This dissertation has been microfilmed exactly as received 67-2474

LAIR, Robert Leland, 1932-
EMILY DICKINSON'S FRACTURE OF GRAMMAR.

The Ohio State University, Ph.D., 1966
Language and Literature, modern

University Microfilms, Inc., Ann Arbor, Michigan
© Copyright

Robert Leland Lair

1967
EMILY DICKINSON'S
FRACTURE OF GRAMMAR

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By
Robert Leland Lair, B. A., A. M.

* * * * * * *

The Ohio State University
1966

Approved by

[Signatures]

Julian Markels

Francis Lee Alley

Advisers
Department of English
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Several persons have contributed to the composition of this dissertation, and it gives them small thanks to express here my appreciation.

Professors Francis Lee Utley and Julian Markels, my Saints Peter and Paul, have encouraged this study from the start, providing the assurances of their own faith in the project when lesser saints had doubted. I have leaned upon their keen minds and their good sense at numerous points in the dissertation.

My wife, Zovinar, and my children, Marian and Michael, have borne it all with patience and the gift of confidence. Their love can be reckoned by itself alone. To him who never felt it, there is no relating it.

Dickinson Bianchi. Copyright 1929, (c) 1957 by Mary L. Hampson. A final debt of gratitude is due Houghton Mifflin Company for permission to include the texts of lyrics for which they hold the copyright.

Robert Leland Lair
VITA


1954. . . . . B. A. (Religion), Bob Jones University, Greenville, South Carolina

1954-1956 . . Graduate Assistant, Department of English, Bob Jones University, Greenville, South Carolina

1956. . . . . A. M. (Religion), Bob Jones University, Greenville, South Carolina

1961. . . . . A. M. (English), Middlebury College, Middlebury, Vermont

1962-1963 . . Graduate Assistant, Department of English, Miami University, Oxford, Ohio

1963-1965 . . Teaching Assistant, Department of English, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio

PUBLICATIONS

"Hemingway and Cezanne: an Indebtedness." Modern Fiction Studies. VI (Summer 1960), 165-168.

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: American Poetry

Studies in American Criticism. Professor Claude Simpson.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: THE CRITICS AND THE MOTIVE .............. 1

PART I

I. THE ADJECTIVE AS ADVERB .................................. 20
II. THE ADJECTIVE AND THE NOUN ............................ 42
III. THE VERB .................................................... 60
IV. PARTICIPLES AND GERUNDS ................................... 79
V. THE NOUN AND THE VERB .................................... 87
VI. THE ADVERB AS NOUN ....................................... 93
VII. OTHER VARIANTS ........................................... 100

PART II

VIII. ELLIPSIS ................................................... 108
IX. INVERSION .................................................... 130
X. AMBIGUITIES OF MODIFICATION ................................ 143
XI. DOUBLE FUNCTION ........................................... 154

CONCLUSION: BUT TELL IT SLANT ............................ 165

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY ...................................... 175
INTRODUCTION

THE CRITICS AND THE MOTIVE

Speaking of the few lyrics which Emily Dickinson had sent him for examination and criticism, Thomas Wentworth Higginson wrote in his Atlantic Monthly essay: "She almost always grasped whatever she sought, but with some fracture of grammar and dictionary on the way. Often, too, she was obscure, and sometimes inscrutable; and though obscurity is sometimes, in Coleridge's phrase, a compliment to the reader, yet it is never safe to press this compliment too hard." Higginson was on Miss Dickinson's side. What might a critic less sympathetic with her poetry as a whole and her syntactic oddity in particular say of her? Thomas Bailey Aldrich, writing in the same periodical within a year of Colonel Higginson's pronouncement, states his opinion of the "poetical chaos" of her grammar somewhat more sharply:

The English critic who said of Miss Emily Dickinson that she might have become a fifth-rate poet "if she had only mastered the rudiments of grammar and gone into metrical training for about fifteen years," the rather candid English critic who said this somewhat overstated his case. He had, however, a fairly good case. If Miss Dickinson had undergone the austere curriculum indicated she would, I am sure, have become an admirable lyric poet of the second magnitude. . . .

1"Emily Dickinson's Letters," LXVIII (October, 1891), 444-456.
If Miss Dickinson's disjecta membra are poems, then Shakespeare's prolonged imposition should be exposed without further loss of time, and Lord Tennyson ought to be advised of the error of his ways before it is too late. But I do not hold the situation to be so desperate. 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.

He spoke with a clarity and assurance which must have seemed authoritative in his own century: "an eccentric, dreamy, half-educated recluse in an out-of-the-way New England village (or anywhere else) cannot with impunity set at defiance the laws of gravitation and grammar." 2

As a matter of fact, most of the dozen and a half reviews of the 1890 Poems, appearing shortly after its publication, contained vague attributions of praise along with references to the formless and fragmentary quality of the lyrics. For example, the London critic of The Saturday Review expressed his mixed feelings thus:

Some of the poems . . . seem destitute of any metre whatsoever, the lines do not scan; the rhymes are arbitrarily thrown in or left out, in accordance with no fixed system, and grammar, and even good taste are sometimes only conspicuous by their absence. But in some of her roughest poems there is still an idea which forces the reader to attend to its meaning, and impresses him, in spite of the irritation he may feel at the form.

An anonymous spokesman for Catholic World suggested that the lyrics were

like strange orchids among a mass of gay, sweet-smelling, highly cultivated, but not rare or unfamiliar flowers.

2 "In re Emily Dickinson," LXIX (January, 1892), 143-145.

3 "A Poet and Some Others," LXXII (September 5, 1891), 279.
Considered merely as rhymed and metrical compositions they are overfull of apparently wilful sins against rule and convention. . . . These deviations from common standards justify themselves by appeal to a law not made for chrysanthemums and roses; not binding in the school-room nor in the editorial rooms of popular magazines.

Thus, typically, such a critic, confronted by something obviously strange, yet compelling, retreated to the less precise utterance of metaphor.

Even those critics who believed most fully in the powerful utterance of Miss Dickinson's "versicles," I mean those courageous persons who had edited them for publication, had serious doubts about the acceptability of certain enigmatic or downright erroneous usages in the lyrics. Mabel Loomis Todd and Thomas Wentworth Higginson prepared the first collection of her poems for Roberts Brothers in Boston in 1890. They were careful to "correct" instances of "substandard" grammar. Professor Thomas H. Johnson, in his definitive three-volume edition of The Poems of Emily Dickinson has meticulously recorded for each poem the authorial text with all marginal variants, reconstructed from the scraps of envelopes and bits of paper which Emily's sister Lavinia found when she opened the now famous dresser drawer. In addition to these authorial variants, however, he also listed all editorial variants; some are obviously the products of a failure to understand the usefulness of sprung rhyme. For example, in the last stanza of lyric #511, the second line was altered by the editors

---

4"Talk about New Books," LII (January 6, 1891), 600-604.
to regularize its rhyme; Emily had written:

But, now, uncertain of the length
Of this, that is between,
It goads me, like the Goblin Bee--
That will not state--it's sting.  

In Poems, the second line of the stanza was rewritten altogether:
"Of time's uncertain wing." Most readers, I think, will prefer
Miss Dickinson's original rendering as avoiding the triteness of
the editorial revision as well as setting up a certain tension in
the dissonant rhyme which aids the meaning of the lines.

Other emendations were made in favor of clarity of punctua-
tion and standardization of spelling. But by and large the major-
ity of the corrections were made to "improve" Emily's substandard
grammar. For instance, in lyric #619, three verbs in the last two
stanzas were altered for convention's sake:

How they will tell the Story--
When Winter shake the Door--
Till the Children urge--
But the Forty--
Did they--come back no more?

Then a softness---suffuse the Story---
And a silence---the Teller's eye---
And the Children---no further question---
And only the Sea---reply---

The problem must have seemed of a very simple solution to Mrs.
Todd and Mr. Higginson: unhappily, Emily had not had enough
"-nool" to realize that singular verbs demand singular subjects
or that certain verb forms require auxiliaries. The solution?
Change shake to shakes, suffuse to suffuses, sea to waves, and all

5All quotations of Emily Dickinson's poems are from The Poems
is regular enough for the most finical syntactic taste. And so they did. But suppose the whole passage is meant to suggest a future hypothetical instance? Suppose the will of the first quoted line is meant to suggest itself at the three crucial points? Suppose we read the lines:

How they will tell the Story—
When Winter (will) shake the Door. . . .

Then a softness (will) suffuse the Story . . .
And only the Sea—(will) reply—

I am not, of course, suggesting here that my proposed reading of the passage is in any way superior to that of Miss Dickinson's first and venerable critics and editors. But I do prefer the original version, for it gives us a choice in reading the last two stanzas. The version which appeared in Poems robbed us of that choice. The very ambiguity of the original undergirds the speculative nature of the assertion. The poetess may only guess what the telling of such a tale will be like through the frozen months of winter, and she can only surmise too what will be the reaction of the listeners to it. But we have the advantage here; we have only recently emerged from an age of enormous experiment in poetic effect, and our minds respond more readily to the divergent than did the minds of the nineteenth-century critics. The majority of the emendations weaken the poems decidedly while leaving them more nearly in conformity with the current conventions.

It is now difficult to define what Miss Dickinson's own attitude toward these problems of syntactic oddity may have been. She had so slightly developed a theory of poetry, having sung
apparently, as she herself urged, "as a boy does by the burying ground, because I am afraid." Her *ars poetica* she had stated succinctly and enigmatically to Colonel Higginson: "If I read a book and it makes my whole body so cold no fire can ever warm me, I know that is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry. These are the only ways I know it. Is there any other way?" And when she wrote of her literary craft within the poems themselves, she was equally cryptic:

Tell Him—I only said the Syntax—
And left the Verb and the pronoun out—
(#494)

Higginson wrote as follows in his *Atlantic* reminiscence of her "Your Riches Taught Me Poverty": "Here was already manifest that defiance of form, never through carelessness, and never precisely from whim, which so marked her." It is interesting too that Emily Dickinson seemed to have sensed formal weaknesses in other poets and to have thought their want of clarity irritating. Writing of the Scottish poems of Alexander Smith (1830-67), she had said: "They are not very coherent, but there's a good deal of exquisite frenzy, and some wonderful figures, as ever I met in my life." It is strange that she could define so clearly in other

---


8 Ibid., 446.

9 *The Letters*, I, 256.
poets the very faults which critics charged her with. This may be a clue which can be turned into the argument that she was a conscious artist who did indeed understand the problems of form and syntax, but who wrestled with them in a most experimental and enlightened manner.

Professor Whicher sensed the need for thoughtful reconsideration of the enigma of her style as early as 1938, when he published his *This Was a Poet: Emily Dickinson.* He devoted several pages to the "dislocations of syntax and other verbal abnormalities." Whicher insisted that Miss Dickinson's idiosyncratic diction was "normal" in a creative artist:

If we examine Emily Dickinson's apparent lapses from grammatical convention, we shall soon discover that nearly all spring from one or another of the following causes: her preference for vernacular idiom, her old-fashioned training, her use of poetic mannerisms which she did not employ in prose, and her omission of verbal connective tissue in the effort to secure the utmost condensation of thought.

Professor Whicher's assertion, while it cannot in itself constitute irrefutable evidence, corroborates my own conclusions about Miss Dickinson's oddity of syntax: that it is the product neither of capriciousness nor of ignorance, but of convention or purposeful invention. One must conclude one of two things: that the difficulties and idiosyncrasies of syntax are either the results 1) of imprecision of meaning (the charge which many of the earlier critics made, and one which seems wholly unfounded in light of later studies), or 2) of a poetic technique deliberately embraced

---

10*(Ann Arbor, 1957), pp. 231-236.*
as the means to calculated ends. I am convinced of the latter. For, although her conception of poetic art may have been relatively intuitive and without theoretical concreteness, it cannot be said that her attitude toward poetry was careless; she knew it to be an all-consuming master, much as she knew love to demand all of one's being:

To pile like Thunder to it's close
Then crumble grand away
While Everything created hid
This--would be Poetry--

Or Love--the two coeval come--
We both and neither prove--
Experience either and consume--
For None see God and live--
(#1247)

It is no wonder that Grace B. Sherrer should have observed:

Urgency of expression characterizes every line she wrote; even her punctuation indicates the remarkable force of her forward impetus, for it cuts phrase from phrase as if each word group were an entity of expression rather than part of a segmented whole.\textsuperscript{11}

The "mistakes" in her grammar Miss Sherrer saw as the "right and inevitable symbols of her thought." The argument can be seen to have occurred to Miss Dickinson's nineteenth-century critics as well; W. D. Howells had defended her syntactic crudity with equal vigor:

Occasionally, the outside of the poem, so to speak, is left so rough, so rude, that the art seems to have faltered. But there is apparent to reflection the fact that the artist meant just this harsh exterior to remain, and that no grace of smoothness could have

imparted her intention as it does.\textsuperscript{12} Anna Mary Wells puts it in a slightly different way: "Poetry for her was always connected with emotion rather than cerebration, and her interest in form was only spasmodic."\textsuperscript{13} Again I would agree. She did what she did intuitively, but there was no element of capriciousness about the intensity of her rite. Miss Wells concludes with the modern critics that "every irregularity was conscious and of artistic purpose."

If it is then possible to say that Emily Dickinson knew precisely what she was about, what effects her eccentricity would excite, we may speak with greater assurance in her behalf (if, indeed, there is any need). Her chiefly posthumous publication has left the question partly speculative, though with abundant evidence in favor of a conscious exploitation of syntactic oddity simply in the recurrence of similar experiments and the emergence of patterns of practice.

Two-thirds of a century has passed since Higginson and Aldrich made their charges, and, at any rate, we look at the problem in a totally different light. No one can deny that the obscurity of many passages persists. For instance, a recent series of entries in \textit{Explicator} invoked the opinions of some six critics

\textsuperscript{12}"Editor's Study," Harper's New Monthly Magazine, LXXXII (January, 1891), 318-321.

\textsuperscript{13}"Early Criticism of Emily Dickinson," American Literature, I (November, 1929), 243-259.
in an effort to unravel the essential ambiguity of a few lines from Emily Dickinson's lyric #1068:

Further in Summer than the Birds  
Pathetic from the Grass  
A minor Nation celebrates  
It's unobtrusive Mass.

No Ordinance be seen  
So gradual the Grace  
A pensive Custom it becomes  
Enlarging Loneliness.

Antiquest felt at Noon  
When August burning low  
Arise this spectral Canticle  
Repose to typify

Remit as yet no Grace  
No Furrow on the Glow  
Yet a Druidic Difference  
Enhances Nature now

It appears that Yvor Winters and Richard Chase began the controversy when, in their respective discussions of the lyric in *In Defense of Reason* (Denver, 1938) and *Emily Dickinson* (New York, 1951), they reached two somewhat different conclusions. Winters explains the first two lines of the last stanza thus: "There is as yet no diminution of beauty, no mark of change on the brightness." He adopts a participial reading compressed from something like the following:

No grace (has), as yet, (been) remit(ted).  
No furrow (has yet appeared) on the glow.

Richard Chase sees the meaning as slightly different:

The "grace"—that is, the coming of death and the immortality it bestows—seems "so gradual" that the

14 Pp. 283-299.
positive thought of nature as death can be briefly suspended. In this moment of poignant loneliness, we need pay no immediate or ostensible homage to death--such may be the purport of the unintelligible: "Remit as yet no grace." The idea of nature as death need not blemish--put "no furrow on the glow"--the pure contemplation of loneliness.

He feels the force of remit imperative, likely with an understood repetition in the second line of the last stanza:

Remit as yet no grace.
(Remit as yet) no furrow on the glow.

And Remit is used here in its obsolete sense of "surrender."

Sparked by these discussions of the poem, Robert and Helen Elias published their view in the eleventh volume of Explicator. The Eliases argue that line six modifies line five and that there is need for a mark of punctuation after "Grace." They continue by suggesting that "to typify" in line twelve should be read "typifying" and not "(in order) to typify," and that "Remit" of line thirteen is an imperative, bringing their syntactic interpretation into conformity with Richard Chase's.

René Rapin could not agree and explained in the twelfth volume of Explicator that one must supply a semi-colon at the end of line five, cutting it off altogether from line six. "Remit," he urged, is not an imperative at all, but a foreshortened participial adjective, a condensed form for which Emily Dickinson had an instinctive preference. His proof? Professor

15 Pp. 171-172.
16 1952, Item 5.
17 1953, Item 24.
George Frisbie Whicher's testimony. So Rapin returns to Yvor Winters' syntactic explication.

Marshall Van Deusen joined the dialogue in volume thirteen, with further illumination drawn from his own knowledge of theological symbol. By now the poem had become indeed the "nocturnal diamond" of Maulnier's phrase, and each critic had set afire his own stars.

The debate is only a minor one, to be sure, and it was engaged in with little passion, but it is symptomatic of the difficulties confronting the explicator of Miss Dickinson's poetry. It underscores as well a second, more important matter for our consideration, which is that critics now think the apparent ambiguity of Miss Dickinson's syntax worth the effort of careful examination, even fruitful ground for the exercise of analysis and critical speculation.

Clark Griffith, in his *The Long Shadow*, comments of the Dickinson style:

On nearly every page, Emily Dickinson presents the short cramped line, the crabbed and cryptic phrase, the equivocal question, the flat and the unembellished statement. Plainness in diction, a hesitant and hence involuted syntax, a studious avoidance of ornamentation, a cautiously subdued tone; these are the recurring features in her poetry.

Griffith has done much to restore sanity to our reading of Miss Dickinson's poems; he praises her for what she is, not for her

---

18 1954, Item 33.

failure to fit the preconceived patterns of lyric convention. Of her stylistic modes he continues:

They involved a sort of studied ugliness: an attempt to record the treacheries of experience by the blunt antithesis, the gutteral expression, the abrupt break in meaning, the barbarous lapse from rhyme. They involved the logical contradiction and the apparently inept word: qualities which reflected Miss Dickinson's sense of a tangled and indecipherable reality. And they involved dryness, reticence, and understatement: qualities that satisfied her need to be uncommitted and inconspicuous. One and all, these were the mannerisms best suited to Emily Dickinson's vision of man's difficult place in a difficult world.20

Griffith, then, sees the very stylistic characteristics of her poetry as the keys to the metaphysical and psychological views of the poetess. These characteristics are cosmological in implication. I agree. The odd little New England spinster kept herself apart from the busy traffic of the Amherst life about her, but she could not keep her secrets from the poems themselves. This fact alone argues the need for careful and intense examination of the nature of her lyric expression.

I have not yet asked the testimony of Emily Dickinson's poems themselves, and I think the summons long overdue. I should like now to cite one of the most popular of the lyrics, if one may judge from the frequency with which it appears in anthologies. It is #321, and I shall speak primarily of the second of three stanzas.

Of all the Sounds despatched abroad,
There's not a Charge to me
Like that old measure in the Boughs—

20Ibid., p. 64.
That phraseless Melody—  
The Wind does—working like a Hand,  
Whose fingers Comb the Sky—  
Then quiver down—with tufts of Tune—  
Permitted Gods, and me—

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

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

The theme of the lyric can be summarized as the exhilaration which the poetess experiences in hearing the wind's melody. The second stanza is of a particularly convoluted syntax, startling us by its use of active for passive forms ("the art to be earned," "the trait to be taken away"), the enigmatic inner (i. e., more deeply within us), the strange singular-plural shift of Dust which "do not arise and play / In some odd fashion of its own," the rather elliptical, elusive nature of the passage as a whole. Yet, when one begins to examine the problem in light of the total semantic
evocation, the structure and sense of the passage appear to be in much greater agreement than might at first be anticipated. The "odd, erratic character of both the wind and the dust of the dead is perfectly consonant with the odd, erratic quality of the grammar. If one were to resort to conventional methods of diagramming, he would discover a complication somewhat similar to that which appears on pages 16 and 17.

I wish to suggest here neither that complexity in itself is a virtue, nor that one is conscious altogether of the syntactic relationships within the stanza, but that the grammatical convolution does serve serious artistic ends. The strange and sudden shifts of wind, the mysterious behavior of the tomb's dust, the exotic mirage of the aural caravan are all represented in the enigma of syntax.

My method throughout this examination of the syntactic oddity of Miss Dickinson's lyrics has been inductive. That there is ground for such examination is implicit in a large portion of the criticism which has appeared and is still appearing. I have gone through the poems individually, selecting examples of deviations from the normal syntactic expectation. I have then tried to confirm patterns which have seemed to me to appear in these analyses. Some particular deviations have recurred with great frequency (e.g., the use of the adjective where the adverb may have been anticipated, the appearance of a noun functioning as an adjective and vice versa); others have appeared only once or twice, and, while often crucial within individual poems, they have not merited
is inheritance

It us

i t r aitart

i e (be) earn(ed) (be) take(n)

Robber

is gotten

(fingers)

(is) hidden (i.e., more deeply within us)

golden

inner (i.e., more deeply within us)

more deeply within us)

number or length)

days

arise (that)

do(es) / ncan vouch

fashion

 Holiday

Hollow

Hollow

Hollow
Rh

winds

u

thrum 

door 

laceirds take 

ibear orchestra 

them
an entire chapter. I have sought to prepare a lexicon of usages
which are frequent in the canon, and, at the same time, to make
note of rarer occurrences which form a significant part of the
total style. Wherever possible, I have tried to suggest the relation­
ship of the syntactic minutiae to the larger matter of the
lyrics as whole poems and to the character of the poetic method
at large.

I have divided my subject into two parts: the first treat­
ing specific syntactic variants; the second, general stylistic
characteristics. In Part I, I discuss such oddities as the use
of the adjective as adverb and as noun; tendencies in the uses
of verb, participle, and gerund; interchange of noun-verb
function; and the use of adverb as noun. In Part II, I am con­
cerned with such larger topics as ellipsis, inversion, modifica­
tion, and the double function of sentence elements.

I have assumed, and have found nothing in the course of my
investigation to make me feel it an unjustifiable assumption, that
Miss Dickinson knew what she was about. A significant number of
critics have shared that conviction, and, were I to start this
study again, I should still think it essential and right. The
conclusions to which my study has brought me are three: 1) at
times the syntactic oddity of Emily Dickinson's poems results
from the natural distortions of the metric discipline; 2) at
times it is the means by which second and third meanings or
ambiguities have been embraced or superimposed upon the more
obvious meanings; and 3) at times the style is the key to the
psychic tangle which is inevitably a part of such a creative mind as Emily Dickinson's. These form the basis of my concluding chapter.
PART I
CHAPTER I
THE ADJECTIVE AS ADVERB

By far the most common of the syntactic idiosyncrasies of Emily Dickinson's poetry is that of the appearance of a word inflected as an adjective in an adverbial slot. There are literally several hundred examples of this deviation from usual practice. Note that in lyric #77, for example:

I never hear the word "escape"
Without a quicker blood,
A sudden expectation,
A flying attitude!

I never hear of prisons broad
By soldiers battered down,
But I tug childish at my bars
Only to fail again!

It is essentially an "obvious" lyric, with little of the obscurity to which the early critics had objected. There are, nonetheless, several ambiguities both of meaning and syntax. Partly these are the products of compression. The second line likely suggests:

Without a (great)er quick(ening of the flow of) blood.

The fourth line presents a somewhat more troublesome problem; does the poetess mean to suggest that, upon hearing the word "escape," she visualizes herself in the attitude of flight, or that she experiences the illusion that she is actually flying
(like a bird who knows freedom)? Or is it possible that both such meanings are implicit? Again, in the opening of the second stanza, is one to assume that "battered down" modifies "prisons" as the normal syntactic reading might intimate, or is its inversion to a position after "soldiers" intended to suggest (if only remotely) that the soldiers themselves have been battered down and that this has been the motive of their revolt? And is one really to think that "broad" suggests only a large prison, or is he justified in hearing a faint "abroad" in the line? These are all questions, somewhat speculative I will admit, which must finally be resolved by the individual reader in terms of the evidence within the poem itself.

The problem which I meant to illustrate by introducing this brief lyric, however, is that of the syntactic ambiguity set up by the appearance of a word inflected as an adjective in an adverbial slot:

    But I tug childish at my bars
    Only to fail again--

If childish is meant, as its inflection argues, to function as an adjective, then it must be thought to modify I. Such a reading is perfectly credible; the narrator of the poem thinks of himself as childish, deluded by fantasies of escape when he knows his imprisonment is sure, excited unreasonably by the mere utterance of a word which suggests the fulfillment of his dream, irrepressibly tugging again despite repeated failure. But he is childish to be so aroused, for he knows escape is impossible for him.
On the other hand, if we conceive that the positioning of the word *childish* at the point at which we would normally expect an adverb outweighs the argument of the inflection, what we may actually have here is a foreshortened adverbial form (a "flat" adverb akin to the synchronic foreshortening of *slowly* to *slow* as a standard adverb). If we read the poem thus, its meaning is altered slightly. Now it is the action of the tugging itself which is childish in this circumstance. Why should one, so excited by a word, tug at his bars when he knows escape is hopeless? The action expresses the unreasonableness of a child.

