

INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

UMI

A Bell & Howell Information Company
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
313/761-4700 800/521-0600

Order Number 9521321

The male muse

Ungar, Barbara Louise, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1995

Copyright ©1995 by Ungar, Barbara Louise. All rights reserved.

U·M·I
300 N. Zeeb Rd.
Ann Arbor, MI 48106

THE MALE MUSE

by

Barbara Louise Ungar

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

1995

©1995

BARBARA LOUISE UNGAR

All Rights Reserved

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in English in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

15 December 1994
Date

Angus Fletcher.
Chair of Examining Committee

14 December 1994
Date

Justina
Executive Officer

Ma-C

Robert M. Brown, Ph.D.
Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

INVOCATIONS

*Deus est in nobis
Agitante calescimus illo*

A god is within us;
when he urges, we are inspired.

—Ovid

A woman's face, with nature's own hand painted,
Hast thou, the Master-Mistress of my passion—

—Shakespeare, Sonnet 20

There are only a few recorded references in English
Literature to a male Muse, and most of these occur in poems
written by homosexuals and belong to morbid pathology.

—Robert Graves

So may some gentle Muse
With lucky words favour my destined urn
And, as he passes, turn
And bid fair peace be to my sable shroud.

—Milton

However, woman is not a poet; she is either a Muse
or she is nothing.

—Graves

Muse! See how happy they feel—
Girls and women, and widows—See?
I'd rather die on the torturer's wheel
Than endure these fetters made for me.

I know: I too will have to turn
To telling my fortune by tearing apart
A daisy. Everyone must learn
To endure love's torture in his heart.

—Anna Akhmatova

Psychologically, a female poet has always seemed an absurdity, because of the necessarily intense relationship between the poet and the Muse.

—John Montague

The muse has come to live here, now Ted has gone.

—Sylvia Plath

The concept of a male Muse is clearly ridiculous . . .

—Frank Warnke

My muse is male, has the radiant silvery complexion of the moon, and never speaks to me directly.

—Diane Ackerman

The truth is, a great mind must be androgynous.

—Coleridge

Everyone is partly their ancestors, just as everyone is partly man and partly woman.

—Virginia Woolf

One who has a man's wings
And a woman's also
Is in himself a womb of the world
And, being a womb of the world,
Continuously, endlessly,
Gives birth


—Lao Tzu

CONTENTS

Invocations	iv
Table of Contents	vi
Introduction	1
Part One: The Shape-Shifter	11
Chapter One: The Muse	12
Conjectural	13
Historical	21
Psychoanalytic: Winnicott	35
Some Etymological Musing	48
Chapter Two: The Male Muse	53
Giving Birth	53
The Man Question (or, The Body in Question?)	65
The Poetical Context: Women's Writing	73
A. Critics Consider the Male Muse	73
B. Poets Speak of the Male Muse	84
Part Two: A Shapeless Friend: Emily Dickinson's Muse	90
Chapter Three: Master as Muse	91
The Master Letters	105
The Master Poems	113
Marriage	122
Loaded Gun	136

Chapter Four: The Soul that Hath a Guest	142
The Passion	145
A Piercing Virtue	149
Anatomy of Pain	160
Master Death	168
Translation	175
Possession	181
Conclusion	192
Appendices	198
A. A Loose Working Taxonomy of the Muse	198
B. Dickinson's Master-Muse Poems	202
Bibliography	212

INTRODUCTION


 MUSE
 THE US
 WITHIN THE
 ME

A clear idea is therefore another name for a little idea.

—Edmund Burke¹

To write about the muse is to reassert the primacy of the imagination in the creative act, at a time when literary criticism, under the influence of cultural studies, seems increasingly hybridized with the social sciences. As a poet and scholar, I would like to reemphasize the study of poetry and the process of writing—in terms not of historical and social factors (as if these ever could “explain” a work of art) but precisely what can *not* be accounted for by these other disciplines. Countless women shared Emily Dickinson’s sociohistorical experience, but only one wrote her poems, which is, after all, why we remember and study her. It is the mysterious other factor, the *x*, the *je ne sais quoi*, that distinguishes Dickinson from her contemporaries that I wish to examine. Artists and poets have for millennia referred to this intangible as the muse.

This attempt to explore a new variant of an ancient archetype, the muse, is nevertheless indebted to contemporary feminist and psychoanalytic theory. Its germ is an

¹*Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (London, 1757) 2: 4, qtd. in Samuel H. Monk, *The Sublime* (New York: MLA, 1935) 94.

intuition that the male muse may be something like a woman artist's animus, just as the muse may be a male artist's anima.² Albert Gelpi's application of Jungian theory to Emily Dickinson in *The Tenth Muse* is very helpful, though ultimately too reductive, as Margaret Homans observes in *Women Writers and Poetic Identity*. Thus another psychological paradigm for the muse is necessary, as provided by Winnicott's notion of the transitional object,³ which represents the third or intermediate area of experience—neither inner nor outer, self nor other, subjective nor objective, but a symbol of both the separation and merger of these linked pairs. Winnicott sees humanity as constantly navigating between inner and outer experience: this third area is where play, the precursor of art, religion, and all cultural life, transpires.

The limen or threshold may be variously drawn between self and other, conscious and unconscious, mind and matter, finite and infinite, mortal and immortal, profane and sacred.⁴ Rilke's Orpheus is a perfect example of the muse as bridger of the two realms: he lingers on the threshold, trying to sing the other side back to this one—to bring Eurydice back alive—and fails, except in song.

Or, as Octavio Paz describes the muse with ambiguous precision in *The Other Voice*,

²C. G. Jung defines anima and animus as the "personification of the feminine nature of a man's unconscious and the masculine nature of a woman's. . . . The animus and the anima should function as a bridge, or a door, leading to the images of the collective unconscious . . ." *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Vintage, 1988) 391-92.

³The transitional object, the infant's "first 'not-me' possession" such as a blanket or teddy bear, represents the third or "intermediate area of *experiencing*, to which inner reality and external life both contribute," thus providing "a resting-place for the individual engaged in the perpetual human task of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet interrelated." D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (New York: Routledge, 1989) 1-2.

⁴I am indebted to Angus Fletcher's notion of liminal poetics, in such essays as "Threshold, Sequence, and Personification in Coleridge," in *Colors of the Mind: Conjectures on Thinking in Literature* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard UP, 1991) 166-88.

All poets in the moments, long or short, of poetry, if they are really poets, hear the *other* voice. It is their own, someone else's, no one else's, no one's, and everyone's. Nothing distinguishes a poet from other men and women but those moments—rare yet frequent—in which, being themselves, they are other. (151)

Paz locates this "*other* voice" in space and time as "not outside but inside" all poets and as "never the voice of here and now, which is the modern voice, but the voice from beyond, the other one, the one of the beginning" (153).

What I am trying to define here defies logic. The muse is the us within the me: the sense that being oneself, one is also many and other. It is the link to the past—the tradition, the race, the species, all of life. The offspring of Memory, a messenger from the unconscious. A visitant from beyond, akin to dreams, prophecy, the uncanny. A daemon mediating the human and divine. A border-guide where self becomes other, where the other speaks through the self. It is both self and other, inside and outside, male and female. A protean figure for the imagination, a name for the ineffable. A shape-shifter. Can we even write this?

We do not know what the imagination is. Imagining, how can it have what is called "being?"⁵

⁵ Owen Barfield, in his illuminating essay, "Imagination and Interpretation," cites Coleridge's idea of the "imagination as the best-known means of preserving a right relation between the two sides of the threshold" (71). Barfield analyzes the problem of the theorist "investigating the working of imagination in symbol and image" as that of "investigating the relation between the two sides" of the threshold, the symbol and the symbolized: "you cannot consider the *relation* between two things or states unless you know something about *both* of the two things themselves," and we do not know what lies on the other side. *Interpretation: The Poetry of Meaning*, ed. Stanley R. Hopper and David L. Miller (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966) 67.

Cf. Octavio Paz's claim: "Since the Paleolithic, poetry has been a part of the life of all human societies; no society exists that has not known one form of poetry or another. But although tied to a specific soil and a specific history, poetry has always been open, in each and every one of its manifestations, to a transhistorical beyond. I do not mean a religious beyond: I am speaking of the perception of the *other side* of reality. That perception is common to all men in all periods; it is an experience that seems to me to be *prior* to all religions and philosophies." *The Other Voice* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990) 153-54.

Perhaps only in images: the muse images how the imagination might “be.” Poets have a live sense of how imagination works in them, and still use the term “muse” to refer to this process. As the contemporary African-American poet Lucille Clifton explains,

talking about poetry tends to be talking about it in the language of literary theory—and the language of theoreticians—and I don’t think poetry, at least for me, happens that way. To talk about [poetry] is to talk from the outside in, and the happening of it is happening inside out. When I talk about poetry, I want to talk about it as a poet. And what I do understand is the way I feel and approach poetry: I know what my process is. . . (57)⁶

My goal is to take a third, liminal position, neither exclusively theoretician nor poet, but both. I would like to talk about poetry from the outside in and the inside out, to take a Möbius position that flows seamlessly from one to the other, that reveals the two as flip-sides of the same paper, and inseparable.

The ancient Greeks believed the poet to be literally possessed by the muse, an actual entity from beyond the threshold. Gradually, as the concept of inspiration becomes interiorized as “genius,” the figure of the muse becomes a personification of imagination, a projection of capabilities presumed to be internal, yet somehow sensed as “given”—the artist receives the mysterious and precious gift from somewhere, and “muse” is still the name given to the unknown giver. This is the muse as speaker or writer of the poem, the voice that possesses, working *through* the poet, actually providing the words.

A contrasting rhetorical model is the silent muse as listener or receiver of the poem, the catalyst, working *on* the poet, eliciting the words. Here the muse is external but secularized, and often identified with a specific individual (whether an actual human being or a split-off and projected psychic aspect is a moot point). This muse-person may be dead

⁶“An Interview with Lucille Clifton,” Grace Cavalieri, *Poets and Writers Magazine* 22.2 (1994): 55-61.

“The language of theoreticians” seems to be growing farther and farther away from the experience of poetry; as poet and critic Dana Gioia noted, at the last “literary” conference he attended papers were given on the gender coding of cereal boxes and the phallogocentrism of the L.A. freeway system. Dana Gioia, “Does Poetry Matter?” New York University, 19 April 1994.

or quasi-divine, for unattainability is the necessary condition: Laura and Beatrice are archetypes of this “personal muse.” Once personalized, the muse must be gendered, which raises the question of the woman writer and the male muse.⁷

Irene Tayler’s *Holy Ghosts: The Male Muses of Emily and Charlotte Brontë* (1990) is the only book-length literary study that centers around the idea of male muses. Tayler concludes that the Brontës “vigorously expressed those elements of selfishness, assertiveness, isolation, and arrogance that were necessary to the survival of their creativity” through their male muses (300). Yet Tayler’s study of the Brontës includes neither classical mythic background nor in-depth discussion of the muse’s nature and psychic function, so that Tayler’s Christian conception of the muse as Holy Ghost remains somewhat limited: he is a positive figure of inspiration, a holy word-bearer. Tayler omits the destructive and erotic aspects of the muse, and leaves the implications of the male muse for poetics largely unexamined. In psychoanalytic terms, her conception of the muse is closer to an ego ideal (or superego), mine closer to the unconscious (or id). Yet Tayler clearly recognizes the Brontës’ male muses and their importance as models for other women writers, providing a valuable example of the way in which women’s writing may be illumined by this figure.

Dickinson’s muse, who begins as an apparently “real” man, addressed in many poems and three extant, unmailed letters to an unknown “Master,” seems at first a personal muse. He evolves, though, and through a sacred marriage enacted in the poetry becomes increasingly interiorized by the poet until ultimately transformed into a mysterious guest of the soul. Like Dante’s Beatrice, the figure of the unattainable beloved leads the poet through exquisite torments of unrequited passion to higher realms of love, ultimately to the divine. In such poems as “I dwell in Possibility” [657],⁸ Dickinson

⁷Tennyson and Arthur Hallam provide an obvious example of a male poet with a male personal muse; unfortunately, the limited scope of this study does not permit more than a gesture in this direction, which will be explored in future work.

describes her communication with “visitors” from beyond the threshold, who are neither outer nor inner but both—transitional, or liminal.⁹

Dickinson may personify inspiration as male to express at once its otherness, belovedness, power, and divinity, since she is female in a society in which power belongs to men, God takes male forms, and the trope of the soul’s marriage to God is common. Or she may experience inspiration literally as she describes it. Dickinson seems to live on the threshold, visiting the other realm frequently—one reason for the terror expressed in her work. Her idiosyncratic language explodes logic, which belongs to this side, and invents itself to convey news of the other side.

The belief that the muse must be female blocks women poets, and simply is not true: throughout its millennia-long history, the muse varies in number, gender, and form—hence, I call it a shape-shifter. Obviously, a shape-shifter is neither male nor female but both, and more. Women, though used to symbolize the “other” for men, have not themselves been allowed access to the “other” realm, whether called “imagination” or “poetry,” traditionally considered a male domain. Suzanne Juhasz names this “the double-bind of the woman poet . . . for the words ‘woman’ and ‘poet’ denote opposite and contradictory qualities and roles” (*Naked and Fiery Forms* 1). I do not mean to imply that imagination or poetry is inherently masculine, but simply that women poets often figure the other, the “not-me,” as male. Women are granted bodily creation, and traditionally used to embody artistic creation for men: the muse. This procreative analogy, simplistically applied, is extended to exclude women from artistic creation because they

⁸Numbers of poems in brackets throughout are those assigned by Thomas H. Johnson in *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1960) and *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Including Variant Readings Critically Compared with All Known Manuscripts* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1955).

⁹The metaphor of the threshold or limen is particularly apt for this poem, with its conceit of “Possibility” as a “House” in which the poet dwells, which is “Superior—for Doors—” and thus open to “the fairest” “Of Visitors.”

cannot "have" the muse.¹⁰ That women might have communications with the muse modelled on homoerotic, sororal, or maternal relationships has gone unmentioned until recently, while the idea of a male muse has been dismissed as "ridiculous."¹¹

Recent feminism has demonstrated that women do indeed have female muses. Mary K. DeShazer's *Inspiring Women: Reimagining the Muse* argues that modern women writers "claim as muses powerful, active women," who "may be goddesses or mythological forces; literary foremothers or feminist cocreators; women from their own lives—mothers, lovers, one or many sisters; aspects of their own psyches" (ix). But only feminine aspects need apply. DeShazer repeatedly dismisses evidence of male muses (in the work of Dickinson, Brontë, H.D., Bogan, Plath, Sexton, and Rich), to support her claim that women "seldom turn to a male inspirer, as several nineteenth century poets—notably Emily Dickinson and Emily Brontë—sometimes tried to do" (3). This dismissal rests

¹⁰Though John Montague remarks in his Introduction to *The Book of Irish Verse* that early Irish poetry "is the only literature in Europe, and perhaps in the world, where one finds a succession of women poets," whom he includes in his anthology, he nevertheless continues, "Psychologically, a female poet has always seemed an absurdity, because of the necessarily intense relationship between the poet and the Muse." (New York: Macmillan, 1974) 22.

The opening lines of Jane Hirschfield's Preface to her translations of two Japanese women poets correct Montague: "In the history of world literature there is only one Golden Age in which women writers were the predominant geniuses. This occurred at the turn of the last millennium, when the emperors of Japan held court in the city of Kyoto." *The Ink Dark Moon: Love Poems by Ono no Komachi & Izumi Shikibu, Women of the Ancient Court of Japan* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1988) vii.

¹¹The "Petrarchan male poet, in his posture of devotion to the elevated, distant, and virtuous lady, his Beatrice or Laura, is simultaneously expressing erotic longing, transmuting that longing into religious transcendence, and establishing contact with the magical roots of his own creativity. But, as Graves asks in his essay on Sor Juana, where is the female poet to find her Muse? The concept of a male Muse is clearly ridiculous, and . . . in Gaspara Stampa's *canzoniere*, the unfaithful Collalto in no sense fulfills a Muse-function. He is the agency, the occasion, through which Gaspara's creative and erotic energy is liberated, but that energy has its ultimate source in Gaspara herself. She is, as Graves remarks of Sor Juana (and Sappho) herself the Muse." Frank Warnke, *Three Women Poets, Renaissance and Baroque: Louise Labé, Gaspara Stampa, and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz* (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1987) 18. I wonder what the Muse-function may be if not precisely to provide "the agency, the occasion, through which" the poet's "creative and erotic energy is liberated"?

upon an assumption that what is male must be inherently destructive, as epitomized by Carolyn Heilbrun's reaction to the idea of a male muse: "Not a bad image of a muse, sexes reversed, except that the man, in turning to the muse, turned to what seduces, and the woman turns to what rapes."¹²

I believe the male muse is far more popular and successful than DeShazer recognizes, for "we are apt to find what we look for."¹³ I recognize him in the work of Mira Bai, Dickinson, the Brontës, H.D., Bogan, Plath, Sexton, Rich, and Marina Tsvetaeva, for example, though he is still ignored or stigmatized. I attempt here to make room for other women—and men—whose imaginations work differently. I do take issue with the separatist strain in feminism that would reject the notion of a male muse a priori simply because it is masculine; though I understand the root of such vilification as rage deepened through centuries of oppression, this desire to cast out the male is ultimately not only polarizing but unrealistic. Rather I want to suggest, as one possible solution to the double-bind of the woman poet, the idea of the male muse, which allows embracing the masculine within the imagination itself.

The dynamics or erotics of the imagination are my central concern. The muse as animus/anima is but one twin image of a vast unknowable—call it the imagination, genius, self, G-d, collective unconscious, what you will. Creation remains a profound mystery: our notions about it amount to faith, varying attempts at describing what may never be described but is, nevertheless, experienced. So I am arguing for something like religious tolerance.

¹²Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Reinventing Womanhood* (New York: Norton, 1979) 67, qtd. in Mary K. DeShazer, *Inspiring Women: Reimagining the Muse* (New York: Pergamom P, 1986) 30.

¹³ Dorothy Sayers, *The Poetry of Search and the Poetry of Statement* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1963) 12.

Emily Dickinson has been chosen as my main example for many reasons (and in a sense this study is intended as a new introduction to her work). First, in the work and in the response to it, Dickinson appears as, in fact, an inspired genius. Second, she is a muse poet whose inspiration has been misunderstood, largely through incomprehension of her male muse. Third, much of her work chronicles the evolution of this muse and her experience of inspiration. Fourth, understanding of her work has been hampered by criticism that tends to twist her into an eccentric figure through excessive focus on her biography. I hope to demonstrate that Dickinson's "Master," though perhaps based on a composite of men in her life, is actually an aspect of her muse: I shall trace her imaginative transference in relation to this figure, her renunciation of any physicality in this relationship, her mythologizing of her own "Passion," and her growing understanding of how this psychic drama enables her to transcend gender and reach an ultimate ecstatic state, as her erotic desire for an external love object is transformed into the source of an internalized spiritual and creative power.

There never will be, nor could there be, a Key to Emily Dickinson. Like blind women describing an elephant, we find in Dickinson the part we touch, and which touches us; we each describe our dialogue with Dickinson, who has Circumference enough to encompass and elude us all. It is important to some now to "out" Dickinson, to "claim" her as a lesbian, for political purposes. For those who have her by that end, that is fine; I believe the evidence of her writings, especially her letters, makes it a likely surmise.¹⁴ However, to paraphrase Simone Weil on the existence of God, the evidence is not available to us here below, and I would rather conjecture about the evidence at hand—her work. If she were what we would now call "gay," it remains equally important to account for her use of male figures in her poetry, just as male poets use female figures (the Lady of Shallott, say) to represent aspects of the self, or a mysterious other, "the *other* voice."

¹⁴See Martha Nell Smith's *Rowing in Eden: Rereading Emily Dickinson* (Austin: U of Texas P, 1992) and her forthcoming *With the Exception of Shakespeare: Emily Dickinson's Writings to Susan Huntington Gilbert Dickinson*.

There is a tendency to read women writers differently from men—more biographically, with emphasis on sexuality, and more literally, turning them into icons or static figures. This reification of women denies them creative subjectivity, the imaginative capacity to become male or female, to change shape at will, to o'erleap boundaries necessary for artistic creation. The concept of a male muse will help accord women writers impartial treatment by refocusing attention on the work and on women's imagination. Paradoxically, a more generalized critique will only result from a liberated equanimity regarding the erotics of inspiration.

While male artists are judged as artists first and as men second, and given a wide latitude in the second category for belonging to the first, female artists are judged as women first and artists second. This focus on women's bodies and domestic lives has its corollary in the assumption that the muse must necessarily be female. Most discussions simply assume that "museness" is indissolubly linked to femaleness (thus linking poethood with manhood). Museness, however, can be separated from gender—and it is the museness of the muse I want to concentrate on (whether in male or female shape), just as it is the artistry of the artist the critic ought to focus on (whether the artist is female or male in shape). Some feminists, too, focus excessively on the womanhood of women artists, as if that were all that mattered or what mattered most. But to a poet—especially one like Dickinson, who after all spent her days and nights writing, not living with a lover of any sex—surely poetry is what matters most. One could argue that Dickinson has at least as much in common with Shakespeare as with her sister, Vinnie: her genius transcends her experience in a woman's body. Of course she has even more in common with other great women writers, especially her contemporaries, the Brontës, Barrett Browning, and George Eliot, whom she reveres. Thus I hope most broadly that this dissertation will help correct the way gender skews our ideas of authorship, that it will true the wheel.

PART ONE:
THE SHAPE-SHIFTER

Shape: OE *gesceap*, creation, creature, make, structure, natural character; form, figures, configuration; pudendum; decree, destiny; ON *skap*, state, condition; fate, destiny; the genitals.

.....

16. The sexual organs;

17. *shape-shifter*; as in sense 5: The visible form or appearance characteristic of a particular person or thing, or of a particular species of animate or supernatural being.

Shift: OE *scifian*, to change, share, determine, separate, divide, classify, arrange in order . . . (*OED*)

CHAPTER I: THE MUSE

Muse *sb* 1 [a. F. *muse*, ad. L. *musa*, a. Gr. *mousa* : —pre-Hellenic **montya*, f. Indogermanic root **mon-* (:men- :mn-) to think, remember, etc.: see MIND *sb*]

1. *Mythology*. (Now usually with capital.) One of nine sister-goddesses, the offspring of Zeus and Mnemosyne, regarded as the inspirers of learning and the arts, esp. of poetry and music.

In Greek antiquity there were other accounts as to the number of the Muses and of their parentage. The names of the nine Muses appear first in Hesiod, who says that Calliope is the chief of them. Later mythologists assigned to each of the Muses a particular class of functions, which, however, are less definitely limited than they appear in modern allusive use.

b. In classical poetry, *the Muse* is often invoked or referred to as if only one Muse were recognized. Hence often in modern poetic use.

2. (With capital or small initial, according to the degree of personification.) a. Chiefly with a possessive: The inspiring goddess of a particular poet. Hence, a poet's particular genius, the character of his style and spirit.

b. *The Muse*: poetry personified, as an object of devotion. So *the Muses*: the liberal arts, 'polite literature'.

c. *transf.* Used for: One under the guidance of a Muse, a poet.

Muse *v*, [a. F. *muser*, to waste time, trifle, in OF. also to muse, meditate = Pr. *musar*, It. *musare*, to stare about, idle, loiter.

Prob. a derivative of the Rom. word represented by It. *muse*, OF. *muse*, muzzle, (cf. Florio's explanation of It. *musare*, 'to hould one's musle or snout in the aire'), the primary allusion being to the action of 'a dog sniffing the air when in doubt as to the scent' (Skeat). Possibly the sense 'to meditate' may be due to the influence of L. *musa*, MUSE *sb* 1 Cf. Med. L. *musare*, to play music.]

I. *intr.*

1. To be absorbed in thought; to meditate continuously in silence; to ponder.

2. To be at a loss to discover; to ask oneself meditatively, to wonder.

3. To be affected with astonishment or surprise; to wonder, marvel.

4. To gaze meditatively; to look thoughtfully or intently.

II. *trans.*

7. To ponder over, reflect upon; to contemplate, meditate. Now *rare*.

8-11 *Obs.*: To murmur discontentedly. To excogitate. To marvel at. To bewilder, puzzle. (*OED*)

CONJECTURAL

All we can sense of inspiration is its failure, all we can recognize of it is its misguided violence.

