

“A Prison Gets to be a Friend”: Emily Dickinson, Agoraphobia and Introspection
Lauren Vanderhurst, University of California, Santa Barbara

I'm just from meeting, Susie, and as I sorely feared, my life was made a victim. I walked – I ran – I turned precarious corners – one moment I was not – then soared aloft like Phoenix, soon as the foe was by – and then anticipating an enemy again, my soiled and drooping plumage might have been seen emerging from just behind a fence, vainly endeavoring to fly once more from hence. I reached the steps, dear Susie – and smiled to think of me, and my geometry, during the journey there – It would have puzzled Euclid, and it's doubtful result, have solemnized a Day. How big and broad the aisle seemed, full huge enough before, as I quaked slowly up – and reached my usual seat!

In vain I sought to hide behind your feathers – Susie – feathers and Bird had flown, and there I sat, and sighed, and wondered I was scared so, for surely in the whole world was nothing I need to fear – Yet there the Phantom was, and though I kept resolving to be as brave as Turks, and bold as Polar Bears, it didn't help me any. After the opening prayer I ventured to turn around. Mr. Carter immediately looked at me...but I discovered nothing, up in the sky somewhere, and gazed intently at it, for quite a half an hour. During the exercises I became more calm, and got out of church quite comfortably. Several roared around me, and, sought to devour me, but I fell an easy prey to Miss Lovinia Dickinson, being too much exhausted to make any further resistance.

She entertained me with much sprightly remark, until our gate was reached, and I need'nt tell you Susie, just how I clutched the latch, and whirled the merry key, and fairly danced for joy, to find myself at home! How I did wish for you – how, for my own dear Vinnie – how for Goliah, or Samson – to pull the whole church down, requesting Mr. Dwight to step into Miss Kingsbury's until the dust was past!

-Emily Dickinson in a letter to Sue Gilbert, 1853

As a poet, Emily Dickinson is famously defined by her deeply personal subject matter involving abstract themes of fear, mortality and the mind woven into complex metaphor through concrete images and the innovative dash. In this distressing letter, Emily Dickinson not only reveals her distinctive poetic style, but also the nature of her character through a disturbing personal confession. She speaks of herself in a moment of immense fear, which is represented as a “Phantom” that haunts and diminishes her strength. Through this fear, her “life was made a victim,” suggesting an exploitation of her existence. She has been forced into a state of submission from which she cannot escape. Dickinson’s fear alters her perception of her surroundings as they become “full” and “huge” “roaring” and seeking to “devour” her. This state of emotional fervor is illustrated through Dickinson’s signature use of the dash, which act as harsh, violent lines slashing across the page, breaking up the rhythm of her language into staccato fragments. Dickinson presents herself as defeated and impoverished through the bleak representation of phrases such as “doubtful result” and “vainly endeavoring to fly.” This fear is all-consuming as she becomes “too much exhausted to make any further resistance.” Dickinson seems to have lost the battle against this “Phantom” until the entrance of her sole salvation, the home. This letter written to a lifelong friend and future sister-in-law vividly illustrates Emily

Dickinson's sheer panic and terror as she "quaked" "walked" and "ran" from the haunting "Phantom" of fear, and it is in this state of distress that Dickinson represents the symptoms of an agoraphobic panic attack.

Agoraphobia is a psychological disorder that involves a marked fear of being alone or in public places from which escape or help might be difficult to find (Beck 36). The term "phobia" refers to a specific fear, which is "exaggerated and often disabling" (Beck p. 7). An intense desire to avoid a future situation characterizes this fear where exposure to this situation evokes anxiety and panic. However, the patient does not simply fear the act of going outside, but rather the negative consequences that could result from being in such a circumstance. In this way, agoraphobics have an overactive imagination, which causes them to "catastrophize" (Beck p. 33) or expect the worst outcome of any given situation. By dwelling on this event, sufferers become fearful and bring what is a distant future into the present, inducing emergency patterns such as "flight, inhibition and fainting" (Beck p. 12). If a potentially anxiety-provoking event has been avoided, the agoraphobic feels as though he or she has temporarily suppressed his or her symptoms. Most importantly, the individual believes that he or she cannot cope with external dangers without the help of potential caretakers (Beck p. 14).

However, empirical psychiatric data is not enough to fully comprehend the overwhelming emotional experience of this disorder. To turn to literature and individual stories helps us access the psyche of the agoraphobic. Dickinson's letter provides such a personal account, as she illustrates a moment of extreme panic, which develops en route from her house to church and remains until she has returned home. As addressed by Maryanne M. Garbowsky in *The House Without the Door: A Study of Emily Dickinson and the Illness of Agoraphobia*, "All the telltale signs are there: the sudden apprehension of fear, the overwhelming panic arising from no apparent cause, trembling and an urgency to run and hide" (Garbowsky 36). By examining this letter we can understand what the experience of agoraphobia feels like for the individual who suffers from this debilitating disorder. The first sentence, Dickinson claims that her "life was made a victim," which reveals the vulnerability and self-doubt attributed to agoraphobic sufferers (Beck 68). She seems to be incapable of rational thought as she focuses solely on her weakness and complete submission to this fear. By claiming that her "life" is the victim, she displays agoraphobia's catastrophizing characteristics. Furthermore, Dickinson exhibits self-destructive behavior, because this panic attack is not viewed as a singular incident, but rather a disruption of her entire "life." This pessimistic outlook speaks to the hopelessness and loss of control felt by agoraphobics (Thorpe 16). Dickinson then moves on to describe the affects of this panic on her mental and physical state, "I walked – I ran – I turned precarious corners – one moment I was not – then soared aloft like Phoenix, soon as the foe was by – and then anticipating an enemy again, my soiled and drooping plumage might have been seen emerging from just behind a fence, vainly endeavoring to fly once more from hence." While Dickinson's illustration of her emotional state is highly stylized and indicative of her voice, she still displays anxiety symptoms. She is "hyper vigilant, constantly scanning the environment for signs of impending disaster or personal harm" (Beck 31). This disorder is marked by the sufferer's appraisal of a high degree of risk in a relatively safe situation (Beck 9). Since Dickinson is only walking from her home to church, we can assume that she is not in any "actual" danger. However, she assesses the situation as one that is very threatening, and seems to be anticipating the "impending disaster," suggesting that she herself is responsible for this fear. Therefore, Dickinson in effect becomes her own worst enemy by creating the scenario to be feared.

Dickinson then describes the typical physical response to a panic attack, “I reached the steps, dear Susie – and smiled to think of me, and my geometry, during the journey there – It would have puzzled Euclid, and it’s doubtful result, have solemnized a Day. How big and broad the aisle seemed, full huge enough before, as I quaked slowly up – and reached my usual seat!” That Dickinson’s fear and panic remains, even upon entering the church, shows how agoraphobia is not necessarily a fear of open spaces, but a situational discomfort in public places (Thorpe 12). Furthermore, she describes herself as quaking in her seat, which demonstrates the high level of arousal, increased muscular tension, rapid heart rate, and trembling that result from an anxiety ridden panic attack (Thorpe 1). Dickinson continues to say, “In vain I sought to hide behind your feathers – Susie – feathers and Bird had flown.” Her need to be under the protection of Susie reflects the notion that agoraphobics feel relief in the presence of a companion (Thorpe 14). Her dependency upon such a friend demonstrates how the disorder is characterized by the desperate need for comfort, and fear of the uneasiness that arises upon being separated from said comfort.