One may make a choice therefore. He may wish to honor the inflection and read the lyric in one way as an elemental example of poetic inversion:

```
But I, childish, tug at my bars
Only to fail again--
```

Or he may prefer the force of position and read the line as an illustration of lyric compression:

```
But I tug childish(ly) at my bars
Only to fail again.
```

But is there a third possibility? Does this appearance of the adjectival form in the adverbial slot actually suggest a syntactic ambivalence by the compression of the adjectival and adverbial forms? If it does, then what we are actually left with is a double function which could be read as follows.

1. Historically, *slow* and other flat adverbs are from an adverbial ending *-e* (*slāwe* in Old English), in free variation with the *-lic* adverbs.
But I, childish, tug childish(ly) at my bars
Only to fail again.

Of course, such a reading would argue for the conscious or unconscious emendation of the text as it stands, both supplying the adverbial marker and restoring the adjectival form to its normal position. And I am not suggesting that any reader moves systematically through the process. But I do argue that, for those readers most sensitive to the possibilities of the syntactic ambiguity, the composite reading does suggest itself almost instinctively.

That there should be a tendency for adjectives and adverbs to lose their distinct identities has long been noted by grammarians and linguists. For example, Otto Jespersen, in his A Modern English Grammar (London, 1911), remarks that "No fixed boundary can be drawn between adjs and advs." He notes common instances of the ambiguous function in such ordinary usages as "go fast, run deep . . . lie heavy, speak fair, play false . . . ring true." He notes too such common idioms as "This is easier said than done," of which he explains: "most grammarians will probably take easier as an adv (=more easily said than done)." In still another volume, he cites, among other examples, Shakespeare's "The course of true love never did run smooth." It appears then that numerous creative artists have readily crossed the boundaries between the two syntactic forms. However, no previous poet seems to have

---

2VII, 47.

3Ibid., III, 359.
done so with such persistence or with such deliberateness of effect as Emily Dickinson.

I said earlier that there are hundreds of examples in the Dickinson canon, and it will not help my case to multiply them excessively here. However, I should like to consider several others. Note the use of the words faster and final fast in lyric #109:

By a flower—By a letter—
By a nimble love—
If I weld the Rivet faster—
Final fast—above—

Never mind my breathless Anvil!
Never mind Repose!
Never mind the sooty faces
Tugging at the Forge!

Interestingly enough, the word fast has both an adjectival and an adverbial sense. Here it is not a matter of the absence of inflection, since one must always decide the word's syntactic function from its context. If one were to consult a rather standard dictionary of the time, the 1829 Octavo edition of Webster's American Dictionary of the English Language, for example, he would find the modern sense of the word largely present. Fast may function as an adjective meaning firmly fixed, or as an adverb meaning swiftly or immovably. However, the senses of fixity or of swiftness of motion are actually quite at odds with one another, and there is need here to decide upon which meaning Emily Dickinson has drawn for her lyric.

If we adopt the more common adverbial meaning of faster, i.e., more swiftly, the poem makes good sense: there is a note
of urgency in the poetess' fulfilling of her task; she must do her riveting more rapidly. And that meaning is substantiated by the second stanza, in which the poet has no time for rest (repose), but works her anvil till it is breathless with the haste of manufacture (though there is also here an ambiguity arising from the fact that the anvil is an inanimate, breathless assistant to her labor), and disregards her slaves with their faces sooty from tugging at the forge. However, if we put **faster** alongside its echo **fast** in the next line, we may be persuaded to change our minds. For, in the fourth line of the lyric, **fast** quite clearly takes on the adjectival meaning **firmly fixed**. If this be true, ought we to take the **faster** as an adjectival comparative replacing the normal **more securely fast**? The result is actually three choices: 1) speedily, 2) securely, 3) speedily and securely. I prefer the third.

Of course, the last line of the first stanza here is a highly elliptical one and will require some syntactic amplification. We can be fairly sure that the **fast** means **secure** here, but what of the **final**? Are we to read it as adjectival, and to supply a coordinating conjunction:

(It will be) final (and) fast above,

or are we to read it as a foreshortened adverb, whose loss of the -ly inflection was dictated by the regularity of meter?

(It will) final(ly) (be) fast above.

We have here a complex of ambiguities set up by the sequence of three words (**faster**-- / **Final fast**--), each word affecting
our reading of the others and providing semantic alternatives for our interpretation. And, in this instance, the device is successful.

This use of faster raises the whole question of the comparative forms of adjective and adverb. Normally in English, adjectives form their comparatives by the addition of the suffix -er. Adverbs require the precedent use of the adverb more. Of course, there are exceptions: faster, slower, etc., may function as either adjectives or adverbs; adjectives ending in -ly may rarely form their comparatives by adding -er: costlier, seemlier, etc. Yet the rule is substantially consistent. Note Miss Dickinson's unusual usage in lyric #244, however:

It is easy to work when the soul is at play--
But when the soul is in pain--
The hearing him put his playthings up
Makes work difficult--then--

It is simple, to ache in the Bone, or the Rind--
But Gimblets--among the nerve--
Mangle daintier--terribler--
Like a Panther in the Glove--

Here it seems obvious that the adverbial sense is intended (although it is not altogether impossible that Miss Dickinson means to suggest too that the "Gimblets--among the nerve--" are "daintier--terribler--") and that we are to read daintier and terribler as comparative adverbial forms shaped by 1) the loss of the adverbial inflection and 2) the subsequent treatment of the words as adjectives in the formation of the comparatives. I accept the adverbial as the major choice too because there is no secondary semantic ambiguity as in the case of fast.
Occasionally the adjectival-adverbial comparative is a part of a complex and convoluted syntax which requires considerable grammatical juggling and often even amplification before the semantic intent is evident. Lyric #856 provides an example:

There is a finished feeling
Experienced at Graves--
A leisure of the Future--
A Wilderness of Size.

By Death's bold Exhibition
Preciser what we are
And the Eternal function
Enabled to infer.

Here the inversion, the ellipsis, the adjectival-adverbial ambiguity all work together to add to the difficulties of interpretation. A prose rendering of the second stanza might take something of the following shape: "(When confronted) by Death's bold Exhibition, (we are) enabled to infer preciser (i.e., more precisely) (both) what we are (i.e., the meaning of our existence) and the Eternal function (i.e., the purpose of eternity or the dogma of the eternal)." But even here one may interpret *preciser* as an adjective functioning substantivally through the ellipsis: "By Death's bold Exhibition (we are given a) preciser (sense of) what we are, and (by it we are) enabled (also) to infer the Eternal function." In this second reading, we have actually two independent clauses linked by the common relation to the opening adverbial prepositional phrase. This second reading seems to me more nearly satisfactory largely because the first is lacking in parallelism; nevertheless, I could not insist upon one to the exclusion of the other.
What we have then in the comparative form of the adjectival-adverbial ambiguity is not simply the want of the -ly (or, -li-), but a significant difference in actual pattern of inflection; that is, here is not simply a reduction of *preciselier* to *preciser*, but a rather important shift from *more precisely* to *preciser*.

In lyric #586, we have an instance of the adjective-adverb ambiguity in the superlative:

We talked *as* Girls do--
Fond, and late--
We speculated *fair*, on every subject, but the Grave--
Of our's, none affair--

We handled Destinies, *as cool--*
As we--Disposers--be--
And God, a Quiet Party
To our Authority--

But fondest, dwelt upon Ourself
As we eventual--be--
When Girls to Women, softly raised
We--occupy--Degree--

We parted with a contract
To cherish, and to write
But Heaven made both, impossible
Before another night.

There are numerous deviations from normal syntax here: Fond(ly) (2), fairly (3) (perhaps an inversion for: "on fairly every subject"), cool(ly) (5), eventual(ly) (10), all illustrate the adjective-adverb ambiguity. There are examples of ellipsis: "We handled Destinies as cool(ly)--/ As (if) we (could) be--Disposers (of them)." There are difficulties of poetic inversion: "Of our's--none affair" ("It--the grave--was none of our affair," or "It was no affair of ours"). And there is the unusual "Our-
self" which the dictionaries label "of a regal style," but which here applies to two girls.

In the third stanza, fondest appears again to be adjectival superlative in inflection, but adverbial in placement. It echoes the equally ambiguous fond of stanza one (though there the joining with late argues strongly for the adverbial reading) and can be read either as additional modification of the we of lines one, three, and five, or as a modification of dwelt (i.e., "But we dwelt most fondly upon Ourself as we eventually would be"). Again, we are struck by the unusual gap which Miss Dickinson wishes us to cross. We have not merely a compression of fondestiest to fondest, but of most fondly to fondest. But let me state again that the transition is somewhat easier once one has been willing to let the positive adjectival form function in lieu of the adverbial form; it is a short second step to the comparison of these forms as adjectives as well.

Adding to the ambiguities of syntax here are the ambiguities of meaning. Fond carries with it not only the quality of affection, but that of foolishness as well. One is reminded of Lear's ambiguous redundancy:

I am a very foolish fond old man,
Fourscore and upwards, not an hour more nor less;
And, to deal plainly,
I fear I am not in my perfect mind.
(IV, vii, 60-63)

It may well be that the girls talk affectionately to one another in the opening stanza, but that they have reached a point of superlative foolishness by the third. At any rate, the semantic
ambiguity complicates the syntactic one, making a subtle, but useful, comment upon the situation.

Admittedly, in some of those hundreds of instances referred to earlier, there is little point in stressing the syntactic ambivalence. For example, in the fifth line of lyric #953, there would be small value in reading instant in any way other than as a foreshortened adverbial form:

The Door as instant(ly) shut—And I—
I—lost—was passing by—
It would be difficult to see the Door as instant. And there is little to be gained by any but the obvious reading. Critical instinct is a valuable asset in estimating the worth of any of these examples. Often an awareness of a poet's syntactic method is only a tool for deciding upon the "correct" reading, but often too a poem's meaning is enlarged significantly by alertness to the double function here described.

It may be worth mentioning at this point that Miss Dickinson takes other poetic liberties with the adjective in forming her comparisons. For example, in lyric #232 she takes the adjective supreme (already the Latin superlative of superus) and creates a comparative form supremer:

She felt herself supremer—
A Raised—Ethereal Thing!

And in lyric #351 she gives us the unusual comparative form possibler:

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

Normal usage might have predicted more probabler or even probabler, but not possibler. Yet Miss Dickinson's remarkable inventiveness was not shaped by any conformity to grammatical expectation; the nuance of form was at times its own end for her, but often (though perhaps not in this particular case) the felicity of sound and sense gave her inventiveness genuine poetic value.

In the third stanza of lyric #277, she uses the adjective unmeaning in a position which would have been more prosaically comfortable with the adverb meaninglessly:

They cannot take me--any more!
Dungeons can call--and Guns implore
Unmeaning--now--to me--

It is possible to interpret the word as an adjective modifying Dungeons and Guns, but the placement seems to argue for modification of the verbs call and implore. There is a third possibility, too, and that is that the adjectival form may be used to modify that which follows in the fourth stanza:

As laughter--was--an hour ago--
Or Laces--or a Travelling Show--
Or who died--yesterday!

Dungeons and Guns are now as meaningless as laughter was an hour ago, or as Laces or a Travelling Show or knowledge of who died were to the poetess yesterday. But the ambiguity of the word and its position allow it to shift subtly in its syntactic function as the poem progresses. Yet there is no loss of clarity nor any confusion, but only enlargement of meaning. The inflection
relates unmeaning to the nouns, the position to the verbs; the semantic import of the word enshrouds both subject and action with an aura of want of meaning. Thus Miss Dickinson exploits the word for larger semantic effect than would be possible in strictly conventional usage.

Again, in the opening stanza of lyric #306, there is this same multiple suggestion of meaning:

The Soul's Superior instants<br>Occur to Her--alone--<br>When friend--and Earth's occasion<br>Have infinite withdrawn--

Beyond the double suggestion of the word alone (should one understand it to mean to her alone and to no one else or only when she is alone, in solitude?), there is the ambiguity of infinite. Taken in its adjectival sense modifying friend and Earth's occasion, the word appears to suggest that the soul's superior instants occur to her only when friends and occasion have withdrawn and have become infinite (intangible, no longer a part of her temporal experience); but taken in the adverbial sense as modifying withdrawn, the word suggests that these instants occur only when friends have withdrawn infinitely (i.e., an infinite distance) from the soul. In either interpretation, the lyric's meaning is still elusive and somewhat subjective; however, the first rendering may suggest the possibility, substantiated in the rest of the poem, that the poetess is talking about her friends' deaths, which have made her soul unusually sensitive, while the latter stresses the poetess' soul's instinctive need for
isolation. Certainly neither meaning contradicts what we know of the biography of Miss Dickinson.

In another lyric, #411, Miss Dickinson uses the word infinite in this same syntactically ambivalent way, but this time she stresses the first meaning which I suggested above: infinite contrasts with finite as the dead does with the living:

The Color of the Grave is Green--
The Outer Grave--I mean--
You would not know it from the Field--
Except it own a Stone--

To help the fond--to find it--
Too infinite asleep
To stop and tell them where it is--
But just a Daisy--deep--

The pronoun it appears to refer consistently to the grave, but the grave becomes a metonymy for the corpse which lies buried in the earth, for it is apparently the dead who are "too infinite asleep" to provide the living mourner with adequate direction to the grave. Our first impulse is to read infinite as another example of the foreshortened adverb ("too infinitely asleep"), but what of the further possibility that infinite and asleep are both adjectives compressed together by the elision of the conjunction (too infinite and asleep, or too infinite, too asleep)? It may be thought that the absence of punctuation argues for the adverbial reading; yet when one has become accustomed to the recurrent deviation from normal punctuation in the lyrics, the argument no longer seems to hold with any firmness. But I have alluded to this lyric largely to suggest that, in Miss Dickinson's vocabulary,
infinite does often evoke those whose flesh lies in the grave, but whose spirits have ascended to God.

Lyric #457 contains an example similar to this last, an example in which two consecutive adjectives with neither punctuation nor a conjunction appear:

Sweet—safe—Houses—
Glad—gay—Houses—
Sealed so stately tight—
Lids of Steel—on Lids of Marble—
Locking Bare feet out—

The subject is death again; the vaults which contain the dead are safe sealed houses which cannot be touched by all that afflicts the living. In the third line, we find the word stately, usually adjectival in function, though rarely adverbial (after the example of Milton). Since the more common use of stately is the adjectival one, I am tempted to think many readers (myself for one) would be inclined to read the line "so stately, so tight." The sealed graves have about them such dignity, such a formal ceremonious quality; this is suggested by the adjectival function. But, for the sake of syntactic normality, one is forced to read the word adverbially as well; yet its adverbial sense has an element of slightly shocking incongruity about it: so stately tight. Stately is so lofty a word, its whole chain of association suggesting the exalted quality of its meaning; tight is a narrower, commoner, less dignified term which pulls us back considerably when it follows so lofty a word as stately. But, when one has thought it through rather carefully, he may conclude that that is just the point of the ironic juxtaposition of the two words;
they create some sort of tension between the apparent imagined
security and safety and dignity of the grave as it quarrels with
our natural apprehension and fear of the indignity of being con­
fined to the infinitesimal space of a tight-fitting enclosure in
death. The effect is much greater if stately is meant to modify
tight than if both words function equally as adjectives modifying
houses, for in the former case, the dependence of the one word
upon the other is much greater and the irony much more obvious.

I have let lyric suggest lyric here in these last few pages,
because it has seemed to me that I could forge a chain from poem
to poem by establishing connections between ideas and between
syntactic usage and vocabulary which might take the poems as all
parts of one large poem which encompasses the whole canon. These
characteristics, which may, in individual cases, seem only frag­
mentary and inconclusive, do stretch throughout the seventeen
hundred seventy-five lyrics. In those related to the theme of
death, for example, there seems to be an inevitable ambiguity in
the poet's attitude toward the event. Nearly always there are
two, and often more than two, ways of looking at a passage, as I
have suggested it in connection with the last lyric. In lyric
#804, for further example, the poetess stands watching a woman she
loved face the gaze of death. Again there are two ways that the
last line of stanza three may be read:

    Of shrinking ways--she did not fright
    Though all the Village looked--
    But held Her gravity aloft--
    And met the gaze--direct--
Either one may accept the adjectival inflection of the word **direct** and speak of the "**direct gaze of death**" as the woman is confronted by him, or one may accept the force of the position to say that she met the gaze of death **directly**. In the first case, the implication is that none of us who are alive can be confronted by the direct gaze of death; only when we lie in its throes can we see how direct it can be. In the second, the stress is upon the **fearlessness** of the woman as she faced death: she met its gaze **directly**, without turning or seeking to escape from it.

There is here, as in others of my examples, an important **ancillary factor** at work: a **heurism** of meter forces the dropping of the adverbial marker. In Emily Dickinson's day it would have been called "poetic license" in the exploitation of an available "flat adverb" form. Nonetheless, the device produces a two-pronged ambivalence with both prongs working. In the one instance, death is the central factor; in the other, the heroine's **courageousness** in the face of death dominates. Why should it be necessary to say that one is correct and the other false? Both are surely implied in the ambiguity.

Frequently, then, we gain in semantic dimension through the syntactic ambiguity. Admittedly, however, there are times when it is difficult to judge Miss Dickinson's reasons for adopting one form or the other. At times, indeed, her choice seems merely **capricious**. In lyric #1297, for example, there seems to be no certainty of purpose.
Go slow, my soul, to feed thyself
Upon his rare approach--
Go rapid, lest Competing Death
Prevail upon the Coach--
Go timid, lest his final eye
Determine thee amiss--
Go boldly--for thou paid'st his price
Redemption--for a Kiss--

A letter from Emily to the Norcross cousins tells us that the poem was inspired by the coming of spring; the commands to move at once slowly and rapidly, timidly and boldly, to meet and enjoy the ecstasies of the coming season are quite clear. It is difficult to determine why Miss Dickinson has chosen to use the foreshortened forms rapid and timid and then to give us the fully inflected boldly. One could suspect that the first two adjectival substitutions for the normal adverbial forms were in imitation of the legitimate shortened adverbial form slow; however, with such a theory one arrives at boldly with something akin to shock, having expected bold in the fulfillment of the pattern. The only remotely satisfying argument could be that of the desire for regularity of meter here, since the lines are perfect alternating iambic tetrameters and iambic trimeters; however, that demand could have been met in any number of ways. It may not have been what Miss Dickinson intended at all, but I must say that I like the effect: the timid stresses that quality about the soul of the poet, while the boldly stresses the manner in which the soul is to act (i.e., the soul may remain timid while putting on an act of boldness). But the movement from adverb to the two adjectives and the return to the adverb in parallel constructions is otherwise a puzzle. Slow
and rapid do not give us as much as timid does. Some of the poems are more complete than others, more finished and clear in their ambivalent effect. In this instance, the effect does not appear to have been worked out fully nor in a totally satisfying way.

I do not mean to suggest by this last example that I find Miss Dickinson's poetry wanting in clarity, or that I would wish her to have inflected her adverbial forms in a more orthodox way in these examples. As a matter of fact, I think I have shown here how extraordinarily effective the ambiguity of syntax can be in conveying double, and often ironic, meanings. What Miss Dickinson has done is to have sacrificed a single-dimensioned and unambiguous syntactic interpretation in preference to one that can convey a double, and occasionally triple, effect. At times she failed unforgivably, but at times also she achieved almost miraculous success. Often the ambiguity enhances the poem for many readers, giving a subtlety which affords greater pleasure upon continual reexamination.

It is striking that a contemporary of Emily Dickinson's, working as she did in the relative obscurity of a self-imposed isolation, should have practiced a similar compression, a similar semantic ambivalence. I refer, of course, to Gerard Manley Hopkins, another poet published posthumously. In his "terrible" sonnet "Carrion Comfort," Hopkins prays:

But ah, but O thou terrible, why wouldst thou rude on me Thy wring-world right foot rock?

Again, if one accepts the adjectival inflection of rude here, he
is given no problem until he arrives at the verb rock. He can read the adjectival form as modifying thou (God). However, when he finishes the sentence, the possibility arises that rude may be serving an adverbial function: "Why wouldst thou rock rude(ly) on my thy wring-world right foot?" Hopkins' general syntax is, admittedly, somewhat more complex than Miss Dickinson's. His placement of rude reinforces the ambiguity. In fact, it is not the adjectival force of rude which suggests itself to the reader first; it is the verbal: "Why wouldst thou rude on me?" Our impulse is to argue that rude has no history of predicative force; but, knowing Hopkins' unorthodox syntactic practice, one assumes he has simply used the adjectival form verbally. All this, however, adjusts itself upon our reading further. God is a rude God, and He is rocking His foot rudely. It is a terrible anthropomorphism, yet it reveals succinctly much more of Hopkins than flat "correct" statement could at this point.

I do not mean to suggest here any indebtedness on the part of either Hopkins or Miss Dickinson. Such is clearly impossible, considering the biographies of the two poets. What I think can be suggested, however, is a common source of poetic indebtedness; likely that source is the metaphysical poetry of the seventeenth century. W. H. Gardner remarks in his Gerard Manley Hopkins that it is "remarkable that nowhere in his writings does Hopkins mention Donne; yet it is difficult to believe that he had not read a poet who in personality, intellect, and style was so like himself. That Hopkinsian felicity of syntax . . . is anticipated
in many passages of Donne . . . each passionately intellectual and morally earnest, to unite similar unconventional modes of rhythm and grammar."^4

It is difficult too to establish precisely the debt of Emily Dickinson to the metaphysical poets. Professor Whicher comments in his *This Was a Poet*: "Any allusion from her to the religious poets of the seventeenth century would be of particular interest because of the close parallel between her work and that of Donne, Herbert, and Vaughan."^5 But Whicher can offer only one reference to them in her letters. He feels this evidence would "lead us to surmise that she was not well acquainted with her distant predecessors." It is interesting that Thomas H. Johnson, on the other hand, in his *Emily Dickinson*, uses the exact same evidence to suggest that Donne was a poet she greatly admired.^6 The evidence of the lyrics themselves (in affording examples of similarity of practice) also lends support to Professor Johnson's assertion, and I am inclined to agree with him. It may indeed have been their fascination with the syntactic oddities of their seventeenth century predecessors that resulted in both Hopkins' and Miss Dickinson's exploitation of remarkable syntactic effects, or they may have acted merely as independently "metaphysical" poets, driven by a similar lonely discourse with God. What we

^4II (London, 1949), 173.


do have, nonetheless, is two poets related by a kind of revival of interest in experimental syntactic effects, with alliances which trail back into the seventeenth century.
CHAPTER II
THE ADJECTIVE AND THE NOUN

Often one finds in the poems of Emily Dickinson examples of nouns used as adjectives or adjectives used as substantives. At times, especially when this substitution appears in a highly elliptical passage, the meaning of an entire lyric may hinge upon the alternative readings. For example, in lyric #98, a significant difference in interpretation of the entire poem depends upon one's decision between reading pomp as a noun (as its inflection argues) or as an adjective (as its placement after how argues):

One dignity delays for all—
One mitred Afternoon—
None can avoid this purple—
None evade this Crown!

Coach, it insures, and footmen—
Chamber, and state, and throng—
Bells, also, in the village
As we ride grand along!

What dignified Attendants!
What service when we pause!
How loyally at parting
Their hundred hats they raise!

How pomp surpassing ermine
When simple You, and I,
Present our meek escutcheon
And claim the rank to die!

Reading the first line of the last stanza with pomp retaining its nounal function, one may expand the ellipsis in the following manner.

42
How (great a) pomp (there will be, even to the)
surpassing (of) ermine,

When simple You, and I,
Present our meek escutcheon
And claim the rank to die!

With such a reading, the lyric's meaning seems all rather obvious. No matter how lowly the circumstances of one's life, no matter how trivial in importance one's person may be, there is one grand and dignified event which awaits all: every man will be treated royally in death. The brilliance of the lyric lies largely in the manner in which Miss Dickinson provokes it all to vivid sensuous life: the coach, the footmen, the chamber in which we lie in state, the throng of mourners, the somber bells which resound as we are borne along toward the grave, the stiff ceremoniousness of those who stand alongside the casket, the grandeur and solemnity of the funeral service itself, all are evoked in steady, yet rapid, sequence. All seems shrouded about with the proper reverence of tone. And there is almost a rhapsodic note in the voice when we arrive at the concluding stanza: "How great a pomp there will be, even surpassing the ermine of kings!"

