jr. has pointed out that Blake's works imply an "attack on a referential theory of language"; Blake "reinvigorates language by transposing it into his own special contexts and by literally inscribing it on his plates of metal" (362-63). Blake "knows all there is to know about flawed words and stubborn sounds," but he writes in the faith that his own symbolism is "ultimately guaranteed" by Imagination (364). Damrosch concludes that "to read Blake at all is to enter, however provisionally, in the quest" for truth, and "if in the end we cannot believe," then we are at least "forced to confront the meaning of our disbelief, to see plainly the empty universe which no religion of art can fill" (369-70).

The only difference I see between Blake and Dickinson in this regard is that Dickinson, unlike Blake, often joins the reader in confronting "the meaning of . . . disbelief," seeing "plainly the empty universe which no religion of art can fill." But like Blake, Dickinson was a sophisticated student of language, and like Blake, she responded to the limitations of perception and language not only with a brilliantly imaginative use of the everyday language at hand but also with an innovative supplemental symbol system of her own. Many of her individual poems belong to groups of poems related by dominant symbols, images, or themes. In this way, a single poem may be one riddle that is part of a
larger riddle comprised of a group of poems, and these groups of riddles constitute a canon that, taken as a whole, represents the "Riddle" of her life (P 50). To solve the riddle of a single poem, the reader must draw additional clues from the group of related poems to which the single riddle belongs. The only other reliable sources for clues are her correspondence and the Bible interpreted as she interpreted it.

Analyzing Dickinson's canon by working outward from a single riddle poem to solve more and more of the larger riddle seems to me a process that forces the reader to approximate Dickinson's own process of circumference. This process requires the kind of active intellectual engagement that Blake's poetry requires and that he intentionally demanded. Blake once summarily dismissed an accusation that his art was too difficult to comprehend: "That which can be made Explicit to the Idiot is not worth my care," but "I am happy to find a Great Majority of Fellow Mortals who can Elucidate My Visions & Particularly they have been Elucidated by Children. . . . There is a vast Majority on the side of Imagination or Spiritual Sensation" (E 702-03). Constantly challenging traditional assumptions, the poetry of Blake and Dickinson performs the function of prophecy not by dispensing truth to a passive audience but by helping readers to develop their own level of vision. On the first plate of Milton Blake inscribed the following words from
Numbers 11.29: "Would to God that all the Lords people were Prophets" (E 96).

Some of Dickinson's best known poems belong to a group of poems united by their symbolism of spiritual warfare, a dominant theme in the poetry of both Blake and Dickinson. Blake's prophecies dramatize mental warfare. He referred to his graver as a "Sword," his weapon in the crusade for a spiritual Jerusalem:

I will not cease from Mental Fight,
Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand:
Till we have built Jerusalem,
In Englands green & pleasant Land.

(E 95-96, M 1.13-16)

Near the end of her life, Dickinson looked upon her store of poetry fascicles as a record of her own spiritual "Wars:"

My Wars are laid away in Books--
I have one Battle more--
A Foe whom I have never seen
But oft has scanned me o'er--

(P 1549)

Dickinson's comparisons between words and weapons reveal how closely she connected her development as a poet with her spiritual growth. Early in her career, her "Power" is like a simple slingshot, and she fails in battle because she lacks David's faith:

I took my Power in my Hand--
And went against the World--
'Twas not so much as David--had--
But I--was twice as bold--
I aimed my Pebble--but Myself
Was all the one that fell--
Was it Goliah--was too large--
Or was myself--too samll?
(P 540)

In my reading of this poem, going "against the world" does not refer to interpersonal or social conflict. Since I include this poem among her visionary poems, I interpret going "against the world" to mean a renunciation of worldly priorities, the kind of renunciation that is "a piercing Virtue" (P 745). Sometimes the problem Dickinson describes is not that of insufficient strength in warfare but that of insufficient control. In reply to an early letter of criticism from Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Dickinson confessed that "I . . . cannot rule myself, and when I try to organize--my little Force explodes--and leaves me bare and charred--" (L 271).