This fear of discomfort is furthered as she says, “After the opening prayer I ventured to turn around. Mr. Carter immediately looked at me...but I discovered nothing, up in the sky somewhere, and gazed intently at it, for quite a half an hour. During the exercises I became more calm, and got out of church quite comfortably. Several roared around me, and, sought to devour me, but I fell an easy prey to Miss Lovinia Dickinson, being too much exhausted to make any further resistance.” Dickinson’s victimization has reached its height at this moment, as she displays the agoraphobic’s fear of confinement with no means of escape (Thorpe 13). She tries to avoid anything and anyone that stands in the way between her and the sanctuary that is home. Dickinson also begins to catastrophize once again, reflected in her irrational and distorted perception of being “easy prey” to the “Several [who] roared around me, and, sought to devour me.” The negative aggrandization of her surroundings asserts that the imagination is indeed Dickinson’s own worst enemy, as the mind distorts ordinary images into threatening ones. Finally, Dickinson rejoices the moment she returns home, “I need’nt tell you Susie, just how I clutched the latch, and whirled the merry key, and fairly danced for joy, to find myself at home!” It is this love and need for home, along with a distrust of the outside world, which will shape Emily Dickinson’s poetry for years to come.

However, as a writer, Dickinson harnesses the self-destructive ability of the imagination within the agoraphobic syndrome, and uses it to her poetic advantage. The very fact that her mind is capable distorting ordinary images suggests that Dickinson’s creativity allows for her to see reality in a unique and aestheticized perspective. For example, by returning to the quote, “then soared aloft like Phoenix,” Dickinson asserts that this fear does not stunt or inhibit her, but rather allows for her to be reborn and rise from her own ashes of anxiety. Dickinson continues to say that her plumage is “soiled and drooping” indicating that this flight as a phoenix has not occurred without the tarnishing effects of trials and tribulations. Her wings are not pristine because she herself is not void of hardship. Due to this fear, Dickinson’s “geometry” has been so altered that “it would have puzzled Euclid.” Euclid and his study of geometry connote reason, boundaries and constrictions through which Dickinson moves beyond. She uses this fear as a vehicle from which she can rise above. Therefore, the way in which Dickinson the poet constructs this letter shows that the fear of agoraphobia can be used as a creative advantage. While agoraphobia is often a debilitating and shaming disorder, in Emily Dickinson’s case, it works to empower her mind and imagination. Even though this disorder dislocates and limits her physical existence, as she must confine herself within the home, her creativity as a poet thrives

and expands as a result. Due to the former, negative connotation of agoraphobia, many critics of Dickinson are uneasy with the idea of reducing her to a psychological disorder. However, as an intensive analysis of her poetry will reveal, agoraphobia or symptoms associated with agoraphobia, offer a source of inspiration and generativity.

Many scholars of Emily Dickinson share a desire to “diagnose” this prolific writer with agoraphobia and consequently proceed to analyze her poetry and letters in support of this idea. Many biographical facts as well as the themes of her letters (like the one above) and poetry seem to support some sort of distress related to the agoraphobic syndrome. Born on December 10, 1830, Dickinson spent her childhood in her West Street house, which was located in front of a cemetery. Due to the heightened amount of tuberculosis cases at the time, Dickinson would have seen many deaths and funerals within this cemetery (Kirk 25). However, it was the year of 1844 that would prove to be a significant time in Dickinson’s life. This year marked the death of many people close to her, including the death of friend and cousin Sophia Holland (Kirk 26). Sophia’s death was a traumatizing event for Dickinson and forced her into a deep depression. The theme of death that seems to haunt Dickinson’s young life would later become an important subject matter in her poems. As a young adult, Dickinson was described as shy and nervous, and often preferred small groups to larger ones. She was quite sociable and had many friends but would retreat into silence if she experienced too much stimulation (Kirk 35). For the agoraphobic person, companionship is important in providing comfort, and being sociable would allow Dickinson the opportunity to establish relationships with those who could alleviate her anxieties. However, her retreat into silence exemplifies the agoraphobic’s need for comfort and relief.

Throughout Dickinson’s life she had one devoted companion who never left her side. Carlo was Dickinson’s faithful dog, which would accompany her each time she left the house (Kirk 36). *The Agoraphobic Symptom: Behavioural Approaches to Evaluation and Treatment* claims that, “The agoraphobics experienced great comfort from the companionship of men or even inanimate objects such as a cane or vehicle” (Thorpe 3). Therefore, Dickinson’s reliance on her dog Carlo reflects the behavior of one who can only leave his or her house as long as he or she has something to relieve this anxiety. The year 1855 saw Dickinson moving to the Amherst home where a small room with a window acting as an observation post became her bedroom (Kirk 51). Dickinson would come to illustrate this room as a sanctuary in her letters and poems as she began to slowly retreat during 1861, and completely in 1866 (Kirk 82). It was in this room that Dickinson wrote over 1,800 poems. The location connected her to the outside world, while at the same time provided her with the ability to retreat into introspection as a way to cultivate her creativity and craft.

For the purpose of this analysis, agoraphobia will not be presented in psychological terms. Instead, agoraphobia will function as a thematic representation of space, thought and seclusion in Dickinson’s writing. Her poetry will not be analyzed as a way to diagnose a disorder, but rather as a way to explore how specific symptoms of agoraphobia are thematized. Emily Dickinson seemed to have a deep obsession with the oppositions of immortality and mortality, and the way in which these two ideas relate to the mind. For Dickinson, heaven does in fact exist on earth and lives in the mind. If mortality is of the body, while immortality is of the mind, the mind must be cultivated to reach consciousness. Dickinson’s poetry reflects how her mind is shaped by creativity and imagination, so by developing the mind she will have the ability to use its resources to create poetry. The only way for this to occur is for Dickinson to retreat to seclusion in a place of comfort for introspection to take place. Furthermore, alienating herself from the outside world will preserve her mind from being contaminated by the trivialities of her

everyday society. Dickinson's work acts as tangible proof of the creativity and imagination that resulted from her agoraphobia. Her desire to remain inside and safe represents a personification of her desire to retreat into the interior of her mind.

"A letter always feels to me like Immortality because it is the mind alone without corporeal friend. Indebted in our talk to attitude and accent, there seems a spectral power in thought that walks alone."

-Emily Dickinson in a letter to Mr. Higginson 1877

"It is somehow recognized that the power of her letters is like the power of her poetry – the two are from the same source, certainly, whatever their final difference. Yet the difference is important. Her letters are not poems; they are communications in good faith, they are messages to her friends. The friends of Emily Dickinson were possession beyond price; they were individuals, and as such they were addressed. Her poems might be "a letter to the world," but these were letters to certain persons in that world, and they were true to their purpose."