However, unless we become dogmatically partial to our first reading of the line, there is another interpretation which is likely to suggest itself. The how which precedes the pomp has a very urgent force, compelling us, upon further reading, to consider the possibility that Miss Dickinson has given us a compressed adjectival form pomp(ous): "How pomp(ous) (an event that will be, even) surpassing (the pompousness of kings in their) ermine." Admittedly, such a reading requires considerable
expansion of the elliptical original (though actually no more than the former reading), but I feel sure it is justified and that, perhaps, many readers experience the ironic contrast almost instinctively. Now there is a great deal of connotative difference between the two words *pomp* and *pompous*. While *pomp* may be a legitimate show of splendor and magnificence, a *pompous* display is usually an excessive parody of grandeur. If, then, one is justified in reading the adjectival form as a part of what has been suppressed in the ellipsis here, the whole tone of the poem is altered. Its theme now emerges out of the hypocrisy and excess of the funereal gaudiness which usually accompanies the putting away of men in death. The dignity is no longer dignified at all, but a rancid mockery of the proper respect which one expects to be paid to the ending of human life. I think it is not eisegetical to say that Miss Dickinson had this in her mind all along, and that it is the ambiguousness of the syntax which unveils it for us.

The question will arise in some minds whether two such disparate meanings can comfortably coexist within the same passage or whether the resultant ambivalence is only confusion in need of clarification. Here again critical common sense is needed. It appears to me that the paradoxical statement in lyric #98 is adequately justified and as precise an account of our ambiguous attitudes about the ceremonies of death as one will find anywhere. Everyone of us who has ever been forced to participate in the funereal exercises of burial knows how essential is the reverence of the occasion; yet, paradoxically, we have been struck as well
with the embarrassing hypocrisy of the rite. How does one convey such a contradiction of feeling in language? Emily Dickinson has encompassed the paradox in her compressed and ambiguous syntax.

There is a further example of the use of the noun as an adjective in the opening stanza of lyric #596:

When I was small, a Woman died--
Today--her Only Boy
Went up from the Potomac--
His face all Victory

To look at her--How slowly
The Seasons must have turned
Till Bullets clipt an Angle
And He passed quickly round--

We know the lyric, five stanzas in length, was written for Francis H. Dickinson of Belchertown, who was killed in the battle at Ball's Bluff, Virginia, in 1861. It plays upon a potentially sentimental scene, the reunion of a war hero and his mother in Paradise. The poetess imagines the joyous meeting when the brave soldier walks through the streets with his long-dead mother. It is not one of Miss Dickinson's best poems certainly, but it does provide an interesting example of the particular ambiguity that here absorbs us. In the fourth line of the first stanza, one would ordinarily expect to find: "His face all Victorious," instead of "His face all Victory." Here there is no ambiguity involved in the noun-adjective substitution. There can be little semantic difference whether his face is all victory or all victorious, though I prefer the noun as seeming to have greater force. There is, however, another point of ambiguity in the passage which relates to the precise placement of modifying phrases: should the
infinitival phrase To look at her be taken with went up or His face all Victory? In the first reading, he simply went up the Potomac to look at her, and, incidentally, his face was all Victory; thus the Victory seems clearly the result of the battle and of his heroic part in it (a somewhat strange response, considering that the Yankee army came out of the battle with great losses). In the second reading, however, his face is all victory because he can look once again upon his mother's face. The youth's face is victorious then either because of his part in the battle (victory and soldier are semantically attractive to one another) or because of his being reunited with his mother. I prefer the second reading; the first is a first thought and there is gain in dropping it in favor of the second. The process of reading thus becomes evident; rereading a Dickinson lyric often either confirms or contradicts first readings. Here the ambiguity is possible, but unlikely.

Often the effect of the noun, substituting for the more normal adjectival form, is to give a greater concreteness, a firmer palpability to a passage; while the effect of the adjectival, functioning where one would normally expect a noun, is antithetical to that: it usually suggests a greater abstractness than might otherwise be present. Look at the noun Brigadier in the third stanza of #152, for example:

The Sun kept stooping—stooping—low!
The Hills to meet him rose!
On his side, what Transaction!
On their side, what Repose!
Deeper and deeper grew the stain
Upon the window pane—
Thicker and thicker stood the feet
Until the Tyrian

Was crowded dense with Armies--
So gay, so Brigadier--
That I felt martial stirrings
Who once the Cockade wore--

Charged, from my chimney corner--
But Nobody was there!

Note how much more vivid is the circumstance with the actual presence of the Brigadier himself, suggested by the use of the capitalized noun in preference to the adjective. Everyone knows, of course, that the whole militaristic image is only metaphorical, yet it is evoked so much more forcefully by the actual Brigadier than by the less strong Brigadier-like. The armies, the martial stirrings, the Cockade worn once by the poet, the charge upon "Nobody," are all reinforced by the presence of the commander of the brigade, an effect that would certainly have been lessened by the use of the adjective.

Let me illustrate my point further by selecting four passages from the Dickinson canon. In each case, reference is made to imaginary or supernatural creatures as means of comparison with the real world. And, in each case, the comparison is strengthened significantly by the use of the noun where one would normally expect to find an adjective to fulfill the requirements of the syntax. The first of these examples, and I shall simply list them in chronological order as Miss Dickinson penned them, is found in the fourth stanza of lyric #354. The poem describes the butterfly
as it comes forth from its cocoon and moves in marvellous beauty over the countryside. There is about the butterfly a phantomlike quality which Miss Dickinson wishes to convey, but she uses only the noun *phantom* in adjectival position:

Her pretty Parasol be seen
Contracting in a Field
Where Men made Hay--
Then struggling hard
With an opposing Cloud--

Where Parties--Phantom as Herself--
To Nowhere--seemed to go
In purposeless Circumference--
As 'twere a Tropic Show--

The second is in lyric #493 and involves a woman's prayer that she may be worthy of the expectation of her husband. The poetess is stricken by doubt that she can be worthy, but offers for her soul

A prayer, that it more angel--prove--
to meet adequately the love offered her. The third is in lyric #590, which ponders upon the extreme loneliness which one could, in his imagination, experience at the mouth of a dark cavern; the essence of the terror is encapsulated by Miss Dickinson in the word *Goblin* in the second stanza (a word which, by the way, has now lost much of its sinister implication, once suggesting more certainly the evil spirits of the world about us):

Did you ever stand in a Cavern's Mouth--
Widths out of the Sun--
And look--and shudder, and block your breath--
And deem to be alone

In such a place, what horror,
How Goblin it would be--
And fly, as 'twere pursuing you?
Then Loneliness--looks so--
The last is in lyric #981, another picture of death; those who have been lost to death seem distant, remote, fictitious, fairy-like; but Miss Dickinson employs the noun fairy rather than the adjective:

As Sleigh Bells seem in summer
Or Bees, at Christmas show--
So fairy--so fictitious
The individuals do
Repealed from observation--
A Party that we knew--
More distant in an instant
Than Dawn in Timbuctoo.

I cite these four examples to make one point to which I shall develop a corollary later: that the noun has greater substantial, tangible, palpable force than the adjective (which bears an essentially dependent function), and that Emily Dickinson exploits this force even in defiance of syntactic convention.

In the opening stanza of lyric #198, we have an opposite situation from that in the lyrics just discussed; here we have an adjective apparently functioning as a noun:

An awful Tempest mashed the air--
The clouds were gaunt, and few--
A Black--as of a Spectre's Cloak
Hid Heaven and Earth from view.

The creatures chuckled on the Roofs--
And whistled in the air--
And shook their fists--
And gnashed their teeth--
And swung their frenzied hair.

The morning lit--the Birds arose--
The Monster's faded eyes
Turned slowly to his native coast--
And peace--was Paradise!

The lyric describes a storm so frightful in the experience of it
that it appears to be a supernaturally monstrous invasion; however, with the coming of dawn, all seems again peaceful and serene. It may be possible to read black simply as adjectival in function, modifying Cloak (the punctuation need not disturb us, since it is so capricious at best):

A Black (as of a Spectre's Cloak) Cloak
Hid Heaven and Earth from view.

In such a reading, Cloak functions both as the noun head of the preposition of and as the subject (modified by A Black) of Hid. The repetition is avoided in the poem to aid the compression of the lines. However, there is another way in which the passage may be interpreted: Black may be seen as a shortened form of the noun Blackness. If that is true, then, despite the compression, the syntax is normal: "A Blackness, as of a Spectre's Cloak / Hid Heaven and Earth from view." What has Miss Dickinson achieved in the compression? Primarily she has avoided the somewhat conventional picture of the storm as evoked in the blackness of the night, but has given it an eerie, almost necromantic substantiality, suggesting that it is palpable, a mystic entity, and not a mere quality; it is the black itself which hides heaven and earth from view.

In many of the Indo-European languages, a singular adjective can have substantival force, but that is rarely true in modern

---

1Professor Utley pointed out to me also a usage of Black as a noun when it refers to a Negro. The Arabian Nights was a familiar text for Miss Dickinson, and there is good likelihood that this image is part of the terror here.
English. Jespersen has this to say on the subject: "Adjectives cannot now as in former periods of the language be used freely in the sg /singular/ without a sb /substantive/ or one; ... instead of a poor ... or the old ... one has to say a poor man, the old man or a poor one, the old one." Jespersen does, however, record a number of instances of singular adjective forms which have become standard in their use as substantives: the Almighty, the Crucified, the dead, the deceased, the bereaved, the condemned, the fatherless. Beyond these few established forms, English readers are generally startled by instances of the singular adjective in English functioning substantivally. But Miss Dickinson's poetry abounds in examples.

In the second stanza of lyric #524, for example, we find the word bodiless functioning substantivally with the participial form begun:

Departed—to the Judgment—
A Mighty Afternoon—
Great Clouds—like Ushers—leaning—
Creation—looking on—

The Flesh—Surrendered—Cancelled—
The Bodiless—begun—
Two Worlds—like Audiences—disperse—
And leave the Soul—alone—

There is a highly fragmented quality here, likely intended to suggest the breathlessness and incomprehensibility of the speaker who has been left behind by a loved one who has died. The lyric ends with an ambiguity created partly by the elliptical nature

---

2 II (London, 1911), 231-232.
of the lines: we are not certain whether it is the soul of the
dead or of the living that has been isolated and is now alone.
But the use of the substantival adjective is particularly interest­ing here; the addition of a noun would only weaken the passage.
The adjective bodiless stresses the negative abstract quality of separation of the spirit from the body; had Miss Dickinson attached the adjective to any noun, the adjective would simply have characterized an object, have been given a somewhat more palpable objective form. As it stands, the very abstractness of the quality of the adjective supports its semantic suggestion: the soul is totally non-tangible, without the possibility of objective sensory confrontation. Thus the very syntactic devia­tion supports the semantic sense of the line.

In an early lyric, #5, we find a third instance of a singular adjective form functioning substantivally. In this example, the nominal sense is confirmed by the fact that Bright is modified by a comparative form of another adjective (though perhaps again the adjective could be thought an example of the foreshortened adverbial form if the argument were to be pressed). I shall quote stanza four of the lyric, since it is only that stanza which is germane to our discussion here:

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

Of course, there is one way of reading the stanza so that the
syntactic function of the word Bright is perfectly normal: it can be thought to modify light as golden does. However, that creates a problem with our interpretation of the syntactic function of serener; it is a bit awkward, though perhaps not impossible, to speak of a "serener Bright light." I think, however, that it is better to assume that we have here a foreshortened nounal form, brightness (an assumption reinforced by the capitalization). It may suggest an interesting pattern, in fact, to note that in all three of the cases which I have cited, the nounal form is shortened by the loss of the suffix -ness: blackness in lyric #198, bodilessness in #524, and brightness in #5. And again I should like to propose that Miss Dickinson's instinct for syntactic liberty was right. The lyric describes the disappearance of a favored robin which, doubtless, sings gaily in another country, while the poet is compelled to remain in a land about to be taken over by winter. To have said: "in a land more serenely bright," would not have added one iota of clarity, while it would have, I fear, thrown the whole stanza into a trite, flat diction, in which each syntactic detail is tediously spelled out.

In the first and second stanzas of lyric #458, there are further instances of the adjective functioning as a noun:

Like Eyes that looked on Wastes--
Incredulous of Ought
But Blank--and steady Wilderness--
Diversified by Night--

Just Infinites of Nought--
As far as it could see--
So looked the face I looked upon--
So looked itself--on Me--
In the first stanza, Blank appears to be a shortened form of Blankness, unless one assumes that Blank and steady are both adjectives modifying the noun head Wilderness; I doubt the latter assumption, since the capitalization of blank would suggest strongly that it has substantival force. The Infinites of the second stanza is a somewhat rarer and more interesting form, since infinite only very late in the nineteenth century develops popular nounal use: again, in the 1829 edition of Webster's American Dictionary of the English Language, there is no recognition of its use as a noun at all. As Miss Dickinson places and inflects the word, however, it has clear nounal function. As with an earlier example, the unusual usage aids the meaning of the passage, stressing the abstract qualities of blankness and of infinity without giving them tangible shape by making nouns of them. They seem even more blank, more infinite, by their qualitative exploitation here.

There are two other examples of the peculiar significance given to the adjectival quality when the adjective appears alone. The first is found at the end of the second stanza of lyric #306:

The Soul's Superior instants
Occur to Her--alone--
When friend--and Earth's occasion
Have infinite withdrawn--

Or She--Herself--ascended
To too remote a Hight
For lower Recognition
Than Her Omnipotent--

This Mortal Abolition
Is seldom--but as fair
As Apparition—subject
To Autocratic Air--

Eternity's disclosure
To favorites--a few--
Of the Colossal substance
Of Immortality

The lyric as a whole is a rather important one, since it unveils a significant aspect of Miss Dickinson's whole concept of the "Colossal substance of Immortality." I have discussed the unusual use of the adjective infinite in my chapter on the adjective-adverb ambiguity. I did not there, however, suggest the problem of the ambiguous Mortal in the third stanza: is it the soul's abolition of all that pertains to the earthly mortal life which is requisite for the "apparition" of the true meaning of the eternal, or does the knowledge of the meaning of the eternal simply abolish all the dread which normally accompanies our understanding of mortality? At any rate, knowledge of the eternal appears to come only at the price of nullification of the mortal, the temporal, the earthly.

What creates an interesting ambiguity of tone in the lyric is the contrast between the much-sought esoteric superiority of those who comprehend the meaning of the eternal and the apparent distasteful snobbishness which accompanies such knowledge. Such superiority is two-edged: it provides knowledge and comfort, but it also separates the "superior" soul from its fellows. It is knowledge, in other words, purchased at considerable cost. A part of this ambiguity is present in the unusual adjectival form Omnipotent. Though Miss Dickinson uses the word several times as an
adjective, as did her contemporaries, she only this once uses the word as a noun. The lexicons advise us that the word, substantively employed, has only one reference, and that to God. If, as I suspect, Miss Dickinson was aware of this rather transparent implication of the word as she uses it, she suggests in this lyric that the soul, to comprehend eternity, must become God, for He alone could know its fathomless aspect. And, if all this be true, then she may be making a covert charge against God: that He too has kept Himself too completely aloof, that He is only understood by that few elect persons of which the Calvinist theologians spoke so freely. God has become a snob, incomprehensible to mortals, autocratic in His eminence and withdrawal. Thus the adjectival form provides a double effect, describing the superior soul and its esoteric experience, but also suggesting something about God's nature and the difficulty mortals experience in their efforts to know Him.

The other illustration is found in the second stanza of lyric #455:

Triumph--may be of several kinds--
There's Triumph in the Room
When that Old Imperator--Death--
By Faith--be overcome--

There's Triumph of the finer Mind
When Truth--affronted long--
Advance unmoved--to Her Supreme--
Her God--Her only Throng--

A Triumph--when Temptation's Bribe
Be slowly handed back--
One eye upon the Heaven renounced--
And One--upon the Rack--
Severer Triumph—by Himself
Experienced—who pass
Acquitted—from that Naked Bar—
Jehovah's Countenance—

Here is essentially a religious lyric, which speaks of the
spiritual (though sometimes merely ethical) triumphs of the soul
over what may be called roughly "evil." "The finer Mind" of the
second stanza is very likely a somewhat reserved phrase for the
soul. The soul "triumphs" when it overcomes great difficulty or
persecution in behalf of "Truth" and advances uncompromisingly "to
Her Supreme." The adjective has no nounal head which it can
modify, but is used substantivally. Actually, there is some
advantage to the ambiguity. One could supply the noun expression
to read the lines:

When Truth—affronted long--
Advance unmoved—to Her Supreme (expression)--
Her God--Her only Throng--

In such a reading, Her God and Her only Throng are in apposition
to the substantival adjective Supreme. One is inclined to think
of Jesus' saying: "I am the Truth." To enter the presence of God
is, thus, to enter the presence of the supreme expression of
Truth. On the other hand, one can assume that the substantival
adjective is equivalent syntactically to something like supremacy
(or supreme position):

When Truth—affronted long--
Advanced unmoved—to Her Supremacy--
Her God--Her only Throng--

Now the last line of the stanza appears to explain to us why
Truth could advance unmoved to her position of supremacy: the
only throng which she sought to please in her behavior was her God, that in which or He in Whom she believed. Thus the amplification of the adjectival form can affect the way in which surrounding passages are read.

The third stanza of lyric #744 provides a further interesting example of the adjective functioning as noun; it is one of Miss Dickinson's best lyrics which I shall discuss more fully in another connection, but its last stanza is useful for our purposes here:

Remorse is cureless--the Disease
Not even God--can heal--
For 'tis His institution--and
The Adequate of Hell--

Miss Dickinson offers an alternative reading for the last line of this lyric:

The Complement of Hell--

If we adopt this reading, as her editors did in the 1891 Poems, then Miss Dickinson seems to be speaking of remorse as the temporal, finite, earthly complement of hell; if one wishes to know what hell is like while still on earth, he may compare it to its earthly counterpart, remorse. However, if one keeps the original reading adequate, the line's meaning is somewhat broader. Remorse can make any human experience a hell; it is adequate to render a man's life as intolerable as the torment of eternal retribution. And even God cannot heal the wounds of remorse, for, as in the case of hell, it is God Who instituted it.

Let me conclude all this by saying what I have already
implied in one way or another, that Emily Dickinson is conscious of the normal semantic differences between the noun and the adjective, and that she interchanges these forms, not capriciously at all, but with nearly always a clear notion of what she is accomplishing by the substitutions. Adjectives characteristically convey qualities which may be attributed to objects, but by giving them nounal syntactic status, Miss Dickinson objectifies the quality and makes it appear to have independent existence as a quality. Nouns, and here I largely exclude abstract nouns, characteristically name objects and bespeak tangibility. When used adjectivally, they denote a greater palpability than the usual adjectival form which could convey only a quality or characteristic of an object.

Let me point out too that there is another principle which aids her selection: she invariably chooses the shorter form. When the noun is shorter than the adjective (e.g., angel-angelic, fairy-fairylike, pomp-pompous), she selects the noun; when the adjective is shorter than the noun (e.g., black-blackness), she selects the adjective. Thus, depending upon the end in view, Miss Dickinson selects between distinct syntactic functions for her lyric purposes, whether they be semantic or whether they involve the principle of compression, or both.
CHAPTER III

THE VERB

In prose, as in poetry, an enormous semantic weight is entrusted to the verb. Carefully devised predication can eliminate much excessive wordiness and general misconstruction in the writing of the English sentence. When Hemingway sent an early manuscript to Ezra Pound, in fact, that "master of the blue pencil" returned it with massive excision of adjective and adverb, rendered unnecessary by precision of noun and verb. Of course, the lean sparse prose of the twenties is no longer the absolute model of language it once seemed; however, the implications of the venture are still edifying, illustrating the unnecessary lumber of the average prose style. All of us, at one time or another, have had the experience of having to trim away the excess in preparation of a message for a telegram. Adjectives and adverbs flee, while nouns and verbs press the meaning in its most succinct form.

Because of their general semantic importance, verbs are among the most valuable equipment of the poet, and Emily Dickinson's skill in making them her vassals is the subject of this chapter. In passing, I have already referred in other chapters to certain verb practices which are a characteristic of Miss Dickinson's
style. Here I should like to bring together those problems and to add others of equal interest. I shall divide my discussion into four parts: I shall speak of her interchange 1) of active for passive forms; 2) of plural for singular forms; 3) of subjunctive for indicative forms. Finally, 4) I shall refer to a number of other less frequent, though no less provocative, verbal deviations.

The general superiority of the active over the passive voice in most expository situations has been universally agreed upon. Of course, there are occasions when the passive form is preferable; for example, to say "Mrs. Beethoven bore Ludwig in 1770" would be nothing short of absurd. Nonetheless, in ordinary usage, it is better to allow the real actor to be the grammatical subject of a sentence. The reason? The active voice has a natural superiority in its very nature; it states its meaning actively. Except in cases where emphasis demands it, use the active voice; that was Professor Strunk's advice in "the little book," and it has stood up rather well as a stylistic injunction. It is just this greater "active" force of the active voice which Emily Dickinson exploits in using the active form where normal prose syntax had anticipated the passive.

Most frequently this substitution occurs in infinitival phrases. For example, in the first stanza of lyric #1207, to define appears to represent either an ellipsis or an active-passive substitution:

He preached upon "Breadth" till it argued him narrow--
The Broad are too broad to define
And on "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!

One may expand the second line to read:

The Broad are too broad (for us) to define (them),
or,

The Broad are too broad to (be) define(d).

In the first reading, the subject us is implied; in the second, there is an ambiguity as to who should do the defining, the emphasis accruing to the action with no suggestion of agent. The second rendering is certainly preferable if we wish to emphasize the impossibility of definition of "the Broad" (in the first it is our inability to define which is stressed). Miss Dickinson achieves the same semantic effect, saves one word and one morpheme, and preserves the stronger active form of the infinitive.

The same is true in the third stanza of lyric #795:

Her final Summer was it--
And yet We guessed it not--
If tenderer industriousness
Pervaded Her, We thought

A further force of life
Developed from within--
When Death lit all the shortness up
It made the hurry plain--

We wondered at our blindness
When nothing was to see
But Her Carrara Guide post--
At Our Stupidity--

When duller than our dullness
The Busy Darling lay--
So busy was she—finishing—
So leisurely—were We—

Here again the text of the tenth line can be emended to conformity
with more normal usage by one of two means. Either we can expand
the line to read:

Nothing (there) was (for us) to see,
or,

Nothing was to (be) see(n).

In the first rendering, the understood us is subject of the active
infinitive; in the second, nothing is subject of the passive
infinitive. In the first, emphasis is upon the action; in the
second, upon the object. Miss Dickinson has suggested both by
her use of the active infinitive at a point at which we would
normally anticipate the passive.

An argument based upon the assumption of ignorance on Miss
Dickinson's part does not hold up very well, first, because her
prose practice demonstrates her awareness of usual English syntac-
tic expectation; secondly, because frequently she uses active
and passive forms side by side in the same lyric. This is
illustrated in the second and third lines of the short lyric
#1135:

Too cold is this
To warm with Sun—
Too stiff to bended be,
To joint this Agate were a work—
Outstaring Masonry—

How went the Agile Kernel out
Contusion of the Husk
Nor Rip, nor wrinkle indicate
But just an Asterisk.
There is here an interesting alternation between the homonyms too and to (as the sign of the infinitive) at the beginnings of the lines of the first stanza. I think the intention of that effect makes the use of the irregular active form in the second line integral; had she written to be warmed, Miss Dickinson had lost the pause given us by the apparent parallel structures too cold--too warm, which, in the course of the poem, must be revised to clarify the infinitival function of the second line's to warm.

The same alternative emendations are possible, but the surprising thing is that the irregular form appears just before a line in which the full passive syntactic equivalence is given (despite the inversion to bended be).

The first stanza of lyric #995 presents an interesting further example, since the expanded form demands the alteration of a form:

This was in the White of the Year--
That--was in the Green--
Drifts were as difficult then to think
As Daisies now to be seen--

Looking back is best that is left
Or if it be--before--
Retrospection is Prospect's half,
Sometimes, almost more.

In this example the fourth line gives us the perfectly normal to be seen, while it is preceded by the exceptional to think. An expansion to allow the passive form would require to (be) thought (of), while (for us) to think (of) would be the alternative pattern.