—Maurice Blanchot¹

Where does creative inspiration come from? Poets and artists answer, the muse. Who or what is the muse? A name, perhaps, for the inexplicable element of creativity, perceived as “outer”—what Octavio Paz calls “the *other* voice.” We no longer believe in the nine sister goddesses of Mt. Helicon or Olympus. And yet we still speak of the muse when wandering into the unmapped terrain of inspiration. Wherever we locate its source—in a work of art, a person, the unconscious, nature, a supernatural being, or divinity itself—the idea of the muse allows us to begin an account of the experience of inspiration. What in a poet’s work may be said to be original? What is derived from the past, from tradition, from other poets?

The *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* defines inspiration as

the urge that sets a poet to work and the devotion that keeps him at it. There have been two theories of the origins of this urge and devotion. The first, more widespread in space and time than the second, is that inspiration comes from outside the poet; the second, that it comes from within him. The data on which this first concept is based come from literature and anthropology; the data for the second, from psychology.

A third possibility is that inspiration is neither outer nor inner, but both: transitional, liminal, paradoxical. Inspiration is, in a word, breath. To breathe is to take in the external and to expel what has thus been made internal. Is breath an external or internal phenomenon? Breathing keeps us alive as separate individuals even as it ties us to the cosmos. Inspiration is, at least in part, loss of individual self-consciousness or ego-

¹Maurice Blanchot, “The Gaze of Orpheus,” *The Gaze of Orpheus and other literary essays*, trans. Lydia Davis (Station Hill, NY: Station Hill Press, 1981) 103.

boundaries, which Eastern philosophy and quantum mechanics tell us are illusion, an experience of merger with the cosmos.²

As Nietzsche writes in *The Birth of Tragedy*

Schopenhauer has described for us the tremendous awe which seizes man when he suddenly begins to doubt the cognitive modes of experience. . . . If we add to this awe the glorious transport which arises in man, even from the very depths of nature, at the shattering of the *principium individuationis*, then we are in a position to apprehend the essence of Dionysiac rapture, whose closest analogy is furnished by physical intoxication. (22)

Nietzsche's translator here, Francis Golffing, uses two of Dickinson's favorite words, "awe" and "transport," to name this state, as Dickinson herself frequently employs the trope of intoxication to describe inspiration, as in "I taste a liquor never brewed" [214]. Poets universally use intoxication to shatter the constraints of the ego and primary process thinking. "One should always be drunk," as Baudelaire advises, "With wine, with poetry, or with virtue, as you please,"³ or as Li Po describes in "Drinking Alone in Moonlight":

With three cups I penetrate the Great Tao.
Take a whole jugful—I and the world are one.
Such things as I have dreamed in wine
Shall never be told to the sober. (Yohannan 235)

²As Tennyson describes in a letter of 1874: "A kind of waking trance I have frequently had, quite up from boyhood, when I have been all alone. This has generally come upon me through repeating my own name two or three times to myself silently, till all at once, as if were [sic] out of the intensity of the consciousness of individuality, the individuality itself seemed to dissolve and fade away into boundless being, and this not a confused state, but the clearest of the clearest, the surest of the surest, the weirdest of the weirdest, utterly beyond words, where death was an almost laughable impossibility, the loss of personality (if so it were) seeming no extinction but the only true life. . . . I am ashamed of my feeble description. Have I not said the state is utterly beyond words? But in a moment, when I come back to my normal state of sanity, I am ready to fight for *mein liebes Ich* [my dear self], and hold that it will last for aeons of aeons." *Alfred Lord Tennyson, A Memoir*, 1897, 1: 320, qtd. in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, fifth ed., vol. 2, 1161.

³Charles Baudelaire, "Get Drunk," prose poem 33 in *Paris Spleen 1869*. Trans. Louise Varèse (New York: New Directions, 1970) 74.

Or again, as William James writes in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, drunkenness “expands, unites, and says Yes: it brings its votary from the chill periphery of things to the radiant core; it makes him for the moment one with truth” (387).

In *The Greeks and The Irrational*, E. R. Dodds observes that the “inspirational theory of poetry is directly linked with Dionysus by the traditional view that the best poets have sought and found inspiration in drink” (101, n. 24). Dodds works the ground broken by Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy*, which reintroduces the ancient Asiatic god Dionysus into modern Western thought. Nietzsche argues for the irruption of the irrational into the rational and for the necessity of both, since pure rationality spells death to art, as Plato recognizes when he has Socrates regrettably banish poets from his utopia.⁴ Nietzsche also claims that “individuation is the root of all evil” (67) and that

Apollo embodies the transcendent genius of the *principium individuationis*; through him alone is it possible to achieve redemption in illusion. The mystical jubilation of Dionysos, on the other hand, breaks the spell of individuation and opens a path to the maternal womb of being. (97)

Nietzsche further describes the solace of Dionysiac art along Eastern lines (via Schopenhauer):

It makes us realize that everything that is generated must be prepared to face its painful dissolution. It forces us to gaze into the horror of individual existence, yet without being turned to stone by the vision: a metaphysical solace momentarily lifts us above the whirl of shifting phenomena. For a brief moment we become, ourselves, the primal Being, and we experience its insatiable hunger for existence. Now we see the struggle, the pain, the destruction of appearances, as necessary, because of the constant proliferation of forms pushing into life, because of the extravagant fecundity of the world will. We feel the furious prodding of this travail in

⁴Socrates ambivalently declares, “And therefore when anyone of these pantomimic gentlemen, who are so clever that they can imitate anything, comes to us, and makes a proposal to exhibit himself and his poetry, we will fall down and worship him as a sweet and holy and wonderful being; but we must also inform him that in our State such as he are not permitted to exist; the law will not allow them. And so when we have anointed him with myrrh, and set a garland of wool upon his head, we shall send him away to another city.” Plato, *Republic* (Book III, 398) trans. B. Jowett (New York: Random House, 1937), qtd. in Jacques Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1953) 102.

the very moment in which we become one with the immense lust for life and are made aware of the eternity and indestructibility of that lust. Pity and terror notwithstanding, we realize our great good fortune in having life—not as individuals, but as part of the life force with whose procreative lust we have become one. (103)

Dionysus, one of the most complex of the ancient Greek gods, is far more than the god of wine. Dodds attributes our image of “jolly Bacchus’ the wine-god with his riotous crew of nymphs and satyrs” to the Romans “with their tidy functionalism and their cheerful obtuseness in all matters of the spirit.” Greek cult titles indicate much greater powers: Dionysus is “the Power in the tree,” “the blossom-bringer,” “the fruit-bringer,” “the abundance of life” (*Bacchae* xii). “The Force That through the Green Fuse Drives the Flower,” Dylan Thomas calls him, recognizing that this creator also “Is my destroyer.” Often pictured as an androgynous young man, and theriomorphically as bull, snake, or lion, Dionysus is particularly associated with shape-shifting, especially gender-bending, from his very birth out of his father Zeus’ thigh.⁵

In Euripides’ *Bacchae* Dionysus possesses the unbelieving Pentheus (his cousin, and another beardless youth), causing him to dress as a woman and so to suffer *sparagmos* at the hands of his own mother Agave; Dionysus similarly possesses Agave (his aunt, Semele’s

⁵Zeus fell in love with and impregnated the mortal Semele, daughter of King Cadmus of Thebes; jealous Hera tricked Semele into asking Zeus to appear before her in his heavenly form of lightning and thunder, which consumed her. Zeus saved their premature child, Dionysus, by sewing him into his own thigh until he was ready for birth. Lillian Feder, *Crowell’s Handbook of Classical Literature* (New York: Lippincott & Crowell, 1964) 60.

According to Dodds, it was probably “as earth goddess” that Semele “became the Bride of the Thunderbolt” *Euripides’ Bacchae* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1960) 63.

Cf. Robert Graves’s account of the births of Dionysus and Athena: Zeus’ conquest of ancient goddess cults is symbolized by his rape and murder of the goddess (he consumes Semele, and swallows the pregnant Metis) and his subsequent usurpation of female prerogative by giving birth to the “new” gods. Hermes, the trickster, attends both masculine births: he sews the premature Dionysus into Zeus’ thigh and delivers him three months later; he also persuades Haephestus (or Prometheus) to open Zeus’ skull. Graves quotes Jane Harrison’s characterization of Athena’s birth as “a desperate theological expedient to rid her of her matriarchal conditions.” *The Greek Myths*, vol. 1 (Baltimore: Penguin, 1955) 46, 56-57.

sister), causing her to mistake her own son Pentheus for a lion (Dionysus?) in her frenzy. Greek drama, springing from Dionysian rites, causes men to dress as women, and causes those under its spell to confound one realm of being with another, thus allowing humans to take the place of gods. So Dionysus makes a particularly apt figure for the muse as shape-shifter, confounding the boundaries of male/female, animal/human, and mortal/immortal.

The root of shape is the Old English *gesceap*, which means not only creation and creature, but “make, structure, form, figure, configuration, and pudendum,” as well as “decree (of God), destiny.” (*Gesceap* is also the root of *scop*, poet, maker or shaper.) There is an obvious link between generation, the organs of generation, and the forms thus generated; in another direction, creation may be easily linked to destiny or God’s decree. But completing the triangle, as it were, leads to a surprising linkage: genitals are fate, we might say. The root of shift, Old English *scifian*, “to determine, separate, divide, share” is also akin to the idea of fate, in the Greek sense of *moira* or portion. So a shape-shifter, whether Greek god or Native American Trickster, can change not only shape but gender, character, and fate.

Paul Radin’s *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology* describes the trickster as one of the most ancient and universal figures in all mythologies, characterized by extreme ambivalence: both creator and destroyer, god and animal, culture-hero and fool, he “embodies the vague memories of an archaic and primordial past, where there as yet existed no clear-cut differentiation between the divine and the non-divine” (122). Yet Trickster persists, for he “represents not only the undifferentiated and distant past, but likewise the undifferentiated present within every individual. . . . What happens to him happens to us” (169).

Trickster is “*the spirit of disorder, the enemy of boundaries*” (185), writes Karl Kerényi in the same volume; his function “is to add disorder to order and so make a whole, to render possible, within the fixed bounds of what is permitted, an experience of what is not permitted.” Comparing Greek gods to Trickster, Kerényi concludes, “Dionysian ecstasy had the same function as the trickster myth: it abolished the boundaries, not least the boundaries of sex. Trickster’s metamorphosis into a mother reaches down into the comic depths of the Dionysian realm” (188). The Dionysus myth involves not only a man dressed as a woman (Pentheus), but a male (Zeus) giving birth,

and a woman (Agave) killing her son—certainly extreme acts impermissible (or impossible) according to usual gender divisions.

“All mythical figures correspond to inner psychic experiences and originally sprang from them” (195), Jung comments, relating Trickster’s universality to that of shamanism. “Because of its numinosity the myth has a direct effect on the unconscious, no matter whether it is understood or not” (207), and the trickster myth’s therapeutic value lies in its account of “the gradual civilizing, i. e. assimilation, of a primitive daemonic figure who was originally autonomous and even capable of causing possession” (205). The muse is one name of this shape-shifting figure, which is paradoxically both an archaic remnant and a piece of the contemporary psyche. “The figure works,” Jung asserts, “because secretly it participates in the observer’s psyche and appears as its reflection, though it is not recognized as such. It is split off from his consciousness and consequently behaves like an autonomous personality” (209). The muse—both beneficent creator of art and indifferent destroyer of artists—is rooted in this undifferentiated archaic stratum; its function, like Trickster’s, is to unleash the tremendous creative power of those depths, without concern for morality, norms, or boundaries.

The ancients attributed great power to hermaphrodites and such mythic figures as the seer Tiresias, who had been both man and woman.⁶ Shamans male and female frequently cross-dress and live as the opposite sex for a time, like Trickster. These beings blur the boundaries of our usual categories: their very persons destroy logic, which is predicated on differentiating A from not-A; they embody the wisdom of primary process thinking, wherein A = not-A, a man is a woman, an animal a god, and vice versa, as in dreams.

⁶Tiresias was transformed into a woman for seven years for killing a female snake; in another account he was blinded by the gods at age seven for disclosing to men things the gods did not wish them to know. Feder, *Crowell’s Handbook* 423.

Artists, it is often observed, tend (emotionally, at least, if not physically) toward androgyny or bisexuality. Negative capability has many forms, and this is one of them. Wendy Lesser claims in her recent *His Other Half: Men Looking at Women through Art* that Shakespeare's "writing stems from a self which seems composed equally of male and female parts."⁷ His work constantly confounds gender boundaries—revealing their absurdity. Dickinson, who loves Shakespeare above all other writers,⁸ also seems to think of herself in male as well as female terms.

It's a tricky business. For how can one speak of a "male" muse while asserting the absurdity of gender boundaries? Perhaps we might speak of male phases, aspects, or emanations of this shape-shifter, as in Blake's "The Mental Traveller." Or, as Rilke proclaims in the fifth of his *Sonnets to Orpheus* (as translated by Stephen Mitchell):

For it *is* the god. His metamorphosis
in this and that. We do not need to look

for other names. It is Orpheus once for all
whenever there is song. He comes and goes. (27)

The muse, a figure for the imagination, does not "have" a specific gender but appears to various artists in various ways. Thus I question DeShazer's insistence that women's muses must be female. I do not mean to imply the opposite—that women's muses must be male—either, but choose to focus on male names, or emanations, such as Orpheus or Dionysus, to augment and correct the generally overriding emphasis on female names.

⁷As a further example, Lesser cites Cynthia Ozick's description of Henry James "as protean artist, as imaginative tenant of the souls of both women and men," and relates that when Elizabeth Hardwick was once asked, during a panel discussion about American literature, to name 'our greatest female novelist,' she promptly responded 'Henry James.'" *His Other Half: Men Looking at Women through Art* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1991) 1, 96, and 99.

⁸There are many examples throughout Dickinson's correspondence of her adulation of Shakespeare; for example, T. W. Higginson reports that "After long disuse of her eyes she read Shakespeare & thought why is any other book needed." *Emily Dickinson: Selected Letters*, ed. T. H. Johnson (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1971) 210.

Lesser's *His Other Half*, for example, uses Winnicott to underpin her examination of male artists and their female "missing halves," a notion based on Aristophanes' myth in the *Symposium* of the original hermaphroditic whole human being. I intend to provide *her* other half here, by examining one consummate woman artist and her descriptions of a male "missing half."

Putting gender issues aside for the moment, I will attempt to sketch in some of the historical metamorphoses of this shape-shifter. I conjecture, in the broadest terms, that the muse, originally a god outside, becomes increasingly interiorized and secularized until being replaced by genius—which is, in turn, supplanted by the internal spirit, or shaping form of the poem, and, finally, by language itself. Octavio Paz claims that in modern times we have replaced God with language (Fletcher, *Colors of the Mind* 10). At this extreme end, when the muse or god seems to have utterly vanished, it springs forth again, returning us full circle to "In the beginning was the Word."

HISTORICAL

The Sibyl, uttering her unlaughing, unadorned, unincensed words with raving mouth, reaches out over a thousand years with her voice, through the god.

—Heraclitus⁹

The history of the muse is one of constant flux, whose main drifts will be charted here, deliberately avoiding any elaborate historicist detail. From the ancients' daemon to the contemporary "internal spirit which shapes the poem" (Frye, *Anatomy* 98) the muse never held his/her/their form long. Though we generally think of the muses as nine daughters of Mnemosyne (Memory), with prescribed realms of sway, these are relatively late inventions, and never stable. The muse's protean forms vary from the Great Goddess—as singular, a trinity, or an ennead—to classical gods and demi-gods such as Zeus, Apollo, Dionysus, Eros, Narcissus, and Orpheus, whom Christian writers later conflate with Christ, the Holy Ghost, and Adonai; the address to the poet's own soul, or to a friend or lover, exists in classical times as well. So the "invention" of a male form of the muse belongs to a tradition almost three thousand years old.

The ancients themselves are vague and contradictory on the subject of the muse. "Unlike the Olympians, the Muses had no well-marked personalities," Curtius remarks in *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*. "No one knew much about them" (229). Three older muses are sometimes distinguished from the nine sisters: Mneme (Remembrance), Melete (Meditation), and Aoide (Song).¹⁰ Robert Graves conjectures in

⁹Josef Pieper cites Heraclitus' Fragment 92 as the oldest testimony concerning the Sibyl. *Love and Inspiration: A Study of Plato's Phaedrus*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (London: Faber and Faber, 1965) 53.

¹⁰Originally the Nymphs of inspiring springs, the muses "were first celebrated in Thrace near Mt. Olympus and Pieria. Hence that peak was regarded as their home and the Pierian Spring as the fountain of learning. Probably before Homer's time their worship had spread southward to Helicon and thence to Delphi." Though their oldest sanctuaries are those at the foot of Olympus and Helicon, other favorite haunts were certain springs with temples and statues in their honor: Castalia, at the foot of Mt. Parnassus, and Aganippe

The White Goddess that Mnemosyne, the mother of the muses, is actually the first member of a trinity, originally the Great Triple-Goddess (343), who was later weakened by being split into an ennead, the nine sisters, each of whom was assigned her particular realm of sway, and all of whom were subordinated to Zeus and Apollo (390-94).

Each poet seems to have had his own muse, varying in number, name, place of origin, and function. The Homeric muse is a single goddess, invoked very simply at the beginning of each epic; in the *Iliad* the muse becomes plural when invoked more elaborately in Book II, before the catalogue of ships, beginning the tradition of the second (or multiple) invocation at a particularly difficult point in an epic, which Virgil develops further.

Homer's Olympian muses differ from Hesiod's nine of Mt. Helicon. "These Muses once taught beautiful singing to Hesiod," he declares in the *Theogony*. "It is the gift of the Muses and of the archer-god Apollo that makes men on earth singers and musicians" (53-55). In *Genius: The History of an Idea*, Penelope Murray notes that "the gift and teaching idioms presuppose an actual meeting between gods and men," and differentiates between temporary inspiration (*mania* or possession, associated with the Dionysian) and such "permanent endowment which . . . foreshadows subsequent notions of the genius as a person with special gifts" (11-12).

The *Theogony* describes the muses as "nine daughters all of one mind," conceived by Zeus and Mnemosyne on nine successive nights, and born singing and dancing. Hesiod gives them the names we use but does not differentiate spheres of influence; much later, as belief in the muses declined, allegorizing Alexandrian scholars assigned them separate spheres based on Hesiod's poetic names, as follows:

and Hippocrene, on Helicon, near the towns Ascra and Thespai. "As the inspiring Nymphs of springs, they were early connected with Dionysus; the god of poets, Apollo, is looked on as their leader (*Musagetes*), with whom they share the knowledge of past, present, and future. . . . They were represented in art as virgin goddesses with long garments of many folds, and frequently with a cloak besides; they were not distinguished by special attributes till comparatively later times." *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*.

Name	Translation ¹¹	Role
Calliope	"beautiful voice"	Epic or heroic poetry
Clio	"celebrate"	History
Euterpe	"delight"	Elegy or lyric poetry
Melpomene	"choir"	Tragedy
Thalia	"festivity"	Comedy, bucolic poetry, agriculture
Erato	"lovely"	Lyric or erotic poetry, mime
Terpsichore	"delight of dancing"	Dance, choral dancing and singing
Polyhymnia	"many songs"	Music, hymns, sacred poetry
Urania	"heavenly"	Astronomy, i.e., cosmological poetry

So, for example, Urania, the "Heavenly," became the muse of astronomy (and later Milton's "Heavenly Muse," and later still Pound's "Uranian Muse."¹²) The muses' roles were never stable: in the Renaissance, they were reassigned different spheres and often conflated with the Seven Liberal Arts.

E. R. Dodds, in *The Greeks and the Irrational*, distinguishes the epic tradition from that of the divinely possessed poet, which he traces to Democritus, though it is generally credited to Plato. In the epic tradition, the poet invokes the muse for supernatural knowledge—not just accurate memory but an actual vision of the past—but does not ask to be possessed (81-82). Rather, the muses are invoked as figures parallel to the inspired Pythia, while the poet plays the part of the priest who interprets her ravings. Dodds also notes that Pindar

begs the Muse to grant him "an abundant flow of song welling from my own thought." As McKay has put it, "The Muse is the source of the poet's originality, rather than his conventionality" (*The Wrath of Homer* 50).

¹¹Norman O. Brown's translation of Hesiod's Catalogue of the Muses, *Theogony*, (ll. 76-79). List of the muses' later spheres from Marina Warner, augmented by Robert Graves and the *Princeton Encyclopedia*, for "definitions do vary," as Warner notes. *Monuments and Maidens* (New York: Atheneum, 1985) 358, n. 80.

¹²Wayne Koestenbaum quotes Pound's verses sent to Eliot in a letter suggesting revisions to *The Waste Land*: "These are the Poems of Eliot / By the Uranian Muse begot;" Koestenbaum explains "the phrase not only refers to Milton's muse, but to the Uranian poets, homosexual verse-writers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries." *Doubletalk: The Erotics of Male Literary Collaboration* (New York, London: Routledge, 1989) 120, 122.

Chadwick, *Growth of Literature*, III.182, quotes . . . a curiously exact primitive parallel, the Kirghiz minstrel who declared, "I can sing any song whatever, for God has implanted this gift of song in my heart. He gives the words on my tongue without my having to seek them. I have learned none of my songs. All springs from my inner self." (22)

Dodds explains that Hesiod, in crediting the muse with his invention, "interpreted in terms of a traditional belief-pattern a feeling which has been shared by many later writers—the feeling that creative thinking is not the work of the *ego*" (81). "It corresponds to what Bernard Berenson has called 'the planchette element in the pen, which often knows more and better than the person who wields it,'" Dodds adds, giving further examples: "The songs made me, not I them,' said Goethe. 'It is not I who think,' said Lamartine; 'it is my ideas that think for me.' 'The mind in creation,' said Shelley, 'is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness'" (100).

I add the American poet Anne Sexton's exclamation, "By God, I don't think I'm the one who writes the poems!" (Middlebrook 65). And Diane Ackerman recounts that the "poets May Swenson and Howard Nemerov like to sit for a short spell each day and copy down whatever pours through their heads from 'the Great Dictator,' as Nemerov labels it" (298). Rosamond Harding's *Anatomy of Inspiration* lists many more examples: Thackeray, for one, observes in *The Round-about Papers*, "It seems as if an occult Power was moving the pen" (15). Or, as Charlotte Brontë wrote to G. H. Lewes:

When authors write best, or, at least, when they write most fluently, an influence seems to waken in them, which becomes their master—which will have its own way—putting out of view all behests but its own, dictating certain words, and insisting on their own being used, whether vehement or measured in their nature; new-molding characters, giving unthought-of turns of incidents, rejecting carefully elaborated old ideas, and suddenly creating and adopting new ones. (Charlton 38)

There is traditionally a great price to be paid for such gifts. Both Dodds and Graves note (differing from the *OED* as cited at the top of this chapter) that the root of muse may be *mousa*, "mountain," that the muses may originally have been mountain

nymphs, and “it has always been thought perilous to meet a nymph” (Dodds 99). According to Graves, the poet originally paid for the goddess’s love with his life; the sentence was later commuted to mere mutilation. The tradition is at least as old as Homer, the legend of whose blindness perhaps springs from the portrait in the *Odyssey* of Demodokos, “whom the Muse had loved greatly, and gave him both good and evil. / She reft him of his eyes, but she gave him the sweet singing / art” (8.63-65). Dodds notes, “The Muses also disabled Thamyris, *Il.* 2.594ff.” (99). Moses’ stutter is a similar myth of a physical price paid for divine inspiration, perhaps a sign of rational control breaking down under the influx of supernatural power.