Poem 147 is another poem that employs martial imagery in conveying a sense of spiritual strength or weakness. In this poem she describes one who went to his death "as soldiers, / His musket on his breast," and she prays for spiritual power like his:

```
. . . . . . . . . . . . .
Please God, might I behold him
In epauletted white--
I should not fear the foe then--
I should not fear the fight!
```
In another poem she develops an image of a military procession with "salutes" to the "Queen of Calvary," who remains preoccupied and unmoved by the splendid pageantry and the "unthinking Drums." Unable in her grief to respond to the springtime renewal of life, she is handicapped as a poet:

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 acknowledgment
Of their unthinking Drums--

(P 348)

I understand "childish Plumes" in this poem to mean the words of her poetry, with plumes functioning as a metonym for words based on associations between the quill pen and the written word. Other meanings of the figure Plumes are possible. Dickinson's lexicon included the definition of plume as "Token of honor; prize of contest" and "pride" (American Dictionary, 1828 ed.). Her use of this figure in Poem 348 quoted above shows how deftly she forces multiple meanings into apparently simple poetic expressions.

Dickinson uses the participle plumed in another poem containing martial imagery (P 126), and in my reading of this poem, plumed again refers to the quill pen that writes
poetry. Thus, in Poem 126 below, a "plumed procession" is poetry, just as "the plumed feet" of Poem 512 is poetry.

To fight aloud, is very brave—
But gallanter, I know
Who charge within the bosom
The Cavalry of Woe—

Who win, and nations do not see—
Who fall—and none observe—
Whose dying eyes, no Country
Regards with patriot love—

We trust, in plumed procession
For such, the Angels go—
Rank after Rank, with even feet—
And Uniforms of Snow.
(P 126)

This poem is based on a comparison between external warfare and spiritual warfare, and it specifically compares the kind of valor in battles fought "aloud" because of "patriot love" with the kind of valor in battles fought "within the bosom."
The hero in this poem is not a passive sufferer who merely endures the pain of injury. Suffering both emotionally and spiritually, this fighter attempts to "charge" a "Cavalry of Woe." The "Uniforms of Snow" in her poetry represent the integrity of language that poetry requires, and thus Dickinson, like Blake, conceived of language as a force at work for truth or error. Written about 1859 according to Thomas Johnson, this poem was not at that time an expression of fully formulated religious belief, but I think the poem clearly reveals the direction her thought was taking.
Another poem belonging to the group of poems about spiritual warfare is the enigmatic poem beginning "My Life Had Stood a Loaded Gun" (P 754). Of all Dickinson's poems, this poem has attracted the widest critical response and it has generated the greatest diversity in interpretations. My discussion of it here owes much to David Porter's commentary about it (209-218), but I strongly disagree with his conclusion that this poem betrays an anxiety over "purposelessness" in art and language (216) and that, in being "[l]imited to a vision of restlessness and pieces, . . . the Dickinson idiom is a cloistered language for postmodern poets" (292). According to Porter, the persona speaking in the poem is language. I would make a minor qualification to this by adding that perhaps the persona is a single word representing all of language. The persona, then, is a personification that conflates person/word/language/gun, making this a poem of almost paralyzing complexity:

My life had stood—a Loaded Gun—
In Corners—till a Day
The Owner passed—identified—
And carried Me away—

And now We roam in Sovereign Woods—
And now We hunt the Doe—
And every time I speak for Him—
The Mountains straight reply—

And do I smile, such cordial light
Upon the Valley glow—
It is as a Vesuvian face
Had let its pleasure through—
And when at Night—Our good Day done--
I guard My Master's Head--
'Tis better than the Eider-Duck's
Deep Pillow--to have shared--

To foe of His--I'm deadly foe--
None stir the second time--
On whom I lay a Yellow Eye--
Or an emphatic Thumb--

Though I than He--may longer live
He longer must--than I--
For I have but the power to kill,
Without--the power to die--

The owner of this persona/word/gun is a poet who by
using the word/gun either defends himself against error
("foe of His") or gets spiritual sustenance ("the Doe").
The "Sovereign Woods" is the poet's consciousness. The
power in the word/gun is imaged here by a kind of volcanic
force like that referred to in other Dickinson poems. The
joyful reply of the mountains recalls several passages from
the Hebrew scriptures (Psalm 65.12 and Psalm 98.8, for
example) as well as Dickinson's Poem 722, and the "Valley"
may refer to the valley of the shadow of death in Psalm 23.
The stanza about guarding the Master's head echoes other
Dickinson poems in which a "trusty word" either guards the
poet's head (P 1347) or brings her solace. The last stanza
plays on different meanings of the word live. Since the
owner/poet possesses an eternal soul, he "must" live longer
than the lifetime to which the word/gun belongs.