There are instances of this active-passive substitution other
than the infinitival one. In the opening stanza of lyric #508, for example, the complementary gerund using sounds strange to ears accustomed to a passive form in such a syntactic environment:

I'm ceded--I've stopped being Their's--
The name They dropped upon my face
With water, in the country church
Is finished using, now,
And They can put it with my Dolls,
My childhood, and the string of spools,
I've finished threading--too--

More regular usage had anticipated:

Is finished (being) use(d) now,
or,

(I've) finished using now.

What appears contradictory to the general premise in the first interpretation above is that is finished and being used give us two passive forms consecutively by implication, while my argument has been based upon the assumption that Miss Dickinson uses the active syntactic forms because of their greater "active" semantic force. Of course, I can offer in defense that Professor Johnson thinks it in "hardly more than worksheet draft as it stands."¹

Also, the emphasis, in the present shape, is upon the name, an emphasis necessary for the conveying of the sense of the passage: it is her name that the poetess has finished with and left behind her, along with other childhood attachments; likely this was a part of the poetic intention.

Again in the last stanza of lyric #598, we see ambiguities

arising from the unusual use of the active participial form lulled:

Three times—we parted—Breath—and I--
Three times—He would not go--
But strove to stir the lifeless Fan
The Waters—strove to stay.

Three Times—the Billows threw me up--
Then caught me--like a Ball--
Then made Blue faces in my face--
And pushed away a sail

That crawled Leagues off—I liked to see--
For thinking—while I die--
How pleasant to behold a Thing
Where Human faces—be--

The Waves grew sleepy—Breath—did not—
The Winds—like Children—lulled—
Then Sunrise kissed my Chrysalis—
And I stood up—and lived--

Interestingly enough, a remarkable bridge between poetess and nature is established here through the ambiguity of voice. At first we are prone to think that the winds, as a part of the natural surrounding and yoking themselves with the waves of the preceding line, have become calm and motionless:

The Winds—(seemed) like Children—(who had been) lulled (to sleep).

Or is it the winds which are an active "lulling" force calming the distraught poetess until finally the morning sun kisses her to life? Of course, the ambiguity is extended because of the preceding line. Are we to think the implication of "Breath—did—not—" fulfilled by allowing "grew sleepy" to double as its elliptical fulfillment:

Breath—did not—grow sleepy;
or is the phrase meant to suggest that "breath—(still)did not—"
Certainly the ambiguity lends considerable force to the paradox that the poetess had "died" three times while still alive. In that sense, breath both "did not come" and it merely "grew sleepy," depending upon whether the literal or metaphorical sense is foremost in our minds.

There is a similar ambiguity in the third line of the opening stanza of lyric #1147:

After a hundred years
Nobody knows the Place
Agony that enacted there
Motionless as Peace

Weeds triumphant ranged
Strangers strolled and spelled
At the lone Orthography
Of the Elder Dead

Winds of Summer Fields
Recollect the way--
Instinct picking up the Key
Dropped by memory--

Ellipsis and ambiguity of voice combine to enlarge the meaning of the lines. Of course, it is possible to regard only the ellipsis and to expand the verses to read:

(The) Agony that (was) enacted there
(Is now) motionless as Peace.

However, to do so is to nullify the active implication of enacted, a subtle point which makes agony itself, and not the human creatures of the event, an active agent transcending the merely fleeting motions of men now dead. It is an ambiguity worth preserving.

All these examples of Miss Dickinson's substitution of active for passive forms (and there are, of course, no examples in which
she does the reverse) seem to carry with them again an awareness of achievement. Nearly all the instances which I have mentioned here (and they are representative of the total practice) do function in a measurable way to increase effect, even if that effect be only the greater force of the agent-action sequence implicit in the active form. At times too the noticeable semantic increase supports the argument for a conscious exploitation of syntactic practice.

Such an advantage is not always so clear in the second type of verb substitution which Miss Dickinson employs with some regularity: the use of a plural where we would normally anticipate a third singular form. In English, we inflect verbs for person and number only in the case of the third singular. At one time in our history the inflection was fuller, but we now have only that remnant of inflection for person and number (with the obvious exception of the copulative verb to be). What is singular about this particular poetic practice is the fact that Miss Dickinson frequently resorts to it in her prose letters. There too she often completely disregards inflection for person and number in verbs. For example, writing to her brother Austin on 7 May 1853, she had said: "Wasn't you very tired when you got back to Cambridge?" And in late June 1883, just three years before her death, she would still say in a letter to Maria Whitney: "Then we pray to Him to rescind the 'no,' and He don't

---

answer at all. It would be of little relevance to argue ignorance for Emily, since most of the time she used the forms correctly. But I have been able to determine no uniformity of motive for her; some of the instances appear to be purposeful, others merely capricious.\(^4\)

The practice is abundantly illustrated in the lyrics as well. There are examples in the second and fifth stanzas of lyric #529:

\[\text{I'm sorry for the Dead--Today--} \\
\text{It's such congenial times} \\
\text{Old Neighbors have at fences--} \\
\text{It's time o'year for Hay.} \]

\[\text{And Broad--Sunburned Acquaintance} \\
\text{Discourse between the Toil--} \\
\text{And laugh, a homely species} \\
\text{That makes the Fences smile--} \]

\[\text{It seems so straight to lie away} \\
\text{From all the noise of Fields--} \\
\text{The Busy Carts--the fragrant Cocks--} \\
\text{The Mower's Metre--Steals} \]

\[\text{A Trouble lest they're homesick--} \\
\text{Those Farmers--and their Wives--} \\
\text{Set separate from the Farming--} \\
\text{And all the Neighbor's lives--} \]

\[\text{A Wonder if the Sepulchre} \\
\text{Dont feel a lonesome way--} \\
\text{When Men--and Boys--and Carts--and June,} \\
\text{Go down the Fields to "Hay"--} \]

The lyric is somewhat elliptical and, consequently, does not always allow us to be positive in diagnosis of the deviation from normal syntax. We cannot be positive, for example, that discourse

\[^3\text{Ibid., III, 780.}\]

\[^4\text{Of course, it is true that wasn't and don't in her letters may be considered examples of a standard colloquial dialect.}\]
is actually the verb whose subject *Acquaintance* represents an unusual yoking of singular subject to plural verb, or whether *discourse* may not be a noun, a clarification of *Acquaintance*. I suspect the former is true, but the latter is not impossible. And even at that it is not certain whether *Acquaintance* is meant to represent a syntactic plural or whether here is a further example of the interchange of number in subject-verb agreement.5

The mispunctuation of *Neighbor's* for *Neighbors'* in the fourth stanza is likely nothing more than that (Miss Dickinson's apparent misunderstanding of punctuation generally and of the apostrophe particularly is a problem which taxes every effort at interpretation of her poetry). However, in the fifth stanza, in her use of *Dont* as verb for the subject *Sepulchre*, we have the most characteristic instance of deviation from normal usage: a singular subject with a plural verb. Strictly speaking, the *do* here may suggest a precise subjunctive form, employed by Miss Dickinson to convey properly the quality of hesitation or doubt about the whole question. However, in other instances of the identical subject-verb pattern, such is surely not the case.

What did Miss Dickinson's earlier editor Mrs. Bianchi do with these difficulties when she prepared them for publication? She reduced the oddity to perfectly regular syntax, substituting *acquaintances* for *Acquaintance* and *Is not* for *Dont* feel. For the

5There is another interesting use of *Acquaintance* in what appears a plural sense in the second stanza of lyric #1020: "I couldn't weep--for so many smiling / New Acquaintance--this Baby made--".
latter "correction" she merely followed the example of Mrs. Todd in the 1896 Poems, but the former was her own emendation. Again the critics showed themselves fearful of all but the most prim grammatical form, though their impulse here did no harm.

In the opening stanza of lyric #751, we find a similar example:

My Worthiness is all my Doubt--
His Merit--all my fear--
Contrasting which, my quality
Do lowlier--appear--

And there is a different sort of example in each of the three stanzas of lyric #828:

The Robin is the One
That interrupt the Morn
With hurried--few--express Reports
When March is scarcely on--

The Robin is the One
That overflow the Noon
With her cherubic quantity--
An April but begun--

The Robin is the One
That speechless from her Nest
Submit that Home--and Certainty
And Sanctity, are best

Here the consistency of the effect seems deliberate, evoking the conjecture that Miss Dickinson uses the singular form of the noun to "single out" the robin from all other birds, to individualize him, while she uses the plural form of the verb to suggest the large number of robins assembled to interrupt, to overflow, and to submit. Such an assertion can be speculative at best, but it seems reasonable in view of the recurring pattern here. Ordinarily, however, this second variety of interchange appears only
gratuitous, contributing nothing to the effectiveness of the lyrics.

If I may be forgiven a momentary digression, I should like to note here that there are instances of this singular-plural interchange which do not involve verbs. For example, in lyric #689, there is what may be explained as an example of the editorial plural:

We learned to like the Fire
By playing Glaciers—when a Boy—
The linking of We and a Boy does not resound with perfect agreement, but is likely a reflection of a convention of studied modesty which had been assimilated into Miss Dickinson's style.

Also, in lyric #373, we come surprisingly upon a singular noun where we had expected a plural one:

Put from my simple speech all plain word--
Take other accents, as such I heard. . . .

Here the singular form seems to be dictated by the need for rhyme. But the example underscores a principle already laid down: if the syntactic order can somehow be suggested without explicit statement, Emily Dickinson tends to take the liberty when she sees need or occasion.

Our third interchange is that of subjunctive for indicative forms. I have already suggested its possibility earlier, and indeed the third species is closely related to the first, since the subjunctive form in English often overlaps the plural indicative form: he ask instead of he asks resembles the uninflected form of the verb which is perfectly regular for every other person.
and number: I ask, you ask, we ask, you ask, they ask. The subjunctive form has virtually disappeared from common usage except in the conditional and other infrequent conventional patterns where it has been fixed by usage (e.g., "I would like to ask that my son be excused from class"). Usually there is an alternate means of expression which comes more readily to mind. However, in a poetess about whom a number of critics have noted an insecurity and uncertainty about the nature of the world about her, the subjunctive form appears with a regularity which causes some question about its intention. Of course, were Emily Dickinson using the subjunctive forms in a purely conventional way, we should conclude simply that she followed a rigid conventionalized style. However, she does not do so, but uses the subjunctive form where more rigid conventions had demanded the indicative. This is what makes her usage provocative.

Lyric #455 builds its quality of ambiguity upon this interchange of subjunctive for indicative forms. The normal indicative syntax had suggested a certainty about the situations described; but Miss Dickinson seems to say, after each verb, "if indeed that is possible":

Triumph—may be of several kinds—
There's Triumph in the Room
When that Old Imperator—Death—
By Faith—be overcome—

There's Triumph of the finer Mind
When Truth—affronted long—
Advance unmoved—to Her Supreme—
Her God—Her only Throng—
On the surface, the poetess appears self-confident: there are several kinds of triumph: that of conquest over death through faith, that of truth over error, that of resisting temptation, and that of acquittal before the judgment of God. But Miss Dickinson's casting of the four main verbs in the subjunctive mode tends to raise some doubt about the matter. She then appears to say: "there is a triumph in the room when death is overcome by faith, if, indeed, death can be overcome by faith at all."

No doubt the self-assurance of the Calvinistic divines whom Miss Dickinson had listened to had not convinced her altogether that eternal life was so certain as they had maintained (at least that is the testimony of the letters which she wrote during her early years). So what appears at first a poem of moral and spiritual superiority over the vicissitudes of life, becomes finally a revelation of timorousness in the face of so awesome a metaphysical spectrum as is evoked in talk of death, of truth, of temptation, and judgment. The grammar conveys the hesitant ambiguity.

Other passages reveal the general want of modal auxiliaries.

Note these two stanzas of lyric #848:

Just as He spoke it from his Hands
This Edifice remain--
A Turret more, a Turret less
Dishonor his Design—

According as his skill prefer
It perish, or endure—
Content, soe'er, it ornament
His absent character.

The solutions to the elliptical verb forms vary from line to line. In stanza 1, line 1, and stanza 2, line 2, we appear to be required to add some such word as let: "(Let) this edifice remain just as (it was when) he spoke it from his hands," and "(Let) it perish or endure content, (what)soe'er (it may become, so long as) it (may) ornament his absent character." The problems of stanza 1, line 4, and stanza 2, line 1, appear to involve other difficulties: "A turret more, a turret less, (would) dishonor his design," and "According as his skill (wishes it to be), prefer (it)."

Here the solution suggests a slightly different principle from the previous example. There Miss Dickinson exploits the ambiguous uncertainty of the subjunctive form appearing where normal usage had dictated indicative forms. Here she compresses the expanded verb phrases to a single form, providing us her characteristically economical syntax.

In this second example, as in others, often the ambiguity suggests not so much the subjunctive as the elliptical imperative form. This is true in lyric #515 as well:

No Crowd that has occurred
Exhibit(s)—I suppose
That General Attendance
That Resurrection—does—

(Let) Circumference be full—
(Let) The long restricted Grave
Assert hex Vital Privilege—
(Let) The Dust—connect—and live—

On Atoms—(Let) features (of the dead be re)place(d)—
All Multitudes that (ever) were
(Are) Efface(d) in the Comparison—
As Suns—dissolve a star—

(Let) Solemnity—prevail—
(Let) It's Individual Doom
Possess each separate Consciousness—
August—Absorbed—Numb—

What Duplicate—(could) exist—
What Parallel can (there) be—
Of the Significance of This—
To Universe—and Me?

Of course, one could interpret these examples as mere shortened singular forms of the indicative, but the sense of conjuration which rises out of the speculation that they may be imperative forms is more appropriate to the semantic sense of God's calling the dead from their graves to final judgment. At any rate, the compression leaves the poem open for either possible interpretation.

The result then of Miss Dickinson's use of this third species of verb variation is that it creates ambiguity of modal possibility which, in turn, may, and frequently does, enhance the total meaning of the lyric. It may be thought simply a compression of usual indicative forms, in which case, the succinctness resulting from the elision of the modal auxiliary is the only uniform benefit (except, of course, that there are occasional gains in metric and phonetic effects). More often, the use of the verb without its third singular morpheme implies either a subjunctive or imperative form; in the former case, the quality of doubt and
uncertainty are foremost; in the latter, a reticence to give commands with force and clarity may lie at the source. Both of these latter possibilities reinforce the sustained image of the poetess as shy, withdrawn, reluctant. And one is compelled to conclude again that the very syntactic shape of her lyrics reflects the reclusive nature of which her critics have spoken uniformly.

Beside these rather frequent recurring patterns of verbal variation, there are numerous examples of departure from normal usage. For example, occasionally Miss Dickinson uses an unusual sequence of tenses: "I showed her Hights (sic) she never saw (i.e., had never seen before)" (#446), and "I (would have) liked to stay-- / But Morn--didn't want me--now--" (#425) when we should have expected a present tense of the verb to conform with the temporal indication of now. Or she may use a verb as an adjective (perhaps intending to suggest a shortened participial form): "But there (i.e., at Woe's gate)--(Time's Chargers are) so gloat (i.e., so full of gloating, or so prone to gloat) to hesitate / They will not stir for blows--." (#1458). Or unusual contracted forms: "The Soul's (i.e., The Soul has, in analogy with the opening stanza of the lyric) retaken moments--" (#512).

There are as well the clear examples of solecism: the appearance of swang for swung in line six of #42, the frequent early misuse of lie and lay. Most of these examples appear in the earliest lyrics as their numbers indicate, and Miss Dickinson appears to outgrow the problems noted.

Emily Dickinson's use of verbs and verb forms then shows her
poetic instinct as well as her linguistic agility. She can pare away all that may be extraneous to the basic communication, exploiting at the same time the inevitable ambiguities attendant upon such condensations. She prefers the active to the passive forms, letting the obvious semantic force of the language persuade us of the syntactic passive, while getting the greater charge of the active form. And she can all the while retain her instinctive reticence by modal ambiguity which lends a hint of personal reluctance existing side by side with sureness of poetic technique. All in all, her mastery of the arts of compression and suggestiveness are clearly illustrated in her use of the verb.
Closely connected with the oddity of verb usage in the lyrics of Emily Dickinson are the frequent eccentricities of participial and gerundial forms. There are four particular recurring patterns. The first of these is the unusual substitution of the present or preterite form of the verb for the more normal participial form. At times the substitution strikes a note of seeming barbarousness, as it does in the fourth stanza of lyric #356:

The Day that I was crowned
Was like the other Days--
Until the Coronation came--
And then--'twas Otherwise--

As Carbon in the Coal
And Carbon in the Gem
Are One--and yet the former
Were dull for Diadem--

I rose, and all was plain--
But when the Day declined
Myself and It, in Majesty
Were equally--adorned--

The Grace that I--was chose--
To Me--surpassed the Crown
That was the Witness for the Grace--
'Twas even that 'twas Mine--

Of course, it could be argued even here that Miss Dickinson, both semantically and syntactically wished to focus attention upon the action of him who chose her, rather than upon the state of
existence as one chosen: her fourth stanza is built upon such a
notion, that it is more important to be the subject of the
choosing than to have the crown which designates her as having
been chosen. Still, the subtlety hardly outweighs the shock of
the ungrammatical form.

A similar instance occurs in the opening line of lyric #664:

Of all the Souls that stand create--
I have elected--One--
When Sense from Spirit--files away--
And Subterfuge--is done--

More normal syntax had dictated created at the end of the first
line, but Miss Dickinson rejected the convention for her unusual
form. It may be that she was following the implications of a
quite different logic, however: there are examples in English of
adjectival forms which are identical with the present tense of
the verb (e. g., prostrate, prostitute, etc.). Shakespeare, in
fact, had predicted Miss Dickinson in Romeo and Juliet: "O any­
thing of nothing first create." Shakespeare may have been her
source here; yet her frequent use of the same deviation shows how
fully she had assimilated the principle.

In the fourth stanza of lyric #961, we see the same device
used in a most unusual pattern; there the indicative form of the
verb appears to stand as a substantival adjective, formed after
the pattern of the shortened participle. Putting it another way,
the indicative functions as gerund:

The Tenant of the Narrow Cottage, wert Thou--
Permit to be
The Housewife in thy low attendance
Contenteth Me--
The second clause has as its verb *contenteth*; its subject is likely whatever noun *permit(ted)* may modify; or, from another point of view, if *permit* itself is to function as subject, it must have gerundial or infinitival status (this latter suggests the possibility that the *to be* functions both as complementary to *permit* and as its functional marker */"to be permitted to be the housewife . . .  contenteth me"*/). The final choice seems a matter of reader preference, but the syntax cannot stand close inspection without some adjustment of form.

A second common variation in use of the participle is very like the common fault of schoolboys inexperienced in the subtleties of learned linguistic habit: the dangling modifier. In one of her best known lyrics, for example, Miss Dickinson causes the puristic grammarians some anxiety over the abstruse modification of the participle *bred*:

> Exultation is the going  
> Of an inland soul to sea,  
> Past the houses—past the headlands—  
> Into deep Eternity—

> Bred as we, among the mountains,  
> Can the sailor understand  
> The divine intoxication  
> Of the first league out from land?  

As it stands, *bred* has neither noun nor pronoun to which it may be attached. "Correct" usage had required: "Can the sailor understand, as (do) we (who have been) bred among the mountains, the divine intoxication of the first league out from land?" Like the child who primitively laments that he "ain't got no candy," Emily
Dickinson does make her meaning clear, but at some stress of syntax. She strips away what apparently is not absolutely needed (four words), yet arouses no perplexity as to precise semantic equivalence. The effect is an excellent terseness of expression.

Another equally popular lyric of the anthologies is #303, and it raises the same difficulty of the dangling participial modifier:

The Soul selects her own Society--
Then--shuts the Door--
To her divine Majority--
Present no more--

Unmoved--she notes the Chariot--pausing--
At her low Gate--
Unmoved--an Emperor be kneeling
Upon her Mat--

I've known her--from an ample nation--
Choose One--
Then--close the Valves of her attention--
Like Stone--

It is interesting that the editors of the 1890 Poems again altered the seventh and eighth lines to read: "Unmoved--an Emperor is kneeling / Upon her Mat--." In such a case, the unmoved appears to describe the emperor; apparently, though ignored, he cannot be moved from her door. Miss Dickinson's original, however, seems to enforce the first line of the second stanza by repeating the word which carries the weight of indifference for the poetess, unmoved. It still describes the aloofness of the poetess even in the face of the approach of nobility. The expanded "(She remains) unmoved (even though) an emperor (may) be kneeling upon her mat" adds nothing but syllables to the lines.
In a number of lyrics, especially some which resemble fragments more than complete poetic utterances, Miss Dickinson builds a group of participial phrases and leaves them dangling. Note lyric #1289, for example:

Left in immortal Youth
On that low Plain
That hath nor Retrospection
Nor Again--
Ransomed from years--
Sequestered from Decay
Canceled like Dawn
In comprehensive Day--

The structure of the poem depends upon the syntactic identity of the four words left, ransomed, sequestered, and canceled; they are all participles. But participles cannot stand by themselves; they must modify substantives. Here they do not. It may be that Miss Dickinson takes the same liberty with the participle (as an adjective) which she takes with the adjective; she requires it to function as both modifier and modified (as adjective or noun, respectively). That still, of course, does not answer the problem totally. While it gives us an excuse for the gerundial estimate of the participial form, it still leaves us with substantival isolates which cannot attain sentence status in any usual categorization. No prescriptive analysis can account for it. Yet it is successful in its originality.

I have already touched upon the third species of participial variation in my chapter on verbs, but from quite a different point of view. What I wish to point up here is the frequent appearance of participial where one had expected indicative forms and vice
versa. An example of the former is found in the first stanza of lyric #650:

Pain--has an Element of Blank--
It cannot recollect
When it begun--or if there were
A time when it was not --

It has no Future--but itself--
It's Infinite contain
It's Past--enlightened to perceive
New Periods--of Pain.

Of course, the second line of the second stanza has its own oddity, one which the 1890 Poems revised to read: "Its infinite realms contain / Its past." But my chief point of interest here is in the participial form begun. It could be argued that Miss Dickinson had simply erred in selecting the past participle when she meant to use the preterite (a frequent problem in the strong verbs). However, she seems to be drawing our attention to the fact that, so far as our memory is concerned, this pain had no beginning; it seems, in retrospect, always to have been begun before we remember its beginning. It is a somewhat complicated and theoretical solution, and it may well be that the poem is not greatly strengthened by it, but it could have semantic, as well as syntactic, force. To have said began or even had begun had weakened the fusion of grammar and implication as they stand now tightly mutual in support of one another. The effect is neither superfluous nor the product of ignorance; it is the result of careful control of syntax and sense.

An example of the latter, the use of an indicative form for the gerund is found in lyric #422.
More Life—went out—when He went
Than Ordinary Breath—
Lit with a finer Phosphor—
Requiring in the Quench—

A Power of Renowned Cold.

Quench has no status as a noun, yet it functions here as object of the preposition in. Its substantival marker the also gives it a standing which it does not normally assume. Quench has established only verb usage; verbs, to attain substantival status, must acquire gerundial inflection (quenching is the proper form). Nevertheless, the indicative is allowed to stand as noun head of a prepositional phrase, set apart to that task by the definite article.

There is one final participial usage which I should like to refer to; it is not unique with Miss Dickinson, but is an ambiguity which frequently arises in participial usage. I can best speak of it by example:

Shame is the shawl of Pink
in which we wrap the Soul
To keep it from infesting Eyes—
The elemental Veil
Which helpless Nature drops
When pushed upon a scene
Repugnant to her probity—
Shame is the tint divine.

(#1412)

The ambiguity is in the third line: does Miss Dickinson mean to suggest that the soul wraps itself in shame to keep itself from infesting the eyes of those who look upon it, or to keep the eyes of others from infesting it? Perhaps both interpretations could be argued for; if so, then the total poem is enriched by the condensation of both ideas into the single ambiguous phrase.
All these participial-gerundial deviations are closely linked to those of the verb itself, since the participle is essentially a verbal adjective and the gerund a verbal noun. They give the poetess a power of ambiguity, a subtlety of syntactic reinforcement of semantic intent, a capacity for playfulness and artificiality appropriately suited to her total poetic intent. That she knew what she was about in exploitation of the devices is attested by the agility with which she exercises liberty of usage and the nuance of effect which her experiment yields.
CHAPTER V

THE NOUN AND THE VERB

In English it is a common occurrence for nouns to gain verbal usage, and vice versa. For example, the snow can blanket the countryside, and the police may ticket cars that are overparked. Similarly, players can do their act, and teachers can grade their papers. The syntactic expansion of forms (known technically as "functional shift") developing between these two parts of speech is particularly frequent. Nevertheless, the average speaker of American English is reluctant to carry the principle very far; Most of us are not adept at "inventing" forms which we have not heard as a regular part of established speech. This is not true of the poet, however; he often surprises us by the facility with which he bridges the gap between syntactic forms. Emily Dickinson is no exception.