The parallel between poets and madmen is extremely primitive: according to the *Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics* it dates back to the time when “the poet, the prophet, and the priest were one and the same and when madmen were considered the special children of the gods, invested with prophetic and magical powers.” The ancient relation of poetry to prophecy lingers in many languages; Sir Philip Sidney points out in his *Defence of Poesy* that *vates*, the Roman term for poet, means “a diviner, a fore-seer, or Prophet,” which Shelley builds upon in *A Defence of Poetry*. Plato calls the idea of the “frenzied” poet “an old story,” and Dodds conjectures that it is “a by-product of the Dionysiac movement with its emphasis on the value of abnormal mental states, not merely as avenues to knowledge, but for their own sake” (82). Despite his distinction between such *mania* (“possession by the Muses”) and the epic poet’s gift, Dodds asserts that even for the latter, his

vision of the past, like insight into the future, remained a mysterious faculty, only partially under its owner’s control, and dependent in the last resort on divine grace. By that grace poet and seer alike enjoyed a knowledge denied to other men. In Homer the two professions are quite distinct; but we have good reason to believe that they had once been united, and the analogy between them was still felt. (81)

Plato clearly associates poetry and madness. In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates claims, “Our greatest blessings come to us by way of madness, indeed of madness that is heaven-sent”

(244). Socrates compares the four types of divine madness, attributing “the inspiration of the prophet to Apollo, that of the mystic to Dionysus, that of the poet to the Muses, and a fourth type which we declared to be the highest, the madness of the lover, to Aphrodite and Eros” (265).

Josef Pieper’s *Love and Inspiration: A Study of Plato’s Phaedrus* opens out the topic of inspiration and madness for the modern reader. A major cultural philosopher, grounded in Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, and Aquinas, Pieper, according to T. S. Eliot, “restores to their position in philosophy what common sense obstinately tells us ought to be found there: *insight* and *wisdom*.”¹³ Pieper enlarges our sense of what is involved in inspiration; he begins by translating the Greek “*mania*” not as madness, which might be dismissed too easily, but as

a being-beside-oneself, a loss of command over oneself, surrender of autarchic independence and self-control; a state in which we are not active, but passive. We do not act, but suffer something; something happens to us. French scholars, in interpreting this passage in Plato, speak of *transport*, that is, a condition of being carried away out of the center of one’s own being. . . it is also conceivable that this being-beside-oneself may not be caused by mental disturbance, not by poison or drugs, but by a divine power. (49-50)

“Transport’s mighty price is no more than he is worth—” Dickinson writes [L 359].¹⁴

“Transport” is one of her favorite terms to describe this state of “being carried away out of the center of one’s own being,” which she also calls “Circumference.” “My Business is Circumference,” she wrote to Higginson, who judged her “partially cracked” [L 268].

Pieper’s further comments explain Higginson’s misjudgment as a common one:

If the word *enthusiasm* were not so debased in English, it would in fact most fittingly describe what Plato intended, and indeed he himself uses it

¹³T. S. Eliot, introduction, *Leisure, The Basis of Culture*, by Josef Pieper (London: Faber and Faber, 1952) 16.

¹⁴*The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, ed. T. H. Johnson and Theodora Ward (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1958). Unless otherwise noted, all citations from Dickinson’s letters will refer to this edition, with the number of the letter enclosed in brackets after an “L” to distinguish letters from poems.

in the sense of "being filled with the god." In the middle of the *Phaedrus*, Socrates speaks of a man thus possessed by mania. "The multitude," he says, "regard him as being out of his wits, for they know not that he is full of a god [*enthousiazon*]. (50)

Or, again, in Dickinson's words, "Much madness is divinest sense" [435].

Pieper refers to Book VI of the *Aeneid*, where Virgil says of the Sibyl that Apollo "breathed into her a great mind and soul," to clarify the experience of inspiration. "Human nature is so placed within its plane of existence that it remains essentially open to the sphere of the divine. Man is so constituted that . . . he can be thrown out of the autonomous independence of his thinking by *inspiration*, which comes to him as a sudden, unpredictable force from outside" (56). The autonomous, rational individual is, at one and at the same time, involved in the Whole of reality. "This conception of man, involving as it does a tension of opposites which refuses to be reduced to a smooth formula, which is in itself a perpetual source of unrest—this conception may be said to have been Plato's central problem through out his life" (51). This unresolvable tension is precisely what Winnicott calls the paradox of the transitional.

Pieper cites contemporary analogues to the four types of mania named by Socrates, trying to determine whether they still convey any truths of value to us.¹⁵ The first type, *theia mania*, he compares to religious inspiration, of which he asserts, "man's being *is* at times overpowered by inspiration. It is something that actually happens," though he admits that "such a statement calls for an inquiry into the metaphysical structure of the

¹⁵Pieper quotes C. S. Lewis's *Screwtape Letters*, in which "A devil grown wise by long practice, here called Screwtape, writes . . . to his less experienced nephew—. . .

'Only the learned read old books and we [the united spirits of hell] have now so dealt with the learned that they are of all men the least likely to acquire wisdom by doing so. We have done this by inculcating The Historical Point of View. The Historical Point of View, put briefly, means that when a learned man is presented with any statement in an ancient author, the one question he never asks is whether it is true. He asks who influenced the ancient writer, and how far the statement is consistent with what he said in other books, and what phase in the writer's development, or in the general history of thought, it illustrates, and how it affected later writers, and how often it has been misunderstood (specially by the learned man's own colleagues). . . . And so on.'" (London, 1942; New York, 1943) 139, qtd. in *Love and Inspiration* 54.

human being. This is a subject which can scarcely be grasped ‘scientifically,’” for rationalism “renders a false picture of the Whole of life” (56-57).

The second type, cathartic *mania*, he compares to psychoanalysis:

Plato undoubtedly knew that Asclepian medicine was originally a *mantic* art in which the petitioner received instructions and healing in dreams. But dreams are things we do not bring about ourselves. “We ‘endure’ the dream.” This is not a sentence from an ancient philosopher; it was written by the modern psychologist, C. G. Jung. He too, like Plato, speaks of the necessity for submitting to a state of being outside oneself, to *mania*, for the sake of healing and wholeness. To strengthen his case he quotes the “ancient motto of the Mysteries”: “Let go of what you have; then you will receive.” (61)

Pieper gives many modern examples (including Goethe, Hölderlin, and Rilke) of the third type of *mania*, poetic inspiration; he might have cited Dickinson had her work been available. But it is the fourth and highest form of *mania*, the erotic, toward which his argument, following Plato’s, moves:

in that overpowering emotion he [the lover] is carried out of the dimension of the here and now, becomes unborn and imperishable, and his emotion cannot be satisfied with anything less than the Whole, the Totality of being, truth, goodness, beauty. The person who does not grasp this simply cannot understand what Love really is. (76)

This is one of Dickinson’s great themes; as she writes in a letter after the death of her beloved nephew Gilbert, “All this and more, though *is* there more? More than Love and Death? Then tell me it’s name!” [L 873]. Pieper’s descriptions of the lover elucidate Dickinson’s life and poetry far better than the “bad allegories” of so much Dickinson criticism, which seems unable to imagine any love beyond the carnal, and so remains mired in the hunt for the biographical identity of her beloved.

Though in the *Phaedrus* Plato honors the poet, in other writings his association of the poet with madness seems more pejorative, most famously in the *Republic*. Pieper explains this seeming contradiction: “there is no such thing as a Platonic system. Those who truly know Plato have time and again had to admit this. Plato, Wilamowitz tells us in his book, ‘actually arrived at no completely logical unity in his teachings and beliefs

concerning the human soul,” which Pieper considers as “not a sign of internal contradictions in Plato’s mind, but—as is the case with other great thinkers, such as Aristotle, Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas—a mark of tacit respect for the unfathomability of the universe” (xv-xvi).

Plato makes no distinction between the *mania* of epic and lyric poets, as the following passage from *Ion* (534, 536) illustrates:

The epic poets, all the good ones, utter their beautiful poems not from art, but because they are inspired and possessed. So it is also with the good lyric poets; as the worshipping Corybantes are not in their senses when they dance, so the lyric poets are not in their senses when they are composing their lovely strains. . . . A poet is a light and winged thing, and holy, and there is no invention in him until he has become inspired, and is out of his senses, and reason is no longer in him. So long as he has not attained to this state, no man is able to make poetry or to chant in prophecy. . . . (Trans. and qtd. in Maritain 101)

The passage not only names two mythical poets, Orpheus and Musaeus, as male muses, but establishes the notion of what I call the “precursor muse”: that is, an earlier poet inspiring a later. The importance of such received inspiration in Plato’s own writing is obvious:¹⁶ Plato more than acknowledges his debt to Socrates, who in turn attributes his own most profound ideas to others—Diotima in the *Symposium*, Stesichorus in the *Phaedrus*—or to his daemon.¹⁷ Thus Socrates may be said to be Plato’s muse, as Socrates’

¹⁶Of the passage in which Socrates reclines under the plane tree, claiming, “There is something welling up within my breast” (*Phaedrus* 235c), Pieper writes, “if I were asked to name a classical text which best expresses the mysterious and nevertheless unquestionable presence of the great and sacred tradition in the minds of the best pre-Christian thinkers, I would probably choose this passage. For what does it say? That the knowledge has come down from the ‘Ancients’; it is echoed in the poets; the vessel of the mind has been filled by hearing, that is to say, not out of personal experience and personal observation, but from external sources; yet the ‘how’ and the ‘from whom’ is forgotten.” *Love and Inspiration* 28.

¹⁷“A great deal has been written about the Socratean *daimonion*,” Pieper writes. “Socrates’ own account of it, especially in his *Apology*, is the most authoritative: ‘You have heard me speak of it many times; the divine voice has been constantly with me all through my life till now, opposing me in quite small matters if I were not going to act rightly; . . . sometimes it has stopped me in the middle of a speech; but today, although I was on my way to court, to the death sentence, it has been silent—because . . . what has happened to me is a good’ (40a–b). If we consider this and similar explanations from Socrates himself,

daemon is a kind of muse. (Socrates himself in this dialogue appears to be something of a mystic—with his daemonic voice and frequent recourse to myth—¹⁸ and not the epitome of rationality Nietzsche finds him.)

After Plato, the single most important document (or “primary ring”) transmitting to us the idea of the poet as divinely possessed is *On the Sublime*, which asserts that “men of great genius in literature” rise “above the mortal” so that “sublimity raises them almost to the intellectual greatness of God” (67), which will be fundamental to later romantic notions of genius and imagination. According to Monk’s study, *The Sublime*,¹⁹ in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England the notion of sublimity departs from Longinian principles and becomes a receptacle for all that is not allowed by Neoclassicism—inspiration, possession, irrationality, mania, loss of control—and thus a fount of romanticism; these qualities, associated with the muse, never disappear, though they may be filed under a different name.

As Allen Tate makes clear in *The Forlorn Demon*, writing on Longinus and the transitional, the original treatise emphasizes neither inspiration alone, nor skill, but asserts that both in tandem create the highest art. Longinus both compares poetic to prophetic

we cannot concur with those interpreters who hold that the daimon was simply *conscience*. Rather we must consider it as a phenomenon belonging to the oracular realm—though that, of course, makes its nature no clearer.” Pieper, *Love and Inspiration* 35.

¹⁸Pieper also clarifies Socrates’ seeming dismissal of myth in the beginning of the *Phaedrus*: “There are mythic tales, and there is Myth as such; there are a variety of traditions, and there is Tradition. Myth and Tradition as such bear on the heart of existence; they bear on man’s salvation. Wherever these concepts crop up in the Platonic writings—as, for example, in the narratives of the origin of the universe, of the primal state and fall of man, of judgement after death—Socrates clearly and strongly proclaims his unconditional veneration. On such occasions Socrates does not talk about having no time for Myth; he goes to considerable lengths to delve into its meaning.” *Love and Inspiration* 15.

¹⁹See Samuel H. Monk’s *The Sublime* on Longinus’ profound influence on eighteenth-century English thought and literature.

inspiration, as in the *Phaedrus*, and discusses techniques for achieving the heights of sublimity, such as

Imitation and emulation of great writers and poets who have been before us . . . for many are borne along inspired by a breath which comes from another; even as the story is that the Pythian prophetess approaching the tripod, where is a cleft in the ground, inhales, so they say, vapour sent by a god; and then and there, impregnated by the divine power, sings her inspired chants; even so from the great genius of the men of old do streams pass off to the soul of those who emulate them, as though from holy caves; inspired by which, even those not too highly susceptible to the god are possessed by the greatness which was in others. (30)

Longinus continues, “when a poem brilliantly imitates the work of another, we think its author inspired” (32); his emphasis on the transmission of inspiration from one poet to another, echoing Plato’s *Ion*, is central to my concept of the precursor muse. The priestess who “impregnated by the divine power, sings her inspired chants” provides an prototype for the woman artist inspired by divinity imagined in masculine form.

Although Roman poets inherited ideas of possession by spirits or demons, alcohol, and madness, according to Curtius, as Hellenic myth gave way to skepticism, the muses were parodied and sometimes replaced by invocations of friends or lovers. In the Imperial Age, invocation of the Caesars replaced that of the muses.²⁰ The muses themselves were reinterpreted along Pythagorean lines as celestial spirits who conferred immortality on those devoted to arts and learning; as such, their rejection by Christian writers was a topos from the fourth to the seventeenth century, culminating in Milton’s Hebraized Protestant muse (232-33). “That in every century the Muses continued to trouble Christian poets may seem strange,” Curtius notes, but explains, “The Muses alone could have been successfully dealt with. But they were not alone: since the times of Homer and Virgil they had been indissolubly connected with the epic form. The West was able to get along

²⁰Lucan, for example, in Book I of *The Civil War*, invokes Caesar: “But to me you are divine already; and if my breast receives you to inspire my verse, I would not care to trouble the god who rules mysterious Delphi, or to summon Bacchus from Nysa: you alone are sufficient to give strength to a Roman bard.” Trans. J. D. Duff (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1969) 7.

without the drama for over a thousand years, but before 1800 there is not a single century without epic" (241).

Zeus was also invoked by ancient poets, including Pindar, Theocritus, Virgil, and Ovid; Christian poets translated Zeus into their God. "The invocation of Christ as the Word was already current in the early Middle Ages," Curtius observes. "It was one of the most obvious Christian substitutes for the antique *invocatio*" (239). Other replacements are the Holy Spirit, God the Father, and various pagan deities such as Calderón's "Divine Orpheus" and Sor Juana de la Cruz's "Divine Narcissus," interpreted as prefiguring aspects of the Trinity. The earliest poem in English, "Caedmon's Hymn," claims a Christian form of divine inspiration, which continues from "The Dream of the Rood," through Margery Kempe, Milton, Smart, Blake, Rossetti, and Hopkins to the contemporary African-American poet Lucille Clifton.

The address to the poet's soul is also known in ancient times, Curtius points out, beginning with Odysseus' speaking "with himself in his stout heart" (5.298). Pindar calls upon his own soul; Ovid begins his *Metamorphoses* with his soul ("*animus*") urging him to write; Lucan, Statius, and Claudian follow suit, until by Prudentius, "the poet's soul has entered the *invocatio* as a substitute for the Muse" (234).

Although belief in the classical muses fades, invocations of them still continue, if only in conjunction with other types of muse (especially in the epic: for example, the multiple muses of Spenser and Milton). Dante is crucial in establishing this shift from classical to modern muses. In the *Divine Comedy*, beside pro forma invocations of the classical muses, the classical and medieval traditions are summed up in the figure of Virgil, Dante's poetic "Master" or precursor muse, while Beatrice, the type of the personal muse, points toward the future. Both human beloved and representative of divine love, Beatrice connects the human and divine realms, inspiring the poet's vision. Dante's muses for the first time play leading roles within the poem, which may be claimed as one characteristic of the romantic muse, who thereby reveals the subjectivity of the inspired poet. (The

classical muse for the most part remains outside the poem and, hence, relatively “objective.”)

The precursor muse authorizes the poetic tradition of the poem by linking the poet to the past. While Dante’s Virgil is the archetype for this diachronic mode of inspiration, Beatrice represents the synchronic or apocalyptic mode of inspiration, which, placed outside of time, transcends history. (These two modes may also be related to what Murray describes as the idioms of “teaching” and “the gift” to denote inspiration.) The dialectic between the two modes of inspiration continues—as in Milton’s “Lycidas,” for example, which combines the classical elegiac tradition with Christianity, crossing time and the timeless²¹—to James Merrill’s contemporary trilogy, *The Changing Light at Sandover*.

Some of the many examples of precursor muses in the English tradition are Collins and Gray, who begin to refer to their predecessors of the Golden Age as Dante refers to Virgil; the romantics’ Milton; Keats’s “On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer”; and Ginsberg’s visions of Whitman and Blake. Though Blake’s “Visionary Heads” and his dead brother Robert’s inspiring his illuminated printing put him, as ever, in a class of his own, the entrance of Milton’s spirit into Blake’s body through his left foot (in *Milton*) is a particularly stunning visitation by a precursor muse.

While Curtius claims the muse died with Blake’s lament “To the Muses” (246), I contend that, since we still speak of the muse today, romanticism merely marks a major shift in an ongoing process of secularization, internalization, and personalization. Shelley’s *A Defence of Poetry* traces the shift to the personal muse back to the troubadours and the courtly love tradition, culminating in Dante and Petrarch:

Love became a religion, the idols of whose worship were ever present. It was as if the statues of Apollo and the Muses had been endowed with life and motion and had walked forth among their worshippers; so that earth became peopled by the inhabitants of a diviner world. (497)

²¹Cf. T. S. Eliot’s *Four Quartets*.

Shelley recognizes that the courtly poet's mistress performs the same transitional agency that the muses and Apollo once provided—connecting the poet to the realm of the divine. The gods and goddesses are now situated within the individual human being.

Romantic theories of genius and imagination provide a transition between the traditional theory of inspiration as coming from without (the classical muse, who lives on an actual mountain with a spring) and the modern notion of inspiration as coming from within the psyche of the poet. According to the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, “*Genius* is a Latin word, probably considered by the Roman as the equivalent of the Greek *daimon* . . . In late Latin, however, *genius* came to be used as the equivalent of *ingenium* and its operation was transferred from the outer to the inner world of the poet.”

To Blake, the imagination is the source of divine spiritual energy, or God in the human soul, and rescues us from “Single vision & Newton’s sleep.” Coleridgean imagination, “as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM,” similarly relocates the divine within. Dickinson inherits and translates such romantic ideas:

The Brain is just the weight of God—
For—Heft them—Pound for Pound—
And they will differ—if they do—
As Syllable from Sound—

[632]

The muse remains to this day a figure for the varying relation sensed between creation and divinity. Though shape shifting in number and in gender from its earliest beginnings, the muse expresses artists’ universal intuition that creativity seems to come from without, as a gift—though often a “gift” with a very steep price tag attached. The muse is very early associated with madness and possession, a state of being beside oneself; the possessing spirit, though originally a nymph or god, may also be another person, whether an earlier writer, as in Plato and Longinus, or a beloved, as in the Roman poets and Dante. As belief in the classical gods fades, the muse-function continues, increasingly shifted onto modern muses who appear as characters in the work, such as Dante’s Virgil

and Beatrice, precursor and personal muses. As this process of secularization, personalization, and internalization of the muse continues, we must shift our gaze from mythology to psychology.

PSYCHOANALYTIC: WINNICOTT

But all poetry is mysterious; no one knows about everything it is given him to write. The dreary mythology of our age speaks of the Subconsciousness or, what is even more unlovely, of the Subconscious; the Greeks invoked the Muse, the Hebrews the Holy Spirit—it comes to the same thing.

—Borges²²

Along with questions of theology, the muse raises questions of poetic psychology. In “Imagination and Inspiration” Owen Barfield cites Coleridge’s idea of “imagination as the best-known means of preserving a right relation between the two sides of the threshold,” which is variously drawn between self and other, mind and matter, conscious and unconscious (Hopper 71). While inspiration implies actual possession by a visitor from the other side, Barfield suggests that “what was once inspiration is now imagination,” since “both sides of the threshold are now to be found ‘within’ us, instead of one side being within and the other without” (68).

That is, what were once the gods are become the unconscious: the muse from Mt. Olympus or Helicon has changed its name to “Genius” and moved inside the poet, “though what we mean by ‘in’ and ‘out’ in such a context is never very clear” (67). Wrestling with these terms, Barfield exclaims, “It is almost as though the problem for the theorist of imagination is to retain the concept of inspiration, while at the same time rejecting it!” (66). This paradox accords well with Winnicott’s vision of the essentially paradoxical nature of transitional phenomena (as well as recalling Keats’s negative capability). Winnicott’s theory of the transitional also helps clarify the Wordsworthian

²²Jorges Luis Borges, “Preface to *The Collected Poems*,” trans. Robert Mezey, *The American Poetry Review* January/February 1994: 24.

version of this in/out conundrum; indeed, Wordsworth might be called the first poet of object relations.

D. W. Winnicott's contribution to psychoanalysis, to summarize briefly, is his focus on the third area of experience: neither inner psychic experience nor shared outer reality, but what he calls the intermediate or transitional area. This is the realm of cultural experience, which develops from the child's transitional object, the first not-me possession (such as a teddy bear or blanket), symbol of the union of mother and infant, which, paradoxically, is predicated upon the separation of mother and infant.

Winnicott recognizes that our separation is an ongoing struggle, never completed. Our first experience is utter dependence upon or merger with the mother, which Wordsworth describes so well: "a Babe, by intercourse of touch,/ I held mute dialogues with my Mother's heart" (*The Prelude*, Bk. II, l.268-9). Winnicott is careful to point out that he uses the word "mother" to refer to the primary caregiver, who may or may not be the infant's biological mother or, indeed, a woman. If fortunate enough to have a "good-enough mother" who meets our needs, we are able to believe we have omnipotent magical control over her; she is a "subjective object," still part of us, and we think we "invent" her each time we find her. Through slowly increasing her frustration of our desires and surviving our aggression, she enables us gradually to separate from her and achieve consciousness. Finally, to perceive her objectively as a separate human being is the end of a long and difficult process. (How many of us can actually claim to be objective about our mothers?)

Wordsworth has a deep intuitive understanding of this process, as expressed in both "Tintern Abbey" and especially *The Prelude*, Book Second, in the famous "Blest the infant Babe" section, which anticipates Winnicott's theory of the transitional and links it to romantic ideas of genius:

Blest the infant Babe,
(For with my best conjecture I would trace
Our Being's earthly progress) blest the Babe,

Nursed in his Mother's arms, who sinks to sleep
 Rocked on his Mother's breast; who, when his soul
 Claims manifest kindred with a human soul,
 Drinks in the feelings of his Mother's eye!
 For him, in one dear Presence, there exists
 A virtue which irradiates and exalts
 Objects through widest intercourse of sense.
 No outcast he, bewildered and depressed;
 Along his infant veins are interfused
 The gravitation and the filial bond
 Of nature that connect him with the world.

.....
 For feeling has to him imparted power
 That through the growing faculties of sense
 Doth, like an Agent of the one great Mind,
 Create, creator and receiver both,
 Working but in alliance with the works
 Which it beholds. —Such, verily, is the first
 Poetic spirit of our human life,
 By uniform control of after years
 In most abated or suppressed, in some,
 Through every change of growth and of decay,
 Preeminent till death. (ll. 232-265)

Wordsworth meets Winnicott on more than one point. First, he places primary emphasis upon the importance of the mother and the mother-infant union to the child's healthy growth. Second, he stresses the transitional space between mother and infant, the "one dear Presence" of the mother at first representing, and later replaced by, "[o]bjects through widest intercourse of sense," which becomes the "gravitation and the filial bond / Of nature that connect him with the world." Third, creativity is considered as inherently transitional: the individual is "like an Agent of the one great Mind," who can "Create, creator and receiver both, / Working but in alliance with the works / Which it beholds." Fourth, Wordsworth stresses the fundamental importance of such creativity, which he claims as "the first / Poetic spirit of our human life," much as Winnicott claims that "[i]t is creative apperception more than anything else that makes the individual feel that life is worth living" (*Playing and Reality* 65). Finally, the artist is considered by both as the rare individual who remains in touch with this human birthright, which is "In most abated or

suppressed, in some, / Through every change of growth and of decay, / Preeminent till death.”