-Mark Van Doren in his Introduction "Letters of Emily Dickinson"

While scholars often illustrate Emily Dickinson as a recluse who shunned society in an attempt to separate herself from a world which she could not connect, her thousands of letters suggest otherwise. Throughout her life, Dickinson wrote passionate and personal letters to those closest to her. Each letter showcases her poetic abilities, as if to say that her creativity and artistry is present in every aspect of her life. Even during her seclusion, she maintained these correspondences with a wit and light-heartedness that often goes unnoticed. Many of these letters are quite revealing, as Dickinson divulges her personal thoughts to those she trusted the most. Not only do Dickinson's letters attest to the value she held for her beloved companions, but they also contain her unique perception of the world of which she was a part. In a sense, her letters express as much depth and significance as her most complicated poems. Through the deconstruction of these letters, we can gain insight into the meaning of her poetry. For the purpose of this analysis, a few select poems will reveal the ways in which Dickinson valued the cultivation of the mind and body through the practice of agoraphobia.

Emily Dickinson's most inspiring and significant letters come from the correspondence with her literary mentor, Thomas Wentworth Higginson. In one letter, Dickinson describes the reasons for detaching herself from society in order to remain at home, "Of shunning men and women, they talk of hallowed things, aloud and embarrass my dog. He and I don't object to them, if they'll exist their side." Dickinson asserts that distancing herself from the outside world is not due to fear, but is rather due to the distaste for people within society. Her mention of "hollowed things" suggests that she finds herself unable to partake in trivial discussions. Dickinson's heightened awareness and appreciation of the capacities of the mind means she cannot feel stimulated in situations that do not inspire her imagination or creativity. This confession seems to imply that Dickinson cannot relate to superficiality due to her admiration of the profound. As a result of this letter, we begin to see what it is that inspires and motivates Dickinson the most – the cultivation of her mind.

In a letter written to her cousins in the spring of 1874, Dickinson divulges the nature of what can be gained from her isolation, "Remoteness is the founder of sweetness; could we see all

we hope or hear the whole we fear told tranquil, like another tale, there would be madness near. Each of us gives or takes heaven in corporeal person, for each of us has the skill of life.” This is a complex passage in which Dickinson expresses the notion that separating oneself from the world causes one to discover “sweetness” and “tranquility”. She also claims that if the complexities of our surroundings were not given proper insight and attention, “there would be madness near.” Furthermore, by saying, “Each of us gives or takes heaven in corporeal person, for each of us has the skill of life,” Dickinson illustrates the importance of our mortal lives. Life should not be a means to an end (heaven,) but an end in and of itself. However, Dickinson asserts that “remoteness” is the only way through which we can truly appreciate the lives we lead. Therefore, isolation or separation through agoraphobia creates an environment that allows us to experience introspection, which in turn results in heightened self-awareness.

Each of these examples from Dickinson’s letters demonstrate her perception of what it means to be human, and how we can get the most out of our mortality. In another letter to Mr. Higginson, Dickinson writes, ““To be human is more than to be divine, for when Christ was divine he was uncontented till he had been human.” Dickinson argues that we should not live our lives for the sole purpose of reaching heaven, but to enjoy our humanity. Our bodies are “divine”, and we must appreciate all they have to offer. In order to obtain the importance of humanity, we must seclude ourselves in a space that will allow for deep introspection. By cultivating creativity and imagination we will exercise the mind and achieve consciousness. Therefore, the theme of introspection through seclusion put forth in her letters, acts as a foundation for the motif of agoraphobia, which Dickinson illustrates in her poetry.

“Truth is such a rare thing, it is delightful to tell it.”

-Emily Dickinson to Colonel Higginson

When it comes to Emily Dickinson’s poetry, there is no doubt as to who the speaker is. These words and images are Emily’s and Emily’s alone. To read her poetry is to see into her soul and intrude on her mind. Her work is so deeply personal that it almost feels as if we are imposing on her secrets. However, she meant for her poetry to be heard. For Dickinson, words are her way of expressing the truth. Yet the specific nature of this “truth” is hidden behind a vast array of analogies, paradoxes, and dashes, as if to say that we must work to gain access to her meaning. The complexity of her poems and the immense concentration required to reach some kind of understanding reflect the introspective themes that make up her poetry. In a sense, she is forcing us to expand our creativity, imagination and sense of self. Therefore, in order to see the truth behind her poems, we must “become” Emily Dickinson and see the world from her eyes. A close reading of “A Prison gets to be a friend” will illustrate how Dickinson uses her panic relative to the exterior as a trope to explore the ways in which the home exists as a sanctuary within which she can separate herself to cultivate her mind, through introspection.

A Prison gets to be a friend—
Between its Ponderous face
And Ours—a Kinsmanship express—
And in its narrow Eyes—

We come to look with gratitude
For the appointed Beam

It deal us—stated as our food—
And hungered for—the same—

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

As splashing in the Pools—
When Memory was a Boy—
But a Demurer Circuit—
A Geometric Joy—

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

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

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

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

“A Prison gets to be a friend” represents the complexity of Emily Dickinson and her writing, as it depicts the paradoxical nature of how a place of constriction and restraint becomes familiar and comforting. While many studies of agoraphobia seem to focus on fear of overstimulation from the exterior, I would like to use this poem and Freud’s *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* to explore the sufferer’s need to remain inside. In studying the nature of agoraphobia, we should not center solely on the fear of going outside. Instead, I argue that the significance of this disorder lies in the agoraphobic’s need for comfort and introspection. Therefore, we must focus on the need to remain inside, rather than the fear of the outside. Through Freud’s psychoanalysis of anxiety (the root of agoraphobia,) I shall demonstrate the ways in which this poem reflects a need for constriction in order to gain an understanding of the self and what it means to value human life.

In his *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*, Freud draws a parallel between anxiety and attachment theory. According to Freud, anxiety “appears to us as a reaction to a loss, a

separation... The first experience of anxiety which an individual goes through (in the case of human beings, at all events) is birth, and, objectively speaking, birth is a separation from the mother” (Freud 59). In other words, the most safe and protected we will ever feel as a human being is inside the wombs of our mothers. In the womb, we can depend completely upon the mother to sustain our existence, and we will spend our entire lives trying to return to this state of comfort. The attachment to our mothers within the womb, and our desire to return, is solidified in early infancy, as the child will cry when it is separated from the mother. “The reason why the infant in arms wants to perceive the presence of its mother is only because it already knows by experience that she satisfies all its needs without delay. The situation, then, which it regards as a ‘danger’ and against which it wants to be safeguarded is that of non-satisfaction, of a *growing tension due to need*, against which it is helpless” (Freud 66-67). In a sense, anxiety is a product of mental helplessness due to biological helplessness. The child’s situation as a fetus is replaced by a psychical object-relation to its mother (Freud 68). Therefore, the anxiety the child feels upon non-satisfaction from its mother is analogous to the experience of being born. Anxiety occurs as a fear of the absence of the mother, which would result in helplessness and eventual death. So, the agoraphobic’s desire to remain at home reflects a need for comfort, and thus the human desire to return to the womb.