Note her use of the noun as verb in the second stanza of lyric #942:

Snow beneath whose chilly softness
Some that never lay
Make their first Repose this Winter
I admonish Thee

Blanket Wealthier the Neighbor
We so new bestow
Than thine acclimated Creature
Wilt Thou, Austere Snow?
The whole lyric appears at first an apostrophe to the snow which covers the graves of the dead. The poetess asks the snow to blanket the newly dead neighbor more wealthily than it does those accustomed to the climate through long lying beneath the ground. Such a syntactic interpretation, while clearly supported by the last lines of the first and second stanzas of the lyric, presents two problems; it is argued against by the want of punctuation after snow in line 1 and by the unusual cryptic ellipsis of the second line. Reconsideration reveals a second possibility:

Some that never lay
Beneath (the) snow (beneath) whose chilly softness
(They) make their first repose this winter.

It appears both readings are necessary for the fullest realization of the poem's meanings.

But I had referred to this lyric to point to the example of the noun functioning as a verb. *Blanket* appears here to have verbal force, carrying imperative weight; the snow is admonished to blanket the newly bestowed neighbor "wealthier" (i.e., "more wealthily"; the implication is, I suppose, that the snow is to provide a softer, more luxuriant blanket for the woman). *Blanket* is, as I have already suggested, a rather common verb form.

The verbs which function as nouns, however, are of a more unusual kind. Note that one in the first line of the last stanza of lyric #784:

I tried to drop it in the Crowd--
To lose it in the Sea--

In Cups of artificial Drowse
To steep its shape away--
Drowse has no history as a noun, yet it functions here as the object of the preposition of and is modified by artificial. It is interesting especially to note the compression effected here. To have said the same thing in more normal syntactic structure had required something like this: "I tried to steep it (the grave)'s shape away by imbibing cups of wine which could induce an artificial drowsiness." Miss Dickinson's compression is better; it fuses the intoxicating liquor and the drowsiness in a most effective way.

At times the substitution is of a verb where, at the least, a gerund had been required by normal syntax. In the second stanza of lyric #639, for instance, moan seems to function where moaning had been usual.

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

The lyric describes the experience of defeat as contrasted to victory. Moan does have nounal status, but only as a pluralizer. Here it is functioning either as a quantifiable noun or as a foreshortened gerund. I think the latter, since it is the action that is stressed. Of course, the gerund is itself a hybrid form, keeping the character of the verb while functioning as a noun. Such is the case here.
There is a similar example in the first stanza of lyric #243:

I've known a Heaven, like a Tent--
To wrap it's shining Yards--
Pluck up it's stakes, and disappear--
Without the sound of Boards
Or Rip of Nail--Or Carpenter--
But just the miles of Stare--
That signalize a Show's Retreat--
In North America--

The expression retains much of its semantic oddity, but it becomes more syntactically regular if we emend the form *stare* to read *gerundially staring*. Again, *stare* does have nounal status, but only as a pluralizer form; it is never used quantifiably.

Consequently, the passage is open to an ambiguity of solution: either, as I have suggested, we must interpret it as a foreshortened gerundial form, or as an irregular quantifiable usage. In either case, we have a crossing of the nounal-verbal boundaries.

There are instances also when it is impossible to be absolutely sure whether Miss Dickinson means us to read the nounal or verbal character of ambiguous forms as preeminent. For example, in the second stanza of lyric #743, it is difficult to decide whether *blossom* is to be construed as an imperative form following the pattern of *go*, or whether a copulative verb is to be understood as implied between the two words:

The Flowers--appealed--a timid Throng--
I reinforced the Door--
Go blossom to the Bees--I said--
And trouble Me--no more--

Either "Go, blossom to (or for) the bees," or "Go, (be a) blossom to the bees"; we cannot be dogmatic. My preference is for the former.
The same assertion may be made of the opening stanza of lyric #17:

**Baffled for just a day or two--**
**Embarrassed--not afraid--**
**Encounter in my garden**
**An unexpected Maid.**

**She beckons, and the woods start--**
**She nods, and all begin--**
**Surely, such a country**
**I was never in!**

Here there is no ambiguity of meaning: the maid appears (from the circumstances of composition) to have been a flower, likely a rosebud which had appeared early in the poetess' garden. Encountering the "maid" unexpectedly, she is momentarily embarrassed or baffled. The only ambiguity is that of the syntactic function of encounter in line three. Ought we to expand the tight syntax to read:

(I am) baffled . . .
(When I) encounter in my garden
An unexpected Maid,

or

(I was) baffled . . .
(By the) encounter in my garden
(With) an unexpected Maid.

In the one instance, encounter is a verb; in the other, a noun. Having the status of both and appearing in a compressed structure, it cannot finally be decided. It may be also that the confusion of syntax is contrived by Miss Dickinson to convey the slight and momentary bafflement and embarrassment occasioned by the sudden encounter. At least form and meaning seem to function harmoniously.
I have suggested in all these examples that Miss Dickinson follows a rather well established convention of formation of syntactic forms (nouns from verbs, etc.), but usually with an additional freedom which takes her beyond the convention. There is a further example of this in stanza two of lyric #283:

And yet a Wren's Peruke  
Were not so shy  
Of Goer by—

I have picked these three lines from the lyric to demonstrate my point: Goer by gets its form undoubtedly from such standard patterns as passerby, suggesting a compressed clause such as one who passes by. If language were governed by logic, rather than by established and often capricious patterns of usage, goer by would, by analogy, be a perfectly satisfactory form. However, it must strike the reader as still strange. Yet Miss Dickinson does not hesitate to take the liberty if it is suited to her desired effect.

It appears in all this that common or accustomed usage simply could not keep pace with the poetess. Language moves at a snail's pace, liberating itself from the arbitrary rules imposed upon it by convention, abetted by the prim old maids who earn their bread by perpetuating venerable lies. But the poetess, looking to the pattern, seeing the direction, moved on to forms of her own invention.
In her substitution of the adverb where normal usage had preferred the noun, Emily Dickinson provides us a further illustration of her bent toward syntactic freedom, while actually effecting no particular semantic ambiguity except that which might be implicit in syntactic form (e.g., I had earlier suggested that the use of the adjective black in a nounal position in lyric #198 seems to convey a greater palpability than the adjective had otherwise been capable of). In this present species, the adverbial form functioning in a nounal position may tend too to give substantival status to words which ordinarily qualify matters of time, place, manner, degree, cause, etc.

There is an interesting example of this in the fourth stanza of lyric #622, in which Miss Dickinson uses the word Well in a nominal sense. The poem contains several unusual instances of syntactic deviation and fragmentation, and I quote it in its entirety:

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

To know if He was patient—part content—
Was Dying as He thought—or different—
Was it a pleasant Day to die—
And did the Sunshine face His way—
What was His furthest mind—Of Home—or God—
Or what the Distant say—
At news that He ceased Human Nature
Such a Day—

And Wishes—Had He Any—
Just His Sigh—Accented—
Had been legible—to Me—
And was He Confident until
Ill fluttered out—in Everlasting Well—

And if He spoke—What name was Best—
What last
What One broke off with
At the Drowsiest—

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

There is a quality of haste about the lyric as a whole. Questions
of the most difficult and provocative kind are asked; questions
which have no answers that can be given with any degree of cer­
tainty, which reflect concern with the details of death, a concern
which has earned Miss Dickinson the label morbid. But the
questions enter the mind with a rapidity which is overpowering in
itself, at times not allowing the syntax to complete itself, but
pressing on to further questions. There are instances of ellipsis,
of inversion, of idiosyncratic oddity ("and Love too best to be").
And, in the fourth stanza, the adverb Well functioning at a point
at which one would anticipate a noun (e. g., Life, Good, Peace,
etc.). Her choice of the adverb is to be commended, however, for
several reasons: first, it picks up the l sounds which have
clustered in the last two lines.
And was He confident until
ill fluttered out—in Everlasting Well.

Secondly, it encapsulates precisely and yet comprehensively what
the poetess wishes to convey as the orthodox expectation of
eternity—that season when all shall at last be well, when it
shall be well with a man's soul, when he shall be finally at peace
with God and in harmony with himself. The use of the word in
psalm and hymn had been fully established, and Miss Dickinson's
selection of it was little short of instinctive. She managed to
qualify the eternal existence and, at the same time, to give the
characterization substantival status.

Other poets appear to have noticed this linguistic potential
also, and, while I do not mean to suggest indebtedness, I think
similarities of deviate usage can be noted in numerous poets.
Perhaps the most widely hailed of practitioners is our contempo­
rary e. e. cummings. In his "anyone lived in a pretty how town,"
for example, he trades upon the shock effects of syntactic inter­
change. In stanza three, he puts side by side two phrases,
filling them out with identical syntactic forms, but having
ignored the fact that forgot is a transitive verb and that grew
(in this context) is intransitive complete:

  children guessed (but only a few
  and down they forgot as up they grew
  autumn winter spring summer)
  That noone loved him more by more.

Admittedly, cummings is an extreme case even as poetic liberties
go, but he does illustrate a rather basic linguistic phenomenon,
that, in English, patterns of inflection and placement are
important factors which can be exploited in themselves as means of lyric effect. There are measurable semantic differences evoked by unusual syntactic substitutions.

Let us look at two other sets of examples: those in which adverbs of time and those in which adverbs of place are allowed to stand for nouns. In the first stanza of lyric #1226, for example, **Afterward** assumes nounal status and stands as a part of a compound subjective complement of "The Popular Heart is . . . ":

```
The Popular Heart is a Cannon first--
Subsequent a Drum--
Bells for an Auxiliary
And an Afterward of Rum--

Not a Tomorrow to know its name
Nor a Past to stare--
Ditches for Realms and a Trip to Jail
For a Souvenir
```

Here the temporal adverb **afterward**, marked out as a noun by the *an* and its coordinate position with **Canon**, **Drum**, and **Bells**, attaches to itself the extraordinary character of all those things experienced in the period of "hangover" which follows the drinking of rum. The space of time implicit in the adverb defines the temporal limits of the experience, but also suggests the neural and sensory after effects of alcohol.

Again in lyric #1289, there is an example of the adverb of time functioning in a nounal slot as object of **hath**:

```
Left in immortal Youth
On that low plain
That hath nor Retrospection
Nor Again--
Ransomed from years--
Sequestered from Decay
```
Canceled like Dawn
In comprehensive Day--

The lyric is clearly a rapturous vision of death and eternity, man left in immortal youth, freed from the necessity of night, age, and decay. Again is one of those things which are not a part of "that low plain." It is interesting that Emily Dickinson suggested one alternative reading for line three: she entertained the possibility of replacing Retrospection with Peradventure.

As a matter of fact, Mrs. Todd and Mrs. Bingham selected the alternative adverbial reading for their edition Bolts of Melody.¹ If we were to adopt the first reading, the contrast would be between the memory of the past and the potential future recurrence of events (neither of which exists in that "plain"); if we adopt the second reading, there is a parallel substitution of adverbial for nounal forms, while the meaning seems to be that there is no hazard or chance nor any repetition (presumably of unpleasant circumstances), since "time" has ceased to exist.

The third, and my final, example of this adverb of time substituting for the noun is in the last line of lyric #1420:

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

When Flesh and Spirit sunder
In Death's Immediately--

Again, the dictionaries show no precedent of immediately as a noun. Yet Miss Dickinson compresses inflection and position here to give us an adverbial noun of some originality. Even though the syntactic strangeness renders itself evident upon even superficial examination, semantic equivalence is not so easily arrived at. Does Miss Dickinson suggest that, after death, spirit will be free of flesh and thus able to apprehend spiritual ideas without intervening difficulty, or that she will understand immediately in eternity all the mystery of life (i.e., she will be needing to ask answers of none, but will comprehend all the moment she enters death's portals)? Both are clearly possible. In this instance then, there is the added complication of semantic ambiguity (a circumstance somewhat rare in this particular type).

Let us look now at the adverb of place which functions as a noun. Again I will give three examples. The first two are identical in that they substitute nowhere as noun heads in prepositional phrases. One is in the fourth stanza of lyric #354, descriptive of a butterfly:

Where Parties--Phantom as Herself--
To Nowhere--seemed to go
In purposeless Circumference--
As 'twere a Tropic Show--

and the other is in the fourth stanza of lyric #661, and describes the poetess' desire to be a meadow bee:

I said "But just to be a Bee"
Upon a Raft of Air
And row in Nowhere all Day long
And anchor "off the Bar"

What Liberty! So Captives deem
Who tight in Dungeons are.

The third is in lyric #884 and represents the opposite semantic form everywhere:

An Everywhere of Silver
With Ropes of Sand
To keep it from effacing
The Track called Land.

This last lyric has only the one syntactically fragmented stanza and appeared in the 1891 Poems with the title "The Sea."

In these examples of the adverb of time, nowhere and everywhere become very nearly geographical in location, taking on the character of names of sites which might be found on exotic maps. Their nounal status in these examples argues for a more substantial identification than their adverbial natures had suggested. So this species of syntactic substitution too shows the poetess seeking after greater concreteness, greater palpability of linguistic suggestion, obtainable only upon assuming a certain grammatical freedom.
Other Variants

In this final chapter on the species of syntactic variation in the poems of Emily Dickinson, I should like to present several other examples of deviation from normal expectation. All the examples which I shall represent here are found in other lyrics as well as those used for illustration; however, none of the examples is so frequent as those described in the preceding chapters. Here is something of a potpourri, but, nevertheless, these examples are worthy of mention.

The first group is that in which nouns and pronouns are used in some unusual way. Frequently Miss Dickinson employs quantifiable nouns as if they were pluralizer nouns. In English, certain nouns are characterized by the fact that they can be modified by the indefinite article or by numeral adjectives and that they have a common plural which is formed ordinarily by the addition of s or es to the singular (e.g., seven miles, three fathers, nineteen ducks, etc.). On the other hand, certain nouns appear to have such plurals only in the rarest instances; they are modified by words which show quantity and frequently appear in prepositional constructions as the object of of (e.g., some hay, much syrup, a bushel of wheat, a quart of milk; it should
seem extraordinary, though not impossible, to say "China grows three rices/i. e., three kinds of rice\textsuperscript{7}". When this principle is violated in prose, we are startled by the writer's apparent lack of instinctive sensitivity to the normal patterns. However, when a poet, characteristically alert to the nuances of language, departs from the usual expectation, it may well be that he has a reason.

In the last line of her lyric #333, for example, Emily Dickinson says:

And even when it (i. e., the grass) dies--to pass
In Odors so divine--
Like Lowly spices, lain to sleep--
Or Spikenards, perishing--

And then, in Sovereign Barns to dwell--
And dream the Days away,
The Grass so little has to do
I wish I were a Hay--

It is instructive to see what Miss Dickinson's editors in the 1890 Poems did with the line; they corrected it to:

I wish I were the hay!

Mrs. Bingham tells her mother's reason for this in Ancestor's Brocades:

The quaintness of the \textsuperscript{7}Indefinite\textsuperscript{7} article really appealed to me, but my trusted collaborator was decided on that line. "It cannot go in so," he exclaimed, "everybody would say that hay is a collective noun requiring the definite article. Nobody can call it a hay!" So I retired, feeling that of course he was right with regard to the public. But I have always had a sneaking desire to see a change back to the original version!\textsuperscript{1}

\textsuperscript{1}I am indebted to Professor Johnson's quotation of the passage in his first volume of the Poems, 267.
What Mrs. Todd calls "quaintness" may account for the reaction most of us have in preferring a hay to the hay. However, I believe there may be another principle operating which accounts too for our preference: the principle of analogy. If the implication of the last line were completed, the lyric would read: "I wish I were a hay, instead of a human being." The analogy is strong, the envy of the spacious and capacious grass as it gaily and peacefully spends its botanical life, in contrast to the difficulties of the zoological span of human life. So Emily Dickinson would like to become "a hay," not to lose her identity in the quantity of hay harvested from the fields, but to be still distinct from all other hays, that is, from every other blade of grass now come to its final rest in the great bales stored in barns. The line is not only quaint, it bears some semantic weight as well.

At times, certainly, the effect of the interchange is of little value. For illustration, in the third line of lyric #639, Miss Dickinson uses the word less, a normal modification for quantifiable nouns (fewer is the comparable form for pluralizers) with a pluralizer:

My Portion is Defeat--today--
A paler luck than Victory--
Less Paeans--fewer Bells--

It may be argued that Miss Dickinson is seeking to avoid the repetition of fewer in the line; however, that is not adequate justification for so sure a departure from established practice. The effect is lost in the strangeness of the line.
At other times, the gain in suggestive effect argues that the poetess knows what she is about and achieves a genuine poetic effect. In the opening stanza of one of her most popular poems, for example, #783, she does create a clear and lyric effect which gives support to the semantic evocation:

The Birds begun at Four o'clock--
Their period for Dawn--
A Music numerous as space--
But neighboring as Noon--

Strictly, numerous should be reserved for pluralizer nouns, and should not be used for such quantifiables as music and space. Yet the effect here is to suggest that the birds are singing not a single song, not a choric melody in which a particular musical phrase can be heard and enjoyed in itself. The birds are singing each his own invention, each in his own key, at his own tempo; yet the impression is of a single morn's resounding. The word numerous then bears a double weight of meaning. In its own pluralistic right, it suggests the multiplicity and disunity of sounds of the birds singing in a melodic confusion; yet, in its quantitative use, it conveys the total discordant splendor (if I may use such a seeming oxymoron) of the single joyous and overpowering scene. Such subtlety of implication would argue purposeful exploitation of a defiance of convention.

Pronouns also provide Emily Dickinson opportunity for imaginative syntactic connections. Occasionally, ambiguities of reference arise which enlarge the meanings of poems; I have suggested instances at other junctures in this discussion. There
is one particular example which I should like to point to now. It is in the opening stanza of lyric #467:

We do not play on Graves--
Because there is'nt Room--
Besides--it is'nt even--it slants
And People come--

And put a Flower on it--
And hang their faces so--
We're fearing that their Hearts will drop--
And crush our pretty play--

And so we move as far
As Enemies--away--
Just looking round to see how far
It is--Occasionally--

Here there is not only a shift in pronoun number (from a plural antecedent Graves to a singular pronoun it), but an apparent semantic shift. In the first line we are speaking specifically of literal graves, plots of earth in a cemetery which we scrupulously avoid as we go to our childish play; however, the shift to a singular pronoun (in lines three, five, and twelve) creates a false memory that the antecedent must have been the grave. Now it is not literal mounds of earth, but the grave as a universal symbol of the awesome spectre of death. From the concrete graveyard scene our attention is shifted to the image of flight from death by a shift of number from plural to singular. The effect is purposeful and is conveyed imaginatively.

At times, too, in her use of pronouns, Emily Dickinson appears to falter, to lapse into solecism. This is true in the two final stanzas of lyric #768:

Icicles upon my soul
Prickled Blue and Cool--
Bird went praising everywhere--
Only Me--was still--

And the Day that I despaired--
This--if I forget
Nature will--that it be Night
After Sun has set--
Darkness intersect her face--
And put out her eye--
Nature hesitate--before
Memory and I--

"Only Me--was still" and "before / Memory and I" may be argued as achieving respectively self-objectification and perfection of rhyme, but the effects are scarcely worth the shock of variation. Her editors did not err when they substituted "Mine alone--was still" and "before / Memory and me."

In her use of infinitives, Miss Dickinson rarely departs from the formulae of expectation. Occasionally her faulty parallelisms or her unusual compressions demonstrate some sensitivity or determined felicities of sound. The latter is true in the opening stanza of lyric #672, for example:

The Future--never spoke--
Nor will He--like the Dumb--
Reveal by sign--a syllable
Of His Profound To Come--

The infinitive to come appears a compression of some larger semantic unit such as "Of His Profound (containment of what is) To Come." But the difficulty which I have had finding the proper noun head for the first preposition shows how much instinctive excellence can emerge out of a poetic sensitivity to language. I had tried "Of His Profound (knowledge of what is) To Come," but that is not precisely it either: the future does not know what
is to come, but somehow the future is itself what is to come. It is a difficult concept to convey in such a compressed lyric context, but Emily Dickinson hurdles the problem successfully with her "Of His Profound To Come."

With prepositions as well, Emily Dickinson knows how to take significant liberties. I had already referred in passing to her use of them as nouns (note "I lingered with Before" of the third stanza of lyric #609, in which the preposition becomes a representation of all those earlier years when the poetess had been at "Home"). I had alluded too to the use of a double preposition where only one is required. Whether it is intended or not, such instances create a distinct effect that the poetess is wandering aimlessly through the sentence, not at all careful to see that the syntactic frame is unified or precisely wrought (note the second stanza of lyric #1340: "Of Ignominy's due / Let all addicted to / Beware"; here the to and the of both function with the nounal head due).

Aside from the adjective as adverb and adjective as noun substitutions to which I have devoted earlier chapters, there is frequent surprise in the comparative and superlative adjective forms. There are numerous odd examples: in lyric #1422, "But graphic (i.e., more graphic) for grace"; in #1388, "Or odiouser (i.e., more odious) offend"; and in #1192, "Is durabler (i.e., more durable) than Bronze." In lyric #1046, there is the impossible "perfecter." The superlative forms are also frequently
Oddity is the rule rather than the exception in Miss Dickinson's poems. These various examples to which I have alluded do not appear with the great regularity that those to which I have devoted chapters do; yet they appear more than once, often a dozen or two times. Taken as individual instances, they may not seem so remarkable; however, taken cumulatively, they show Miss Dickinson a poetess of extraordinary awareness of the potential of language when freed from its narrowest conventionalized confines. They show too a sensitivity and, at times, even an intellectuality, which sometimes baffled her readers so totally that they revised her "weaknesses" out of existence or dismissed them as the wanton defiance of inexorable grammatical "laws" by an ill-prepared schoolgirl who preferred yeast and robin to the rigors of the mind. She did know what she was doing with language, and she would not be bridled by all the sterile prescriptions of the schoolmarm's and parsing masters of her day.
PART II

CHAPTER VIII

ELLIPSIS

"Concentration is the essence of poetry," said Ezra Pound when he formulated the creed of the Imagist school of poets. His dictum pronounced no new truth, presuming he was speaking primarily of lyric poetry, for lyric poets of many eras have striven for intensity, for concentration, for compression. Poe would acknowledge no other form of verse, writing off Paradise Lost and The Iliad as merely two series of short lyrics. Ideally the poem sustains so intense, so concentrated an effect, that the long poem was a contradiction in terms for him. Emily Dickinson's practice was doubtless not the product of so well-formed an aesthetic creed, but her instinctive poetic habit caused her to write a poetry which conforms largely to such an artistic convention.

Professor George Frisbie Whicher, in This Was a Poet, traces the succinctness of her style to the New Englandly manner in which she looked at the world about her:

The controlling principle of her technique was a severe economy of means to ends. . . . She never expanded or elaborated her poems. In the few cases where we have two versions of the same lyric, the later version is invariably condensed. . . .

It [the idiom of her poetry] reproduces as far as is possible in verse the qualities of New England speech,
laconic brevity, directness, cadence. Fond as her contemporaries were of oratory, they did not lavish their admiration on ornamental discourse. . . .

She learned from daily practice to appreciate the overtones that vibrate in understatement, and to love a phrase with a neat turn of wit. . . . And all her life she was trying to go straight to the point and "set it in sunlight." To know if she told it clear was the boon she asked of Higginson.1

And one of the most characteristic means by which she achieved this laconic effect is her use of ellipsis for compression of meaning.

There are a number of apparent reasons for Miss Dickinson's writing elliptically. Many of these will become obvious as we look at particular examples. Sometimes the omissions are of the most elemental and transparent kinds, where meaning is not affected at all, but the mind makes automatic emendations of syntax. For example, in lyric #147, the simple addition of a verb like go is all that is needed to fill the syntactic gap, though such addition mars the meter decidedly:

Bless God, he went as soldiers (go),
His musket on his breast—
Grant God, he charge the bravest
Of all the martial blest!

Often there are omissions of pronouns which create no difficulty of total meaning, but whose omission does aid the compression of the passage. For example, in lyric #153, the subconscious addition of he in the second stanza eliminates the otherwise

awkward and erroneous: "Nobody never was a boy." The correct reading follows:

Nobody knew "his Father"--
(He) Never was a boy--
Hadn't any playmates,
Or "Early history"--

Or, in #160, the addition of some such expression as I am going or I want and the regularizing of the inversion of the second line render the whole passage readily assimilable:

Next time, (I am going) to stay!
Next time, (I am going) to see the things
By Ear unheard,
Unscrutinized by Bye--

Next time, (I am going) to tarry,
While the Ages steal--
Slow tramp the Centuries,
And the Cycles wheel!

