

Emily Dickinson, the Tyrant, and the Daemon:  
A Critique of Societal Oppression, and the Significance of Artistic Truth

As many critics have attempted to understand the formidable works of Emily Dickinson, a growing perception of the poet has been painted as one who was intensely aware of herself, the world around her, and the creative force that both fueled and tormented her and her art. Not only does this perception of Dickinson illustrate her as a woman who was keenly aware of herself and her surroundings, her intense and intimate relationship with language and art also allowed her to recognize the complex and oppressive forces at work within the frameworks of the society in which she lived. Unwilling to surrender herself to the mold of her society, the institutional practice of Christianity, and gender expectations, Dickinson embarked on a path of self-discovery that enabled her to conduct a life in self-imposed exile as a means to emancipate herself from the constraints of conventional living. This enabled her to fiercely explore her imagination while questioning the tyranny of patriarchy and gender expectations.

My preliminary research has shown that many critics regard Dickinson's iconoclastic work as a series of conscious decisions made by a genius who sought to fully master her artistic potential. The creative force Dickinson dedicated her life to has often been referred to as the daemon. For Dickinson, the daemon is not a supernatural being who possesses and controls the body of another being, but rather a metaphor that expresses the relationship between one's imaginative energy and their humanity. Dickinson, who was excruciatingly in tune with her daemon, was unable to ignore its presence and chose to explore its powerful, liberating, yet frightening terrain. By embracing her daemon, Dickinson created a personal language through poetry. This language, however, was never structured to enlighten an audience, but rather serves to answer solely to her and her daemon.

Much of the research for my project consists of analyses of several poems of Emily Dickinson, as well as critical works from literary scholars. In order to further explore Emily Dickinson's response towards gender, sexuality, and patriarchy, I employ feminist theory and analyze works such as Adrienne Rich's essay, "Vesuvius at Home: The Power of Emily Dickinson", and Susan Howe's book-length study, *My Emily Dickinson* (2007). Also, in order to understand the daemon figure and the relationship between man and art, I analyze works such as Harold Bloom's *The Daemon Knows: Literary Greatness and the American Sublime* (2017), as well as C.G. Jung's book *The Spirit in Man, Art, and Literature* (1966).

Although the facts of an artist's life cannot fully explain or reveal an artist's truth, works of art are undeniably created through an artist's personal concerns and are often (unconsciously and consciously) a response to the limitations that infringe on their creativity. My project contributes to scholarship by bringing insight into Dickinson's complex relationship with her daemon, which will further shed light onto her various literary personas. Rather than seeing Dickinson's poetry solely as a response to feminist discourse or being a woman ahead of her time, through my thesis I hope to reveal that Dickinson is attempting to deconstruct the frameworks of the institutions of her society in order to reconstruct her human identity through the emancipatory power of art.