Dickinson’s poem explores Freud’s notion of agoraphobia as she depicts a prison that transforms into a kind of sanctuary. While we should not reduce such a complex poem to a singular theme of agoraphobia, I suggest that it does illustrate the theme of comfort that shapes the agoraphobic syndrome. The poem begins with the line, “A Prison gets to be a friend”. Her use of the preposition “A” indicates that this prison is not specified but rather is universalized. In doing so, this line becomes an aphoristic statement, in which Dickinson expresses what she thinks is a universal truth. However, this truth is not inherent as suggested by the inclusion of “gets to be.” Through this phrase Dickinson constructs the aphorism as an active development. In doing so, she suggests that this prison at one point was in fact a prison and work is required to make this change. Furthermore, Dickinson’s lack of specificity in reference to the prison could also suggest that we as readers should understand this to be a metaphorical prison, which she explains later on in the poem.

The first line also epitomizes the notion that the poem is written as a paradox. When one conjures up the image of a prison, it would most usually be described with constricting negative connotations that are symbolic of punishment. However, in Emily’s mind, a prison can get to be a friend. A prison is no longer associated with unwanted submission or restriction, but becomes synonymous with the mutual affection, respect and comfort of a friendship. This is solidified as she goes on to write, “Between its Ponderous face/ And Ours – A Kinsmanship express” (lines 2-3). She personifies the prison by giving it a “Ponderous face” that is capable of thought, and in doing so, she makes it human. Through the personification of the prison, Emily renders it more feasibly comparable to the human self. The third line, with words like, “Ours”, “kinsmanship” and “express” indicate camaraderie among equals, which supports the personification of the prison and its connection to Emily. The word “express” refers to an image or likeness that is exact in its resemblance, which suggests that the Prison and Emily are connected and form a bond. Since Freud asserts that agoraphobia is founded upon one’s desire to return to the safety and protection of the mother’s womb, Dickinson’s relationship with the prison mirrors Freud’s analysis of fetal attachment to the mother in agoraphobia. In this sense, the image of the prison takes on a womblike connotation as it becomes a home and space for comfort.

Dickinson continues the poem as she says, “And in its narrow Eyes - / We come to look with gratitude” (Lines 4-5). The image of the prison having “narrow Eyes” is where the poem starts to explore the importance of introspection in an enclosed space. Her use of the word “Eyes” and its emphasis via capitalization indicates importance, which seems to be a reference to the popularized phrase “Eyes are the window to the soul.” If eyes become synonymous with the soul, then Dickinson’s “gratitude” upon looking into the prison’s eyes implies that the prison exists as a space through which the soul can be reached. Since she views this as a positive occurrence, the prison is a metaphor for introspection and self-reflection. In other words, this metaphorical prison is the sanctuary by which Dickinson can cultivate her mind and soul. Furthermore, her specified word choice of “come” (line 5) and “gets” (line 1) evokes this experience not as intrinsic but one, which must be learned or discovered at the result of an epiphany. In the line, “For the appointed Beam/ It deal us”, “Beam,” represents a synecdochal relationship with a structure that is “appointed” or required. This constructed enclosure that is desired yet required correlates with the connotation of a house. A home, like “food” is granted as a necessity for life, yet it becomes something that is also wanted rather than simply needed. This yearning for something that is essential mirrors the attachment and reliance of children to their mothers as primary caregivers. Within this poem, agoraphobia is representative of attachment.

The third stanza of the poem illustrates a heightened sensory awareness through the line, “We learn to know the Planks-/That answer to Our feet”. Her usage of the first person plural “We” and “Our” in this stanza, as well as in the previous two, support the aphoristic style of the first line. Dickinson is often characterized by her use of the first person singular “I” or “Me”. So why does she break away from her typical style and voice? Perhaps the answer lies in the very basis of Freud’s analysis of agoraphobia. According to my interpretation of Freud, agoraphobia speaks to the intense attachment of child to mother and the overwhelming desire to return to the mother’s womb. Every human being experiences the trauma of birth and will therefore live their lives repressing their need to return “home”. Agoraphobia, while an immense amplification of this desire, still seems to refer to the need for attachment in all of us. Therefore, Dickinson’s use of the first person plural reflects the universal nature of “attachment”. She is attempting to connect with her reader as well as provide this reader with a sense of community and belonging. Agoraphobia as a disorder should not be an alienating experience, as it relates back to an intrinsic desire within all people. It seems as though through this sense of community, Dickinson illustrates agoraphobia as a positive attribute, which is reflected in the first two lines of this stanza. The ability to hear the sounds of the planks against one’s feet indicates a hyper awareness, where she is attuned to her senses and their relation to the object around her. Since it is something we “learn to know”, Dickinson asserts that the sensitivity to our senses is not intrinsic and must be learned as a result of being confined through agoraphobia. Dickinson reveals how agoraphobia, or separation from the over-stimulated and oppressive exterior world into an enclosed and pristine place, can awaken one to one’s own existence. In other words, the state of agoraphobia can make introspection possible. The final lines of this stanza speak the idea of how confinement “at first” is a “miserable” experience, but results in a “sweet” end.

Dickinson’s fourth stanza presents us with the juxtaposition of two notions of freedom and happiness. She uses simile to link the sweetness of the sound from the previous stanza with the nostalgic memory of the first two lines, “As plashing in the Pools-/ When Memory was a Boy” (lines 13-14). The personification of memory as a carefree boy suggests a yearning for the innocence of pure freedom without inhibition that comes with “plashing in the Pools.” However, Dickinson modifies this desire with, “But a Demurer Circuit-/ A Geometric Joy” (lines 15-16).

The word “Demurer” connotes a sweetness or joy that is more sober and serious. This could mean that Dickinson’s present condition contains a loss of this innocence and naivety. “Joy” is no longer carefree, but associated with “Circuit” and “A Geometric Joy”. Therefore, enjoyment comes from the construction and confinement associated with agoraphobia and the comfort of the mother’s womb.

The lines, “The Posture of the Key/ That interrupt the Day/ To Our Endeavor” within the next stanza, contain the image of a particularly placed key that symbolizes freedom. However, Dickinson describes this freedom as an event that interrupts. The negative connotation of “interrupt” implies that this freedom is unwanted because it disrupts “Our Endeavor”. Yet, what exactly is this coveted endeavor that Dickinson speaks of? Since we know that Dickinson is a poet, in her case it is safe to assume that this endeavor is her daily work of writing. The issue lies in the first person plural “Our”. The capitalization of “Our” and “Endeavor” indicates that the endeavor is one of great importance that all people can participate in. Dickinson’s poetry often contains themes that require deep self-reflection and introspection. If introspection is necessary for Dickinson to create a poem than it is most likely that self-awareness is the referent of the endeavor. Agoraphobia in its constriction is a necessary experience in order to achieve heightened awareness of the self, through introspection. For Dickinson, self-reflection produces her creativity and stimulates her imagination. Therefore, confinement within a comfortable, pristine and isolated place renders it possible for us to see into ourselves. This notion is solidified as the stanza ends with, “Not so real/ The Check of Liberty” (lines 19-20). Our preconceived notions of freedom are incorrect, because physical freedom released by “the Key” is “Not so real”.