According to Winnicott, the transitional object (the beloved well-worn blanket or stuffed animal) helps the infant separate and survive the traumatic loss of omnipotence and magical control through the transference of magical powers of connection to the object. The transitional object is neither subjective nor objective, neither inside nor out, but fills up the potential space between infant and mother, the transitional space. Inherently paradoxical, the transitional object symbolizes both separation and union. In *Playing and Reality*, Winnicott describes the baby as “mad . . . in one particular way that is conceded to babies” (71):

the essential feature in the concept of Transitional Objects . . . is the paradox, and the acceptance of the paradox: the baby creates the object, but the object was there waiting to be created. . . . we will never ask the baby . . . did you create that or did you find it? (89)

The transitional object as symbol of union with the mother helps the infant establish and maintain the trust in continuity of being necessary to play: that is, to live creatively, to mediate inner and outer, to represent the inner by the outer; later, art and religion replace play as mediating the strain between inner experience and outer reality. As Dickinson writes, “Blessed are they that play, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven” [L 690]. In an essay “On Communication” in *The Maturation Processes*, Winnicott describes “cultural life” as “the adult equivalent of the transitional phenomena of infancy and early childhood” in which “communication is made without reference to the object’s state of being either subjective or objectively perceived.” Thus one cannot talk “about the experience of communication in art and religion unless he is willing to peddle in the intermediate area whose ancestor is the infant’s transitional object” (184).

I am willing not only to peddle but to set up shop here. I believe the muse functions as what I will call a transitional agent in a similarly paradoxical way. The artist invokes the muse to provide a sense of trust in continuity, to enter the transitional space.

The artist is also allowed to be “mad” like the infant, suspending logical thought or letting it exist alongside magical thinking. If we ask the artist, “Did you create that or did you find it?” she may well reply, “I made it, but the muse gave it to me.” The muse’s function (like that of the good-enough mother) is to provide the artist (infant) with what it needs to find/create. The muse is a cover for the transitional space in which what we make is half-created, half-received, and a guard against logical intrusion into the magic realm.

Wordsworth provides another excellent illustration of the transitional just before the turn at the end of “Tintern Abbey”:

. . . Therefore am I still
 A lover of the meadows and the woods
 And mountains; and of all that we behold
 From this green earth; of all the mighty world
 Of eye, and ear, —both what they half create,
 And what perceive; well pleased to recognise
 In nature and the language of the sense,
 The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
 The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
 Of all my moral being. (ll.102-111)

There is a syntactical slide from an “I” clearly separated from the external world of meadows, woods, and mountains (though joined to it as a “lover” in the first clause) to an indefinite “we” who “behold . . . this green earth,” which becomes increasingly interiorized in the next clause, “all the mighty world / Of eye, and ear.” By the dash, the discrete subject of the sentence is lost; this is the transitional realm of “what they half create / And what perceive.” The subject recovers himself to claim his “anchor,” “nurse,” “guide,” “guardian,” and “soul”—then turns to Dorothy, his muse (or transitional agent), who represents both their lost mother and nature.²³ The loss and recovery of self through merger with the other/mother/nature may be read sexually: the lover, at first discrete,

²³Both Wayne Koestenbaum and Mark Van Doren consider Coleridge, not Dorothy, as Wordsworth’s true muse. Koestenbaum writes, “In Tintern Abbey, by blurring the line between the male ‘Friend’ and the female ‘sister,’ Wordsworth retains the services of Coleridge while saying farewell to him.” *Doubletalk: The Erotics of Male Literary Collaboration* (New York: Routledge, 1989) 102.

approaches the other, intermingles, and loses himself—the dash, like a camera, pans away²⁴— until he falls back, “well pleased,” recovering his sense of himself to claim the other as his own. (Note the triple repetition of “my” in the last three lines.)²⁵

As child’s play develops into artistic creation, the mother’s body as representative of the outer universe and as the link to the genetic past may be compared to the body of Tradition—the past of the race recorded artistically—and the muse symbolizes both the artist’s connection to and separation from this whole. The muse as ancient symbol ties the poet to all poets past, but also, paradoxically, provides the gift of originality. As Winnicott notes, “*it is not possible to be original except on a basis of tradition,*” which is “just one more example, and a very exciting one, of the interplay between separateness and union” (*Playing and Reality* 99).

The ritual invocation of the muse functions as a transitional device: just as the good-enough mother knows better than to wash the threadless blanket, poets keep calling on the same well-worn name, muse. Winnicott states that he uses

²⁴Mary Ann Caws compares this to the dash in Heinrich von Kleist’s story, “The Marquise of O,” which marks (or masks) the rape.

²⁵Wordsworth’s battle with solipsism as fought out in this poem is perhaps another illustration of Winnicott’s notion of individuation as an ongoing struggle; Wordsworth’s early loss of his mother would seem to underlie his particularly intense struggle to separate from nature (in its mortal material aspect) and yet merge with it (in its ideal immortal aspect), to attempt over and over to “master” his mother’s death, as it were. As he describes it in a note on “Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood”: “Nothing was more difficult for me in childhood than to admit the notion of death as a state applicable to my own being . . . from a sense of the indomitableness of the spirit within me . . . whatever might become of others . . . With a feeling congenial to this, I was often unable to think of external things as having external existence, and I communed with all that I saw as something not apart from, but inherent in, my own immaterial nature. Many times while going to school have I grasped at a wall or tree to recall myself from this abyss of idealism to the reality.” *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, fifth ed., vol. 2 (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1986) 207-8.

If Wordsworth’s mother has no external existence, but is inherent in him, then she is not dead; yet his defensive clinging to this undifferentiated state (appropriate to an infant, not a child) threatens his ability to negotiate in the world. As he grows older and loses this “regressive” or “mad” ability to merge with external things, he laments “That there hath past away a glory from the earth,” for he recognizes it as the source of his poetry.

the term cultural experience as an extension of the idea of transitional phenomena and of play without being certain that I can define the word 'culture'. . . I am thinking of the inherited tradition. I am thinking of something that is in the common pool of humanity, into which individuals and groups of people may contribute, and from which we may all draw . . . (99)

This may be compared to Jung's collective unconscious, and the transitional object to the animus as "a psychopomp, a mediator between the conscious and the unconscious and a personification of the latter" (*Aion* 14). Jung uses the terms anima and animus, literally "soul," to represent the true inner self, or the "[p]ersonification of the feminine nature of a man's unconscious and the masculine nature of a woman's" (*Memories, Dreams, Reflections* 391). Despite resistance to his, or any, definition of the terms "feminine" and "masculine," I find Jung's insight that the "animus and the anima should function as a bridge, or a door, leading to the images of the collective unconscious" (*Memories* 392) describes precisely the muse's mediating function.

The muse's form varies, just as each infant selects its own transitional object: blankie or teddy bear, what matters is "not so much the object used as the use of the object" (*Playing and Reality* xii).²⁶ It is the muse's function, not shape, that is crucial: to release the poet from the constraints of ego and secondary process thinking into a more profound experience of being. The muse may be an actual person in the poet's life, a supernatural or imaginary being who may appear as a character in the work, or, most abstractly, "the form of the poem itself" as its "shaping spirit" and "a manifestation of the universal spirit of poetry" (Frye, *Anatomy* 98).

Inspired by Wittgenstein (and perhaps unconsciously by Frye as well), Angus Fletcher argues in "The Language-Game of Prophecy in Renaissance Poetics" that

²⁶Rachel Brownstein recounts the example of a young girl's transitional object: a blanket called night-night in the U. S., after a move to France, was greatly reduced in size and renamed *doudou*, as was the fashion among Parisian toddlers.

the classic appeal to the muse invokes an internally ordering model—the game of playing the poem to its close. The muse, mothered always by Memory, authorizes the inspiration provided by the game itself. In fact poets tell us that their poems inspire themselves, in their playing. The perfection of the playing to a close is the source of inspiration. The sense of authority the poet experiences comes from his being beside himself, but inside the rule of the poem in the making. The poet seeks the inspiring rules of the form of the sonnet, the elegy, the epic.

As maker or *poietes*, the poet is inspired by the formal problem of his poem, as a composer might be inspired by the form of the minuet. . . . Finally, the poet does not so much look for his own voice, to speak the poem, as he looks for the voice of the poem, to speak him. (*Colors of the Mind* 119-20)

Moreover, to write a poem in a given form, a certain amount of company is involved: if one writes a sonnet, for example, she has Petrarch, Shakespeare, Spenser, Barrett Browning, Millay, Hacker, et al. as her guides or companions. Writing in form, one converses with all others who have written that form, beyond the bounds of time. The form, persisting through generations, links the poet to tradition, as the figure of Virgil serves Dante. So the form of the poem itself may be said to be a muse.

Is there a zero-muse function? The final section of Diane Ackerman's *A Natural History of the Senses*, "Courting the Muse," describes the rituals of modern writers, including those who believe they have no rituals; these may be seen as idiosyncratic replacements of the *invocatio* in our skeptical technological age.²⁷

In *The Shadow of the Object*, Christopher Bollas has extended Winnicott's work, emphasizing the aesthetic moment as an echo of the original relationship with the mother. Bollas describes the mother as a "transformational object"; that is, before the infant is sufficiently individuated to perceive the mother as an object, the infant experiences her as a process transforming its existence: from hungry to full, wet to dry, etc. The character of

²⁷A further example of the muse's protean immortality, "How a Friendly Ghost Became a TV Muse" describes a popular new children's show about "an invisible friend, Ghostwriter, who communicates only by writing" on computer screens to inspire children to solve problems "by using their reading and writing skills." *New York Times* 11 July 1993: H26.

this primary relationship—a unique blend of the infant’s inherited or genetic makeup, the mother’s handling, and the infant’s perception and fantasies of the mother—sets the style of each individual’s aesthetic.

Bollas also delineates “The Patient’s Need to Muse.” Citing both *OED* definitions and psychoanalytic accounts, he describes musing as an important self-state that has “less to do with abstract thinking, analysing and the like, and more to do with the poetic and the sensory” (271). He describes musing during ordinary regression to dependence in terms applicable to creative inspiration, if one substitutes artist for patient/analysand and muse for analyst. Anne Sexton, for example, compares writing to therapy quite explicitly: “It is the split self, it seems to me, that is the mad woman. When writing you make a new reality and become whole. . . . It is like lying on the analyst’s couch, reenacting a private terror, and the creative mind is the analyst who gives pattern and meaning to what the persona sees as only incoherent experience.” Middlebrook explains that Sexton has “internalized the doctor as a function of the creative psyche” (64), which I would call the muse-function.

This process depends on the patient’s trust in the analyst, which, like the artist’s trust in the muse, may be compared to the infant’s trust in the mother or in the transitional object. Bollas likens the analysand musing on the couch to

something like the silence of the small child some ten to twenty minutes before falling asleep. During this very special transition from wakeful life lived in relation to important objects, to unconsciousness and the dream, children lie tranquilly in their beds, eyes open, *imagining* their life. Sometimes it will be a going over of some of the events of the day, often it may be wishing for some object, and there is a consistent interplay between gazing at external objects and contemplating internal objects. (263)

Rosamond Harding’s *Anatomy of Inspiration* cites many artists’ descriptions of inspiration as a kind of hypnagogic state, and concludes that “the state when both asleep and awake is the most favourable to inspiration” (12). Diane Ackerman reports that “novelist Mary Lee Settle tumbles out of bed and heads straight for her typewriter, before

the dream state disappears” (298). Edgar Allan Poe provides an eloquent account of hypnagogic visions in *Marginalia* (XVI):

There is, however, a class of fancies of exquisite delicacy, which are not thoughts, and to which, as yet, I have found it absolutely impossible to adapt language. I use the word “fancies” at random, and merely because I must use some word; but the idea commonly attached to the term is not even remotely applicable to the shadows of shadows in question.

(In *The Shadow of the Object*, Bollas coins the phrase “the unthought known” to refer to prelinguistic knowledge.)

They seem to me rather psychal than intellectual. They arise in the soul (alas, how rarely!) only at its epochs of most intense tranquillity, when the bodily and mental health are in perfection, and at those mere points of time where the confines of the waking world blend with those of the world of dreams. I am aware of these “fancies” only when I am upon the very brink of sleep, with the consciousness that I am so.

This transitional state, between consciousness and unconsciousness, allows access to both, or allows otherwise unconscious contents to become conscious; the boundary is porous.

I have satisfied myself that this condition exists but for an inappreciable point of time, yet it is crowded with these “shadows of shadows”; and for absolute thought there is demanded time’s endurance. These “fancies” have in them a pleasurable ecstasy, as far beyond the most pleasurable of the world of wakefulness or of dreams as the heaven of the Northman theology is beyond its hell. I regard the visions, even as they arise, with an awe which, in some measure, moderates or tranquillizes the ecstasy; I so regard them through a conviction (which seems a portion of the ecstasy itself) that this ecstasy, in itself, is of a character supernal to the human nature—is a glimpse of the spirit’s outer world;

Poe carefully delineates the conviction that links poet, prophet, and madman from time immemorial—that he has received visions from another world—and continues

I arrive at this conclusion, if this term is at all applicable to instantaneous intuition, by a perception that the delight experienced has, as its element, but the absoluteness of novelty. I say the “absoluteness,” for in these fancies—let me now term them psychal impressions—there is really nothing even approximate in character to impressions ordinarily received. It is as if the five senses were supplanted by five myriad others alien to mortality. (qtd. in Maritain 278)

Although Poe takes pains to differentiate these “supernal” ecstasies from the most pleasurable of dreams, they might be compared to those rare dreams that Jung calls

“numinous,” borrowing “Rudolf Otto’s term (in his *Idea of the Holy*) for the inexpressible, mysterious, terrifying, directly experienced and pertaining only to the divinity” (*Memories* 397). Or, in Pieper’s terms, if “[h]uman nature is so placed within its plane of existence that it remains essentially open to the sphere of the divine,”²⁸ Poe is describing a hinge whereby the mortal plane opens out to the “supernal.”

Poe’s impression that his five senses “were supplanted” by others “alien to mortality” might be compared to Bollas’s far more cautious description of the stages of ordinary regression to dependence:

4. . . . a subtle *transition* from hearing, seeing, sensing and feeling the properties of the outside world to hearing, seeing, sensing and feeling the inside world. There may be a continuous interplay between the two. Winnicott terms this the intermediate area of experiencing. This transition is not thought about, however, and is fundamentally pleasurable.

5. The patient reports being amidst the discovery of something important and new. I believe this to be a shift from reception to evocation.

6. . . . The patient may find himself profoundly moved as a result of the imaging . . .

7. It is after the stage of imagining and feeling (probably what Masud Khan means by the experiencing of one’s being) that a person in regression to dependence may suddenly ‘see’ what it is all about. I find this exceptionally difficult to describe. I believe that what happens is almost a metonymic act . . .

8. Finally, there is an intense need *to tell [the analyst]*. (260-61)

Bollas explains the patient’s move into silent states of “fundamental modes of perception,” whether tactile, visual, auditory, and/or olfactory: “It is as if the patient needs to cohere basic sense perceptions in order to move inward” (271). And so do writers.²⁹ Something very similar to this description of regression to dependence seems to take place in the experience of inspiration.

²⁸*Love and Inspiration* 56.

²⁹Natalie Goldberg, for example, describes the pay-off of free-writing practice: “I exercised the basic faculty of sight and let it ricochet back into memory and dream.” *Wild Mind* (New York: Bantam, 1990) 9.

Ackerman lists various writers' idiosyncratic ritual means of "Courting the Muse": "Schiller used to keep rotten apples under the lid of his desk and inhale their pungent bouquet when he needed to find the right word"; "Amy Lowell, like George Sand, enjoyed smoking cigars while writing"; "Colette used to begin her day's writing by first picking fleas from her cat, and it's not hard to imagine how the methodical stroking and probing into fur might have focused such a voluptuary's mind." While many writers work best standing up, lying down, walking, and/or naked, "Benjamin Franklin, Edmond Rostand, and others wrote while soaking in a bathtub," and Ackerman herself confides, "I have a pine plank that I lay across the sides of the tub so that I can stay in a bubble bath for hours and write." Turgenev sat at his desk with his feet in a tub of hot water and the window thrown open to the Russian winter. "Both Dr. Samuel Johnson and the poet W. H. Auden drank colossal amounts of tea—Johnson was reported to have frequently drunk twenty-five cups at one sitting" (293-96). Emily Dickinson preferred to work at night with little or no light in the solitude of her room, and to wear white.

As Stephen Spender explains such rituals in "The Making of a Poem":

There is always a slight tendency of the body to sabotage the attention of the mind by providing some distraction. If this need for distraction can be directed into one channel—such as the odor of rotten apples or the taste of tobacco or tea—then other distractions outside oneself are put out of the competition. Another possible explanation is that the concentrated effort of writing poetry is a spiritual activity which makes one completely forget, for the time being, that one has a body. It is a disturbance of the balance of the body and mind and for this reason one needs a kind of anchor of sensation with the physical world. (qtd. in Ackerman 296)

Winnicott stresses the importance of the transitional object for establishing the trust necessary to enter the transitional space and to enable play. Perhaps these rituals serve a similar transitional function: to soothe the artist with their pleasing familiarity so she feels free to lessen ego defenses such as reality testing, to dissolve boundaries, to escape secondary process thinking and relax into primary process thinking, which knows no time.

Time dissolves, and a day passes like an hour.

That elastic sense of time—vanishing into a kind of hyperspeed or crystallizing into stop-frame slow motion—is a mark of what psychologists call the ‘flow’ state, an altered awareness found in people performing at their peak . . . flow is now being charted as the thrill that motivates artists to keep at it year after year. . . .³⁰

Another possible explanation of these idiosyncratic rituals may be based on Van Gennep’s analysis of cultural “rites of passage” as all sharing a three-part structure of separation, transition, and incorporation. Writers’ rituals may function as a means of separation—from other people, from daily life, from ordinary thinking—into the transitional state, where visions are received (whether from unconscious parts of the self, a greater collective unconscious, or actual spirits from beyond the threshold); the need to tell, to write, to share the vision with others, corresponds to the act of incorporation.

Bollas’s account of the stages of ordinary regression to dependence also fits this three-part pattern, and his description of the kind of vision achieved through such regression is akin to that of the artist:

Most typically, however, the analysand reports having almost “seen something.” This is, of course, very difficult to describe. But I am not talking of hallucination. It is rather like an eidetic experience, accompanied by intense feeling and a sense of wonder or discovery. It may not be clear to the person what he has discovered but the picturing inside the mind of some person or event has the integrity of memory rather than the fracture of hallucination.

It is important, of course, to be aware that the nature of the experience at this point constitutes a memory. Like the aesthetic moment, it is a memory of the state of being a child in the mother’s care. When the patient is musing, with the analyst holding the space, the time and the process, I believe the adult is “inside” his childhood. (271)

As the muse descends from Mnemosyne, the aesthetic moment springs from memory—in this case, the analysand’s personal memory. In parallel terms, the muse may be said to

³⁰Professor Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, a University of Chicago psychologist who has led the research on flow and creativity, defines flow in “The Evolving Self,” 1993. *New York Times Book Review* 1 September 1994: 50.

“hold” the artist, connecting her to not only her individual past but her cultural past, Jung’s collective unconscious as a storehouse of images, the body of Tradition.

Or, as Paz puts it, using masculine terms:

Poetry is memory become image, and image become voice. The *other* voice is not the voice from beyond the grave: it is that of man fast asleep in the heart of hearts of mankind. It is a thousand years old and as old as you and I, and it has not yet been born. It is our grandfather, our brother, our great-grandchild. (155)

Memory marks both the diachronic mode of inspiration, in which the muse links the poet to the past, and the synchronic mode, in the Platonic and Wordsworthian sense that we seem to “remember” the timeless state we emerge from and to which we return. Orpheus’ looking back is an archetypal image of the relation between memory and song.

Let us invoke Nietzsche once more as we move away from the psychological dynamics of inspiration to a very old insight: that memory is the mother of the muse. Just as Dionysus symbolizes the bodily aspect of the muse—the shape-shifting aspect, which has to do with intoxication, possession, and ecstasy—Apollo represents the mental aspect, which has to do with memory, vision, and imagining. Both in balance are necessary. We need to remind ourselves of what was always known: that the myth of the muse tells the story of the way the mind is used by artists.

SOME ETYMOLOGICAL MUSING

This genealogy springing from memory is contained within the etymologies of both the substantives “muse” and “mind,” which come from the same Indogermanic root: *men-*, *-mon-*, *mn-*, to think, remember, intend, according to the *OED*. “Memory” is the first set of definitions given for “mind”; these progress from the obscure meaning, “1. the faculty of memory,” through “2. remembrance, recollection,” to “5. commemoration, memorial,” and “6. mention, record.” We can trace a similar progress from memory to art underlying its distant cousin, “muse.” (See *OED* definition cited at top of this chapter.)

The three older muses contain this tripartite process in their very names: Melete (Meditation), Mneme (Remembrance), Aoide (Song). Again, these three correlate to Van Gennep's ritual stages of separation, transition, and incorporation: by whatever means, the poet separates herself from ordinary reality, sinking into a state of "musing" or meditation; in the transitional state time disappears, allowing for remembrance or vision; the vision is then incorporated in song or some other medium that can be shared with the tribe.

The second set of definitions of "mind"—"thought, purpose, intention"—includes, "a spirit or temper of a specified character," which is close to the second definition of "muse": "The inspiring goddess of a particular poet. Hence, a poet's particular genius, the character of his style and spirit." The poet's "mind" is thus kin to her "muse"—a particular spirit, character, style.

The roots of the verb "muse" are different:

Muse *v.* [a. F. *muser*, to waste time, trifle, in OF. also to muse, meditate = Pr. *musar*, It. *musare*, to stare about, idle, loiter.

Prob. a derivative of the Rom. word represented by It. *muse*, OF. *muse*, muzzle, (cf. Florio's explanation of It. *musare*, 'to hould one's musle or snout in the aire'), the primary allusion being to the action of 'a dog sniffing the air when in doubt as to the scent' (Skeat). Possibly the sense 'to meditate' may be due to the influence of L. *musa*, MUSE *sb* 1 Cf. Med. L. *musare*, to play music.]

I. *intr.*

1. To be absorbed in thought; to meditate continuously in silence; to ponder.
2. To be at a loss to discover; to ask oneself meditatively, to 'wonder'
3. To be affected with astonishment or surprise; to wonder, marvel.
4. To gaze meditatively; to look thoughtfully or intently.

II. *trans.*

7. To ponder over, reflect upon; to contemplate, meditate. Now *rare*.
- 8-11 *Obs.* : To murmur discontentedly. To excogitate. To marvel at. To bewilder, puzzle. (emphasis added)

Yet the Latin substantive, *musa*, is presumed to influence the Old French verb, namely by giving "to muse" the sense of "to meditate"; as noted above, Meditation, Melete, is the name of one of the three oldest muses. The "probable" derivation of the verb "muse" from "muzzle," as in a dog's sniffing the air, is reminiscent of A. E. Housman's definition of poetry: "I could no more define poetry than a terrier can a rat, but I thought we both

recognized the object by the symptoms which it provokes in us" (Ackerman 295). The poet's recourse to a primary sensory experience—a dog's sniffing—to define poetry³¹ also echoes Bollas's account of musing as triggered by a moving into the senses. Also, the "aimless, idle" aspect of musing relates to the passive receptive state necessary for receiving inspiration; in Harding's casebook, artists report ideas come best when they are most relaxed and not trying to think.

As verbs, "mind" and "muse" have other surprising similarities. The first transitive definition of "mind," "To put (one) in mind *of* something, to remind" includes "to bring (an object) *to* one's mind," while the second definition, "To remember, have in one's memory; to think of (a past or absent object)" is related to the action of musing, and the third, "To mention, record," repeats the connection between remembering and rendering, or poesis.

"Thus thought in the work of art may be understood as a species of partial recognition," Fletcher suggests in his introduction to *Colors of the Mind*. "Thought as recognition is in part a recollective repetition." He goes on to reveal the relation of such thought to memory and to caring, which

is caught by Heidegger's play on the etymological link between *thinking* and *thanking*. "But if we understand memory in the light of the old word *thanc*, the connection between memory and thanks will dawn on us at once. For in giving thanks, the heart in thought recalls where it remains gathered and concentrated, because that is where it belongs. This thinking that recalls in memory is the original thanks." (7-8)

Orpheus' descent symbolizes such memory and caring—or, the intense vision in which the past comes to life. Art makes this descent possible: his music charms Cerberus, enabling Orpheus to enter the other realm. His power to bring Eurydice back alive is the

³¹Dickinson, too, has recourse to primary sensory experiences to define poetry, according to Thomas Wentworth Higginson's famous account of their first meeting in 1870; he called "a crowning extravagance" her remark that "If I read a book [and] it makes my whole body so cold no fire ever can 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 way I know it. Is there any other way." [L 642a].

same magic art. His looking back marks the threshold between the two realms—in a momentary loss of belief he fears the miraculous gift is but trickery (as if a child were suddenly to become aware of the “lie” of its own play)—and in this moment of returning consciousness loses her, but gives us poetry. She always vanishes, he always sings.