A word/gun used by anyone during this lifetime has the
"power to kill," as many of Dickinson's poems show, but it
"Has not the power to die" (P 1651) because it is only a device for carrying out the will of the person who uses it. Sometimes Dickinson imagines words that injure and kill as arrows (P 1729), blades (P 479), or other agencies of death (P 1375). But according to both Blake and Dickinson, whether a given word sustains or destroys life depends not on the word itself but on the user's level of vision.
Notes

1 Writing from a feminist perspective, Rebecca Patterson examines Dickinson's compass metaphor in detail in "The Cardinal Points" (Emily Dickinson's Imagery, 180-204). See also Patterson's discussion of Dickinson's "disc" imagery and her use of scientific terminology (97-113). Like many recent critics, however, Patterson generally excludes religious meanings from her interpretations.


4 For a recent discussion relating Blake's personifications of letters and words to the interest in hieroglyphics during his lifetime, see Vincent De Luca's "Blake's Human Text" in Words of Eternity: Blake and the Poetics of the Sublime (215-22).

5 In "The Idea of an Indeterminate Text: Blake's Bible of Hell and Dr. Alexander Geddes," Jerome J. McGann argues that Dr. Alexander Geddes, a man who "moved in the same circles with Blake in the early 1790s," was "the chief conduit in England for the ideas which were being pursued and elaborated by the new German scholars of the Bible" (309). In this article, McGann attributes Blake's interest in mythology to his reading of Geddes' biblical studies. Philip Gura's The Wisdom of Words: Language, Theology, and Literature in the New England Renaissance (1981) provides a brief but instructive overview of the new language theories that developed in America from the higher criticism. These theories were a topic of public interest in nineteenth-century America, and Dickinson probably stayed informed about them through her reading in newspapers and periodicals and through her associations with Samuel Bowles, the Hollands, and others. See also Roland Hagenbuchle's

Critics of Blake and Dickinson who have discussed this subject include Margaret Bottrall (*The Divine Image: A Study of Blake's Interpretation of Christianity*, 47-79), and Diane Gabrielsen Scholl (*Emily Dickinson's Conversion Narratives: A Study of the Fascicles*).
CONCLUSION

For over a century, Dickinson scholars have recognized a close intellectual and artistic kinship between Blake and Dickinson. My study of this kinship has been primarily a work of synthesizing and building on the wealth of available criticism about each poet, and thus I am greatly indebted to a host of previous Blake and Dickinson scholars whose work has facilitated my recognition of the parallels I have discussed in this study. In my study I have sketched and compared the broad outlines of Blake's and Dickinson's thought, pointing out evidence of decisive Biblical influence on it. In so doing I have argued that Blake and Dickinson share not only an intellectual and an artistic kinship but a spiritual kinship as well. I have represented their thought not as a fixed system but as a faith-based pattern of Christian/Platonic questing for truth, and I have tried to show that the double perspective of their compound vision is an essential factor be taken into account in all interpretations of their poems and in all considerations of their attitude toward language. Furthermore, I have shown how it is this double perspective of compound vision that gives to their poetry its prophetic character. From this study I draw the conclusion that the kinship between Blake
and Dickinson so often noted in criticism extends beyond superficialities and includes all essentials of their thought.

Kinship between two major writers like Blake and Dickinson constitutes a subject so broad that my study here necessarily leaves additional work to be done. Among the related topics that I think merit further investigation are the following: evidence of Blake's possible influence on Emerson and the resulting influence on Dickinson through Emerson, a comparative analysis of works by Blake and Dickinson according to what Joseph Anthony Wittreich, Jr. has called the strategies and structures of vision (26-47), the parallel influence of Isaac Watts' hymns on the form and content of poetry by both Blake and Dickinson, and the parallel attitudes of Blake and Dickinson toward scientific learning.

I can hardly claim objectivity in my study of these two poets, for I first happily discovered Blake's poetry as a child, and when as an adult I discovered Dickinson's poems, I reacted to them with the same joy of discovery I recalled from first reading Blake. I think that most readers respond to Blake and Dickinson with much the same level of admiration that I have, as the rich, diverse, and overflowing critical record during this century attests. Thus, I have balked at exchanging the two exuberant, expansive, life-affirming poets I initially met for the two angst-ridden,
self-absorbed, earth-bound, postmodern versions of them I have so often encountered in recent criticism. Recognizing my bias, I nevertheless endeavored in carrying out this study to test both versions of Blake and Dickinson against the primary texts. Like most critics, I found Blake and Dickinson to be exacting, probing, shrewd, and analytical in their examination of life, but nothing I have found persuades me that they were rationalist postmodern skeptics.