This next stanza suggests a different kind of freedom that can only be achieved through an agoraphobic-like state. The word “steel” in the first line establishes an image of negative confinement. Steel is the definition of strength and is near impossible to penetrate. Dickinson challenges the reader by describing the steel as “Phantasm.” In doing so, she creates a paradox where the impenetrable steel is actually an illusion and erases all negative connotation of confinement. Following this line, Dickinson once again personifies the prison in order to more feasibly compare it to our selves, “Whose features – Day and Night-/ Are present to us – as Our Own” (lines 22-23). By giving the prison a humanlike physicality, we can assume that being locked away in a prison is the equivalent of being constricted inside the body. This desire to be “escapeless” inside a body once again imitates the return to the womb. The harshness of this imprisonment is a “Phantasm”, because it is something that one craves. In a sense, confinement within an enclosed space, as well as within the body, allows for the freedom of creativity and imagination.

Dickinson begins her next stanza with “The narrow Round – the Stint”, providing direct imagery of agoraphobia. The “narrow Round” illustrates an oppressive and stifling circle that is inescapable in the form of a “stint.” Furthermore, the two dashes on either side of “the Stint” stylistically mirror the enclosed nature of agoraphobia. The definition of the stint is literally realized on the page. She then continues with the lines, “The slow exchange of Hope-/ For something passiver – Content” (lines 26-27). Here, she asserts that the choice of leading an agoraphobic lifestyle results in the surrendering of an extremity such as hope, for a more realistic and practical feeling of contentment. Within this stanza, Dickinson portrays the contradictory emotions applied to the restrictive nature of agoraphobia and attachment. The dependency on comfort comes with set backs as one will never achieve anything higher than contentment. While this perspective prevents us from becoming arrogant and “Too steep for looking up”, it also

keeps us grounded. Dickinson seems to be placing a value on presence within the body and mind, and agoraphobia is the only means by which we can be awakened within our selves.

The notion that agoraphobia has value by forcing introspection and bodily awareness is solidified within the final stanza. Dickinson begins with, “The Liberty we knew/ Avoided – like a Dream” (lines 29-30), which suggests that liberty, like a dream, is unobtainable within reality. The liberty “we knew” seems to refer back to the nostalgia of lines 13 and 14. This pristine and innocent freedom was in actuality, a mirage. In reality, we as people on earth cannot possibly conceive of such freedom, as we are tethered down by our corporeal selves. Dickinson says that liberty is “Too wide for any Night but Heaven” (line 31). Our desperate need for attachment, and the dependency we have on our bodily desires, prevent us from a freedom that only exists within the immortality of heaven. Dickinson argues that since true freedom is unobtainable while we remain alive, we must celebrate the bodies and minds we are presently dealt. Therefore, agoraphobia, or the attachment to the comfort of the interior, becomes the optimal means by which we can tap into what makes us human. The agoraphobic’s desire to remain inside and away from society symbolizes the need to gain introspection and remain inside the self. The very fact that Dickinson ends the poem in a dissonant fashion with, “If That – indeed – redeem,” shows her value of corporeality. Since we cannot possibly rely on the existence of Heaven, we must value our lives and realize the full potential of our minds.

Within this poem, Dickinson has demonstrated the complexity of human thought, simply by its creation alone. By understanding the psychological disorder of agoraphobia through universal themes, Dickinson’s poem becomes a celebration of the mind and body. Confinement to an interior space exists as a metaphor for being restricted within the body. However, it is through this self-created imprisonment that we can gain insight into the complexity of the mind. While many scholars continue to debate whether Emily Dickinson did indeed suffer from agoraphobia, I assert that if she did, it would not reduce her greatness as a poet. Agoraphobia does not require a negative connotation, because it can be beneficial. It is not just an inhibiting disorder as it can expand the imagination. This disorder speaks to everyone’s desire for comfort, safety and companionship. Attributing agoraphobic themes to the poetry of Emily Dickinson does not have to mean that she herself was agoraphobic. However, if she was, we as readers can see that it only helped in shaping one of the most complex and innovative writers of the 19th century.

Some keep the Sabbath going to the Church —
 I keep it, staying at Home —
 With a Bobolink for a Chorister —
 And an Orchard, for a Dome —

Some keep the Sabbath in Surplice —
 I just wear my Wings —
 And instead of tolling the Bell, for Church,
 Our little Sexton — sings.

God preaches, a noted Clergyman —
 And the sermon is never long,
 So instead of getting to Heaven, at last —
 I’m going, all along.

An early letter written to her brother in autumn of 1851 expresses Dickinson's perceptions of home, as she writes, "Home is a holy thing, - nothing of doubt or distrust can enter its blessed portals. I feel it more and more as the great world goes on, and one and another forsake in whom you place your trust, here seems indeed a bit of Eden which not the sin of any can utterly destroy, - smaller it is indeed, and it may be less fair, but fairer it is and brighter than all the world beside." Her use of phrases such as, "blessed portals," "holy thing," and "bit of Eden" indicate that the home is intrinsically sacred in the eyes of Dickinson. For her, the home is not a place of restraint or imprisonment, but of spiritual freedom. The more she sees of the "great world," the more she desires to remain within the constructs of her sanctuary. Dickinson recognizes the home's humble nature as she says "smaller it is indeed, and it may be less fair." Yet, she prefers the comfort and modesty of a home rather than the over-stimulated outside world. The simple fact that she uses the word "home" rather than "house" connotes a personalized and loving attachment. Dickinson's reliance on the interiors of the home reflects the positive desire to remain inside, rather than the negative fear of the exterior.

Through this letter, Emily Dickinson provides us with a glimpse into her unique perception of the relation between home and religious awakening. Within the letter, she sought the comfort and tranquility of home as a means to experience religious freedom. "Some keep the Sabbath going to the Church," expands upon the notion that one can find religious inspiration for the soul just by appreciating one's surrounding environment and remaining modestly at home, by comparing this perspective with traditional interpretations of the Christian religion. The poem illustrates Dickinson's attempt to free her self from the rigid institution of religion as she discovers the freeing spiritual sanctuary of home. It is this hunger for modesty and comfort that reflects the agoraphobic need to remain at home and away from the overly stimulated outside world. Therefore, separation as a means towards introspection results in the cultivation of the soul. Furthermore, Dickinson's overall tone within the poem exhibits a light and airy quality, representing her keen and wry sense of humor that often goes unnoticed, due to the darker content expressed in some of her more prominent poems. This tone becomes an important factor in demonstrating the ways in which Dickinson shows the positive aspects of agoraphobic-like qualities.

The poem begins with the word "Some," indicating that those who "keep the Sabbath going to the Church" do not make up the entire population because there remains an exception. As the next line begins with "I keep it," Dickinson suggests that she is the exception and this transition from "some" to "I" connotes a separation from the masses. According to Charles Anderson in *From a Window in Amherst: Emily Dickinson Looks at the Amherst Scene*, Dickinson's religious beliefs were "so uniquely personal that all institutions and creeds failed to satisfy her" (Anderson 159). As the poem shows, "home" became the only place through which her religious beliefs could be satisfied. In the second line, Dickinson uses "it" as a parallel to "the Sabbath." In doing so, she undermines the proper noun of Sabbath, and transforms it into a more generalized notion of religious worship without a formal context of Christianity. She then contrasts the transitory notion of "going" in the first line with "staying" in the second, indicating a preference towards stillness and remaining behind. For Dickinson, "at Home" exists as her religious alternative to "the Church." Due to the capitalization of "Home," it is elevated to the proper notion of the established Christian church. Her house of god should not be considered as inferior, and deserves equal justification.