But whither Eurydice?

The problem as posed by Susan Howe in *My Emily Dickinson* is that “Identity and memory are crucial for anyone writing poetry. For women the field is still dauntingly empty.” Howe asks, “Is this a poem about Memory or is it about the identity of an American woman writing English poetry?” (17).

That sacred Closet when you sweep—
Entitled “Memory”—
Select a reverential Broom—
And do it silently.

’Twill be a Labor of surprise—
Besides Identity
Of other Interlocutors
A probability—

August the Dust of that Domain—
Unchallenged—let it lie—
You cannot supersede itself
But it can silence you—

[1273]

Like Eurydice. The muse remains necessary for poets to express their sense of openness and receptivity to an other realm, an August Domain, peopled by as many names and shapes as divinity or the unconscious. We have established ancient archetypes for and examples of the male muse, such as Trickster. This archaic boundary-breaker and shape-shifter, in psychological terms, serves as a transitional agent that links the separate individual back to the All from whence inspiration and indeed life spring. Through etymology and mythology, the muse is tied to memory and identity, still largely unfigured for women poets. Once we realize that the muse primarily represents the Other, and serves to break down boundaries between self and Other, we will recognize the gender

of the muse as a merely contingent, not universal, quality. We begin will expect the maleness of the woman poet's muse as a corollary of its function. So, to explore that "dauntingly empty field" of memory and identity for the woman poet, we will follow the trail blazed there by her male muse.

CHAPTER II: THE MALE MUSE

"I *am* Heathcliff!"

—Emily Brontë

"Madame Bovary, c'est moi!"

—Flaubert

GIVING BIRTH

Tragic and eternal dichotomy—if we concern ourselves with the deepest Reality, is this world of the imagination the same for men and women?
—Susan Howe¹

Why the male muse? The traditional gender assumption in the definition cited at the top of Chapter One—the poet is male, the muse female—can be proscriptive for women writers. Literary theory generally operates from this assumption, allowing no place for the woman poet. By performing a relatively simple act of role reversal, the concept of the male muse questions double standards in literary criticism: women's works are still not judged impartially.

Some say nine Muses—but count again.
Behold the tenth: Sappho of Lesbos.

Following this verse attributed to Plato in *The Greek Anthology* (Barnstone 30), the few great women poets admitted to the canon are often pedestalled as "The Tenth Muse," as were not only Sappho but Sor Juana de la Cruz, Louise Labé, Anne Bradstreet, Gabriella Mistral, and Emily Dickinson. The most extreme statement of this tendency is Robert Graves's claim in *The White Goddess* that "A woman who concerns herself with poetry should, I believe, either be a silent Muse and inspire the poets by her womanly presence . . .

¹Susan Howe, *My Emily Dickinson* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1985) 21-22.

or she should be the Muse in a complete sense . . . She should be the visible moon: impartial, loving, severe, wise" (447). This ostensible honor in effect denies women inspiration outside of themselves or in the "other" figured as masculine. Graves's contention that somehow women "are their own muses" is repeated unquestioned at least as recently as Warnke's 1986 study of Louise Labé, Gaspara Stampa, and Sor Juana de la Cruz. Presumably worshipping women as incarnations of the Goddess, Graves actually renders them less than human by turning them into miraculous exceptions, like Dr. Johnson's dog on his hind legs,² or chimeras, part woman, part "visible moon."

Besides placing the woman poet in a nearly impossible position, such notions have other detrimental effects. First, they support the historical tendency, which Marina Warner documents in *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form*, to see women as figures. While men are perceived as subjects, alive and changing, women are reified and fixed on pedestals. But creativity is protean: the writer in the act of writing may become male or female, like Tiresias or Orlando. I want to claim for women the same shape-shifting powers long accorded male artists, the same ability to become "other," to incorporate what lies outside the self, which, for women, may be imagined as masculine. One of the muse's main functions is to erase the boundaries of logic and individuation, to take the artist to the transitional space where gender and dualism are erased.

Rachel Brownstein points out the tendency of not only men but women, also, to see women as Figures—Poetry, Astronomy, Muse, Star—that is, static beings or objects. Even recent feminist criticism tends to fix women poets as figures: for example, Brownstein cites Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's objectification of Dickinson's white dress in *The Madwoman in the Attic*.³

²"Sir, a woman's preaching is like a dog's walking on his hind legs. It is not done well; but you are surprised to find it done at all." July 31, 1763 entry in James Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, vol.1 (London: Oxford UP, 1904) 309.

³Chapter 16, "A Woman—White: Emily Dickinson's Yarn of Pearl," asserts that "Dickinson's white dress implies not a single supposed person but a series of characters,"

John Berger cites the objectification of women by both men and women as a fact of art and life. "Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at," he claims in *Ways of Seeing* (46-47). "At the cost of a woman's self being split into two . . . [f]rom earliest childhood she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually. And so she comes to consider the *surveyor* and the *surveyed* within her as the two constituent yet always distinct elements of her identity as a woman."⁴

Berger makes a further distinction between the terms "naked" and "nude," which may help to delineate the differing treatment of men and women writers:

To be naked is to be oneself.

To be nude is to be seen naked by others and yet not recognized for oneself. A naked body has to be seen as an object in order to become a nude. (The sight of it as an object stimulates the use of it as an object.) Nakedness reveals itself. Nudity is placed on display. (54)

All artists become naked, but while men are allowed to be themselves and reveal themselves, or stay naked, women keep getting turned into nudes—that is, not recognized, objectified, displayed, and used, especially sexually. For example, as Adrienne Rich writes with dry fury in "Vesuvius at Home: The Power of Emily Dickinson,"

What might, in a male writer—a Thoreau, let us say, or a Christopher Smart or William Blake—seem a legitimate strangeness, a unique intention, has been in one of our two major poets devalued into a kind of naiveté, girlish ignorance, feminine lack of professionalism, just as the poet herself has been made into a sentimental object. "Most of us are half in love with this dead girl," confesses Archibald MacLeish. Dickinson was fifty-five when she died. (*On Lies, Secrets, and Silence* 167)

the costume for her "[i]mpersonating simultaneously a 'little maid' in white, a fierce virgin in white, a nun in white, a bride in white, a madwoman in white, a dead woman in white, and a ghost in white." (New Haven: Yale, 1979) 621-22.

⁴Berger further assigns gender-roles to these aspects of the self: "The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object." *Ways of Seeing* (New York: Penguin, 1977) 47. Although I reject these specific gender assignments, I accept the idea of the self as composed of male and female aspects, following Jung and Winnicott. See, for example, Chapter 5, "Creativity and its Origins," *Playing and Reality*, 65-85.

Two more recent examples are Plath and Sexton, who are turned into poetry pin-up girls, suicide stars, like literary Marilyn Monroes. Thirty years after her death, Plath is the covergirl selling the August 23-30, 1993 issue of *The New Yorker*, as “Norma Jean” is selling Gap khakis on page 7. Janet Malcolm’s piece, “The Silent Woman,” has nothing to do with Plath’s poetry, but concerns, rather, the biographical myths that swirl around the poet, who is thus effectively silenced, turned back into Eurydice, despite a life dedicated wholly to writing.

A corollary to the pedestalling of women writers is this tendency to read women writers biographically, with pointed interest in their sex lives, which acquires a prominence not similarly found in looking at male writers. One underlying assumption seems to be that men have imagination and can invent, but women can only write what they have actually experienced. For example, Warnke admits, “Why does one . . . devote time to idle speculation as to the love life of Louise Labé? . . . Perhaps because of an innate fascination on the part of a male writer, with the amorous life of a female artist” (27). Women’s writing is often misinterpreted through such fixations on the poet’s (imagined) sexual behavior.

Dickinson scholarship is particularly egregious: volume after volume of purported criticism turns into gossip, speculating upon either the pathology of her choosing to live alone or, more often, the identity of her supposed lover. The search for the biographical identity of “Master” has given way to a pitched battle over her sexual orientation. Northrop Frye cautions against the temptation to read her work as “biographical allegory,” calling her life not simply quiet but

a carefully obliterated one. There are poets—and they include Shakespeare—who seem to have pursued a policy of keeping their lives away from their readers. Human nature being what it is, it is precisely such poets who are most eagerly read for biographical allusions. We shall find Emily Dickinson most rewarding if we look in her poems for what her imagination has created, not for what event may have suggested it. (*Fables of Identity* 198)

I intend to provide an account of her relationship to her mysterious Master that is specifically focused on the poetical rather than the biographical.

Women have not been allowed sexual desire as either inspiration or expression: their lives, rather than their works, have been examined for "virtue," and they have been dismissed as artists for assuming the same sexual freedom granted male artists. For example, Labé was dismissed as *plebia meretrix*, Stampa as a *cortigiana honesta* (Prine 132-33). On the other hand, Dickinson was dismissed as "partially cracked" by her contemporary Thomas Wentworth Higginson⁵ and by psycho-biographer John Cody as "a queer, hyponchondriacal, and depressed old maid" (*After Great Pain* 438). Yet another kind of restriction upon women artists' sexuality is some feminists' disapproval of women's desire for or expression of the masculine as retrogressive or harmful, as if it were a form of "sleeping with the enemy."

Similarly, for male artists, inspiration by or desire for other men has often been misinterpreted, ignored, or distorted. This would include not only writers whom we would label "homosexual" in the twentieth century but also such complicated inspirational triangles as that of Dorothy and William Wordsworth and Coleridge.⁶ A muse may but need not be an object of erotic desire (such as Dante's Beatrice and Virgil); many poets have both male and female muses, as Shakespeare demonstrates in his sonnets. By tracing the development of this vital myth of the muse, I attempt to open up a traditional metaphor for creativity to make room for all artistic variations.

⁵L 481, n (2: 570).

⁶Mark Van Doren claims in his introduction, "Dorothy was good for him, but Coleridge was necessary. The great poet in him slept till Coleridge woke him up, by conversation and example." *William Wordsworth: Selected Poetry*, ed. Mark Van Doren. (New York: Random House, 1950) xvi.

More recently, Wayne Koestenbaum asserts that "In 'Tintern Abbey, Wordsworth obscures his tie to Coleridge by addressing Dorothy: Wordsworth is not the only male writer in history to snap the bond between erotic entanglements and literary partnerships, to deny that he has used another man as muse." *Doubletalk: The Erotics of Male Literary Collaboration* (New York: Routledge, 1989) 110.

Although biological procreation remains an obvious “archetypal analogy” for literary creation, this is but a metaphor, which applies regardless of the genders of poet and/or muse. The concept of art as the symbolic progeny of two men is at least as old as Plato’s *Symposium*, a crucial text establishing the variations of desire and “begetting,” and as new as Wayne Koestenbaum’s *Double Talk: The Erotics of Male Literary Collaboration* (1989). As Carolyn Heilbrun points out in *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny* (xiii), most readers forget that Aristophanes’ myth in the *Symposium* describes three original whole beings: male-male, female-female, and female-male.⁷ Thus, to the extent that the muse may represent the poet’s “missing half,” both women and men may invoke male muses, just as both may invoke female muses.

⁷Exerpts from Aristophanes’s panegyric on love: “In the first place there were three sexes, not, as with us, two, male and female; the third partook of the nature of both the others and has vanished, though its name survives. The hermaphrodite was a distinct sex in form as well as in name, with the characteristics of both male and female, but now the name alone remains, and that solely as a term of abuse. Secondly, each human being was a rounded whole, with double back and flanks forming a complete circle; it had four hands and an equal number of legs, and two identically similar faces upon a circular neck, with one head common to both the faces, which were turned in opposite directions. It had four ears and two organs of generation and everything else to correspond. These people could walk upright like us in either direction, backwards or forwards, but when they wanted to run quickly they used all their eight limbs, and turned rapidly over and over in a circle, like tumblers who perform a cart-wheel and return to an upright position.”

After Zeus punishes these formidable beings for overweening pride by splitting them in two, “just like fruit which is to be dried and preserved, or like eggs which are cut with a hair,” the result is that “each half yearned for the half from which it had been severed. When they met they threw their arms round one another and embraced, in their longing to grow together again, and they perished of hunger and general neglect of their concerns, because they would not do anything apart. . . . So they went on perishing till Zeus took pity on them, and hit upon a second plan. He moved their reproductive organs to the front. . . .”

“Those men who are halves of a being of the common sex, which was called, as I told you, hermaphrodite, are lovers of women . . . Women who are halves of a female whole direct their affections toward women and pay little attention to men; Lesbians belong to this category. But those who are halves of a male whole pursue males, and being slices, so to speak, of the male, love men throughout their boyhood . . . Such boys and lads are the best of their generation, because they are the most manly.” *Symposium*, trans. Walter Hamilton (New York: Penguin, 1951) 59-62.

Socrates relates Diotima's defense of the love between two men as superior "because the children that they share surpass human children by being immortal as well as more beautiful," citing as examples Homer's and Hesiod's poetry (91). This ancient attempt to claim poetic birth as men's natural sphere while restricting women to biological birth seems to indicate womb-envy. Men admire women's procreative ability and imitate it artistically, then claim artistic creation as not only their exclusive domain but the superior one. Thus the muse archetype, which begins descriptively, expressing an intuition that men receive the gift of creativity from women, turns proscriptive: the idea of a woman poet becomes a "psychological absurdity" because she cannot "have" the muse.

The following passage from Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* combines the analogies of procreation and divine inspiration, as it points the way toward the concept of the male muse.

As with other products of divine activity, the father of a poem is much more difficult to identify than the mother. That the mother is always nature, the realm of the objective considered as a field of communication, no serious criticism can ever deny. . . . But the poet . . . is not the father of his poem; he is at best a midwife, or, more accurately still, the womb of Mother Nature herself . . . the poet has to give birth to the poem as it passes through his mind. . . .

The true father or shaping spirit of the poem is the form of the poem itself, and this form is a manifestation of the universal spirit of poetry, the "onlie begetter" of Shakespeare's sonnets who was not Shakespeare himself, much less that depressing ghost Mr. W. H., but Shakespeare's subject, the master-mistress of his passion. When a poet speaks of the internal spirit which shapes the poem, he is apt to drop the traditional appeal to female Muses and think of himself as in a feminine, or at least receptive, relation to some god or lord, whether Apollo, Dionysus, Eros, Christ, or (as in Milton) the Holy Spirit. (98)

Frye names various guises of the male muse, classical and Christian, as representing "the internal spirit which shapes the poem." Clearly "the universal spirit of poetry" is neither masculine nor feminine but may be personified as either, according to the needs of the poet, which makes Shakespeare's "master-mistress" the quintessential androgynous model.

Although Frye begins with the paired assumptions that Nature is female and the poet is male, as he considers with an open mind the actual experience of inspiration and

creation, he cannot hold them: in his reluctance to call the poet the “mother” of the poem, he shifts from “father,” to “midwife,” to “womb,” and, finally, “in a feminine, or at least receptive, relation to some god or lord.” Frye’s hesitance to admit the poet’s “feminine” role leads to the speculation that one psychological function of the “traditional appeal to female Muses” at the most “receptive” moment of inspiration is to stem sexual anxiety.⁸ Perhaps the male poet, to protect himself against the feminine role he has been taught to fear and despise, yet which is manifestly necessary for creation, splits off his female element and projects it as the muse; by veiling the transaction (whose model is impregnation by the god) in this gender-reversal, he may preserve his threatened sense of masculinity. The corollary for women would be splitting off “masculine” aspects, such as power and aggression, and projecting them as a male muse.

Some poets seem to accept more easily their own feminine role in creation, ascribing a masculine role to the muse. For example, Gerard Manley Hopkins’ sonnet “To R. B.” clearly casts the poet as mother of the poem:

That fine delight that fathers thought; the strong
 Spur, live and lancing like the blowpipe flame,
 Breathes once and, quenched faster than it came,
 Leaves yet the mind a mother of immortal song.
 Nine months she then, nay years, nine years she long
 Within her wears, bears, cares and combs the same:
 The widow of an insight lost she lives, with aim
 Now known and hand at work now never wrong.
 Sweet fire the sire of muse, my soul needs this;
 I want the one rapture of an inspiration.
 O then if in my lagging lines you miss
 The roll, the rise, the carol, the creation,
 My winter world, that scarcely breathes that bliss
 Now, yields you, with some sighs, our explanation. (68)

Although the “fine delight that fathers thought” is identical with “the one rapture of an inspiration,” Hopkins, assuming the muse must be female, resorts to the phrase, “Sweet

⁸Koestenbaum suggests, for example, that “If receiving is unmanly, a heterosexual poet might well wish to discard his Friend as muse, and embrace a feminine Nature instead,” as Wordsworth turns from Coleridge to Dorothy/Nature. *Doubletalk* 102.

fire the sire of muse,” to describe his experience of inspiration as an influx of masculine power.

Ezra Pound writes more graphically that “creative thought is an act like fecundation, like the male cast of the human seed” (Koestenbaum 121). In *Double Talk: The Erotics of Male Literary Collaboration*, Koestenbaum cites the following comic verses Pound sent Eliot in a letter suggesting extensive revisions to *The Waste Land*.

SAGE HOMME

These are the Poems of Eliot
By the Uranian Muse begot;
A Man their Mother was,
A Muse their Sire.

How did the printed Infancies result
From Nuptials thus doubly difficult?

If you must needs enquire
Know diligent reader
That on each Occasion
Ezra performed the caesarean Operation. (120)

Koestenbaum asserts further that “Pound, Eliot’s male muse, is the sire of *The Waste Land*” (121). As in the Frye passage above, “midwife” (or, here, obstetrician) serves as a useful cover for more overtly sexual—and threateningly homosexual—metaphors for man’s siring role in the creative act.

Rilke, who composed or received the *The Duino Elegies* and *The Sonnets to Orpheus* in what translator Stephen Mitchell calls “surely the most astonishing burst of inspiration in the history of literature” (*Sonnets* 8), has no qualms about his feminine position. As Rilke writes to a young woman,

The deepest experience of the creative artist is feminine, for it is an experience of conceiving and giving birth. The poet Obstfelder once wrote, speaking of the face of a stranger: “When he began to speak, it was as though a *woman* had taken a seat within him.” It seems to me that every poet has had that experience in beginning to speak. (*Sonnets* 163)

In his introduction to Mitchell’s translations of *The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke*, Robert Hass calls Rilke androgynous, defining androgyny as “the pull inward, the erotic

pull of the other we sense buried in the self" (xxxii).⁹ Rilke also writes to Lou Andreas-Salomé [June 26, 1914] in "feminine" terms:

I am like the little anemone I once saw in the garden in Rome: it had opened so wide during the day that it could no longer close at night. It was terrifying to see it in the dark meadow, wide open, still taking everything in, into its calyx, which seemed as if it had been furiously torn back, with the much too vast night above it. And alongside, all its prudent sisters, each one closed around its small measure of profusion. (*Sonnets* 173)

Keats writes in strikingly similar terms, "it seems to me that we should rather be the flower than the Bee . . . let us open our leaves like a flower and be passive and receptive—"10

These "masculine" and "feminine" roles of muse and poet have nothing to do with the biological sex of either party, as Maud Gonne makes clear writing to Yeats: "our children were your poems of which I was the Father sowing the unrest & storm which made them possible & you the mother who brought them forth in suffering & in the highest beauty."¹¹ For Gonne as for Hopkins, the mother is the poet who labors and bears, while the muse has the easier role of "sowing." For a woman poet, such gender reversal is simply unnecessary.

Art is ultimately epicene, as Anne Sexton claims in "Consorting With Angels." "I was tired of being a woman," the speaker complains, "tired of the gender of things." She addresses her dream: "You are the answer. / You will outlive my husband and my father," and has a vision of angels, "each one like a poem obeying itself, / performing God's

⁹Cf. Aristophanes's panegyric, especially the "common sex" or "hermaphrodite," above.

¹⁰ To John Hamilton Reynolds, Feb. 19, 1818, *Selected Poems and Letters by John Keats*, ed. Douglas Bush (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1959) 266.

¹¹ *The Gonne-Yeats Letters, 1893-1938*, ed. Anna MacBride White and A. Norman Jeffares (New York: Norton 1993), qtd. in *The New York Times Book Review* 10 January 1993: 13.

functions, a people apart.” Losing her “common gender” and “final aspect,” she becomes “not one thing or the other,” and finally claims, “I’m no more a woman / than Christ was a man” (67). Or, in Harold Bloom’s words, “The making that is poetry is god-making and even the ephebe or starting poet is already as much daemon as man or woman.”¹²

The male muse provides a way to experience such daemonic androgyny for women poets: “masculine” parts of the self may be split off and objectified in the muse.

Winnicott’s emphasis on androgyny posits a “female” and “male” element in everyone; the terms may be problematic, though he takes pains to stress their metaphorical nature: they have nothing to do with being a woman or a man.¹³ “The male element *does* while the female element (in males and females) *is*” (81). The female element, based on the original merger with the breast, identification with the other, is primary, and without it, nothing else avails: “After being—doing and being done to. But first, being” (85). (Wordsworth describes this state beautifully and attests to its crucial importance: “No outcast he, bewildered and depressed,” is the infant babe blest with a good-enough mother.)

Winnicott stresses one’s need of both elements, and contends that creativity is one of the common denominators between men and women—yet in our culture, with its rigid gender roles, a woman is more likely to “split off” her “active doing,” which the culture calls “male,” and which she needs to recover in order to write (or act) (*Playing and Reality* 72). While gender roles are not simple contraries, I speculate that whereas male poets invoke the muse to give them access to the traditionally “feminine” spheres of receptivity, sensitivity, fecundity, and shapeliness (and to ward off anxiety about adopting “feminine”

¹² *Figures of Capable Imagination* (New York: Seabury P, 1976) 55.

¹³ Lesser notes that “Winnicott, too, is finally unable to rest comfortably with the usual psychoanalytic distinction between masculine and feminine. ‘I was now no longer thinking of boys and girls or men and women but I was thinking in terms of the male and female elements that belong to each,’ he writes in a 1968 fragment. At the end of that same fragment he notes: ‘I cannot avoid it, but just at this stage I seem to have abandoned the ladder (male and female elements) by which I climbed to the place where I experienced this vision.’” *His Other Half* 267.

roles), women poets may experience great anxiety about claiming traditionally masculine privileges of assertion, power, and writing itself, and may project these aspects outwards into male muses. Many critics, such as Rich, Diehl, and Martin, see Dickinson's "Master" as precisely that—a projection of her split-off male aspect.¹⁴ Dickinson's letters employ both male and female terms to refer to herself, such as "Brother Emily," "Uncle Emily," and a "bachelor" who was once "a Boy."¹⁵ An elaborate relationship with her male muse enables this creative androgyny.

Poetry leads past possession of self to transfiguration beyond gender.

(Howe 138)

¹⁴Wendy Martin notes that Rich and Diehl "speculate that Dickinson's use of 'Master' might . . . have referred to her active, creative self—her own inner agency, which she feared would desert or destroy her. Her British counterparts commonly assumed male or at least neuter pseudonyms—Mary Ann Evans became George Eliot, Charlotte and Emily Brontë chose Currer and Ellis Bell—and it is possible that Dickinson also referred to her creative self as male.

An early letter to Abiah Root reveals that Dickinson was in the habit of personifying aspects of herself as male. . . . Two years later she writes a poem about her alter ego or imaginative faculty as a boy named Tim." *An American Triptych: Anne Bradstreet, Emily Dickinson, Adrienne Rich* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1984) 103.

¹⁵Dickinson calls herself "a Bachelor" in an 1859 letter to Elizabeth Holland; she signs herself "Brother Emily," writing to her cousins, Louise and Francis Norcross; in a letter to Edward Dickinson, she refers to when she was "a Boy." L 204, 315, 367, 405, and 571.