Such elliptical excisions do not cause any real problem for the reader, and it is perhaps only the most pedantic exercise to seek to supply the omitted words. Others are much more difficult and are thus our main interest here.

Doubtless the most troublesome examples of ellipsis are intended often by Miss Dickinson to convey certain agitated states of mind (e. g., fear, grief, bewilderment, anger, or other general kinds of emotional upheaval or exhilaration). Such is the case in lyric #201, where Miss Dickinson finds herself unable to describe fully the fate of the defeated swimmer and, in her shocked state can only say: "Oh God! the Other One!"

Two swimmers wrestled on the spar--
Until the morning sun--
When One--turned smiling to the land--
Oh God! the Other One!
The stray ships—passing—
Spied a face—
Upon the waters borne—
With eyes in death—still begging raised—
And hands—beseeching—thrown!

Here there is no problem of meaning; the emotion of terror which accompanies the realization of the death of the "other" swimmer keeps the poetess from stating the circumstance very explicitly in the first stanza. Instead, she creates the effect of a delayed confrontation of the truth of the event by relating the sight seen by passing ships. She does not avoid the truth fully, but only delays it by a realistic outburst in response to the realization of the death of the swimmer. The interruption of the description, the momentary inability to describe the scene coherently all contribute to the emotional impact carefully plotted in the lines.

Again, in #257, a lyric effort to define the word delight, the sense of exhilaration, the quality of fleeting pleasure which accompanies the transient moment of delight, are skilfully conveyed in the elliptical, almost suddenly shifting, quality of the syntax:

Delight is as the flight—
Or in the Ratio of it,
As the Schools would say—
The Rainbow's way—
A skein
Flung colored, after Rain,
Would suit as bright,
Except that flight
Were Aliment—
"If it would last"
I asked the East,
When that Bent Stripe
Struck up my childish
Firmament—
And I, for glee,
Took Rainbows, as the common way,
And empty Skies
The Eccentricity--

And so with Lives--
And so with Butterflies--
Seen magic--through the fright
That they will cheat the sight--
And Dower latitudes far on--
Some sudden morn--
Our portion--in the fashion--
Done--

I think here we see adequately demonstrated that elliptical
effects can aid the representation of exhilarated states of mind
such as delight, as well as that of terror illustrated earlier.
In this example, it is not merely in the ellipsis, but in the
interruptions of syntax as well, that the effect is achieved.
Note the opening four lines; the syntax is never fully spelled
out after the interruption: "Delight is as the flight (pictured
in) the Rainbow's way (i. e., apparent manner)." The general
meaning is not difficult (we delight in things in proportion to
their flight or transience), but the manner of expression is
unusually compressed and suggests the shifts and changes of speech
when the mind is in a highly excited state. Even the vocabulary
requires some rejuggling if its meaning is to be understood:
delight could be compared to a skein of many-colored silk, except
that that skein is substantial (aliment), and the rainbow is even
less tangible, consequently, a better simile. But even at that
the language is somewhat lacking in absolute clarity.

The inversion of the second stanza adds too to the difficulty
of comprehension, an apparently deliberate effort to involve us
in the excitement of the moment. The normal prose order would start with the When clause (which takes up here the last seven lines of the stanza), then return to the second line and finally to the first. But, as it stands, there is the childlike breathlessness about the whole affair: the child's eagerness to tell what he has said even before explaining the context in which he spoke.

The last stanza makes the application, or merely suggests one. As with rainbows and butterflies, so with human lives:

Some sudden morn--
Our portion--in the fashion--
Done--

So what started as a poem about delight and its transience, seems to end as a poem about the general ephemeral nature of human life. Some morning, suddenly, this same swiftly fleeting aspect of life and nature will consume us, will carry us off in the same fashion, our portion of human experience done. The excitement of the exhilarated moment of contemplation of delight vanishes as swiftly as delight by its nature does, and is replaced by the bewildering realization that what is characteristic of delight is also characteristic of all of life: it is a vapor which appears for a moment and vanishes quickly before us. To reconstruct the meaning in its simplest paraphrase requires considerable expansion of the elliptical form of the poem, but it conveys much less of the state of mind than is conveyed in the compressed syntax of the original ellipsis. The lyric treads dangerously near the precipice of obscurantism (as critics have often charged against Miss
Dickinson). Nonetheless, the state of agitation and anxiety are reflected in the lyric, and I find it a satisfying match of sense, mood, and syntax.

Again, in lyric #281, the description of events of terror depends to some extent for its effect upon the syntactic compression, a circumstance requiring the collaboration of reader and poet for the unlocking of meaning:

'Tis so appalling--it exhilarates--
So over Horror, it half Captivates--
The Soul stares after it, secure--
To know the worst, leaves no dread more--

To scan a Ghost, is faint--
But grappling, conquers it--
How easy, Torment, now--
Suspense kept sawing so--

The Truth, is Bald, and Cold--
But that will hold--
If any are not sure--
We show them--prayer--
But we, who know,
Stop hoping, now--

Looking at Death, is Dying--
Just let go the Breath--
And not the pillow at your Cheek
So Slumbereth--

Others, Can wrestle--
Your's, is done--
And so of Wo, bleak dreaded--come
It sets the Fright at liberty--
And Terror's free--
Gay, ghastly, Holiday!

As we start the lyric, we are prone, I think, to imagine the syntax of so over Horror as parallel with that of so appalling in the first line:

'Tis so appalling--it exhilarates--
('Tis) So over Horror, it half Captivates--
However, when we move into the poem, it appears that we have misread the second line, that so is actually the adverb meaning thus or in the same way. The second line then reads: "So Horror, (when it is) over (i.e., past), half captivates (us)." The rest of the stanza, and the entire poem for that matter, follows logically and easily: the Soul stares (with curiosity?) after Horror, secure now that it is past; when one knows by experience the worst, there is nothing more to be dreaded.

The second stanza is another of those where the demands of lyric compression aid the poem's emotional intensity without straining the reader's imagination. Paraphrase is not at all difficult: "To be forced to scan (to actually look at) a Ghost, may very well cause one to faint, but when one is actually grappling with it, he has conquered his fear and his faintness; when one is actually presently experiencing Torment, it does not seem so difficult as the sawing suspense of anticipation made us think it would be." Yet my prose "version" has more than tripled Miss Dickinson's eighteen words, and I doubt that it could be very clearly paraphrased in fewer.

The last stanza further illustrates this compression: Your's (sic) in the second line is meant to suggest clearly Your wrestling, yet the verb wrestle must stand for the noun. And Fright and Terror's seem to stand for such phrases as the man who is frightened and he who has been beset by terror is respectively:

Others, can wrestle--
Your's (i.e., your wrestling) is done--
And so of Woe, (which, in anticipation is) bleak(,)
dreaded--(but when it has actually) come,
It sets the Fright(ened man) at liberty--
And (he who has been beset by) Terror's free--
(To enjoy a) Gay, Ghastly, Holiday!

The last line conveys the final irony that even torment can seem pleasant when we contrast it with the suffering of anticipation of torment. The psychic pain of expectation of horror makes the event itself pleasant by comparison.

At times the ellipsis seems aimed at creating a quality of childlikeness in the lyrics, as in the third and the sixth and seventh stanzas of #373:

Court is a stately place--
I've heard men say--
So I loop my apron, against the Majesty
With bright Pins of Buttercup--
That (I shall) not (appear) too plainly dressed
(If) Rank--(should) overtake me-- . . . .

(It would be) Better to be ready--
Than did next morn
Meet me in Arragon--
(With) My old Gown--on--

And (with) the surprised Air
Rustics--wear--
(When) Summoned--unexpectedly--
To Exeter--

Here the child, in her imagination, sees herself summoned to court and fears she may give away the fact that she is only a rustic, awkward and embarrassed in the presence of royalty. The shyness and the child's naïveté are conveyed in the elliptical, retiring manner of the language.

Syntactic fragmentation occurs with high frequency in the Dickinson canon. In lyric #88, for example, we have a striking illustration of anacoluthon.
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!

Here the sentence begins twice, each time with what is apparently an introductory adverbial clause, but without a main clause to complete the sense (unless possibly the second stanza is thought to represent the main clause). Miss Dickinson, consciously or unconsciously, is caught up in an emotion so powerful that it renders logical syntactic expression impossible; the grappling for the beloved dead presumes upon the very grammatical form which the poem takes.

A very common form of syntactic compression in the poems is that of incomplete comparison. Lyric #556 illustrates this:

The Brain, within its Groove
Runs evenly—and true—
But let a Splinter swerve—
'Twere easier for You—

To put a Current back—
When Floods have slit the Hills—
And scooped a Turnpike for themselves—
And trodden out the Mills—

The question which one asks at the conclusion of the poem concerns the incompleteness of the comparative statement: What is more difficult than putting a flooding current back in its place? Of course, the answer is rather obvious: it is easier to replace the current than to restore the mind to its proper groove of sanity once it has swerved from it. Thus the lyric is suggestively
and semantically complete, though it is syntactically incomplete.

There is another example in lyric #1467:

A little overflowing word
That any, hearing, had inferred
For Arder or for Tears,
Though Generations pass away,
Traditions ripen and decay,
As eloquent appears--

Here again there is no real question of meaning; no one is tempted to misunderstand the lines (this in itself is perhaps an indication of how well Miss Dickinson knew the excessiveness of language, the conventional trappings of its prose form which could be excised in poetry). It is only that, to satisfy the implications of the syntax, one almost instinctively does supply certain elements. A word has been spoken that expresses passion of one sort or another; time cannot destroy the fresh eloquence of the utterance:

Though Generations pass away,
Traditions ripen and decay, (that little overflowing word)
As eloquent appears (as it had when first spoken).

The whole lyric can be given not even the status of a sentence; it is a lengthy fragment of added modifications, but whose syntactic logic exists wholly outside the conventional patterns.

In lyric #1293, the opening two lines provide a further instance of the unusual effect created by inversion and want of completeness in relationship between two concepts: "the things we thought we should do" and "other things":

The things we thought that we should do
We other things have done
But those peculiar industries
Have never been begun--
The Lands we thought that we should seek
When large enough to run
By Speculation ceded
To Speculation's Son--

The Heaven, in which we hoped to pause
When Discipline was done
Untenable to Logic
But possibly the one--

Professor Johnson believes that Emily Dickinson revised this lyric shortly before she sent it to Higginson in a letter; however, she seems to have left the first stanza intact, suggesting that she doubtless meant it to stand as it is. She had given somewhat greater care to those poems she had sent to Higginson, putting them into a more final shape than those which she merely bound up into the small packets with hope of returning for further revision.

Again there can be little doubt as to meaning in this poem: "We have done things other than those that we thought we should do. We have left undone the things we ought to have done." The poem appears to be a remote paraphrase of one of the conventional prayers of the ritual of the church. But the manner of expression is somewhat strange to us. Perhaps the explanation for the adoption of the unusual rendering is that Emily Dickinson wished the three stanzas of the lyric to open with similar structures:

The things we thought that we should do. . . .
The Lands we thought that we should seek. . . .
The Heaven, in which we hoped to pause. . . .

---

²The Poems of Emily Dickinson, III (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1955), 898.
The strangeness of the syntax keeps us pondering the relationships for a moment, but yields its meaning without great difficulty. Yet the effect is to slow us down, to make us think about meaning.

Sometimes the omission of words demands considerable syntactic juggling; for example, lyric #126:

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

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.

Possibly, in the first stanza, one can read the passage in this manner: "I know (that it) is (a) very brave (thing) to fight aloud (i.e., with some show of outward struggle), but (those) who charge (against) the Cavalry of Woe within the bosom (are) gallanter (than those who fight aloud)." On the other hand, one is not certain from the original whether he might be justified also in reading "The Cavalry of Woe" as antecedent to "Who," making the sense: "But I know (that) the Cavalry of Woe Who charge within the bosom are gallanter." Both readings are possible, but their meanings are quite different. In one instance, the Cavalry of Woe is ally, in the other, enemy.

The last stanza of this same lyric provides a diverting
difficulty of inversion which requires often several rereadings before the sense becomes clear. Our first impulse is to read the words "For such" as meaning "For in this manner (i. e., in plumed procession) the Angels go." However, reconsideration confirms another reading as the better of the two: "We trust (that) the Angels go in plumed procession for such (i. e., for those who have fought the inward battles and have won or lost them), rank after rank, with even feet and uniforms of snow." Reexamination in the context of the entire poem tends to confirm this latter reading.

It is just such ambiguities as that which is apparent in the first stanza of this last lyric which I find particularly interesting in my study of the ellipses in Emily Dickinson's poetry. In lyric #1031, for example, even the supplying of a single word in the last line involves something rather crucial to the meaning of the entire line; the omission of a subject for the verb causes confusion of reference:

Fate slew Him, but He did not drop—
She felled—He did not fall—
Impaled Him on Her fiercest stakes—
He neutralized them all—

She stung Him—sapped His firm Advance—
But when Her worst was done
And He—unmoved regarded Her—
Acknowledged Him a Man.

Ought one to supply She at the beginning of the last line, or to think that actually "He acknowledged Him(self) a Man"? Both senses are possible; perhaps both are meant. She (Fate) sees
now that he is a man, and perhaps Miss Dickinson means to imply
that he recognizes it also of himself.

In the fourth stanza of lyric #511, too, the omission of
significant words leaves the door open for ambiguity in suggestion
and interpretation:

If you were coming in the Fall,
I'd brush the Summer by
With half a smile, and half a spurn,
As Housewives do, a Fly.

If I would see you in a year,
I'd wind the months in balls—
And put them each in separate Drawers,
For fear the numbers fuse—

If only Centuries, delayed,
I'd count them on my Hand,
Subtracting, till my fingers dropped
Into Van Dieman's Land.

If certain, when this life was out--
That your's and mine, should be
I'd toss it yonder, like a Rind,
And take Eternity--

But, now, uncertain of the length
Of this, that is between,
It goads me, like the Goblin Bee
That will not state--it's sting.

As in other of her poems, Emily Dickinson wrestles here with the
difficulty of the uncertainty of an experience. If she could
somehow know that at a definite moment, no matter how many "centu-
ries" hence, she and her lover would be reunited, she could find
that certainty tolerable. But having to live with the uncertainty
about the length of time which lies between the poetess' present
and the time of their meeting is unbearable. But, in the fourth
stanza, does Miss Dickinson expect us to supply ended and exist?
If certain, when this life was out (i.e., ended)—
That yours and mine, should (still) be (i.e., exist).

Of course, we may also read the passage:

If certain, when this life was out—
That yours and mine, should (also) be (out),

presuming that they would meet in this out-land. We cannot be certain, I think. But what should be our attitude toward these unresolved problems of meaning? At times surely they indicate that something is wrong with the poem; it has not given us adequate information for resolution. That is the case in the opening stanza of lyric #126 which I discussed earlier. However, here in lyric #511, it is the poetess' uncertainty which she means to convey, and the reader's uncertainty about meaning substantiates the total intention of the poem; the ambiguity is worth wrestling with.

Again, in lyric #1291, when we read "That water grows," what image ought we to conjure to match the words?

Until the Desert knows
That Water grows
His Sands suffice
But let him once suspect
That Caspian Pact
Sahara dies.

Are we to suppose the implication here is "That water (can make things) grow," or that the waters of rivers and oceans swell with the seasons of flood or as the tide moves in and out from shore? Either explanation appears plausible from the ambiguous syntax. The lyric lacks the finish of other examples; the ambiguity is pointless and confusing.
Another interesting effect which results from the omissions of words and from the inversion of normal word order is the tendency toward shifting in syntactic relationships. For example, when one begins reading lyric #1104, stanza 2, he has the impression that the first line is an absolute construction:

The Crickets sang
And set the Sun
And Workmen finished one by one
Their Seam the Day upon.

The low Grass loaded with the Dew
The Twilight stood, as Strangers do
With Hat in Hand, polite and new
To stay as if, or go.

A Vastness, as a Neighbor, came,
A Wisdom, without Face, or Name,
A Peace, as Hemispheres at Home
And so the Night became.

The lyric presents a number of interesting problems, largely the products of inversion and compression. In the second line, for example, we are not certain whether we are confronted by simple inversion of word order ("And the sun set"), or whether there is intended some imaginative nuance in which the Crickets and their singing are the mechanism which sets the sun.

But I had introduced this lyric to speak of the ambiguity of syntax in the first line of the second stanza. Is it, as I suggested earlier, an absolute construction, or is the reader to take the verb form as indicative passive rather than as participial:

The low Grass (was) loaded with the Dew;
The Twilight stood.

I am inclined to favor this second possible reading, but certainly
the first will not be without its supporters. The last line of this same stanza provides another example of compression. It seems to represent some such expanded form as this: "The Twilight stood, with Hat in Hand, as if it could not decide whether it ought to stay or to go." But the slight confusion of mind, the indecision, is much better conveyed by the ellipsis.

In the third stanza of the same lyric, we are faced with another syntactic problem. One cannot be certain whether Wisdom and Peace are parts of Vastness:

A Vastness (i. e., A Wisdom and a Peace) came as a Neighbor,
or whether the three abstractions (Vastness, Wisdom, Peace) are separate and equal grammatical elements, compound subject of the verb came:

A Vastness, as a Neighbor, came,
A Wisdom without Face or Name (came).
A Peace, as Hemispheres at Home (came).

The last line too is odd: "And so the Night became." I would have anticipated: "And so it became Night," or "And so the Night came upon us." Taken as a whole, these deviations from normal prose syntax provide a quality of mystery to the whole picture of the coming of night, and that may be a part of Miss Dickinson's intent.

It is often when asking profound or difficult questions that the poet turns to ambiguities of various kinds. In lyric #456, for example, we may begin the lyric in one way, but find ourselves having to change our manner of reading.
So well that I can live without—
I love thee—then How well is that?
As well as Jesus?
Prove it me
That He--loved men--
As I--love thee--

The first reading seems to support the original idea: "I love you so well that I can live without you. How well is that? As well as I love Jesus, for I love Him though I cannot see Him nor be in His presence." However, when we arrive at the ending of the stanza, when we see the further question: "Prove to me that He loved men as I love you," we become aware of another possible meaning: "I love you as well as Jesus loved men; or, on second thought, perhaps I love you more, since He did not seem to love men so much that He could live without them, for He came to earth to mingle with them." The meaning and its ambiguity seem to hinge upon the ellipsis of the third line: "As well as (I love) Jesus," or "As well as Jesus (loved)." Our recognition of the ambiguity enlarges and complicates the meaning conveyed. The poem is enriched by the double implication.

In lyric #457 it is the great mystery of death and the grave that provokes unusual ambiguities of meaning:

Sweet--safe--Houses--
Glad--gay--Houses--
Sealed so stately tight--
Lids of Steel--on Lids of Marble--
Locking Bare feet out--

Brooks of Plush--in Banks of Satin
Not so softly fall
As the laughter--and the whisper--
From their People Pearl--
No Bald Death--affront their Parlors--
No Bold Sickness come
To deface their Stately Treasures--
Anguish--and the Tomb--

Hum by--in Muffled Coaches--
Lest they--wonder Why--
Any--for the Press of Smiling--
Interrupt--to die--

The poet gives us a mystical and ironic picture of the security of the dead, untroubled by all the trials which beset the living. But she sets up ambiguities by the want of full syntax. For example, in stanza two we are not certain whether it is the Bare feet wading in brooks of plush and walking on banks of satin which fall so softly as the laughter, or whether it is the brooks of plush falling on banks of satin which are not so still as the laughter and the whisper of the pearl people in the coffins. Also, in the third stanza, we are not certain whether "Anguish--and the Tomb" are the "Stately Treasures" of the dead, or whether we are to supply another negative before the line, making it parallel with the first two lines of the stanza: "(No) Anguish and the Tomb (can come to these dead)." Or, and perhaps this is the best reading despite the lack of clear punctuation, are we to take the last line of stanza three as a part of the sentence which opens stanza four: "Anguish--and the Tomb-- / Hum by (the graves)--in Muffled Coaches." But the reason for the quiet movement past the graves is itself strange: it is to keep those in the graves from wondering why any interrupt to die. And again the object of interrupt is left to our imaginations: we can guess the verb is reflexive (interrupt themselves) or that we are to
supply an object (interrupt those already in the graves). Either reading is possible, and either has its shroud of imaginative mystery still.

As I said at the start of this chapter, compression, with its necessary elliptical accompaniment, has been long a favorite device of lyric poets. Because of it, lyric poetry is the most intense and often the most obscure form of verbal communication. Emily Dickinson is no exception in her use of it; as a matter of fact, she excels in compression. It would be difficult to find a single lyric of hers in which there was not some effort at elimination of unnecessary words and syllables. In one sense, this whole discussion could be said to be about Emily Dickinson's efforts at compression, her determination to demand of language a maximum labor. Each word appears to have been thoughtfully chosen, to have been selected precariously and then eliminated if it were not absolutely essential to the poet's purpose.

It is now a critical cliche that Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman were at contrary poles in this respect. While he thought of the line of free verse poetry as the unit, piling up repetitively clause upon clause, each adding often only some nuance of detail or providing the music of a refrain; Miss Dickinson seems concerned with the morpheme, denying us not only clauses and phrases, but particles, function words, and suffixes, if they served no important purpose for her.

We should find it difficult to speculate upon all that motivated her efforts at compression, and perhaps the new critics
would only castigate us by charging the intentional fallacy if we did. However, the bases upon which Miss Dickinson eliminates syllables and whole clauses are obviously varied: at times her reason is so simple as that she needed to be rid of a syllable or two for the demands of her metric; at times she seems bent upon creating excited states of mind by a style which catches the bewilderment, the exhilaration of the soul at white heat; at times it appears she finds it difficult to be at all specific about the great granite mysteries of death and love; at times she exploits the capacity of elliptical speech to be ambiguous. Succinctness is her forte.
CHAPTER IX

INVERSION

A tool equally useful and necessary as ellipsis for the poet is inversion. Nearly every poet, except perhaps the most liberal of the free verse lyricists, finds himself at some time or another forced by the demands of meter, of rhyme, of cadence, of felicity of sound, or of mere preference, to construct a syntactic order altogether inconsistent with the normal prose sequence of language. It is in no sense unusual then that Emily Dickinson should have made use of the technique. If there is anything unusual about her use of lyric inversion, it lies in the extraordinary instances of the practice in her poetry.

One particular variety of ambiguity caused by inversion is that of the confusion between subject-object function. For example, in the fourth stanza of lyric #777, it is difficult to determine whether it is "The Maker of the soul" who is to "illuminate or seal its (i.e., Loneliness') caverns and its corridors," or whether "its caverns and its corridors illuminate or seal the Maker of the soul."

I fear me this--is Loneliness--
The Maker of the soul
It's Caverns and it's Corridors
Illuminate--or seal--

I suspect the former reading above is the correct one, and likely
most readers would agree. But the meaning yields itself only upon careful reexamination and only when semantic considerations are appealed to. Of course, here the problem is somewhat exaggerated by the ellipsis which appears in conjunction with the inversion. A prose rendering might follow something of this pattern: "I fear me (that) this is (a) Loneliness (so profound that) the Maker of the soul (must) illuminate its caverns and its corridors." Apart from the expansion demanded by the ellipsis, it is not so difficult to juggle the syntax, for the object merely has been pulled forward to a position preceding the verb.

A somewhat different situation may be seen in lyric #1471, where, in the first stanza, the object precedes the subject (a circumstance clarified by the agreement of the plural verb withdraw): "The martial Trees withdraw / Their Barricade against the Sky."

Their Barricade against the Sky
The martial Trees withdraw
And with a Flag at every turn
Their Armies are no more.

What Russet Halts in Nature's March
They indicate or cause
An inference of Mexico
Effaces the Surmise--

Recurrent to the After Mind
That Massacre of Air--
The Wound that was not Wound nor Scar--
But Holidays of War--

The poem appears cryptic at first reading, but yields up its meanings somewhat readily upon careful thought. The second stanza is the most obstreperous however. The want of punctuation leaves
us perplexed as to the syntax. Ought we to read the lines:

What Russet Halts in Nature's March
They indicate or cause
An inference of Mexico (which)
Effaces the Surmise,

or are we to think Halts a noun in apposition with They? Or should the first two lines be taken as an inverted sentence?

They indicate or cause
An inference of Mexico
Effaces the Surmise.