Dickinson then moves towards more concrete metaphorical images of both the church and nature in order to illustrate her meaning. In lines three and four, Dickinson replaces

canonical religious images, “Chorister” and “Dome,” with the natural and seemingly humble “Bobolink” and “Orchard.” While “Chorister” and “Dome” connote constructed representations of Christian religious practices, the “Bobolink” and “Orchard” illustrate found objects that can be elevated to a similar meaning. Through this juxtaposition of the natural and the constructed, Dickinson demonstrates what Albert Gelpi in *Emily Dickinson; the Mind of the Poet*, describes as “The process of ‘sacramental’ experience constituted in Thoreauvian terms, the ‘natural Sabbath’ of heaven at home” (Gelpi 86). In other words, Dickinson’s preference for the natural found at home acts as an attempt to free the self from the rigid institutions of religion. What her poem will show is that one can find inspiration for the soul just by observing one’s surroundings and remaining modestly at home. In this sense, the modesty of home can be a freeing sanctuary and separation from mass ideology causes introspection and a chance for Dickinson to cultivate her creative spirit. Therefore, in “Some keep the Sabbath going to the Church,” Dickinson reflects the agoraphobic concept of remaining at home, and surrounds it with the notion that spiritual freedom will come as a result.

In this poem, Dickinson uses the dash as a tool to break up the images she illustrates into specific scenes warranting focus and individual attention. However, the dash still links one line to the next like a stitch connecting two separate fabrics into a whole as if to say that these images and ideas while distinct, are not separate. The first image in the second stanza, which Dickinson constructs, is “Some keep the Sabbath in Surplice-.” The “Surplice” of which Dickinson speaks, is a white linen cloth covering the entire body, worn by clerics and choristers. The nature of this outfit is constricting and enveloping as it unifies people into a singular uniform. The use of “in” within the line suggests a lack of ownership or control of the body. In a sense, the Surplice wears the person, rather than the other way around. This notion is furthered in the second line, “I just wear my Wings” as it undermines the first line. S.N.R Kazmi in *Emily Dickinson and Christina Rossetti: Poets and Mystics*, asserts that “The line, ‘I just wear my wings,’ characteristically cryptic, may be taken to stress both the self-sufficiency of the poetic imagination and the value of the created world” (Kazmi 13-14). By stating, “I just,” Dickinson connotes a humble modesty that parallels the privatized notion of celebrating one’s own religion at home. In using, “wear,” she seems to say that these wings are not permanent, but she can try them on for size. If these wings symbolize a freedom of flight that cannot be reached “in Surplice,” then Dickinson can escape the material world temporarily, but it is not permanent. For Dickinson, the home and nature inspires an out of body experience, yet she remains grounded and aware of the importance of remaining in the physical world.

The last two lines of the second stanza transition from the line-to-line juxtaposition as it reconstructs the preconceived notion of a singular subject, the “sexton.” In the “Church,” Dickinson asserts that the manager of the church property relies on mechanical instruments by “tolling the bell.” However, she undermines the grandeur of this figure by saying “Our little Sexton.” Once again, Dickinson expresses a humility in the face of her own religion, which has now progressed from the singular “I” to the communal “Our.” In doing so, she indicates not only a sense of familiarity but also, a kinship where we too can join her spiritual journey. The final word of this stanza, “sings” is separated by a dash, making it appear as a lonely island whimsically floating on the page. As a result of this form, Dickinson shows a wry and sprightly tone of wit due to its open-ended nature. The very fact that this “little Sexton” “sings” rather than tolls a bell expresses a value for the human instrument. For Dickinson, her spiritual inspiration comes not from the exterior, but the physical and the interior. She does not have to travel outside to appreciate the greatness of humanity because it exists in her and her creativity.

Dickinson expresses her classic ironic sarcasm in the first two lines of the final stanza as she says, “God preaches, a noted Clergyman-/And the sermon is never long.” The word “noted” in these lines presents itself almost as if it should contain quotation marks, which will become more apparent as the stanza concludes. With the final two lines, Dickinson seems to be inviting the reader in on a secret as she juxtaposes “And the sermon is never long” with “I’m going all along,” as evidenced by the rhyme scheme. For Dickinson, this “Clergyman” is in no way “noted” in comparison to her practices as his sermons last one day, while hers is constant. As the poem shows, Heaven does not exist for Dickinson as an end result or reward but rather continues throughout her life on earth. She expresses a need to celebrate the here and now as heaven exists on earth and in the mind or soul, which one only has to access. Dickinson is living this “sermon” by being present at home and in her own mind, body and spirit. This poem celebrates the home as a sacred space within which humanity can be celebrated by virtue of its capacity for creativity and spirituality. Therefore, agoraphobia’s value of the home becomes synonymous with an appreciation and desire for introspection.

The first Day's Night had come —
 And grateful that a thing
 So terrible — had been endured —
 I told my Soul to sing —

She said her Strings were snapt —
 Her Bow — to Atoms blown —
 And so to mend her — gave me work
 Until another Morn —

And then — a Day as huge
 As Yesterdays in pairs,
 Unrolled its horror in my face —
 Until it blocked my eyes —

My Brain — begun to laugh —
 I mumbled — like a fool —
 And tho' 'tis Years ago — that Day —
 My Brain keeps giggling — still.

And Something's odd — within —
 That person that I was —
 And this One — do not feel the same —
 Could it be Madness — this?

At first glance, the poem seems to reflect a terrible incident that occurred in Dickinson’s life, leading her to question her own sanity. If this is the case, this poem could literally be read as an agoraphobic’s account of a panic attack, and the affect it has had on her mental and emotional state. Of all her poems, this one seems to be the most literal and clearly stated, as if she wanted to express a truth that could not possibly be interpreted in any other way. The one thing that remains ambiguous, is the nature of the “thing” that is so terrible. Donoghue in his *Connoisseurs*

of *Chaos* says, “The thing so terrible is not defined, except that having endured it, one is grateful rather than proud, and this is definition enough” (Donoghue 110-111). This analysis shall explore this idea and show how Dickinson expresses a pride in her endurance of the terrible. In doing so, the definition of the terrible becomes unimportant, as the significance lies in her journey in overcoming this “thing”.

The first line through the words, “had come”, suggests that the subject of this poem was a past occurrence. The combined use of “Day’s Night” appears to be paradoxical, leading us to believe that “Night” represents darkness and possibly a sinister moment of the day. The next line, “And grateful that a thing So terrible – had been endured-”, provides a meaning for the metaphor of the previous line. The “Day’s Night” is the same as “a thing So terrible” and the fact that she uses the ambiguous word, “thing” shows how, what occurred is so terrible that it cannot be named. This is solidified by her use of the word, “endured” as it contains a negative connotation of continuous suffering. Dickinson has suffered from this emotional trauma for so long that she can no longer describe it in words. The “thing” is so horrifying and complex that she must resort to metaphor in order to express its meaning. However, the last line, “I told my Soul to sing”, marks a dramatic turn in the tone and theme of the poem. She phrases this line, “as though she and her soul were separate beings communicating with one another” (Lair 84-85). By turning inward and conversing with her soul, she transforms a negative incident into a positive attribute. The use of the word “sing” connotes a kind of artistic freedom of expression, suggesting that this constructive feature is creativity.