Unaware of the Bible's decisive influence on these two poets' lives and thought, or deliberately denying its influence on them, many recent critics have ignored this key to interpreting works by Blake and Dickinson, and having dispensed with this key, they have then interpreted the poetry as a Nietzschean appraisal of life and language as essentially meaningless. It seems to me that this kind of revisionism approaches nineteenth-century bowdlerizing, for it amounts to a laundering of elements that tax intellect and imagination. As I conclude this study of Blake-Dickinson parallels, I feel more strongly than ever that current criticism of Blake and Dickinson needs a correction of this swerve into revisionism.

As a result of this study I have come to believe that the Bible's influence on Blake and Dickinson extends beyond the content of their thought to the rhetorical forms of their work as well. Blake-Dickinson explorations of perception and language probably have more in common with
ancient traditions of prophecy than with postmodern linguistic skepticism and experimentation. During the last half century, eminent Blake scholars have shown how Blake adopted the prophetic and apocalyptic forms used in the Bible, including thematic rather than chronological order, multiple perspectives, mixed genres, and abrupt transitions between these combined elements. In *Emily Dickinson: A Poet's Grammar* (1987), Christianne Miller explores Dickinson's adoption of rhetorical forms from the Bible (131-38). Miller notes that "Biblical style, in its King James version and as modified by seventeenth-century writers and Americans generally, provided a model for the extreme compression, parataxis, and disjunction of Dickinson's style," but Miller regards Dickinson as a precursor of postmodernism, who adopted Biblical forms in order to show "that language is essentially fictitious or arbitrary" (131).

In *The Vision of Tragedy* Richard B. Sewall differentiates between two approaches to life: the systematic approach that gives rise to the comedic vision of life, and the direct confrontation of disorder and boundaries that gives rise to the tragic vision of life (1-8). Sewall points out that it is the active confrontation of limits, not the passive acceptance of them, that provides the material of tragedy: "man at the limits of his sovereignty--Job on the ash-heap, Prometheus on the crag,
Oedipus in his moment of self-discovery, Lear on the heath, Ahab on his lonely quarter-deck" (5). In its full recognition of man's co-existing potential and limitation, the tragic view is the view that leads an author to ask "the existential question--Job's question, 'What is man?' or Lear's 'Is man no more than this?"' (5). In the tragic vision, the author is personally involved in this question: writing becomes the author's way of actively confronting the limits of life (5) just as Blake and Dickinson did in their poetry. Literary tragedy generally appears during periods of cultural crisis, transition, or decline when, after a period of relative social stability, "the questions of ultimate justice and human destiny seem suddenly to have been jarred loose again" (7). Although the Book of Job came out of such a period in the history of the ancient Hebrews, its dialectic method was not new to them; the dialectic method characterizes all Hebrew scripture. By this method

[The Hebrews surrounded even their most sacred religious figures and truths with an aura of ambiguity and qualification. Ideas, or truth, were not regarded apart, as abstractions or final causes. They were ideas-in-action, lived out and tested by men of flesh and blood. Thus like men they were in a constant process of becoming. Even Jehovah, as we see him in the Old Testament, evolved. (14)

These Old Testament methods of active questioning and concrete representations were balanced in the New Testament
by an emphasis on faith, on acceptance of suffering as a discipline, and on spiritual discernment of scripture (50-51). Independently reading the Bible anew, Blake and Dickinson affirmed both the Old Testament dialectic and the New Testament emphasis on faith.

Blake and Dickinson had the strength of character and the mental acuity to be what Blake believed every person should be: priest and king in his own house. Like Job, Blake and Dickinson were not "Intermeasurable with or by any Thing Else" (E 783). Fiercely independent, articulate, and outspoken, they often disturbed the sensibilities of timid acquaintances living on the borders of their lives, but they earned from those who knew them best the highest respect and love, if not a full recognition of their gifts. I see no reason why either of them might feel compelled to continue studying and quoting from the Bible except that each one found in it a source of artistic stimulation and spiritual strength. That they would view the Bible as a "code" or a "card" and then habitually ignore its message or intentionally pervert its meaning seems inconceivable to me. Through deconstruction of their poems, one may demonstrate the complexity and range of the questions they asked, but only with the imagination may one glimpse the clarity and promise of the answers they found.
Notes

WORKS CITED