THE MAN QUESTION (or, THE BODY IN QUESTION?)

It is probably necessary to be a woman (. . .) not to renounce theoretical reason but to compel it to increase its power by giving it an object beyond its limits.

—Kristeva (146)

It is true that the unknown is the largest need of the intellect, though for it, no one thinks to thank God.

—Dickinson

To write about women's poetry and how it is produced, one needs to theorize women's imagination and unconscious as they relate to poetry, language and identity—that "dauntingly empty" field. I use psychoanalytic theory to elucidate my understanding but am not doctrinaire, taking from each theorist whatever seems true to my experience. Freud, the great pioneer, of course provides the basis, but needs to be corrected about the feminine, as does Jung.

I start necessarily from my own experience, and extrapolate to that of other women, as deduced from conversation and reading, rather than from received ideas of the feminine imagination, which are, in psychoanalysis, ultimately based on Freud. French feminism, based on Lacan, founds women's consciousness on lack—because men conceive of women as lacking what men have. But we do not experience our bodies as lacking; we are our own models. There is no reason, in experience or theory, for girls to think they or their mothers had a penis which they lost.

I remember quite clearly my pity for my brother when we were tiny enough to be bathed together: my own trim form seemed streamlined and ideal, while his seemed vulnerable and awkward, even silly. My awe and terror at seeing my mother's body in the tub focused on her breasts, her pubic hair, and her size—sheer terror of metamorphosis, of the unthinkable knowledge that I would one day, uncontrollably, turn into that. (Who could worry about an unimaginable phallus while confronted with those breasts?) Is it not

more reasonable that we would each begin with our own body as the model for others, and then need to account for the differences we later perceive? So it is not surprising that men conceive of women as lacking what they have, but it is both illogical and contrary to the experience of any woman I know to think that women conceive of ourselves that way.

Joke: There is such a thing as penis envy.

Men have it.

I argue that not only female consciousness but language itself does not center around the phallus or the lack thereof. Most of us learn language from our mothers and learn to read in our mothers' laps. Men are silent, women own language—in the Jewish tradition, at least.

Joke 2: Jewish boy comes home, excited: "Mom, I got a part in the school play!"

"Who are you?"

"The Jewish father."

"What, you couldn't get a speaking part?"

"He had no part in language," Barthes captions a photo of one grandfather, and the other, "He, too, had no part in language." In Barthes' family, as in my own (and, I suspect, many others), "language belonged to the women" (*Roland Barthes* 12-13).

I don't believe the phallic marks entrance into language: any separation of the infant from its mother is traumatic, and needs no phallus to accomplish it; language is first used by the child to get its needs met by its mother. Object relations' description of language as transitional, linking child and mother, marking both the separation and connection between the self and other, seems a more accurate account.

My preference for Winnicott and object relations over Lacan and French feminism is based on the twin issues of language and experience.¹⁶ Winnicott bases his exceptionally

¹⁶Nancy Chodorow's *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory*, especially chapter 9, "Psychoanalytic Feminism," provides a useful summary of the tortuous distinctions between and relations among object relations and Lacanian feminist theories (New Haven: Yale UP, 1989) 180-97.

humane theories on clinical practice with children and adults, attempting to describe real human experience and behavior. Lacan, with his emphasis on language, has been adopted by feminist and literary theorists and developed without concern for clinical experience.

Object relations also acknowledges the nonlinguistic: anyone who has felt unable to express fully a dream or an emotion knows there is experience outside of language. Christopher Bollas calls the infant's prelinguistic knowledge "the unthought known." He defines the "self" as "the history of many internal relations,"¹⁷ which may be likened to Kristeva's "heterogeneous subject" or "*subject in process*."¹⁸ According to Bollas, we each experience "the—theoretically infinite—parts of the self articulated through the interplay of internal and external reality. . . . There is no one unified mental phenomenon that we can term self, although I shall use this term as if it were a unity; it is true to say that all of us live within the realm of illusion" (9). The self, which "has continuity over time and is in possession of its own history" (10), contains both conscious and unconscious.¹⁹

There is a sense in which the unconscious remains unknown. Freud found the unconscious a "cauldron of fury," which he described as having, by turns, masculine or

¹⁷*The Shadow of the Object: Psychoanalysis of the Unthought Known*, by Christopher Bollas (New York: Columbia UP, 1987), which extends Winnicott's work, is discussed in detail in chapter 1. I quote here from pp. 9-10.

¹⁸Julia Kristeva opposes to "the transcendental ego" the subject "*formulated as operating consciousness*." "It is of course Freud's theory of the unconscious that allows the apprehension of such a subject; for through the surgery it practiced in the operating consciousness of the transcendental ego, Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis did allow, not for (as certain simplifications would have it) a few typologies or structures that might accommodate the same phenomenological reason, but rather for heterogeneity, which, known as the unconscious, shapes the signifying function." *Desire in Language* (New York: Columbia UP, 1980) 135.

¹⁹Varying from Freud, Lacan, and Winnicott, Bollas defines the "ego" as an "unconscious organizing process," or "a mental structure that evolves from the dialectic of the internal and the external," which constitutes the later "subject" that is "capable of a meaningful interpretation of our existence, and the meaningful presence of others." *The Shadow of the Object* 7-8.

feminine characteristics, or both—but not as inherently either masculine or feminine. It is before or beyond gender. What falls into the cauldron is the repressed: both Jung and Winnicott explain that socialization encourages men to repress what is labeled “feminine,” women the “masculine”; thus, for most of us, the cauldron contains many aspects designated as belonging to the “opposite” sex.²⁰ Each individual differs: female-identified men will repress much that is “masculine,” and male-identified women, much that is “feminine.” Not all women writers are male-identified, as is often asserted. Women writers may experience the cauldron as feminine: for example, Marguérite Duras claims that the “writing of women is really translated from the unknown,” and that when writing “I let something take over inside me that probably flows from femininity.”²¹ Yet other women may experience it as masculine: the contemporary American poet Ann Lauterbach, for example, associates language with the masculine, with the “other”; the typewriter serves as a phallic connection to and identification with her dead father, a journalist. Associations of kinds of language and thought with masculine or feminine are idiosyncratic, based upon personal experience. Certainly there are shared cultural elements, yet neither language nor the unconscious can be called inherently masculine or feminine.

²⁰As Dorothy L. Sayers remarks in *Unpopular Opinions*, “The first thing that strikes the careless observer is that women are unlike men. They are the ‘opposite sex’— (though why ‘opposite’ I do not know; what is the neighboring sex?) But the fundamental thing is that women are more like men than like anything else in the world.’ What the spectrum metaphor suggests is that opposites can also be neighbors, at least to some degree.” Lesser, *His Other Half* 263.

²¹Quoted by K. K. Ruthven, who then critiques her account: “A Freudian explanation of such moments would be that a withdrawal of ego control permitted the release of unconscious materials which Duras then experienced as a surprising encounter with something other than her familiar self. What is questionable in her account, accordingly, is not the nature of the experience she records (for many writers, men as well as women, have left similar testimonies), but the assumption that what she had access to when invaded by her unconscious was an essential femininity inaccessible to the analytic and cognitive techniques she acquired in the course of being educated in a man’s world.” *Feminist Literary Studies: an introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984) 97.

Kristeva argues for poetic language as a dialectic between the semiotic and symbolic dispositions, which seems a truism no matter what one names the two terms: Lacan's Imaginary and Symbolic;²² Freud's unconscious and conscious, or primary and secondary process; Winnicott's inner and outer, or self and other; Nietzsche's Dionysian and Apollonian. What I question is Kristeva's gendering of these dispositions as patently maternal and paternal. She discusses only male writers, who may well experience the unconscious, semiotic, primary cauldron as feminine, yet the reverse may be equally true for women writers. Surely language has neither testes nor ovaries, though it names and, in a sense, contains them both: language is beyond sex and gender. (While gender may be largely socially constructed by language, it has also its somatic bedrock of sex, though "female" and "male" are two ends of a continuum which includes all variations.)²³

²²By treating Lacan's distinction between the Imaginary and the Symbolic as a difference between the maternal and the paternal, Kristeva is able to claim that the Lacanian model has a masculine bias to it, since it conceives of language as a unitary phenomenon confined to a Symbolic order whose characteristics are undeniably masculine. . . . In the course of revising Lacan, she redefines the Imaginary somewhat confusingly as *le sémiotique* . . . an alternative mode of signification to the Symbolic. Its constitutive articulations are bundled together in what Kristeva, borrowing a term from Plato's *Timaeus*, calls the *chora*— 'a pre-verbal, pre-Oedipal locus' (in the words of Alice A. Jardine's helpful gloss) 'where the world is perceived by the child as rhythmic, intonational, melodic'. This pre-verbal *chora* is 'anterior to [Symbolic] signification, denotation, syntax, the word, even the syllable': it is 'the primary organization of instinctual drives by rhythm [and] intonation', and 'functions in discourse as a supplementary register to that of the sign and meaning'. . . . Interplay between *le sémiotique* and the Symbolic constitutes the subject in language, not as a fixity but as a subject in process (*sujet en procès*)." Ruthven, *Feminist Literary Studies* 98-99.

²³In "The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female Are Not Enough," an astonishing article on hermaphroditism, Anne Fausto-Sterling suggests that "intersexuals may constitute as many as 4 percent of births," though now commonly "normalized" in infancy through hormonal and surgical alteration. "[T]he standard medical literature uses the term *intersex* as a catch-all for three major subgroups with some mixture of male and female characteristics: the so-called true hermaphrodites, whom I call herms, who possess one testis and one ovary . . . ; the male pseudohermaphrodites (the "merms"), who have testes and some aspects of the female genitalia but no ovaries; and the female pseudohermaphrodites (the "ferms"), who have ovaries and some aspects of the male genitalia but lack testes. Each of those categories is in itself complex; the percentage of male and female characteristics, for instance, can vary enormously among members of the same subgroup. . . . I suggest that the three intersexes, herm, merm, and ferm, deserve to

Symbolic language as the Law of the Father, centered around the phallus, seems a purely imaginary construct, skewed to and by male bias. Surely language is far older than patriarchy. What Margaret Mead writes of culture in “Sex and Achievement” may be applied to language as well:

It takes considerable effort on the part of both men and women to reorient ourselves to thinking—when we think basically—that this is a world made not by men alone, in which women are unwilling and helpless dupes and fools or else powerful schemers hiding their power under their ruffled petticoats, but a world made by mankind for human beings of both sexes. . . . where one sex suffers, the other sex suffers also. (251-52)

Women neither speak nor write a different language; language is the shared creation of its speakers through the ages. Language occurs between the self and the other; we use it to communicate with others, perhaps even those others inside ourselves. Although Susan Howe believes that “gender difference does affect our use of language, and we constantly confront issues of difference, distance, and absence, when we write,” she continues, “That doesn’t mean I can relegate women to what we ‘should’ or ‘must’ be doing.” Howe cites as an example “‘The Laugh of the Medusa’ by the French feminist Hélène Cixous . . . an often eloquent plan for what women’s writing *will* do. The problem is that *will* too quickly becomes *must*. She writes, ‘I write woman: woman must write woman. And man, man’” (12-13).

Lacan and French feminism erect an immense edifice upon one of Freud’s gravest mistakes—penis envy—and end up foundering in a corollary reductiveness: valorizing the feminine as semiotic and presymbolic, associated with drives and the body, or that old stereotype: man = mind, woman = body. To construct the feminine imagination around the female body by replacing the phallus with clitoris and vulva results in notions such as Irigaray’s and Cixous’s *écriture féminine*,²⁴ or Paula Bennett’s “clitoral” reading of

be considered additional sexes each in its own right. Indeed, I would argue further that sex is a vast, infinitely malleable continuum that defies the constraints of even five categories.” *The Sciences* March/April 1993: 20-24.

Dickinson's poetry: all those little bees, dewes, crumbs, pearls, berries, peas, pebbles, pellets, beads, and nuts, I kid you not.²⁵ Criticism that can claim a poem Dickinson sent to her cousin "is an invitation to cunnilingus" (168), or begin a sentence, "In the poetry privileging the clitoris" (171), or make statements such as "Whether Dickinson satisfied her appetite in reality, or, as is more probably, only in autoerotic fantasy (masturbation), does not matter" (178) is as reductive as any speculation upon the identity of Dickinson's supposed male lover.²⁶

In *Emily Dickinson: Woman Poet*, Bennett attempts to claim Dickinson as an anti-patriarchal writer grounded in the women's culture and writing of her era. "Dickinson was replacing the hierarchies of phallogocentric discourse—" Bennett writes "with a (paradoxical) cliterocentrism of her own" (173), and ends the book with Dickinson claiming "a *jouissance*—of her own" (184). Bennett rejects the masculine as the enemy, citing with approval

²⁴Margaret Homans critiques "an apparently reactionary tendency among some feminists today to designate and celebrate "the feminine," taking cultural fictions for actuality." Hélène Cixous "begins by decrying the standard associations of passivity and corporeality with the feminine and activity and abstraction with the masculine. . . . Cixous writes of an ideally bisexual woman who would erase traditional boundaries between masculine and feminine, but then goes on to grant her a kind of writing that scarcely differs from the old notions of women's capacities. The new writing will be an inscription in the body, and the symbol for this writing will be her milk: a white ink." *Women Writers and Poetic Identity* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1981) 4.

²⁵See *Emily Dickinson: Woman Poet* (Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 1990) 173. Bennett seriously explains, "I am attempting to set limits on this discussion by defining clitoral images as small *and* round. If, however, we use either Moers's images of small objects (*per se*) or Schor's definition of the clitoral as 'detail,' then Dickinson's poetry, in so far as it privileges both smallness and detail, is clitoral throughout." 212, n. 28.

By the same reasoning, so is all of Japanese poetry. (This kind of body-fetishism, like early "Freudian symbols," is far too crude to correspond to the various sexual body.)

²⁶One wants to shield from such remarks the poet who wrote, "In all the circumference of Expression, those guileless words of Adam and Eve never were surpassed, 'I was afraid and hid Myself.'" [L 946].

"It's another case of what T. E. Lawrence said about Shakespeare in a 1925 letter to Robert Graves: "There was a man who hid behind his works, with great pains and consistency. Ergo he had something to hide: some privy reason for hiding. He Being a most admirable fellow, I hope he hides successfully.'" Lesser, *His Other Half* 123.

Susan Howe's dismissal of T. H. Johnson's observation that Dickinson had a male muse as one more instance of male appropriation: "He [Johnson] called his Introduction 'Creating the Poems' then gave their creator a male muse-Minister."²⁷

The "man question" is a central issue for feminism, as for women writers. To blame men as a class for the sex-gender system that has historically oppressed women, and to attempt therefore to excise the masculine from women's art, is to hamstring the woman artist by denying her access to the whole range of human experience, through which male artists range freely. The problem of masculinity for women poets in general and Dickinson in particular is illuminated by poet and critic Suzanne Juhasz in *Naked and Fiery Forms*. Juhasz summarizes and rejects criticism of Dickinson based upon either the search for the lover, or "the frustrated spinster theme":

Both approaches are phallogocentric: that (a) Emily Dickinson wrote poetry because she did not have a sex life or (b) the only explanation for such poetry was an active (albeit secret) sex life. Both interpretations lodge the male at the center of a woman's creativity. (10)

And omit lesbian love. Yet is Bennett's "cliterocentrism" preferable to the old "phallogocentrism?"

There is another alternative: imagocentrism. The male muse figures maleness in Dickinson's work as an aspect of her imagination. Once we perceive this maleness of her muse, we avoid the kind of reductive biographical reading Frye calls "bad allegory" (*Fables* 96), and we allow Dickinson and other women writers the same respect and autonomy accorded male artists inspired by the feminine. Our search for a numinous reading of inspiration therefore needs to recognize that Dickinson belongs to a tradition of women poets.

²⁷Howe, 'Some Notes,' *HOW(ever)* 11, qtd. in Bennett, *Emily Dickinson* 192, n. 16.

THE POETICAL CONTEXT: WOMEN'S WRITING

A. Critics Consider the Male Muse

The male muse appears in a small number of feminist critical works published mainly within the last fifteen years. Irene Tayler's *Holy Ghosts: The Male Muses of Emily and Charlotte Brontë* is the only book centered around the idea. Tayler also relies on Winnicott, tracing the development of the Brontës' male muses from their childhood transitional objects, the toy soldiers that inspired their juvenilia: Emily's Parry develops into Heathcliff, Charlotte's Duke of Zamorna into Rochester. Tayler concludes that "for both sisters the creative force through whom one writes novels and poems was the Holy Ghost—as active doer, as Genius or visitant—only for Emily was that Ghost a figure of death" (287), while Charlotte's muse "was no less than the Word Himself" (302).

Tayler's Christian image of the muse overlooks both destructive and erotic aspects. The muse's erotic deadliness survives not only in the male romantic poet's muse ("La Belle Dame Sans Merci") but also in Heathcliff. Yet Tayler prefers as muse the "God of Visions" of Emily Brontë's poetry, a male spirit that "animates, pervades, broods, changes, sustains, dissolves, creates and rears. This is the traditional *hagion pneuma* or Holy Ghost of Scripture" (47). Thus she calls Paul Emmanuel in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* "The Muse Triumphant" and Heathcliff "The Diminished Muse," because "bereft of his holiness," he is "no visionary messenger guiding her to new heights" (75-76). (He hangs puppies.) But it is precisely Heathcliff's demonic nature that makes him a much more powerful figure for the muse than Paul Emmanuel, "the Comforter" (224). The muse is not a nice nurturer but an often deadly force, as poets have attested to since Homer.²⁸ More recently, Robert

²⁸Besides blinding Demodokos in the *Odyssey*, in the *Iliad* the Muses also disabled Thamyris, as Dodds reminds us in *The Greeks and the Irrational* (99):

and these in their anger struck him maimed, and the voice of wonder
they took away, and made him a singer without memory. . . . (*Il.* 2.594ff)

Graves has claimed “a true poem is necessarily an invocation of the White Goddess, or Muse, the Mother of All Living, the ancient power of fright and lust . . . whose embrace is death” (24).

Elizabeth Imlay, however, does address the dark side of the Brontës’ muses in *Charlotte Brontë and the Mysteries of Love: Myth and Allegory in Jane Eyre*. As Imlay observes, “Graves does not take into account that, whereas he is haunted by the powerful White Goddess, who is his love, his muse and his destruction, a woman may be haunted by a Black God, and that her personal mythology may be functioning in reverse.” Imlay claims that “Charlotte literally saw her Black God,” and recognizes Rochester “as Charlotte’s own passion, her own erotic force” projected as muse (158-59). She further asserts that the Brontës “were each obsessively linked to a spiritual world dominated by a dark male power, amoral, ruthless, fascinating. This obsession inspired literature of a remarkable order” and “Heathcliff and Rochester are as much deserving of the title of muse as are Calliope or Melpomene or even Milton’s Holy Spirit” (160). I shall argue that Dickinson is similarly “obsessively linked to a spiritual world dominated by a dark male power”—her Connecticut Valley in the Hands of An Angry God.²⁹

This question of the muse’s destructive power is crucial, for it provides the main reason many feminists reject the possibility of the male muse. Mary K. DeShazer’s *Inspiring Women: Reimagining the Muse* exemplifies this stance. DeShazer repeatedly ignores or dismisses evidence of women poets invoking male muses to support her claim

²⁹The reference is to Jonathan Edwards’s famous sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” delivered near Northampton in 1741; I quote a line here as a reminder of the notion of deity Dickinson inherited:

“The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked . . . you are ten times more abominable in His eyes than the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours.” *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, 3rd ed., vol. 1 (New York: Norton, 1989) 338.

that rather than “following the male model of invoking a passive Other, creative women have called forth strong female figures from their matriarchal and mythical heritage who serve as sources of power and sustenance” (5). Like Tayler, DeShazer imagines the muse as nurturer, which severely restricts the muse’s function.³⁰

DeShazer believes in theory in “eschewing male-defined binary oppositions (subject/object, active/passive) in favor of a fluid, nonhierarchical construct—a female creative continuum” (27), yet in practice she considers poetry within a rigid binary opposition (male/female, evil/good). For example, DeShazer claims that although “the image of the muse-possessed madman is a common one, then, such a poet is *no passive victim*. Instead, he is an *active master-possessor* who invokes his female muse, *appropriates* her generative capacities, and claims her power—and her—for himself” (10, emphasis added). She sums up this image of the male poet as “perp”:

The main problem with reversing the traditional paradigm is that the woman poet has difficulty separating the male muse from other intimidating and debilitating male forces . . . A “father lover,” claims Caroline Heilbrun, is “not a bad image of a muse, sexes reversed, except that the man, in turning to the muse, turned to what seduces, and the woman turns to what rapes.” (108)³¹

³⁰Even so, Ruth Perry’s study of “mothering the mind” admits that “Men *can* mother, as the bond between G. H. Lewes and George Eliot reveals.” *Mothering the Mind: Twelve Studies of Writers and Their Silent Partners*, ed. Ruth Perry and Martine Watson Brownley (New York and London: Homes and Meier, 1984) 8, qtd. in DeShazer 199.

³¹Even as rapist, man can be a powerful muse. Hades, for example, whose rape and abduction of Persephone (in the Homeric Hymn II, To Demeter), furnishes the central myth of the Eleusinian mysteries. Persephone’s difficult passage underground is necessary for fertility, spring, rebirth.

“The rites at Eleusis probably originated in primitive agricultural ceremonies of purification, the purpose of which was to promote the fertility of the soil and the growth of crops. Apparently the process of planting seeds in the earth that nourished them and from which sprang the living crops suggested that man, whose body was placed in the earth when he died, could also take on renewed life in the Underworld. Thus participation in the ceremonies at Eleusis became a means of seeking immortality for the initiated.” Feder, *Crowell’s Handbook* 133.

Reading Persephone as woman poet (partially) sacrificed to a male god to ensure yearly fertility parallels almost exactly Graves’s “Single Poetic Theme”—“the life, death and resurrection of the Spirit of the Year, the Goddess’s son and lover” (422).

This assumes that women poets cannot tell the difference between Shakespeare and Tarquin—or, worse, that there *is* no difference.

“Emily Dickinson best illustrates this *perverse* absorption with a male muse-figure, an Other whom the poet both desires and fears,” DeShazer observes, and recommends that women poets turn instead, as Adrienne Rich does, to a female muse who is “free of the *patriarchal shackles* that the masculine muse *inevitably* imposes” (28, 147, emphasis added). Moreover, Rich claims that

For woman in her sexual nature the Muse *cannot* be the human lover (as man) because it is man and man’s world which makes it especially difficult for her as artist. Man may at various times exist for her as teacher, idol, guru, master, all dominating roles; he may also exist as a friend with whom she struggles in all the warmth and friction of her affections; but he is *definitely* not the Muse (unless indeed, the anti-Muse, the demon lover, like Sylvia Plath’s “Daddy”). . . . Possibly the idea of the Muse is man’s way of projecting and objectifying his own feminine principle—along with his negative feelings about that principle.³² (emphasis added)

The unruly imagination remains impervious to such normative arguments. Why *cannot* the muse be a woman’s “way of projecting and objectifying her own” masculine “principle, along with” her “negative feelings about that principle”? The question boils down to: are men simply too evil to inspire women?

Hades as animus represents the principle of the Other, which a woman may experience as the enemy, a rapist, but as she goes underground (i.e., delves into the unconscious, proceeding through deeper levels of gnosis), he is revealed as a necessary part of the divinity within—her own primal energy, the source of creativity and power. Art has its roots here in the deepest darkness, the underground, Hades.

³²“Poetry, Personality and Wholeness: A Response to Galway Kinnell,” *Field: Contemporary Poetry and Poetics* 7 (Fall 1972): 14, qtd. in DeShazer 135.

Rich also “sees the word *muse* as a patriarchal construct to be rejected along with terms like *humanism* and *androgyny*.” DeShazer x.