The notion that Dickinson’s physical self is separated from the soul is epitomized as the second stanza takes on a new perspective. While the first stanza is clearly in the first person, the second stanza transitions into the third person and returns to the first throughout the rest of the poem. This anomaly implies that we have entered into the soul’s perspective, as it relays to Dickinson the damages that have been done. Dickinson begins this out-of-body experience with images of violin parts such as “strings” and “bow”. Words like “snapt” and “to Atoms blown”, illustrate a complete and total annihilation of the instrument in which she uses to express her self. Dickinson’s soul interrupts with the first person as it says, “And so to mend her – gave me work/Until another Morn.” The use of the word “mend” asserts that this instrument or creator of art can be reconstructed but can never return to its original or pristine form. However it is this work of creation that keeps her going “Until another Morn.” Due to the fact that Dickinson’s work is in fact the art of poetry, it is this body of creation that will allow for her to work through the annihilation of her senses and “Atoms.” In return, it is this trauma that inspires Dickinson’s imagination and causes her to create. In a sense, Dickinson has painted herself once again, as the phoenix that can rise and soar freely from the turmoil.

The next stanza interrupts the previous line with “And then,” illustrating a sudden change, which Dickinson writes as if she is telling a narrative. This next day is “as huge As Yesterday,” suggesting that this traumatic event is continuous in its complete devastation. Dickinson seems to be describing an unknown terror that is constant, incessant and all consuming. The magnitude of the event does not waver, as it exists “in pairs.” Dickinson then characterizes this event when she says that it “Unrolled its horror in my face/Until it blocked my eyes.” Through the use of the word “unrolled,” Dickinson constructs this horror as slow and menacing rather than abrupt. Furthermore, the horror resides “in” her face insinuating that it enters her private physical space and takes over her identity. Since this horror “blocked” her “eyes,” Dickinson formulates this event as overwhelming and devouring as it eclipses her eyes.

This “thing” is contrived, diabolical and mysterious because it has the ability to act on its own and erase the person that Dickinson once was.

The next stanza speaks of Dickinson’s mental and physical deterioration in the face of this horrible “thing.” According to John Pickard’s *Emily Dickinson, An Introduction and Interpretation*, “The mind’s collapse is caused by the realization of the daily effort which will be required to face the pain of the poem’s unspecified shock” (Pickard 97). For Dickinson, this “thing” is so overwhelming that her mind creates a paradoxical and infelicitous response. The image of her “brain” as it “begun to laugh,” shows the hysteria that has been forced upon Dickinson. This is quickly followed by a bodily breakdown as her speech fails as a result, showing the connection between the mind and the body. Her bodily response to such a horror, reflects the physical symptoms of an agoraphobic panic attack, which results in behavioral inhibited speaking or thinking (Beck 4). The final two lines of this stanza assert that although this day of horror occurred “years ago” her brain “keeps giggling still.” This continuous giggling suggests that the traumatic nature of this event has caused the past to exist as a very real present. Her brain has been taken over and permanently altered by the damaging affects of this horror.

The fragmented nature of the poem finally comes together within the last stanza. The use of the word, “Something,” suggests an uncertainty as to the nature of what is “odd.” The only thing Dickinson knows for sure is that this “something” is different and it has changed her from “within.” Her identity has completely shifted from what she “was” to this “One.” By capitalizing this “One,” Dickinson asserts that who she is now is not a person but another entity altogether, which cannot be defined. Furthermore, she emphasizes the fact that these two beings do not “feel” the same, which implies a poetic value for affect over rationale. It is this appreciation for feeling that causes the haunting open-ended question of, “Could it be Madness – this?” Amy Horiuchi’s *A Tentative Study of Possible Zen Traits in Emily Dickinson’s Perception*, says of this final line, “The poet’s madness could be anything – a rebirth, an incarnation, an obsession for truths or even destiny itself” (Horiuchi 30). As Dickinson relies upon the embodiment of emotion, she cannot produce a rational answer. Therefore, she leaves us in a state of confusion, so that now we as readers enter into her emotional state. We in a sense become mad along with Emily Dickinson.

I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,
 And Mourners to and fro
 Kept treading -- treading -- till it seemed
 That Sense was breaking through --

And when they all were seated,
 A Service, like a Drum --
 Kept beating -- beating -- till I thought
 My Mind was going numb --

And then I heard them lift a Box
 And creak across my Soul
 With those same Boots of Lead, again,
 Then Space -- began to toll,

As all the Heavens were a Bell,

And Being, but an Ear,
 And I, and Silence, some strange Race
 Wrecked, solitary, here --

And then a Plank in Reason, broke,
 And I dropped down, and down --
 And hit a World, at every plunge,
 And Finished knowing -- then --

It is this famous poem of Dickinson that acts as the answer for the question posed at the end of “The first Day’s Night had come.” According to Inder Kher’s *The Landscape of Absence: Emily Dickinson’s Poetry*, “The poem may possibly describe the shifting from a rational consciousness to the unconscious, which is the seat of the intuition, the imagination, and like powers. The unconscious could be either the individual Freudian or the collective Jungian, either one releasing images beyond the rational” (Kher 204-205). Through its most literal interpretation, the funeral within the poem marks the passing to heaven. Since this funeral takes place within Dickinson’s “brain,” the transition from the terrestrial to the celestial represents a shift in perception from “rational consciousness” into a state of pure affect, creativity and imagination. This poem reflects the rebirth of Dickinson into the state of the artist. As her words will show, Dickinson exists outside of the rational realm and cannot be expected to participate and exist within this world.

The word “felt” within the first line asserts that this poem will reside in the embodied and physical state. The funeral is not known within the “Brain,” it is “felt,” undermining and redefining preconceived notions of the mind being solely associated with rationale. What the poem will eventually progress towards, is the idea that the brain is synonymous with unconscious imagination. Within this brain, “mourners” are moving “to and fro” and keep “treading – treading,” symbolizing the pacing of emotion within the mind. It seems as though she is at war with herself and there exists a movement back and forth until finally, “Sense was breaking through.” Zacharias Thundyil’s *Circumstance, Circumference, and Center: Innocence and Transcendence in Emily Dickinson’s Poems of Extreme Situations* asserts, “In this poem Dickinson spoke of her descent into the nether world of unconsciousness where contact with the roots of being might once more be found” (Thundyil 78). Therefore, Dickinson has reached a point where “sense” and logic must give way to emotion and affect.

The first line of the next stanza, “And when they all were seated,” demonstrates stillness and immobility where the “mourners” or affect has finally been embedded within the brain. This is followed by the image of a “Service” that acts in the same way as a “Drum” because it keeps “beating.” Dickinson’s imagery within these two lines connotes a constant ongoing force that cannot be stopped. It is consistent and relentless and will not give up. The onomatopoeia of the drum beating emulates the repetition of the third line within the first and second stanza. Through the technique of mirroring content with form, Dickinson brings the reader into her mental state as we ourselves feel the repetitious “beating” that so consumes her thoughts. As a result of this “beating,” her “Mind” goes “numb,” illustrating the deterioration of her logical “mind” as it makes way for the raw unconscious feeling state. This funeral is responsible for her mental breakdown, as stated by George Monteiro in his, *Traditional Ideas in Dickinson’s ‘I Felt a Funeral, in My Brain,’* “The poem is only superficially about a funeral; it is concerned with the intuitive knowledge of eternity gained through an intimation of death...” (Monteiro 663).