Or are we to supply a copulative verb between the second and third lines?

What(ever) Russet Halts in Nature's March
They (may) indicate or cause (are)
An inference of Mexico (which)
Effaces the Surmise.

And is March to double for the soldierly parade and the month which announces the start of spring? These are all difficult questions to answer for several reasons: first, there is no normality of syntax to aid us across the difficulties; secondly, the general semantic designation of the lines is somewhat troublesome, obscured by the alternating concretizing and abstracting of metaphor (for example, the passing of the seasons is made quite specific when represented by the marching army and its halts; however, the "inference" and "surmise" which apparently fecundate the poetess' mind are not so precise in local habitation). But, no matter what one's conclusions about the lines, it is the inversion, the want of straightforward syntactic sequence which gives rise to the difficulties of interpretation. This lyric is obscure
to a point that I doubt it could satisfy most readers as a poetic utterance.

True, it is often the ellipsis in conjunction with the inversion which makes the difficulty of interpretation. But the joint effect seems deliberate upon the poet's part. Note, for further example, lyric #1410:

I shall not murmur if at last
The ones I loved below
Permission have to understand
For what I shunned them so--
Divulging it would rest my Heart
But it would ravage their's--
Why, Katie, Treason has a Voice--
But mine--dispels--in Tears.

A part of the problem here is certainly the decision which must be made about the implicit modifying function of mine: does Miss Dickinson expect us to think my treason or my voice? If we accept the latter reading, we still have three semantic possibilities: either "but mine (i. e., my voice) dispels (treason) in tears," or "but mine (i. e., my voice) dispels (itself) in tears" (a possible use of the active voice where one would normally anticipate a passive--"My voice is dispelled in tears"--a rather frequent usage in the poems), or "but (treason) dispels--mine--in tears." A fourth possibility is raised by the former reading suggested above: "but mine (i. e., my treason) dispels (i. e., is dispelled) in tears." None of these, it seems to me, is an altogether objectionable possibility, considering the full implications of the ambiguity of the substantival possessive pronoun and the potentially inverted syntax. Doubtless here no
particularly useful semantic purpose is served, except perhaps the evocation of confusion and bewilderment, accompanied by inability for clarity of mind, which are essential parts of the whole experience. Most readers, however, will find the lyric weak at this point.

This same subject-object confusion arises in the third stanza of lyric #258, in which the ambiguous relationship of syntactic parts enforces the general psychological gloom:

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

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

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

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

Here is a lyric that has captured the imaginations of many fine critics and common readers alike. Yet it is a lyric filled with many syntactic problems and difficulties of explication. Does, for example, the second line of the lyric represent an ellipsis of preposition ("On Winter Afternoons") or an apposition to the first line's "Slant of light" ("this oppressive slant of light is, metaphorically, an experience which is, in its quintessence, winter afternoons")? I think the latter by far a better reading,
though for no better reason than that it enlarges the poem's landscape to include much more than the seasonal depression of winter afternoons. However, that is not our prime interest in alluding to this poem.

My question actually relates to the third stanza. How is one to interpret the lines:

'Tis the Seal Despair--
An imperial affliction
Sent us of the Air--

The possibilities are varied, I will admit, but I will suggest only three: "'Tis the seal (i.e., despair) (which) an imperial affliction of the air sent us," or "'Tis the seal (which) despair (i.e., an imperial affliction of the air) sent us," or "'Tis the seal despair; ('tis) an imperial affliction of the air (which was) sent us of (i.e., by or from) the air." I think these possibilities of syntactic explication all equally tenable or defensible, considering the compression, or even suppression, of the grammatical elements of the sentence. I do not mean for a moment here that I believe Emily Dickinson meant any or all of these readings to suggest themselves to the reader. What I am arguing, however, at this point, is that the manner in which she exploited the potential of the word order creates ambiguities which seem often to have as their end the creation of bewildered and bewildering states of mind consonant with the larger semantic meanings of the lyrics. Here it is the oppressive, shadowy, psychic gloom, imprecise and elusive, which is meant to be conveyed; the very imprecision of syntax, the twist and tangle
of its implications, contributes decidedly to our total response.

But the ambiguities of subject-object delineation are by no means the only problems of inversion created in the Dickinson canon. In her lyric memorializing Elizabeth Barrett Browning, for example, there is an ineffectual artificiality created by an apparent perverse notion that "poetic" language must be cantankerous in its arbitrary oddity:

Her—"last Poems"
Poets—ended—
Silver—perished—with her Tongue—
Not on Record—bubbled other,
Flute—or Woman—
So divine—
Not unto it's Summer-Morning
Robin—uttered Half the Tune—
(#312)

Inversion and ellipsis again combine to force the reader to reconstruct the meanings of lines. A prose paraphrase of lines four through eight would read something like this: "(It is) not on record (that an)other flute or woman (ever) bubbled so divine(ly as Mrs. Browning did). No robin (ever) uttered unto its summer morning half the tune (that she did)." Admittedly, I have selected the poorest passage in the lyric, but such deliberate effort at the creation of a stilted diction does not reward careful study. It is an early lyric, troubled by a sing-song of rhythm and a want of certainty of total purpose (aside from the desire to praise the deceased Mrs. Browning), and can be forgiven on such grounds. But it illustrates the tendency of Miss Dickinson's poetic efforts toward a freedom of syntax, a
tendency which achieves enormous effect for her in some of her best lyrics.

Again, in lyric #501, there is an arresting example of complexity caused by inversion in a highly compressed syntax; Miss Dickinson is speaking of life which awaits men after death (for she was ever a believer in immortality), and she says of it:

To gain it, Men have borne
Contempt of Generations
And Crucifixion, shown--

At first reading, one is tempted to think that Generations and Crucifixion are both objects of the preposition of; when it becomes obvious, however, that such a reading leaves the word shown standing alone and without discernible meaning, he sees that he must circle back to ascertain some other reading. Having done so, he discovers that, by an ingenious stroke of compressive logic, Miss Dickinson has fused two phrases into one, with only a single necessary substitution and reconstruction: "To gain it (eternity), men have borne contempt of generations and (have) shown (contempt of) crucifixion." To bear contempt and to show contempt are clearly contrary semantically, but Miss Dickinson brings them together in a highly effective manner; the cryptic insertion of the past participle shown, saved as it is for the end of the phrase and line, annuls the first superficial reading in favor of a more complex, more puzzling, one. Such reconsideration of individual lines of poetry is a frequent necessity while reading Emily Dickinson's lyrics.
Note, for further verification, the first-glance difficulty of such lines as these from lyric #443:

We cannot put Ourself away
As a completed Man
Or Woman—When the Errand's done
We came to Flesh—upon--

We are kept at the passage momentarily while our intuitive senses of syntax reorganize themselves: "When the errand upon (which) we came to flesh's done." Or note these from lyric #640:

Nor could I rise— with You—
Because Your Face
Would put out Jesus'—
That New Grace

Glow plain—and foreign
On my homesick Eye—
Except that You than He
Shone closer by--

Of course, "except that You shone closer by than He" is the prosaic form, but note the effect of contrast achieved by bringing the two pronouns into closer proximity. Or note the coy playfulness of stanzas two and four of #704, which is largely the product of the inversions:

No matter—now—Sweet—
But when I'm Earl--
Wont you wish you'd spoken
To that dull Girl?

Trivial a Word—just--
Trivial—a Smile--
But wont you wish you'd spared one
When I'm Earl?

I shant need it—then--
Crests—will do--
Eagles on my Buckles--
On my Belt—too--
Ermine—my familiar Gown—
Say—Sweet—then
Wont you wish you'd smiled—just—
Me upon?

Here the playfulness is absorbed into the very syntax, which in
less imaginative prose should read: "Just a trivial word, (just)
a trivial smile" or "(A) word (is) just a trivial (thing), etc.,”
and "Wont you wish you'd just smiled upon me?" or "Wont you
wish you'd smiled upon just me (and upon no other)?" But the
poetess' instinct is better.

As I suggested earlier, inversion, despite a dogmatic Ezr
Pound, is of the very fabric of poetry. The rigorous demands of
measure and cadence, and, in many poets, of rhyme and stanza
form, compel the poet to organize his meaning in a sequential
way that could only be accepted in a poem. The good poet, how­
ever, is one who does not let the rigors of his meter master
him, but who, on the contrary, exploits the very arbitrariness
of these rigors. Such is often the case with Miss Dickinson;
she turns the handicap of metric and form into a firm exploitation
of her medium. Note lyric #804:

No Notice gave She, but a Change--
No Message, but a Sigh--
For Whom, the Time did not suffice
That She would specify

She was not warm, though Summer shone
Nor scrupulous of cold
Though Rime by Rime, the steady Frost
Upon Her Bosom piled--

Of shrinking ways—she did not fright
Though all the Village looked--
But held Her gravity aloft--
And met the gaze—direct--
And when adjusted like a Seed
In careful fitted Ground
Unto the Everlasting Spring
And hindered but a Mound

Her Warm return, if so she chose--
And We--imploring drew--
Removed our invitation by
As Some She never knew--

In the opening stanza here, for example, the inversions in the
first three lines serve to emphasize various significant details
about the experience of death: the dying gave no notice, left no
message, did not say for whom she had given a sigh. These details
are organized in such a way at the beginnings of lines as to give
them natural stress in reading, pointing up their importance in
the total meaning. Similarly, the endings of the first two lines
provide positions of stress for change and sigh, exceptions which
complete the meanings of the openings of the lines. How much
better, in terms of over-all meaning, such an arrangement than the
more prosaic: "She gave no notice, but a change; she gave no
message, but a sigh; the time did not suffice (or, more likely,
there was not sufficient time) that she should specify for whom
(she had given the message)." In the third stanza, it is not
clear whether there is inversion or merely ellipsis: "(To speak)
of shrinking ways, she did not fright," or "She did not fright
(i. e., she was not frightened) of (or, by) shrinking ways." The
meaning seems clearer than the syntax which one may choose to
explicate the passage: "She did not shrink with fright from
death, but met the gaze directly." The confusion of the earlier
lines of the stanza may convey, ironically, that she was
momentarily caught off guard, but that she regained her composure.

In the fourth stanza, we have another instance of the necessity of circling back in a passage to gain our bearings as readers. At first, it seems that **adjusted** and **hindered** are compound participles modifying the rather remote **she** of stanza three; however, we later see that "but a mound hindered her warm return." This does not, however, completely relieve the problem, for the second and third lines of this stanza remain obscure: are we to think that she is "adjusted in carefully fitted ground unto (i.e., until) the Everlasting Spring," or that she is "adjusted like a seed in ground carefully fitted (i.e., suited) unto the Everlasting Spring"?

One final example of inversion will allow us to take a last look at this particular problem and, at the same time, to look forward to that discussed in the next chapter: placement of modifiers. The example is in lyric #955:

```
The Hollows round His eager Eyes
Were Pages where to read
Pathetic Histories--although
Himself had not complained.
Biography to All who passed
Of Unobtrusive Pain
Except for the italic Face
Endured, unhelped--unknown.
```

The complexity of inversion appears here in the last four lines. "Of Unobtrusive Pain" seems clearly to follow "Biography," and "Except for the italic Face" "Unobtrusive." However, the placement as it appears in the lyric, creates an extraordinarily effective cohesion between the individual lines. Note, for
example, that line six is inextricably bound to "biography" of line five; that line seven is yoked syntactically to "unobtrusive" of line six; and line eight is closely linked to "Pain" of line six. A prose paraphrase had given us: "The Hollows round his eyes were, to all who passed, (a) biography of pain endured unhelped (and) unknown, (of pain) unobtrusive except for the italic face." Here again, it seems to me that the anguish, the twisted, distorted pain which the poetess wishes us to experience, is in the very lines and their arrangement.

Inversion, then, is a common enough necessity among poets that we are not startled to discover it in Emily Dickinson's lyrics. Frequently, however, we find the effects of inversion complicated by ambiguities of syntactic function (such as that illustrated in the subject-object ambiguity), by ellipsis, by ambivalence of modification. Judged individually, some of the instances examined represent a triumph of the metier over the poet; but, in the best of these examples, the very obdurateness of the form and its rigorous demands find response adequate to the challenge. In those lyrics, what may have been occasioned by the exacting requirements of lyric form becomes functional in aiding the semantic and phonological ends of the poem itself.
CHAPTER X

AMBIGUITIES OF MODIFICATION

It is a part of the genius of the English language that, in its historical development, complexity of inflection has been largely replaced by rigidity of word order. I have already touched upon the problems arising out of this rigidity in the previous chapter, treating the nature of lyric inversion when language is prescribed by detailed requisites of meter and rhyme. In one sense, this chapter may be thought a continuation of that chapter, but in another, it treats specifically of the problem of ambiguities of modification which arise from the idiosyncrasy of placement of modifying elements in Miss Dickinson's poetry.

There is an interesting example in the first stanza of lyric #593:

I think I was enchanted
When first a sombre Girl--
I read that Foreign Lady--
The Dark--felt beautiful--

Our problem is with the word first. Is it meant to modify was enchanted: "I think I was first enchanted / When(, as) a sombre Girl(,)-- / I read (of) that Foreign Lady-- / The Dark (woman)-- (whom I) felt (was) beautiful--"? Or is it to modify read: "I think I was enchanted / When(, as) a sombre Girl(,)-- / I first read (of) that Foreign Lady-- / The Dark (woman)--(whom I) felt
(was) beautiful--"? Or is its placement between the two verbs meant to suggest that it has relation to both? One could argue that the logical reason for its placement is that Miss Dickinson wished to locate it in the accented syllable of a regular iambic trimeter line; if that could be shown to be finally true, then doubtless the former reading above is the correct one. However, whether metric necessity or semantic intent urged the placement upon Miss Dickinson cannot be argued with any degree of certainty. What we have, the lyric itself, contains an ambiguity which extends us double mileage from the monosyllable first. Of course, some will argue, and rightly so, that there is an altogether different way of reading the last two lines of the first stanza: "I think I was enchanted / When first (as) a sombre Girl-- / I read that Foreign Lady-- / (And then,) the Dark felt beautiful-- (i. e., I no longer feared the Darkness)." Such a reading is certainly consonant with the general meaning of the poem, an elegy of praise written for Elizabeth Barrett Browning. The subject is the transforming power of Mrs. Browning's poetry; having read it, the child in Emily Dickinson looked at all of life in a totally new and enchanted way. But certainly all the meanings are implicit in the syntactic structure, and it may very well be that more than one of them is intended. Placement then can be a very important factor in interpretation, and ambiguous placement may be a means of expanding the meanings of the lyric.

At times admittedly the effect of the unusual placement seems of little more than passing interest or mere cleverness. For
example, in lyric #1101, the placement of *between* between the two elements of comparison serves little the total aesthetic purpose. Instead, it smacks of the ostentatiously plotted effect:

Between the form of Life and Life
The difference is as big
As Liquor at the Lip between
And Liquor in the Jug
The latter—excellent to keep—
But for extatic need
The corkless is superior—
I know for I have tried.

Here neither rhyme nor meter can be given as excuse for the oddity of placement; nor is the effect worthy of the effort.

At times too the confusion caused by placement is only temporary, and reconsideration confirms one reading as definitely preferable. For example, in lyric #714, it first appears that the third line is related syntactically to the fourth:

Rests at Night
The Sun from shining,
Nature—and some Men—
Rest at Noon—some Men—
While Nature
And the Sun—go on—

A first reading seems to suggest that the first four lines are composed of two independent clauses: "The sun rests from shining at night; nature and some men rest at noon." However, the strange implication of such a rendering (i.e., "that some men while nature and the sun go on . . .") leads us to reconsider the syntax which then seems to reduce itself to a simple inversion and compression of elements: "The sun rests from shining at night, and nature and men rest at night (as well); (but) some men rest at noon while nature and the sun go on." The solution is the
simplest explanation of the lyric, and there is nothing to be
gained in the ambiguity. Consequently, we must conclude that the
inversion likely serves the function of giving emphasis to the
contrast: "Rests at Night . . . Rest at Noon." In the first
instance, man's behavior seems in harmonious agreement with nature
and the sun; in the second, he seems out of harmony. Such is
apparently the theme of the poem, and the emphasis aids our
assimilation of the contrast.

Frequently the placement is complicated further by its con­
nection with another ambiguity such as the adjective-adverb one
which I discussed in an earlier chapter. Note stanza one of
#630, for instance:

The Lightning playeth—all the while—
But when He singeth—then—
Ourselves are conscious He exist—
And we approach Him—stern—

With Insulators—and a Glove—
Whose short—sepulchral Bass
Alarms us—tho' His Yellow Feet
May pass—and counterpass—

Upon the Ropes—above our Head—
Continual—with the News—
Nor We so much as check our speech—
Nor stop to cross Ourselves—

Taken in its literal inflection, stern appears adjectival, modi­
fying, if the argument of proximity be applied, Him. However,
what follows the word stern seems to modify We (with insulators
and a glove). Yet, in the second line of the second stanza, the
Whose has as its antecedent Him. Consequently, the shift back
and forth and the irregular placement of modifiers makes us
somewhat unsure of ourselves. Finally, one could say that stern seems to modify both We and Him (i.e., we, with appropriate sternness, approach our stern enemy, the lightning). Or one could say perhaps that stern is a foreshortened adverbial form (of which we have seen a plethora in Miss Dickinson's poems) modifying the verb. This triple syntactic implication surely does not weaken the force of the word stern, but instead causes it to characterize both the action and the participants in the action. Such is doubtless true, and the ambiguity of the syntax and placement work together to create the effect, enshrouding all with sternness.

A similar effect can be seen in lyric #1402:

To the stanch Dust  
We safe commit thee—  
Tongue if it hath,  
Inviolate to thee—  
Silence—denote—  
And Sanctity—enforce thee—  
Passenger—of Infinity—

Again, the safe of the second line may be simply an abbreviated adverbial form: "We safe(ly) (i.e., without fear or hesitation) commit thee to the stanch dust." However, its adjectival inflection could suggest that it be related to either We or thee; its proximity to the subject argues for the former, the general semantic sense for the latter. Neither modification could be excluded, however, though the choice can shift the meaning of the poem enormously. If Miss Dickinson means to imply that it is because we ourselves are safe (i.e., unable to be touched at this moment by death) that we commit thee with such assurance to
the dust, we have one motivation; but if she means to say that we commit thee safe to the dust, we have quite another. In fact, the two meanings seem almost sufficiently contrasting to set up an irony of interpretation: in the first instance, it is because we are safe and our love so callous that we commit the dead with such assurance; in the second, it is because we love the dead and yet feel secure in the assurance of eternal life that we commit him. One reading shows us callous, the other loving. If we may believe all that Emily Dickinson wrote in her prose of death and the dying of friends and of members of her family, I think we may substantiate such an ironically ambiguous interpretation. For her, there was always a quality of uncertainty about our efforts to explain our responses to the deaths of those very near us. She never seemed altogether sure whether the fascination which the dead held for us resulted from our own insecurity about the fact of death or from the love in which we held those dying. And the irony is clearly implicit in the ambiguity with which Miss Dickinson states herself here.

Of course, here, as in other instances, the problem is frequently complicated by want of final punctuation. We cannot be certain whether the dashes are indeed to indicate pauses (or merely, as at least one critic has argued, accent marks). In the first stanza of lyric #549, for example, it is difficult to decide for certain whether Enough is meant to modify I never lived, as its placement argues, or if it is meant to join Proof with line
three and the first part of four, merely interrupting the relation:

That I did always love
I bring thee Proof
That till I loved
I never lived--Enough--

If Enough does yoke itself with lived, it would seem to contradict the general meaning of the stanza: to say that one had not lived enough is not the same thing as saying one had not lived at all until he loved. However, because of the placement, that is the first meaning which suggests itself. If, however, we can establish a relation between enough and proof, the sense of the passage is altogether obvious: "I bring thee proof enough that I did always love, (by saying) that I never lived until I loved."

However, if the former interpretation can be argued, then there appears here a submerged ironic contradiction of the assertion (and, interestingly enough, the contradiction is surely more nearly truth than the apparently intended "fictional," romantic argument). It is just this apparent arbitrariness of assertion, undercut by subtle hints of want of certainty, which is the basis of much of the critical controversy about explication of the Dickinson poems. It can be shown, I think, that the recurrences of these ambiguities are of the very fabric of the Dickinson method and are a part of the clear poetic intention.

Other problems are raised in the Dickinson canon by the placement of a modifying phrase precisely between two elements
which seem to have equal claim to it as modifier. Note, for example, the first stanza of lyric #452:

The Malay—took the Pearl—
Not—I—the Earl—
I feared the Sea—too much
Unsanctified—to touch—

Praying that I might be
Worthy—the Destiny—
The Swarthy fellow swam—
And bore my Jewel—home—

Here one is not certain whether to think the meaning: "I feared the sea too much," or "I feared the sea too much unsanctified to (be) touch(ed)." The dash is an equivocal mark for Miss Dickinson, and the use of the active for the passive form (as I have elsewhere suggested) is not at all unusual. If one adopts the first reading, it appears that it is "I" who am "unsanctified" and therefore not worthy "to touch" it. Such a reading appears to be substantiated in the second stanza, in which "I" prays to be worthy of the destiny of the diver who finds the pearl deep within the waters. However, the second reading, while it does seem more natural for the first stanza, leaves us with the difficulty of a dangling participial phrase at the opening of the second, unless one assumes that it is indeed the "swarthy fellow" who both prayed for his earl's success and who dove for the pearl. I prefer to think that the ambiguity is deliberate and that it suggests that both earl and sea are ceremonially unsuited (unsanctified) for one another; such certainly can be justified by the syntax.

A very similar circumstance can be seen in the last stanza of lyric #420, where the phrase and the Sun seems to suggest
equally well a relationship with what precedes and what follows:

Omnipotence—had not a Tongue—
His lisp—is Lightning—and the Sun—
His Conversation—with the Sea—
"How shall you know"?
Consult your Eye!

It is clear from the start that the copulative verb is implied at some point, either at the end of line two or in the middle of line three, through its suppression in the construction parallel to that of the start of the second line: "His lisp is lightning."
The question then is where it should be supplied: "His lisp is lightning, and the sun (is) his conversation with the sea," or "His lisp is lightning and the sun; his conversation (is) with the sea"? It seems one could argue the former on the ground that lightning and sun have in common a radiance and magnificence which could be a laconic conceit for the lisp of Omnipotence.
However, it is also possible to conceive that the radiance of the sun as reflected from the sea is His conversation, while lightning, the capricious flashing of radiant energy, is His lisp (i.e., His voice when He is not speaking on the best terms). Though each reader may feel a preference for one or the other of the readings (as mine is decidedly for the second), it would be impossible to argue that one is the right reading and the other wrong. Both are present by the ambiguity of placement.

There is the same double potential of modification in the opening stanza of lyric #369:

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

Here we are not sure whether she lay as if she were merely playing dead (in the fashion of children and animals when they are told to take on the pretense of death); or if her life had leaped away while she was at play, and this had left upon her corpse some mark which indicated that fact to those who observed her. The former reading seems substantiated in the third stanza:

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

but the latter reading seems more firmly implied in the first as well as the second stanza:

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

The presence of both ideas potentially does not contradict the presence of either one separately; in fact, the two ideas are related and reinforce one another in an interesting way. Likely both were intended.

What we are forced to conclude then is that Emily Dickinson either intuitively or as the result of careful observation understood the nature of the ambiguities which inevitably arise when the established prose order is violated or when the modifications intended are either delayed or sandwiched between two equal syntactic elements. In such cases, ambiguities are set up which
often serve to broaden the general meanings of passages or to fuse meanings in a provocative way.
CHAPTER XI
DOUBLE FUNCTION

Closely associated with these ambiguities of modification are instances in the Dickinson canon in which we find words or phrases used in a double sense or fulfilling more than one syntactic function. In some instances, the ambiguities of modification described in the earlier chapter amount to double and sometimes even triple functions. The examples discussed in this chapter will be of three kinds: 1) that in which a double meaning is assigned to a single word in its ambivalent function; 2) that in which a single word or phrase must be assigned two distinct syntactic functions in order for the context to be understood; and 3) that in which there is a reduction of two similar syntactic forms or morphemes to a single one.