“I recurred in dream to the old lover, the male muse,” writes poet and critic Rachel Blau DuPlessis, who asks bluntly, “Is he in fact an evil figure?”³³ DuPlessis wrestles with the problems raised by the male muse in a more complex and balanced manner, accepting that the “muse is one of the major emotional institutions of poet and poem-making” (25). Of Keats’s “La Belle Dame Sans Merci” she writes, “This too is thralldom—of male to female, for it works both ways, this sexual system. But no matter what happens to the knight, he retains cultural control of the story.” The “central struggle of the woman writer” is that “while the sexual system works both ways, the cultural system works in one direction only” (24). That is, men control the story—especially if one chooses as male muses/lovers writers such as Ezra Pound, D. H. Lawrence, and Richard Aldington, as H.D. did. In H.D.’s novel *Bid Me To Live*, the Lawrence character critiques the poet-heroine’s work:

“I don’t like the second half of the Orpheus sequence as well as the first. Stick to the woman speaking. How can you know what Orpheus feels? It’s your part to be a woman, the woman vibration, Eurydice should be enough. You can’t deal with both.” (21)

(Woman must write woman.) And Pound believed that “intelligence is a kind of concentrated seminal fluid in the brain” (26). Thus, though DuPlessis states that H.D.’s “Pound memoir could suggest this equation only:

male muse for female poet = female muse for male poet”

DuPlessis rejects it.

Simple reciprocity? No. Wrong valence. Unbalanced equation. For everywhere the grave social and cultural asymmetry between the sexes impedes this simplicity. We must understand the context. The male muse does not satisfy the female poet. What then does she choose to sustain her? (37)

³³“Family, Sexes, Psyche: An essay on H.D. and the Muse of the Woman Writer,” *The Pink Guitar: Writing as Feminist Practice* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990) 23.

DuPlessis's answer is that for "the woman writer, the family is the muse" (38), providing a "DIAGRAM OF THE MUSES," which includes MOTHER, SISTER, CHILD, and PSYCHE, along with FATHER ("Judge. Astronomer. Magus. Doctor. Professor. Master. Wise Man. Healer. God. Freud,") and BROTHER ("Pound, Aldington, Lawrence, Macpherson, the attachments: the sexual solar brothers" (32). DuPlessis claims this "multiple family muse" as H.D.'s invention to "give her support for her vocation without the tribute which the male muse, the lover, inevitably and repeatedly exacted—pain, sexual despair, isolation, poetic losses" (37).

Though DuPlessis usefully reminds us that cultural imbalance between the sexes complicates role reversal, the "tribute" the male muse exacts does not seem so different from the price exacted by the muse of any poet—Keats, say, or even Pound. And I cannot help but be skeptical of a solution that entails domesticating women's writing lives as well. (This may well be H.D.'s solution, but what of the woman writer who has no family, or who writes to escape her family?) Nevertheless, DuPlessis's notion of a "multiple family muse" may be useful in explaining Dickinson's devotion to her sister-in-law Susan and dependence on her sister Vinnie, in conjunction with her invocation of a male muse.³⁴

"The literary images available to women all demonstrate to women their unfitnes for poetry," Margaret Homans claims in *Women Writers and the Poetic Identity: Dorothy Wordsworth, Emily Brontë, and Emily Dickinson* (29). The main assumption underlying such restricting images is that woman = nature, speaking subject = man. (I would add that muse = woman, poet = man is central among these literary images, and suggest that

³⁴I agree with Joanne Feit Diehl that "The female serves Dickinson most often not as direct inspiration but as audience and comforter. Susan Gilbert Dickinson, her sister-in-law, shared more of Dickinson's poems than anyone else during the poet's lifetime. And Dickinson listened to Sue's opinions, although she did not always follow her suggestions. . . . But the dominating "lover," the desired yet threatening master who retains the power to destroy or give life to the poet is throughout Dickinson's poems and letters, male." "Come Slowly—Eden': An Exploration of Women Poets and Their Muse," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 3.31 (1978): 574, n. 7.

reversing these roles can and does produce interesting results, despite or even because of cultural asymmetry.) Homans, like DuPlessis, considers uneasily the gender-reversal of poet and muse; though she compares Emily Brontë's "male visitants" to "a masculine poet's muse," Homans judges this as merely

a first step toward the internalization of poetic power . . . unlike the usual situation in which a female muse's power exists to be overcome, the poet's ability to master her muse is in this case genuinely in question . . . the content of these poems is a continuous effort to wrest the visitants' power away from them and make it her own. (104-5)

Like Taylor, I cannot share Homans's view that "Emily [Brontë] struggled with her muse to gain control over language" (*Holy Ghosts* 305). And Homans underestimates the traditional muse, whose power does not merely "exist to be overcome," who is a goddess, and often deadly. The relative power and destructiveness of the male muse thus must always be compared with the deadly aspect of the traditional female muse.

Homans compares Emily Dickinson to Emily Brontë in that she too "invokes an array of masculine figures of power in reference to the poetic process," and for "both poets these masculine figures function as something like a muse. Both poets love and fear these figures, and both indicate a sense of alienation from their poetic powers, though Dickinson far less than Brontë" (206-7). Does a woman's male muse evidence any greater alienation from poetic powers than a man's female muse? Gender difference may be simply the most obvious way to render the "otherness" of inspiration to which so many poets attest.

Homans continues

This similarity could make one of the strongest cases for the existence of *a common and recurrent experience of feminine poethood*. However, while this alienation is Brontë's major experience of poetry, for Dickinson it is only one aspect, perhaps a stage, of her endeavor to establish her own poetic voice outside the tradition of masculine discourse. Brontë is genuinely "stalled" by the danger and power of the masculine figures she invokes, but to say this about Dickinson is to *overrate* the importance of the masculine in a poetics that endeavors to liberate itself from restrictive terms like those of gender. (208, emphasis added)

I do not judge the author of *Wuthering Heights*³⁵ to be “genuinely ‘stalled’ by the danger and power of the masculine figures she invokes,” but rather to be genuinely inspired by them.

Homans contends that Dickinson tries to liberate herself from gender, as from all dualistic terms, through language that collapses opposites and shows them to be one. Dickinson does indeed transcend gender within a greater transcendence of dualism and logic, but the sheer number of heavily gendered poems dramatizing her ongoing passage to transcendence seems crucial. I believe these poems reveal in great detail “a common and recurrent experience of feminine poethood,” which Homans *underrates* as “a first step” or merely “a stage” in poetic growth.

Joanne Feit Diehl’s “‘Come Slowly—Eden’: An Exploration of Women Poets and their Muse”³⁶ is one of the earliest and most carefully nuanced considerations of Dickinson’s male muse. Adapting the Bloomian model,³⁷ Diehl concludes that for Dickinson as a woman poet, the male muse is necessarily conflated with male precursor poets, who thus must be “warded off” as well as courted, which she finds responsible for Dickinson’s extraordinary and unresolved ambivalence toward poetry. This interpretation raises several questions. First, would a mind as subtle as Dickinson’s be unable to distinguish precursors from muse, simply because they share the same sex?

³⁵Homans is discussing poetry exclusively. However, I consider *Wuthering Heights* as a poem (as does Susan Howe), and Emily Brontë’s lyric verse as for the most part juvenelia, and suggest that not until *Wuthering Heights* did she find her true form.

³⁶*Signs* 3.31 (1978): 572-87; Chapter 1 in Diehl’s *Dickinson and the Romantic Imagination* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1981).

³⁷“Reversing the traditional pattern, Dickinson required and achieved male Muses.” Harold Bloom, introduction, *Emily Dickinson: Modern Critical Views*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1985) 3.

Second, do women poets suffer from the same anxiety of influence (reversed or doubled) that men may experience? Like the Oedipus complex on which it is based, Bloom's "anxiety" applies to women in the most tenuous or problematic fashion. The Electra complex has yet to be established as a clear alternative for women; if it were, we might expect to see Dickinson competing with and attempting to replace other women writers, while courting a male figure—which does not seem the case.

Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* posits women's "anxiety of authorship" and concomitant search for women precursors in opposition to Bloom's "anxiety of influence." (Gilbert and Gubar also note the male muses of Charlotte Brontë and Christina Rossetti, as well as acknowledging Dickinson's complex and fruitful relationship with her male muse.) Dickinson looks to both male and female precursors: though Shakespeare is her favorite, and Diehl argues most convincingly throughout *Emily Dickinson and the Romantic Imagination* for the influence of Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, and Emerson upon her work, Dickinson clearly reverences the Brontës, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and George Eliot as precursors as well. "Emily [Brontë] was both recluse and visionary," Howe writes, claiming that a "close reading of her life and work is crucial for understanding Emily Dickinson. Out of Brontë's Self, out of her Myth, the younger woman chose to pull her purity of purpose" (61).

Third, can one so simply separate precursor from muse along gender lines: must the beloved source of inspiration be of the opposite sex, the dread precursor of the same sex? Following Longinus, the precursor often serves as muse as well. But even if we accept that Dickinson's Master refers to "the precursor" as "a composite male figure . . . a father/lover that surpasses individuals," does it necessarily follow that "the composite father is the main adversary"? (Diehl, *Signs* 574). Must the relation to precursors be one of antagonism and usurpation? Only if we accept the Bloomian model, which reads literature through Freud's family romance. Bloom asserts the [male] poet's impossible desire to be self-created, "for what strong maker desires the realization that he has failed to create

himself.” Thus he is obsessed with the “failure to have begotten oneself” and “the melancholy of the creative mind’s desperate insistence upon priority” (*The Anxiety of Influence* 5, 96, 13).

Yet we “are all incorporations and extensions of—take in and provide aspects of—one another,” as Nancy Chodorow quotes Freud in *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory* (147). She also quotes Joan Rivière, who poses a trenchant (though inadvertent) critique of Bloom’s theory: “When this proposition meets with an intense emotional rejection, there is clearly a direct association in the hearer’s mind . . . with danger, as though anything inside one which is not ‘oneself’ pure and simple is and must be dangerous—or pathological . . . [which] rises from . . . an acute anxiety” (158).

My notion of the precursor muse (to distinguish it from Bloom’s agon) relies on Plato’s *Ion* and Longinus *On the Sublime*,³⁸ with Dante’s Virgil as paradigm. Another example might be Keats’s adulation of Shakespeare, as evidenced by the following letter to Benjamin Haydon of May 10-11, 1817:

I hope for the support of a High Power while I clime this little eminence and especially in my Years of more momentous Labor. I remember your saying that you had notions of a good Genius presiding over you—I have of late had the same thought. . . . —Is it too daring to Fancy Shakspeare this Presider?

Toward the end, Keats writes, “I never quite despair and I read Shakspeare—indeed I shall I think never read any other Book much—” and “I am very near Agreeing with Hazlit that Shakspeare is enough for us—”. He signs off, “So now in the Name of Shakspeare Raphael and all our Saints I commend you to the care of heaven!” (253-55).

³⁸“One poet is suspended from one Muse, another from another; he is said to be “possessed”: for he is taken hold of. And from these primary rings, the poets, others are in turn suspended, some attached to Orpheus, some to Musaeus, from whom they derive inspiration” Plato, “Ion,” *Collected Dialogues of Plato* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1988) 536.

And “from the great genius of the men of old do streams pass off to the soul of those who emulate them, as though from holy caves; inspired by which, even those not too highly susceptible to the god are possessed by the greatness which was in others.” Longinus *On the Sublime*, trans. A. O. Prickard (London: Oxford UP, 1961) 30. See Chapter 1 for fuller discussion of the precursor muse.

Keats's fantasy that Shakespeare is the good Genius presiding over him and his sense of Shakespeare's living presence accompanying him on his "clime" seem closer to Dante's reverence toward Virgil than to Bloom's anxiety. Dickinson's reverence for other poets, preeminently Shakespeare, feels more Keatsian than Bloomian. Of Shakespeare she wrote, "Why clasp any hand but this?" and said to Higginson, "Why is any other book needed?" as Sewall notes in *The Life of Emily Dickinson* (2: 700). And, more generally,

She saw herself as a poet in the company of the Poets—and, functioning as she did mostly on her own, read them (among other reasons) for company. . . . They are "the dearest ones of time, the strongest friends of the soul," her "Kinsmen of the Shelf," her "enthraling friends, the immortalities."
(Sewall 2: 670)

Thus, even if her muse is a composite male precursor, her relationship with him seems hardly antagonistic.

The critics above all acknowledge to some extent the existence of male muses: Tayler, Imlay, and Gilbert and Gubar acknowledge the positive possibilities of the male muse for the woman poet; DeShazer, Homans, DuPlessis, and Rich dismiss it as an unfortunate phase in feminine poetic development, an awkward nineteenth-century adolescence to be outgrown, while Diehl provides the most complex consideration of both negative and positive aspects of the male muse. Diehl, Homans, DuPlessis, DeShazer, and Rich base their negative assessments of the possibility of the male muse for women on the assumption that, since men own language and control culture, a male muse must therefore be daunting or deadly, if not downright silencing.

B. Poets Speak of the Male Muse

Nevertheless, poets themselves, both women and men, provide the best testimony for the male muse.³⁹ Poet and critic Wayne Koestenbaum, for example, assumes men's inspiration by male muses throughout *Doubletalk*, though the muse-question is subsumed by his discussion of male literary collaboration. Charles Olson's remarkable study, *Call Me Ishmael*, is a profound example of the way one male poet may be inspired by another—Herman Melville, in this case, who is himself inspired exclusively by the masculine, particularly by Shakespeare and Hawthorne. (Susan Howe's *My Emily Dickinson* owes much to *Call Me Ishmael*.)

Many women poets, such as H.D., Mina Loy, Louise Bogan, Anne Sexton, and Diane Ackerman, quoted above, attest to their male muses. "Like Aphra Behn, who spoke of 'my masculine part, the poet in me,' [May] Sarton suggests that the aggressive, male side of the female self, the Jungian animus, creates literary works" (DeShazer 11). Despite Rich's insistence that "he is *definitely* not the muse," Sylvia Plath seems quite aware that

³⁹Erica Jong's "*Arse Poetica*" imagines a male muse who is far from the rapist implied by some criticism:

III

Once the penis has been introduced into the poem, the poet lets herself down until she is sitting on the muse with her legs outside him. He need not make any motions at all. The poet sits upright & raises & lowers her body rhythmically until the last line is attained. She may pause in her movements & may also move her pelvis & abdomen forward & back or sideways, or with a circular corkscrew motion. This method yields exceptionally acute images & is, indeed, often recommended as yielding the summit of aesthetic enjoyment. Penetration is at its deepest. Conception, however, is less apt than with other attitudes.

This position is also suitable when the muse is tired or lacking in vigor since the poet plays the active role. Penetration is deepest when the poet's body makes an angle of 45 degrees with the muse's. A half-erect muse will remain in position when this attitude is adopted since he cannot slip out of the poem.

Fruits and Vegetables (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971) 27-28.

Ted Hughes functions as her father-substitute, mentor and male muse (Stevenson 103, 113, 135). Plath writes in her journal, for example, of “my own father, the buried male muse and god-creator risen to be my mate in Ted” (Stevenson 128). And, later, in a letter to the poet Ruth Fainlight, Plath writes, “[p]sychologically, Ruth, I am fascinated by the polarities of muse-poet and mother-housewife. When I was ‘happy’ domestically I felt a gag in my throat . . . the muse has come to live here, now Ted has gone” (Stevenson 268, 262). What stress falls on absence, which invents, then, the “lost other” as muse: the necessity of romantic distance is something Marina Tsvetaeva, like Sexton and Dickinson, well understood. Perhaps Plath’s fatal mistake was attempting to marry her muse.

Both Plath and Hughes read Graves quite seriously; Plath’s fascination with the “polarities of muse-poet and mother-housewife” is especially chilling in light of Graves’s contention that “The White Goddess is anti-domestic; she is the perpetual ‘other woman’ . . . the temptation to commit suicide in simple domesticity lurks in every maenad’s and muse’s heart” (449). Plath’s “Daddy” is perhaps in part responding to Graves’s relegation of woman to the role of muse, as may be heard in the poem’s echo of the following passage from *The White Goddess*:

No Muse-poet grows conscious of the Muse except by experience of a woman in whom the Goddess is to some degree resident . . . his true love is for him the embodiment of the Muse . . . the real, perpetually obsessed Muse-poet distinguishes between the Goddess . . . and the individual woman whom the Goddess may make her instrument for a month, a year, seven years, or even more . . . (Graves 490)

If I’ve killed one man, I’ve killed two—
The vampire who said he was you
And drank my blood for a year,
Seven years, if you want to know. (Plath, *Collected Poems* 224)

Graves’s “Single Poetic Theme”—“the life, death and resurrection” of the male poet as both “the Goddess’s son and lover” (422)—epitomizes the heavily gendered theory of poetic inspiration, which leaves no room for the woman poet. As if rewriting Graves’s “Single Poetic Theme” and “triple goddess” in her own terms, Plath created her own triple

Black God—Death/Daddy/Ted—whose embrace was indeed death. As Imlay observes of Charlotte Brontë, Plath’s “personal mythology may be functioning in reverse”; the muse can be horrifying, murderous, regardless of gender.

Many poets experience the muse as a dangerous, destructive power, whether male or female. The great twentieth-century Russian poet, Anna Akhmatova, for example, expresses her ambivalence toward her “Muse-sister” rather playfully in “The Secrets of the Craft”:

3. MUSE
 A burden I can’t lighten or lose,
 And yet most people call her “Muse”—
 They say: “In meadows you receive her. . .”
 “Ravings,” they say, “Divine as they come. . .”
 She’ll toss you about more roughly than fever,
 And then for more than a year keep mum. (78)

This poet who survived and recorded revolution, purges, and both world wars also writes of her vocation more gravely in “The Muse”:

When at night I await the beloved guest,
 Life seems to hang by a thread. “What is youth?” I demand
 Of the room. “What is honor, freedom, the rest,
 In the presence of her who holds the flute in her hand?”

But now she is here. Tossing aside her veil,
 She considers me. “Are you the one who came
 To Dante, who dictated the pages of Hell
 To him?” I ask her. She replies, “I am.” (*Poems* 48)

Thus the muse’s devastating power should be recognized as an attribute of divinity and the mystery of genesis, not a sex-linked characteristic.

Adrienne Rich, in her ovular 1971 essay “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision,” defines the larger area of debate into which this dissertation enters:

Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for women more than a change in cultural history: it is an act of survival . . . how our language has trapped as well as liberated us, how the very act of naming has been till now a male prerogative, and how we can begin to see and name—and therefore live—afresh. (*On Lies, Secrets, and Silence* 35)

Rich broaches the subject of the male muse, quoting classical anthropologist Jane Harrison, “Why do women never want to write poetry about Man as a sex—why is Woman a dream and a terror to man and not the other way around?” Rich responds, “Man appears as, if not a dream, a fascination and a terror . . . and the source is simply, Man’s power—to dominate, to tyrannize, choose or reject the woman . . . not from anything fertile or life-giving in him” (*On Lies* 36).

Yet even Rich herself invokes male muses in her early work, culminating in “Orion,” which she describes in the same essay as “a poem of reconnection with a part of myself I had felt I was losing—the active principle, the energetic imagination, the ‘half-brother’ whom I projected, as I had for many years, into the constellation Orion” (*On Lies* 45). Moreover, I would argue, four thousand years of poetry by women (much of it anonymous, part of oral traditions) demonstrates that women have written and do write poetry about man as a sex—as “a dream, a fascination and a terror,” precisely.⁴⁰

I am especially indebted to Rich’s empathic reading of Dickinson in “Vesuvius at Home: The Power of Emily Dickinson” (1975), in which she is perhaps the first to acknowledge that the “masculine pronoun in her poems can refer simultaneously to many aspects of the ‘masculine’,” whether god, patriarchal power figures, or her own creative powers, and that “it is far too limiting to trace that ‘He’ to some specific lover” (*On Lies* 162). Furthermore, “the real question . . . is how this woman’s mind and imagination may have used the masculine element in the world at large, or those elements personified as masculine—including the men she knew; how her relationship to this reveals itself in her images and language” (165).

Rich suggests that “a woman’s poetry about her relationship to her daemon—her own active, creative power—has in patriarchal culture used the language of heterosexual love or patriarchal theology,” (170) which Rich clearly finds regrettable. Nevertheless, Rich

⁴⁰See, for example, Alike and Willis Barnstone’s *A Book of Women Poets: From Antiquity to Now* (New York: Schocken Books, 1992).

particularly illuminates “He put the Belt around my life,” [273] and “He fumbles at your Soul” [315]:

These two poems are about possession . . . about the poet’s relation to her own power, which is exteriorized in masculine form, much as masculine poets have invoked the female Muse . . . Since the most powerful figures in patriarchal culture have been men, it seems *natural* that Dickinson would assign a masculine gender to that in herself which did not fit in with the conventional ideology of womanliness. (164-66, emphasis added)

The tricky term “natural” has a strange duplicity in this context, a discussion of supernatural possession. Rich notes that Thomas Johnson said Dickinson “often felt herself possessed by a daemonic force, particularly in the years 1861 and 1862 when she was writing at the height of her drive. There are many poems . . . which could be read as poems of possession by the daemon—poems which can also be, and have been read, as poems of possession by the deity, or by a human lover” (170).

For example, Rich considers “My Life had stood—a Loaded Gun” [754] as the central

poem about possession by the daemon, about the dangers and risks of such possession if you are a woman, about the knowledge that power in a woman can seem destructive, and that you cannot live without the daemon once it has possessed you. The archetype of the daemon as masculine is beginning to change, but it has been real for women up until now. (173)

Rich’s discomfort regarding the masculine, and wish to avoid it, are apparent in the last line. She reads the split in the poem as not simply between male and female, but between human Master and gun, “an object . . . inactive until the hunter—the owner—takes possession of it,” when it becomes a deadly defender who “*speaks for him*”: the split expresses Dickinson’s extreme ambivalence toward power. “The poet experiences herself as loaded gun, imperious energy; yet without the Owner, the possessor, she is merely lethal. The pronoun is masculine; the antecedent is what Keats called “The Genius of Poetry” (174).

Keats himself imagines his personal Genius in male form—as Shakespeare. I shall explore in depth Dickinson’s projection of The Genius of Poetry in male form, arguing

that it is not only what Homans terms “a common and recurrent experience of feminine poethood” (208), but a far more common and recurrent experience of poethood in general than has been heretofore acknowledged.

Though poets male and female have attested to their own experience of male (as well as female) muses, critics attempting to valorize the feminine at the expense of the masculine often explain away evidence of the male muse as merely an unfortunate stage in poetic development. One common misconception is that the muse ought to be nice, and a corollary is that men are just too nasty for the job. But if we acknowledge the muse’s archaic and extremely ambivalent power for both men and women—which, like Trickster’s, consists largely in dissolving such boundaries as male/female and good/evil—we have everything to learn from one of our greatest poets’ accounts of her being inspired by The Genius of Poetry.

PART TWO

A SHAPELESS FRIEND:
EMILY DICKINSON'S MUSE

Conscious am I in my Chamber
Of a shapeless friend—
He doth not attest by Posture—
Nor Confirm—by Word—

Neither Place—need I present Him—
Fitter Courtesy
Hospitable intuition
Of His Company—

Presence—is His furthest license—
Neither He to Me
Nor Myself to Him—by Accent—
Forfeit Probity—

Weariness of Him, were quainter
Than Monotony
Knew a Particle—of Space's
Vast Society—

Neither if He visit Other—
Do He dwell—or Nay—know I—
But Instinct esteem Him⁺
Immortality—

+Report Him

CHAPTER III: MASTER AS MUSE

Raised a living muse ourselves, worth the whole nine of them.

—Dickinson

The difficulty of reading Dickinson is legendary. How to read all one thousand, seven hundred and seventy-five poems, over one thousand letters and one hundred prose fragments? How to avoid imposing a narrative on this vast and elusive oeuvre, whose very order is disputed? And yet, as Rich claims, Dickinson's greatness cannot be measured by any number of "perfect lyrics," but only by her work as a whole, the produce of "a mind engaged in a lifetime's musing on essential problems of language, identity, separation, relationship, the integrity of the self; a mind capable of describing psychological states more accurately than any poet except Shakespeare" (*On Lies* 167). My angle of approach to these essential problems will be via the muse, that "shapeless friend" in her "Chamber" whom Dickinson most often represented with male pronouns and imagery.