Therefore, this imagery of death can be associated with the discovery of eternity, which Dickinson will soon show, exists within the imagination.

The next stanza interrupts the previous line's thought, marking a drastic change in the poem's narrative. The image of the box being lifted in the first line, cites the end of Dickinson's old world as she begins to transition and move into the next. This movement of the mourners in her brain seeps into her "Soul," due to the weight of the "Boots of Lead." This need for affect has become so heavy that it has now awakened the depths of her soul. The final line, "Then Space – began to toll," signifies a new beginning that is beckoning her to enter. She is being awakened into a new realm of thought and being as the "space" is begging for recognition and awareness. Dolores Lucas asserts in *Emily Dickinson and Riddle* that, "The poem demonstrates an awareness of the tenacity with which the human consciousness endeavors to prevail before the finality of death" (Lucas 127-128). Through the image of death, and its relation to finality and ending, Dickinson constructs a unique space within which a new sense of consciousness can be reached. In a way, this moment mirrors her journey as a creative poet, trying to harness and access her imagination that exists in its own "Space" within her mind and soul.

The next stanza begins in a "Heaven" imagined as a "Bell," while Dickinson herself is "but an Ear." By existing solely as an ear, Dickinson asserts that she now has the innate ability to comprehend the music that Heaven produces. She herself becomes a vessel through which creativity flows. Dickinson becomes at one with this space as they are completely connected, where one cannot exist without the other. In response to the final two lines of the stanza, J.V. Cunningham claims in *Sorting Out: The Case of Dickinson*, "The experience described in the poem expands into that of a double divided self: on the one hand, the total engrossment of being in the universe; on the other, personal identity and silence, non-being, alienated and outcast" (Cunningham 454-455). In a sense, the "strange Race" between the unconscious and the conscious has left Dickinson alone and present with only her self to rely upon. She is "Wrecked, solitary, here." As a poet and through her reliance on the imagination, Dickinson is alienated from the natural world. She cannot coexist and can never go back to her former state.

The final stanza literally connotes a negative tone of falling and plummeting to the depths, yet for Dickinson, it conversely acts as an optimistic outlook for artistic creation. A "Plank in Reason, broke," finalizing the loss of the rational consciousness found in the material world. The next two lines conjure the image of Dickinson falling through "Reason," but as she "hit a World, at every plunge," Dickinson indicates that she now has the ability to create new worlds within her imagination. While her body remains on earthly terrain, her mind can exist in another world. The final line, "And Finished knowing – then –" ends suddenly with the conclusion and rejection of "knowing" consciousness. In this rejection of rational thought, words become useless in conveying emotions. She cannot finish speaking, because this lack of knowledge and conception results in the loss of words. By no longer being able to speak, Dickinson has finally submitted to her senses and has been reborn into the realm of imagination and embodied affect. The fact that the action of this poem exists solely in the "brain" illustrates Dickinson's value for introspection and the achievement of heightened senses and awareness. In this sense, Dickinson constructs a metaphorical state of agoraphobia where rejection of the exterior world results in the cultivation of the interior senses.

*"We never know how high we are till we are called to rise.
Then if we are true to form our statures touch the skies."*

-Emily Dickinson

When it comes to the poetry of Emily Dickinson, the imagination and artistic creativity surface as central themes. The only way through which Dickinson can access and harness these features is by retreating into the interior of her mind and soul through active introspection. By rejecting the exterior world and remaining inside the self, Dickinson reaches a freedom that can only be achieved in the imagination. Dickinson's poetry offers tangible evidence for this creative vision, which was so wholly felt and embodied within her senses. The psychological disorder of agoraphobia exists as a metaphor that thematizes the introspection, which Dickinson so carefully crafted. By observing agoraphobia under such terms, Dickinson shows us that the mind is a powerful entity. By deconstructing clinical observation and symptomatology and applying it to the poetic works of Emily Dickinson, agoraphobia is no longer a private and solitary disease. Through the abstract representation of agoraphobia within her poems, it has become a more universalized and relatable concept. While Dickinson's poetry as well as agoraphobia exist has very privatized and subjective forms, the combination of the two open a space of community through which intersubjectivity can be reached.

Works Cited

- Anderson, Charles R. "From a Window in Amherst: Emily Dickinson Looks at the American Scene." New England Quarterly, 31, no. 2 (June 1958)
- Beck, Aaron T. Anxiety Disorders and Phobia: A Cognitive Perspective. USA: Basic Books, 1985.
- Cunningham, J.V. "Sorting Out: The Case of Dickinson." Southern Review, n.s. 5, no. 2 (1969)
- Donoghue, Denis. Connoisseurs of Chaos: Ideas of Order in Modern American Poetry. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1965.
- Freud, Sigmund. Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety. Translated by Alix Strachey and edited by James Strachey. London, Hogarth Press, 1961.
- Garbowsky, Maryanne M. The House Without the Door: a study of Emily Dickinson and the illness of agoraphobia. Rutherford [N.J.]: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; London: Associated University Presses, c1989.
- Gelpi, Albert. "Emily Dickinson and the Deerslayer: The Dilemma of the Woman Poet in America." San Jose Studies, 3, no. 2 (May 1977)
- Horiuchi, Amy. "A Tentative Study of Possible Zen Traits in Emily Dickinson's Perception." Eibungaku Ronko, No. 4. Kawagoe: Toyo University, 1969
- Kazmi, S.N.R. "Emily Dickinson and Christina Rossetti: Poets and Mystics," in Asian Response to American Literature. Edited by C.D. Narasimhaiah. Delhi: Vikas Publications, 1972.

- Kher, Inder Nath. The Landscape of Absence; Emily Dickinson's Poetry. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974.
- Kirk, Connie Ann. Emily Dickinson: A Biography. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2004.
- Lair, Robert L. Barron's Book Notes: A Simplified Approach to Emily Dickinson. Woodbury, NY: Barron's Educational Series, 1971.
- Lucas, Dolores Dyer. Emily Dickinson and Riddle. Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1969.
- Monteiro, George. "Traditional Ideas in Dickinson's 'I felt a Funeral, in my Brain.'" Modern Language Notes, 75, no. 8 (1960)
- Pickard, John B. Emily Dickinson, An Introduction and Interpretation. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1967.
- Thorpe, Geoffrey L. The Agoraphobic Syndrome: Behavioral Approaches to Evaluation and Treatment. New York: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 1983.
- Thundyil, Zacharias. "Circumstance, Circumference, and Center: Innocence and Transcendence in Emily Dickinson's Poems of Extreme Situations." Hartford Studies in Literature, 3, no. 2 (1971)
- Van Doren, Mark. Letters of Emily Dickinson. New York: The World Publishing Company, 1951