In the first variety, a single word is used in two different senses, frequently involving an idiomatic usage in at least part of the ambiguity. Note, for illustration, the fifth and seventh lines of lyric #1290:

The most pathetic thing I do
Is play I hear from you--
I make believe until my Heart
Almost believes it too
But when I break it with the news
You knew it was not true
I wish I had not broken it--
Goliath--so would you--
In the fifth line, the ambiguity arises partly out of the several meanings which attach themselves to it: the pronoun's antecedent had been that which the speaker had "played" or pretended to be true in line four, and will be similarly read in line six. Consequently, it suggests itself to us as a possible antecedent for it in line five. However, there is also good reason to think that my Heart is the it which is broken in line five. A further ambiguity arises in the double cliches of broken heart and broken news. Does the speaker break the heart, the illusion created by the pretense, or the news? The decision must again be made in line seven, and the meaning is equally ambiguous: I wish I had not broken it (i.e., the illusion? the heart? or the news?). All seem clearly possible in terms of the actual context; however, if we accept either illusion (or its equivalent in the poem) or heart as the antecedent, then break is used in the sense of destroy. But if we accept news, then the sense of break is reveal or unveil. Thus, in the ambiguity, the verb takes on two senses depending upon which of the ambiguities we adopt. This particular species, while it occurs often, is relatively less frequent than the second and third varieties. I have, however, because of the overlapping nature of this ambiguity, discussed other examples under different headings elsewhere in this paper.

The second variety is that in which a single word or phrase must be assigned two distinct syntactic functions in order for the passage to be understood; that is, it must function in two phrases or two clauses as compressing two independent functions.
One example is, again, the subject-object ambiguity. Since we do not, in English, inflect nouns for case (except for the possessive form), it is perfectly possible for a noun to function as, say, both subject in one clause and object in another. There is an example of this in lyric #233:

The Lamp burns sure--within--
Theo' Serfs--supply the Oil--
It matters not the busy Wick--
At her phosphoric toil!

The Slave--forgets--to fill--
The Lamp--burns golden--on--
Unconscious that the oil is out--
As that the Slave--is gone.

In the second stanza, it at first appears that The Lamp is object of fill; when we continue reading the lyric, however, it appears that it must function as subject of burns. As a matter of fact, it functions in both ways; thus the two sentences are linked together by a common term serving double syntactic function.

Lyric #1005 contains a similar example, but here the subject-object ambivalence is complicated by a further possibility:

Bind me--I still can sing--
Banish--my mandolin
 Strikes true within--

Slay--and my Soul shall rise
 Chanting to Paradise--
 Still thine.

In this example, it may well be that we are to read my mandolin as both object of banish and subject of strikes. By such a compression Emily Dickinson has ruled out the necessity for the pronoun it. The full reading would be: "Banish my mandolin; it strikes true within." When we arrive at the third stanza, where
an analogous structure appears, however, we are tempted to adopt a different reading: now banish and slay are verb forms whose objects me are suppressed. Thus the passage could be expanded to read: "Banish me; my mandolin strikes true within." In the first instance, it is the mandolin which is to be banished (I think this the better reading, since the poetess herself is not to be banished, but kept and bound to be slain; it is the instrument of her music which is to be sent into exile). In the second, it is the poetess herself who is to be banished. The ellipsis of the repeated object, or of a different one, has left us with an ambiguity, subject to two quite different solutions.

In the third stanza of lyric #405, we have a somewhat different illustration of this double use required of a single word:

I am not used to Hope--
It might intrude upon--
It's sweet parade--blaspheme the place--
Ordained to Suffering--

There are actually two problems here which must be solved independently. First, there appears to be an ellipsis at the end of the second line. It may be that we are meant to supply me, rendering the passage: "I am not used to Hope; it might intrude upon me (i.e., hope would be an intrusion upon me)." Further reading, however, suggests another possibility; that the place could function as object both of the preposition upon and of the verb blaspheme. Thus the meaning of the lines would be: "I am not used to hope; it might intrude upon the place ordained to suffering," and "It's (i.e., Hope's) sweet parade (might)
blaspheme the place ordained to suffering." To acknowledge the possibility of either rendering seems to me to broaden and to clarify the meaning: hope might intrude upon me, and particularly upon the part of my life which has been set apart for suffering.

There is still a different illustration of this double function in the fifth stanza of lyric #327:

Before I got my eye put out
I liked as well to see--
As other Creatures, that have Eyes
And know no other way--

But were it told to me--Today--
That I might have the sky
For mine--I tell you that my Heart
Would split, for size of me--

The Meadows--mine--
The Mountains--mine--
All Forests--Stintless S'tars--
As much of Noon as I could take
Between my finite eyes--

The Motions of the Dipping Birds--
The Morning's Amber Road--
For mine--to look at when I liked--
The News would strike me dead--

So safer Guess--with just my soul
Upon the Window pane--
Where other Creatures put their eyes--
Incautious--of the Sun--

Here the double syntactic and semantic function is in the word Guess. The theme of the poem is relatively simple: the poetess, having lost an eye, longs passionately to be able to see the beauties of nature again; however, when she realizes that to be able to see again would be such an awesome experience it would strike her dead, she remains content to see only with the eyes of her soul. But guess represents a syntactic compression which
may be expanded as either indicative or infinitival in meaning. If the former, then the sense is: "So (I am) safer, (I) guess, with just my soul / Upon the window pane." The poetess, though she must accept her destiny of not being able to see, still does not feel sure that she would not take the risk of death in order to see again. With such an interpretation, the poem comes very near to others in which the poetess expresses uncertainty also about the consequences of experiences which she should still like to know. However, if we adopt the second possibility and interpret guess as an infinitive, the meaning is changed significantly: "So (it is) safer (for me to) guess (what meadows, mountains, forests, stars, noon, birds, and morning are like) with just my soul upon the window pane." In such an expansion, there is no doubt in the poetess' acceptance of the deprivation; she will not look with her physical eyes, because she fears death more than she craves sight. Thus a single word bears a double weight of meaning rising out of a syntactic compression.

Note too the double function of the we are in the second stanza of lyric #856 (which I have dealt with elsewhere in another connection):

There is a finished feeling
Experienced at Graves—
A leisure of the Future—
A Wilderness of Size.

By Death's bold Exhibition
Preciser what we are
And the Eternal function
Enabled to infer.
Undoubtedly, at first glance, we are (or rather the whole clause what we are) is the object of infer: we can make an inference about what we are, after having seen Death's exhibition. However, when we note that the entire stanza is a fragment, a dangling participial phrase, to which must be added we are, it becomes clear that we hear the proper form echoing somewhere in our minds. When we look at the lines, we see that we are is a part of the noun clause which serves as object of infer; but now it seems to take on itself also the offices of subject and auxiliary for the participial form enabled. Thus the entire clause what we are serves as object of an infinitive, while its subject and verb serve as subject and auxiliary for the main verb of the stanza.

There is one final example of this species to which I should like to refer; it is in the first stanza of lyric #519:

'Twas warm— at first— like Us—
Until there crept upon
A Chill— like frost upon a Glass—
Till all the scene— be gone.

In the second line of the lyric, we have what at first appears to be an example of ellipsis: "Until there crept upon (it) / A Chill." Upon reconsideration, however, it seems more accurate to say that the 't of 'twas has been asked to carry a double function: it is both the subject of was in the first line and, at the same time, the object of the preposition upon. Its antecedent is apparently understood to be the corpse which Miss Dickinson is describing as the rigor mortis sets it. But she exercises again her bent for excision of all but the most essential syntax.
The third species of what I call double function examples is very much like the first, except that in these examples, a single syntactic and semantic form is used with a double implication. At times, this species may employ simply a morpheme, as in the case of the -ness in the first stanza of lyric #458:

Like Eyes that looked on Wastes--
Incredulous of Ought
But Blank--and steady Wilderness--
Diversified by Night--

It would not only have been monotonous, but would have raised a problem of metric irregularity, had Emily Dickinson written "But Blankness--and steady Wilderness." Since the -ness would have seemed in her sparse grammar "redundant," she merely eliminates it, either requiring Blank, the adjective, to function as a noun, or, as I suspect, anticipating that the nounal morpheme of Wilderness would serve as syntactic marker for both words.

At times it is simple placement and the want of punctuation which gives rise to the double potential of a passage. This is true in the first stanza of lyric #869:

Because the Bee may blameless hum
For Thee a Bee do I become.

Of course, it could be argued that the line is the unit here and that the For Thee naturally alligns itself with the second clause: "I do become a Bee for Thee." However, the inversion brings the For Thee into proximity with the first clause, arguing as much for attachment to it as for unusual placement in the second clause. Consequently, the case rests upon a decision about punctuation, which, unfortunately (or perhaps fortunately), we do
not have. We are confronted by a choice: either "Because the bee may blameless hum for thee, I do become a bee," or "Because the bee may blameless hum, I do become a bee for thee." But placement and want of punctuation argue for both: "Because the bee may blameless hum for thee, I do become a bee for thee."

The opening stanza of lyric #1170 poses a similar compression of functions identical in two clauses, represented by a single form:

A Diamond on the Hand
To Custom Common ground
Subsides from it's significance
The Gem were best unknown--
Within a Seller's Shrine
How many sight and sigh
And cannot, but are mad with fear
That any other buy.

The normal prose equivalent of lines six through eight would be: "How many sight and sigh and cannot buy (the diamond), but are mad with fear that any other (person can do so)." It is common to use some form of the verb do as a shortened abbreviation in lieu of the repetition of certain verbs of action. However, Miss Dickinson, reluctant to employ words which merely substitute for others (pronouns and substituted verb forms), simply compresses the two into one, delaying the complementary buy until both clauses are complete, dividing the cannot buy so that the verb can and its adverbial negative are in the first, the bare infinitival object buy, which signifies precisely the action, is in the second. Another triumph of the spare New England impulse.
A fourth example is that found in the first stanza of lyric #1170:

Nature affects to be sedate
Upon occasion, grand
But let our observation shut
Her practices extend

To Necromancy and the Trades
Remote to understand
Behold our spacious Citizen
Unto a Juggler turned--

Here the upon occasion must refer to two different sets of occasions, those upon which Nature seems sedate, and those upon which she seems grand. An expanded version would require:

"Nature affects to be sedate upon (one) occasion, (and to be) grand upon (another) occasion." But Miss Dickinson has reduced our fifteen words to eight without loss of meaning, an achievement most significant under the terms of the Imagist assertion that concentration is the essence of lyric expression.

And one final example in stanza four of lyric #328:

He stirred his Velvet Head

Like one in danger, Cautious,
I offered him a Crumb
And he unrolled his feathers
And rowed him softer home--

Here is one of Miss Dickinson's most popular lyrics, the one beginning "A Bird came down the Walk." Again, the placement of Cautious immediately following an adjectival prepositional phrase with which it could be compounded and immediately preceding a pronoun subject which it could legitimately modify, raises a question about meaning. If we adopt the first reading above, it
is the bird who is cautious; if the second, it is "I" who am cautious. Doubtless both assertions are accurate. The frightened bird, noting the approach of a human benefactor, assumes a notably cautious attitude; at the same time, the bearer of breadcrumbs is cautious, fearful that his errand of mercy will be misunderstood, and that the bird, frightened, will fly swiftly from him (as this bird does). Why should it be necessary to adopt one reading while ignoring the other? Both are appropriate; why should not both be adopted?

What has been the effect of having words bear a double function in terms of the total style? They have confirmed what has been suggested earlier, that Emily Dickinson is a poet who has striven to weight her words as heavily as possible with meaning, and whose metaphysical conception of the problems of poetry and experience require her to acknowledge the ambiguity of human life and thought. At times she seems herself uncertain of her meaning, as though the burden of decision is so taxing that she must leave it to the reader. In her best poems she is not imprecise about her meaning, though she is often ambiguous. All the materials which are needed for recognition of the ambiguity are among the données of the poems. But qualities implicit in relationships (such as that between bird and mortal in the last example) are often fluctuating, often seeming to transfer themselves from subject to object or from object to object, from living thing to living thing. We must see that as a part of the intricacy and complexity of Miss Dickinson's lyric utterance.
CONCLUSION

BUT TELL IT SLANT

So what does all this come to? Surely a poet whose practice is at such odds with established or conventional patterns of poetic composition, considering the persistent and far-reaching critical appeal of her work, must reveal in her poems something of the nature of the poetic craft as it appears to her and perhaps even something of her whole metaphysic. It is true at least in this instance.

I had said in the opening chapter that Emily Dickinson's syntactic oddity is related to three distinct matters. At times it is the natural syntactic distortion made necessary by the limitations of the metric discipline. At other times it is the product of a calculated effort to achieve second and third meanings or ambiguities which are meant to be superimposed subtly upon the more obvious meanings. And at still other times it is a clue to psychological or metaphysical attitudes present either consciously or unconsciously in the poetess' whole biography and creative practice.

In the first case, Emily Dickinson is like nearly every other poet in that her poetry shows the effect of the reciprocal impositions of form upon substance, substance upon form. Having selec-
ted his metric and stanzaic shape, a poet has automatically set
down certain limitations of subject (although he may never stop to
think of what his form will **not** allow him to do, his attention is
so firmly fixed upon what he **is** doing). A poet "slaps down one
line," after Emmeline Grangerford's example, and he has narrowed
decidedly the limits of his second, third, and fourth lines, and
perhaps his whole poem. The greater the restriction of form
(i.e., the more numerous its demands), the more fully predictive
of limitations. For example, when Robert Frost decided upon the
rhyme of the third line of a given stanza in his interlocked
"Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," he dictated to himself the
closing syllables of the first, second, and last lines of the next
stanza. His decision that the lines should be iambic tetrameter
as well measured out for him the recurrent beat to which he must
accede or against which he must set up deliberate tensions. As
the complexity of the adopted form increases, the strictness of
limitation increases. But all this is not debilitating to the
poet; instead, these limitations are the articles of the warfare
in his particular struggle.

In Emily Dickinson's case, the determining stanzaic and
metric configurations were those of the short and common measures
of the New England hymnals. I doubt that she ever consciously
"made up her mind" that this was to be the course she would
follow. Here was a poetry she had grown up with and whose imita-
tion must have been instinctive to her. At times it conquered
her, leaving her verse weakly debased by the sing-song of a
monotonously regular cadence. Note that of lyric #124, for example:

In lands I never saw—they say
Immortal Alps look down--
Whose Bonnets touch the firmament--
Whose Sandals touch the town--

Fortunately, Emily Dickinson learned means of overcoming the implicit monotony of a poetic style which must always be conscious of the musical verse patterns so essential to the vocal performance of the hymns she used as models. Look, for illustration, at this lyric; it is one of her best early examples:

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.

(#126)

The subtle deviations from the metrically regular pattern can be seen here to enforce the meaning of the poem, while also avoiding the charge of monotony. In the first stanza, the feminine ending of the third line must stand for the expectation of a four foot line, and the equivalent in pause prepares partly for the unusual emphasis of the fourth line: "The Cavalry of Woe," a line which bears much of the solemn weight of the utterance. In the second stanza, the feminine ending of the third line serves a somewhat
different metric purpose; it allows the two contiguous syllables no coun-try to receive greater stress, suggesting more strongly than otherwise possible the fact that such spiritual gallantry is ignored altogether.

Note too the remarkable effect of the dissonant or sprung rhyme in the second and fourth lines of the second stanza. Observe and love do echo each other consonantally, but there is clearly something less than full satisfaction of expectation in the rhyme. This dissonance is emphasized by the fact that the two stanzas which surround the second use only a single harmonious rhyme: know and Wo, go and Snow. Between these two stanzas is the jarring imperfect rhyme which I just mentioned. How does the unusual rhyme function? To reinforce the images of falling and death with which the stanza ends.

A further frequent substitution is that of the troche (particularly in the third lines of stanzas, putting it just about in the center of the stanza, slightly past the middle foot) for the iamb at the start of the line. Ordinarily some useful purpose beyond the mere avoidance of monotony is served. Here the emphasis is given both by the position at the start of a line and the inversion of the normal accent sequence stressing the legions of angels, ranked in endless lines of procession, honoring the heroic warriors of spiritual battles.

So Emily Dickinson is, in her best poems, not the slave of her metric. She knows how to superimpose upon the rigid pattern her own distinctive lyric purposes, presiding over the technique
with both imagination and determination. How does this relate to our thesis that frequently it is the collaboration of form and idea which causes her to use unusual syntactic forms? Note Miss Dickinson's choices at various points within this same lyric. Why, for example, does she say "To fight aloud"? Is it not because the compression implicit in the form she has selected demands the most succinct of utterances? Whitman could have said it with a fuller and more perfectly elaborated syntax, but Miss Dickinson could not. Her very form precluded "To fight with outward manifestation of activity and noise of display." "To fight aloud" is neither accurate semantically, nor, when yoked to "is very brave," syntactically. Yet it has successfully defied linguistic convention to become one of her most popular and forceful lyrics. We could not have said it so, but we all know very well what she means. So the stricture of a succinct iambic form compelled Miss Dickinson to confine and to shape her utterance in a most unusual and compelling manner. In her best poems, this is well-nigh always true.

I have been struck in the preparation of this paper that, at many points in it, I could have given legitimate explanations for odd forms by saying simply that she had accommodated herself to her choice of formal structure. However, what has emerged upon careful consideration is the evidence that the choice was motivated by more than metric demands, that, in fact, she had exploited the limitations and turned them to her semantic and syntactic ends. In many of the examples of adjective functioning
as adverb, of adjective as noun, noun as adjective, it could have been explained that the shortening usually created a greater felicity of metric; however, in most instances, that was not the only principle operating: the semantic surplus evoked by the syntactic variant was worth noting for its own contribution to the whole poem. As I have insisted before, this is the mark of the great poet: that he can use what would ordinarily be limitations of craft to his own ends.

As my second point of argument, I should like to suggest that Miss Dickinson employs syntactic variants in an effort to embrace second and, at times, third levels of meaning. Critics comment frequently upon the instinctive tendency toward equivocation in Miss Dickinson's poems. Professor Griffith noted this in his *The Long Shadow*:¹

Trapped in a world which declined to be committed, she saw that any avowal suggesting her commitment to it would be a confession of naïveté and, much more seriously, a jeopardizing of the poise and security that indifference alone could afford. . . . Emily Dickinson, the ironic stylist, remained chary of making statements that were likely to seem overly sweeping, overly passionate, or merely overwrought. Miss Dickinson's drab and narrow language was not, as has been asserted, the product of an insensitive ear or of a constitutional awkwardness with words. Her language sprang, instead, from her conviction that in a world characterized by manifold uncertainties, the only viable speech would be a terse and astringent speech—the speech of careful, quiet inconclusiveness.

Even so brief a lyric as that noted definition of "presentiment" has its quality of indecisiveness.

Presentiment—is that long Shadow—on the Lawn—
Indicative that Suns go down—

The Notice to the startled Grass
That Darkness—is about to pass—
(#764)

The poem is constructed on a basic metaphorical association
between darkness and tragedy of some sort: suffering, despair,
the reception of unsettling news. Our first impulse is to read
the poem as a simple evocation of the coming darkness; the
message is stated twice: the long shadow indicates that the night
is about to come; it is, as well, a "notice" (i.e., a notification) to the grass that darkness is about to engulf it. The mood
is uniformly one of gloomy anticipation. However, as critics have
noted,\(^2\) the pass of the last line is elliptically ambiguous; it
could be expanded to read: "That darkness is about to pass (over
it)," or "That darkness is about to pass (from the scene)." In
the latter case, the notification is of coming relief from darkness. It may be that Miss Dickinson is speaking of two different
kinds of presentiment, one of bleakness and suffering and one of
joy and elation. Or it may be that she suggests that presentiment
itself is not totally dependable; we cannot determine from it
precisely the nature of what is to come. While we anticipate
darkness, it may be only an indication of the coming of day (long
shadows are characteristic of both evening and morning). Thus the
ambiguity is functional; Miss Dickinson appears to have chosen

\(^2\)Note the suggestion in Laurence Perrine's *Sound and Sense*
it because it could convey ironical and ambiguous meanings for her.

In the examples discussed, I have stressed this second effect of the oddity of syntax. The use of adjectival inflection for adverbs not only aids compression and contributes to the overall metric spareness of the Dickinsonian style; it provides duality of modification, reinforcing the semantic signification by providing qualities which attach themselves to verbs and to nouns. At times, as in the case of pomp and pompous in lyric #98, the noun and adjective forms have connotative embellishments quite at variance with the strict denotative identifications. Miss Dickinson's sensitivity to language appears to have let her know this instinctively. We must agree with Richard B. Sewall, when he argued that "the fault is in too tight, rather than too loose, organization." 3 What at first seems an indifference to precision of utterance or to clarity of thought turns finally to the advantage of complexity of thought and vision, revealing the mind able to turn about within a single utterance and to view the world from a number of points of view at once. I trust I will not appear to claim too much for Miss Dickinson if I say that her poetry strikes me as sculpturesque, demanding that we turn it about, shift its parts (and now I am thinking of the mobile), follow its complicated and elusive logic, to see layers of meaning intrinsic to the very syntax itself.

3"Dickinson's 'To Undertake Is to Achieve,'" Explicator, VI (June, 1948), 51.
My third and final conclusion about these examples is that they demonstrate something of the general bent of Miss Dickinson's mind and personality. Implicit in them are her shyness, her childlike naïveté and inability to accept the world as the adults about her claimed it, her indecision, her religious heterodoxy, and her anxiety at being forced to live in a world so utterly devoid of certainties. These are rather large claims for the revelatory capacity of style, but they are nonetheless real. Her reticence is clearly reflected in the compressions with which she speaks, the slashing of syntactic morphemes (e.g., the loss of the -ly of adverbs, of the -ness of nouns, the omission of auxiliaries when the main verb can stand without it) and the general ellipsis which scarcely a single lyric has escaped altogether. The childlike quality is often conveyed in solecism and inversion, in ellipsis and in compressed image. Her vacillation is clear from her apparent inability to decide between meanings, her determination to leave a given syntactic puzzle intact, or her refusal to measure out the required syntactic distance for us in ellipsis. Her religious heterodoxy, while at times in her career suppressed, arises often in the ironic ambiguities of such lyrics as #306, "The Soul's Superior Instants." The whole ironic fabric of many of the best lyrics (the subject of Professor Griffith's *The Long Shadow*), underwritten by ambiguities of syntax and superficial awkwardnesses of diction (superficial only in that they at first seem mere weaknesses, while they can later be seen to be intended twists upon the loom, calculated for firmness of effect),
confess for the poetess a basic distrust of life, a confrontation of its tenuousness, an anxious acceptance of its ephemerality. All these things, I say, are woven inextricably into the very syntactic cloth of the poems. And transcending them all is the quality of defiance, of unwillingness to be played upon without resistance, of determined individuality which can set aside what T. B. Aldrich called "the laws of gravitation and grammar." And she did it with success.
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aldrich, Thomas Bailey. "In re Emily Dickinson," Atlantic Monthly, LXIX (January 1892), 143-144.


Davidson, J. "Emily Dickinson and Isaac Watts," Boston Public Library Quarterly, VI, 141-149.

Elias, Robert H. and Helen L. "Dickinson's 'Farther in Summer than the Birds,'" Explicator, XI (1952), Item 5.


-------- ----
fed .  The Poems of Emily Dickinson:  Including
Variant Readings Critically Compared with All Known Manuscripts.

--------------, and Theodora Ward, eds. The Letters of Emily

Leyda, Jay. The Years and Hours of Emily Dickinson. 2 vols.

Miles, Susan. "Irregularities of Emily Dickinson," London
Mercury, XIII (December 1925), 145-158.


"A Poet and Some Others," The Saturday Review (London), LXXII
(September 5, 1891), 279.

Rapin, René. "Dickinson's 'Farther in Summer than the Birds,'"
Explicator, XII (1953), Item 24.

Rosenbaum, S. P., ed. A Concordance to the Poems of Emily Dickin­

Sewall, Richard B. "Dickinson's 'To Undertake Is to Achieve,'"
Explicator, VI (June 1948), 51.

Shackford, Martha Hale. "The Poetry of Emily Dickinson," The
Atlantic Monthly, III (January 1913), 93-97.

Sherrer, Grace B. "A Study of Unusual Verb Constructions in the
Poems of Emily Dickinson," American Literature, VII (March
1935), 37-46.

Stamm, E. P. "Emily Dickinson: Poetry and Punctuation,
Saturday Review, XLVI (March 30, 1963), 26-27.

Stoddard, Francis H. "Technique in Emily Dickinson's Poems,
The Critic, XX (new series XVII) (January 9, 1892), 24-25.

Taggard, Genevieve. The Life and Mind of Emily Dickinson. New

"Talk about New Books," Catholic World, LII (January 1891),
600-604.

Van Deusen, Marshall. "Dickinson's 'Farther in Summer than the
Birds,'" Explicator, XIII (1954), Item 33.

Wells, Anna Mary. "Early Criticism of Emily Dickinson," American
Literature, I (November 1929), 243-259.