The very idea that Dickinson has a male muse is fiercely contested. Again, the question arises: in what sense, exactly, may a muse be said to "exist" or "be?" It is a bit like arguing over the existence of a character in a dream: the dreamer asserts, "I saw him, he spoke to me, and I wrote this down." Is he then "real?" Following Heraclitus, we tend to define as real not that separate world we each turn to at night in our dreams but the shared world of waking existence. Yet the muse has a kind of intermediate shared reality: that is, shared by many artists, but not by everyone, and on a plane somehow between dreaming and waking. And it appears differently to each artist, yet with a common enough function that various artists call it "muse," whether they believe in its existence or merely use the term to symbolize the mystery of the creative process. So the muse may be described as a being within the realm of imagination, or as a personification of imagination itself, which the poet finds useful (if not essential) to creativity, and which leaves its traces in the work as a character, an image, and/or in invocations. (Though the term muse is also used to

refer to those who nurture and comfort the poet, enabling the creative work, and who may serve as the poet's audience, I am less interested in this biographical sense than in the poetic traces in the work of that mysterious being who inspires, possesses, and at times speaks through the poet.)

Obviously I join those scholars, including Johnson, Gilbert and Gubar, Diehl, Bloom, and, to some extent, Homans, Gelpi, and Rich, who identify the male figure in Dickinson's work as muse. This does not mean that some man or other gets the credit for inspiring her work. In a chapter entitled "The Poet and the Muse" in *Emily Dickinson: An Interpretive Biography*, Johnson describes the "Daemonic force that . . . possessed her," asserting that "There is not the slightest question that she recognized a quality of possession singularly her own, and twice described it" (74-75), as in poem 679 (quoted at the top of Part II) in male terms. Unfortunately, Johnson's conviction that the Master was the Reverend Charles Wadsworth, along with his not surprisingly sexist¹ 1950's attitude, also leads him to make statements such as, "Whereas Newton had awakened her to a sense of her talents, Wadsworth as muse made her a poet" (80), which may partially explain why some feminists reject the entire notion of her male muse as a "patriarchal" imposition. But there is no need to throw the muse out with the bathwater.

Nor does belief in Dickinson's male muse imply that she was heterosexual. Such reductive conclusions belie ignorance of how poetry comes to be written. "When I state myself, as the Representative of the Verse—it does not mean—me—but a supposed person," Dickinson famously writes to Higginson [L 268]. Poetry exists on a supposed plane, feeding off the events of daily life, but transmuting them through its alchemy. Overwhelmed by the room full of gold Dickinson left behind, many critics seem anxious to reduce it back to a pile of straw. Whether this man or that man, or Susan Huntington

¹As Speed Hill jokes, "Everybody was, pre-1970."

Gilbert Dickinson in a beard, is claimed to be found hiding in the hay is beside the point.² As Howe writes, “Her talent was synthetic; she used other writers, grasped straws from the bewildering raveling of Being wherever and whenever she could use them. Crucial was her ability to spin straw into gold” (28).

What it does mean to consider Dickinson’s male muse is simply to observe that she frequently describes in masculine terms (as in poem 679 above) a daemonic force or being who inspires her, and to investigate the import of this observation. Again, my aim is to read Emily Dickinson’s work not biographically, but to examine instead her allegorical use of male figures. It is not important whether these male figures represent “real” people in her life, or parts of herself: my focus is upon the intermediate realm where distinctions between external and internal, objective and subjective, dissolve—the transitional realm of poetry.

Dickinson has become a test case: many of us, especially American women poets, look to her as a foremother, and long to see in her our own image reflected back. (And, to quote Dorothy Sayers again, “we are apt to find what we look for.”³) Karen Richardson

²Rumpelstiltskin can be read as a folk image of the male muse: a magical little man who gives a common woman the miraculous gift that makes her a queen, and who exacts a great price—namely, her progeny. Interesting parallels may be drawn to Dickinson’s life and the lives of many other women writers, though in the fairy tale the queen destroys the magic figure (by naming him) and lives “happily ever after,” abjuring the spinning of gold from straw. Women’s domesticity and sexual reproduction are thus opposed to their creativity and artistic production in the folktale.

Rumpelstiltskin may also be compared to Hades, who exacts a similar price of Demeter—namely, her daughter, Persephone, who, in turn, becomes a queen. Queen of the Underworld may represent the woman artist, who henceforth must divide her time equally between the two realms. While Persephone is thus “split in two” in the Greek myth, at the end of “Rumpelstiltskin” the infernal “little man . . . in his rage stamped his right foot into the ground so deep that he sank up to his waist.” Like Persephone, he is half under-, half above-ground.

“Then, in his passion, he seized his left leg with both hands, and tore himself asunder in the middle.” *The Grimms’ Fairy Tales* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, n.d.) 301.

³Sayers, Dorothy L. *The Poetry of Search and the Poetry of Statement* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1963) 12.

Gee plays off Howe's title, claiming that "My Emily Dickinson' develops as each reader invests him or herself in a personal version of the poet. . . . As we engage in this [secondary] reading, we measure a critic's or a biographer's Emily Dickinson against our own, revising our personal Dickinson, rejecting or supporting someone else's Dickinson" (25).⁴

Furthermore, as Sewall notes, "Emily Dickinson establishes an intimacy with her readers as do few other poets"; he quotes Millicent Todd Bingham, "They all think they own her" (707). I hope to avoid "claiming" her, distorting or imposing a narrative upon her work, as I attempt to delineate *my* Emily Dickinson. I intend to tease out one central strand woven throughout the work.⁵

Martha Nell Smith goes so far as to assert that each reader is a coauthor;⁶ she intends to allow greater freedom of interpretation by reading Dickinson in ways that have

⁴"My George Eliot' and My Emily Dickinson," *The Emily Dickinson Journal* 3.1 (1994): 24-40.

⁵According to Sewall, Dickinson herself employs the metaphor of "one gold thread . . . a long, big shining fibre which hides the others" to convey her new-found sense of vocation as a poet; in the same letter, written when she was nineteen, she contrasts herself to family and friends taking part in the current (1850) revival, "I have heeded beautiful tempters, yet do not think I am wrong. . . . and life has had an aim, and the world has been too precious for your poor—and striving sister! The winter was all one dream, and the spring has not yet waked me, I would *always* sleep, and dream, and it never should turn to morning, so long as night is so blessed." *The Life of Emily Dickinson*, vol. 2 (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1974) 397-98.

⁶"If feminist critics do not attempt such complex interrogations, we can, as Cheryl Walker and others have noted, fall into the trap that 'assumes no disjunction between poet and speaker' and reads poems reductively, as if 'the author is the meaning of the text, a personal, autobiographical personage who has a 'true self' that can be embodied relatively transparently in language.' Instead, we need to develop 'a new concept of authorship that does not naively assert that the writer is an originating genius' creating closed artifacts, but is a textual producer whose enterprise is generative, turning every reader into a coproducer or coauthor." Based on the notion of a lesbian or sexual continuum, "the idea of an authorial continuum proves a valuable tool for beginning to understand the very complicated symbioses among author, text, and reader." *Rowing in Eden* 76.

I wonder, then, perhaps "naively," why we bother to study Dickinson, if she is not "an originating genius," but merely "a textual coproducer"? Furthermore, if one's reading intends primarily to prove that Dickinson was lesbian, is this not reading her poems "reductively" as "transparently" autobiographical?

been heretofore ignored or excluded. Yet in practice she sets forth a reading of Dickinson as a lesbian poet whose inspiration, main reader, and even coauthor was another woman, her sister-in law, Susan Gilbert Dickinson. All negative judgments of Susan are discounted as biased gossip stemming from Mabel Loomis Todd, who was not only the first editor (along with Higginson) of Dickinson's work but also Austin Dickinson's lover.

Lillian Faderman's clearheaded review of *Rowing in Eden* in *The Emily Dickinson Journal* praises Smith's emphasis on the importance of examining Dickinson's original material, but finds her "less persuasive in her focus on Dickinson's 'lesbian' relationship with Sue." By virtually ignoring her love letters to Otis Lord, and thus "[d]enying that psychosexual complexity in Dickinson, Smith presents her as unambivalently and committedly lesbian."

By insisting on reading the relationship as "lesbian" in a contemporary sense Smith ignores the wealth of evidence that indicates that women of Dickinson's era had an emotional "space" in the institution of romantic friendship that a post-sexological era can hardly imagine. . . . The need to adhere to pat sexual identities—"homosexual," "heterosexual"—and the judgments that are visited on those identities—"normal," "abnormal," "guilty"—are a burden of our era. To attribute them to Emily's relationship to Sue, which flowered in a time when romantic friendship was in bloom in America, is anachronistic.⁷

Even if, as Smith argues, the Master letters were "cross-dressed" letters to Susan—and if every male figure in the poetry were also a "beard" for Sue—the same question remains: how does this elucidate the poetry?

To interpret the love poems as expressing the frustrations of the closet reduces them to an allegory of forbidden sexual desire, which risks becoming as reductive as much old-fashioned Freudian criticism. For example, in *After Great Pain* John Cody reads poem 579 as describing Dickinson's presumed first (and probably last) sexual encounter: "The transplanted berry may be the hymeneal blood (the first color commonly associated with berries is red); the 'Mountain Bush,' the mons veneris; and the 'Road,' the vagina. We

⁷*The Emily Dickinson Journal* 3.1 (1994): 105-107.

cannot imagine that Emily Dickinson was unaware of these anatomical facts" (141). We cannot? The woman whose idea of a medical examination was to walk, fully clothed, past the door of the room in which the doctor sat? "John Cody's reprehensible biographical psychoanalysis," Howe dismisses it, "is the rape of a great poet" (24). One presumes Bennett would correct Cody's anatomical awareness; the berry is one of her favored "clitoral" symbols.⁸ The poems then become something like a great dreamwork, encoding sexual wish-fulfillment by condensation and displacement. Though there certainly may be an element of this in her work, it diminishes the work to assume this is the central fact of importance.

Poems are imaginative constructs. They may (often do) have catalysts in the events of daily life. Yet, as Howe writes, "There is a mystic separation between poetic vision and ordinary living. The conditions for poetry rest outside each life at a miraculous reach indifferent to worldly chronology" (13). Even if Susan Gilbert were the one and only love of Dickinson's life (already belied by Dickinson's extant love letters to Judge Lord), the one and only inspiration of every poem Dickinson wrote (and why anyone would want to

⁸Bennett might approve, however, of Cody's "cliterary" criticism of poem 609:

Stanza 5

I fitted to the Latch
 My Hand, with trembling care
 Lest back the awful Door should spring
 And leave me in the Floor—

"She makes a faltering and terrified sexual gesture—she touches the 'Latch.' Suddenly we are here confronted with that ambiguity of images so characteristic of Emily Dickinson. A seemingly unconscious bisexuality pervades her symbolism. Is the latch a masculine phallic symbol? If so, it is incongruous for it to be adjacent to an 'awful Door' which threatens to provide a sudden passage into which the poet feels in danger of being propelled. The 'latch' certainly is more fittingly a female phallus—the clitoris suspended above the vaginal vestibule. One is tempted to conclude that the sexual threat that stands between the poet and the tender love she craves is in this instance at least a homosexual one. The function that she futilely imagines for herself and that she fears, disowns, and unconsciously desires is a penetrative one—the masculine role." John Cody, *After Great Pain: The Inner Life of Emily Dickinson* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1971) 138.

press this claim is rather puzzling), it would remain a fascinating problem that Dickinson refers to Susan as “Master,” “Lord,” “Sir,” “My Caviler,” “he,” and so on. In other words, the figures in the poems are unmistakably male, no matter what sex their model was, if there were indeed a living model.

In *The Tenth Muse* Albert Gelpi concludes that “The ‘lover’ in Emily Dickinson’s poetry” is none other than her animus, and that this “‘other’—even if a person actually precipitated the crisis, indeed even if the ‘masculine’ catalyst were a woman—exists in the poetry and in Dickinson’s emotional life chiefly as a mask for aspects of herself, potentialities within herself struggling for expression and accommodation within the psyche” (250). Homans rightly judges that “every reader of Dickinson should be grateful for his putting to rest the search for the biographical identity of Master,” and yet that he is too reductively Jungian in asserting Dickinson’s “ceaseless effort to ‘adapt the masculine characteristics of mind and will to the achievement of an integral identity as a woman’” (207). Gelpi’s definitions of “masculine” and “feminine” are too rigid, mistaking cultural norms for psycho-biological facts:

The animus mediates, to put it crudely, the woman’s capacity for abstract form, rational thought, and pure spiritual enlightenment, as well as her relationship with the masculine (God and man conjoined again), just as the anima, or feminine elements in the male psyche, mediates his connections with the body, nature, emotion, and instinct, as well as his relationship to the opposite sex. (250)

The muse need not be a lover, though the metaphor of love predominates in attempts to describe the poet-muse relationship, just as the metaphor of childbirth for poetic creation predominates. For example, a homosexual man may address a female muse or a male one; the female muse may represent the “other” aspect of the writer himself, not a lover. If Dickinson were what we now label homosexual, we need all the more to account for the male figures in her poetry; I believe the muse is the best explanation, particularly if she were lesbian. Thus I hope that this work will accompany

and enlarge the work of Smith and others who are exploring Dickinson's homoeroticism, specifically in relation to Sue. The two ideas need not be mutually exclusive.

My belief in Dickinson's male muse is based on the evidence of her writing, and should not be confused with a belief about her sexuality. It would appear, based upon the extant love letters to both women and men, that she had (the usual human) bisexual tendencies, which she may or may not have acted on, since there is no conclusive evidence either way. Patterson's, Bennett's, and Smith's arguments for her love of women, and in particular her lifelong devotion to Sue, are persuasive. Yet there is also epistolary evidence that she at least expressed love for, and entertained love from, Judge Lord late in life. Our incomprehension of nineteenth-century romantic friendships, combined with Dickinson's tendency toward hyperbole, makes it difficult to read her letters conclusively. (For example, she calls James D. Clark, who is not even nominated for Master, "my dearest earthly friend" [L 807].) It is very difficult in the late-twentieth century, post sexual-revolution, to consider a life of sublimated passion as a veritable choice rather than a sign of sexual dysfunction.

John Cody's Freudian analysis of Dickinson's sexual dilemma, largely based on his reading of her poetry as symptoms, summarizes Dickinson's impasse: she must choose either heterosexuality, homosexuality, or renunciation. Her "view of heterosexuality appears to have been based on the idea that the man subjugates, humiliates, and assaults the woman"; because of her presumed fear of men and hunger for "'maternal' affection," homosexuality would have been "more easily achievable" for her, except that she "possessed a puritan super-ego" which "regarded homosexuality as depraved and reacted to the mere thought of it with abhorrence. . . . Thus, both heterosexuality and homosexuality as a way of life appear to be ruled out."⁹

⁹*After Great Pain* 126-28. To quote him at all is to risk Howe's scorn: "That Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar continue to draw on his dubious and reductivist conclusions, and even seem to agree with him in places, is a sorry illustration of the continuing vulgarization of the lives of poets, pandering to the popular sentiment that they are society's fools and

Cody never quite seems to take into account the exceptional nature of artistic genius (one thinks of Glenn Gould, for example, in recent times). Defending Dickinson's withdrawal as a self-protective strategy, Rich writes, "I have a notion that genius knows itself; that Dickinson chose her seclusion, knowing she was exceptional and knowing what she needed" (*On Lies* 160). The artist and writer Wyndham Lewis accounts for the exceptional nature of artistic genius by what he calls "craft-mysticism," which results from the life-long, rigorous training (once) required of artists, so that "painters feel themselves locked up in this mystery, in this knowledge, this secret craft. . . . All those who paint regard the painter of genius with awe, as a man who has, in the highest degree, the mastery of the secret" (*The Demon of Progress in the Arts* 45). Lewis then extends the analogy; substituting "poetry" for "mathematics," one will recognize Dickinson:

In every high craft a consciousness of isolation, similar to this, exists. More than in any other, I suppose, there is in higher mathematics a sense of apartness conjoined with superiority. The mathematician is a man who, in his highest flights of imagination, is familiar with realities so augustly remote from the daily round of human life, and is the master of a craft as inaccessible as painting or sculpture, that he must regard himself, to some extent, as privileged among men as is the artist. Also, all those occupied in the most abstruse mathematical fields are bound to experience a sensation of electness, and can hardly escape twinges of superiority—and with much more justification than any but the greatest artist. (45-46)

The consciousness of isolation, the sense of apartness and superiority, the highest flights of imagination to realities so augustly remote from the daily round of human life, the sensation of electness as master of an inaccessible craft: all are recurrent themes in Dickinson's poetry, and explain her eccentricities far better than speculations about her sexuality.

"A Letter always feels to me like immortality because it is the mind alone without corporeal friend," Dickinson writes [L 330]. Dickinson's poetry is her letter to the world—immortal precisely "because it is the mind alone without corporeal friend." To reduce her

madwomen" (24). But poets have popularly been thought mad for millenia (see Plato and Horace, for example), and Howe's wrath is unlikely to change that.

poetry to the corporeal, to any physical love relationship (or the lack thereof), is to deny its immortality. Dickinson lived on the threshold, loving women and men with an intensity that she could express verbally, but in all probability not physically.

What is most important to the lover is the transformation of the world through love, not sensual gratification. Again, Pieper's elucidation of Plato's *Phaedrus* also helps to clarify Dickinson's choices:

Those who submit to the encounter with beauty in the requisite spirit do not see and partake of a fulfillment but a promise—which perhaps cannot be kept at all within the realm of this physical existence. (85)

Or, as Dickinson writes to Higginson, “Emblem is immeasurable—that is why it is better than Fulfillment, which can be drained—” [L 819]. Sewall conjectures that Thomas à Kempis's *Of the Imitation of Christ* may have served as Dickinson's “manual for the dedicated life,” providing her with a “daily regimen” for pursuing her vision. In her copy, “the chapter on Solitude is well marked,” he notes; the two chapters on love are the most heavily marked, except for the chapter on the Cross (Sewall 2: 689-92).

In “Emily Dickinson as Visionary,”¹⁰ Paul Bray observes that she “experienced a kind of surplus of plenitude, a surfeit of mystical presence that threatened at different times in her life to overwhelm her” (113). The poems are therefore “elusive, not merely difficult,” and may not be “mastered” by close reading, but necessitate another kind of reading; he suggests “reading at a distance,” which “would accept the persistence of mystery that only deepens as one proceeds” (114). One methodology Bray suggests (which I adopt) “for bringing a text's elusiveness into focus” is “the discovery of affinities between one text and another, regardless of chronology” (115) or influence. He compares Dickinson's poems to work by Marvell, Dylan Thomas, Emerson, Sir Thomas Browne, Poe, Mallarmé, Joyce, and Blake, among others, claiming that the “discipline of translating direct experience of Being into words makes Dickinson as much a mystic as a poet” (126).

¹⁰*Raritan* 12.1 (1992): 113-137.

Her way is not the traditional *via negativa* of the mystics, however, but the Way of Affirmation, as defined by Dorothy Sayers in an essay on Dante, “The Beatrician Vision”:

The Way of Affirmation, if it is a mystical way at all, has received but little attention from the theologians. This is perhaps just as well, for it is pre-eminently the way of the poets . . . It is by its attention to the sacred significance of the material world that it enables the poet to affirm his proper inspiration . . . That is why the union of male and female supplied all Blake’s symbols of spiritual integration; why Traherne repeats over and over again that to enjoy God and to enjoy the universe are one and the same thing . . . ¹¹

This helps explain Dickinson’s calling herself a “pagan.” Or, again according to Bray, “Kierkegaard calls religion a poetry of fixed metaphors; reversed, this observation means that poetry, at least the poetry of vision, is an embryonic religion, one that has not yet been reified” (122). Her “embryonic religion” is not the fixed Christianity of nineteenth-century Amherst (“They are religious—except me—and address an Eclipse, every morning—whom they call their ‘Father,’” she describes her pious family [L 404]), but a pagan Awe at the sacred significance of nature.

“What is beheld is the transfiguration of something actually existing in the outer world of sense” (48), according to Sayers, who quotes from Exodus, Dante, Blake, Matthew, Tennyson, Wordsworth, and Traherne as each observes, in Traherne’s words, how “Eternity was manifest in the Light of the Day.” Sayers could have added Dickinson to the list—perhaps “The Fingers of the Light” [1000], with its ending worthy of Issa:

The Neighbor in the Pool
Upon His Hip elate
Made loud obeisance and the Gnat
Held up His Cup for Light.

Sayers argues that the “physical bases” of the vision “are very diverse; but the quality of the experience is everywhere recognizably the same: we cannot separate it arbitrarily into ‘erotic’, ‘religious’, and ‘nature’ mysticism” (49) (which is exactly what DeShazer attempts

¹¹Sayers, *The Poetry of Search and the Poetry of Statement* 68.

with the traditional female muse in *Inspiring Women*). Bray attempts in somewhat similar terms to describe the indescribable: “to have vision is to confront an unmediated reality, an experience that occurs outside boundaries and indeed has, as one of its characteristics, the obliterations of limits” (122).

Another feature Sayers emphasizes to distinguish the Beatrician vision from other mystical experience is that the “eyes of the soul are not turned inward to the true Self, but outward to a true Other” (51). She believes this mystical gift “is a natural, not a supernatural gift, and . . . far less rare than is usually supposed,” for many experience it when they fall in love, though “Dante has left us the best of all accounts of this state of grace” (49). In contrast to Wordsworth’s turning to Nature as a source of inspiration, “It was perhaps fortunate for Dante the poet that his Godbearing Image was the image of a person, for it left him no option but to recognize from the start that devotion must be addressed to a real Other” (66), and “Not only was his God personal from the beginning; He manifested Himself throughout by means of persons” (67). Dickinson cannot accept the personal God of Christian dogma, except through the love of persons; her “Godbearing Image” she sometimes calls “Master.” Moreover, Sayers continues, Dante

was fortunate also in that the fashion of his time understood and applauded a disinterested love—how fortunate we may see by the contrasting example of Yeats, in whom the Beatrician quality of his love for Maud Gonne was always embittered by a frustrate desire for possession, and by the knowledge that the society in which he lived had little reverence for a sublimated passion. Total commitment in devotion to a real Other involves total acceptance of the rights of that Other, who is loved, as God must be loved, for being what it divinely is, and for no other reason. (67)

Dickinson, also, was relatively fortunate in this regard—at least compared to twentieth-century American standards of psycho-sexual hygiene. Cody, for example, insists on Dickinson’s “psychosis,” comparing her symptoms (which include poems) to those of others who have undergone psychotic breakdowns; he is thus one of “the multitude”

Socrates describes in the *Phaedrus* who regard the poet “as being out of his wits, for they know not that he is full of a god [*enthousiazon*].”¹²

Sayers quotes Professor Lascelles Abercrombie on Wordsworth, in terms that may be applied equally to Dickinson: “to live self-conscious in a mystical experience of the Divine Being of the impersonal world, as transcendent as any mystic’s experience of his personal God, is to live, as unspeakably *alone*” (67)—which, again, I suggest, describes Dickinson’s reasons for seclusion at least as well as positing a psychotic breakdown. That Dickinson did self-consciously experience the Divine Being of the impersonal world is attested to in many letters—such the first Master letter, or her claim that “I have never believed [Paradise] to be a superhuman site” [L 391]—and many poems, such as:

Who has not found the Heaven—below—
Will fail of it above—
For Angels rent the House next ours,
Wherever we remove—
[1544]

Dickinson might have been better understood in the East, with its long tradition of ecstatic poets who isolate themselves to pursue their vision. For example, the ecstatic fifteenth-century Sufi/Hindu poet Kabir, who also rejects all dogma for personal experience, generally expressed as the love of a slave, servant, or bride for the Master, Teacher, Guest, or bridegroom, writes,

¹²Qtd. in Pieper, *Love and Inspiration* 50.

Maritain describes the pseudo-madness of poets: “Just, then, as the most dangerous criminals are lucid maniacs, so the most perfect poets are madmen using unfailing reason. But poets are not really mad. Consequently they are aware in themselves of a torturing division, a rending of their own human substance, which they are condemned to bring to unity—enigmatic, unstable, never satisfying unity—not in themselves, but in their work. Hence their connatural torment. They are obliged to be at the same time at two different levels of the soul, out of their senses and rational, passively moved by inspiration and actively conscious, intent on an unknown more powerful than they are which a sagacious operative knowledge must serve and manifest in fear and trembling.” *Creative Intuition* 249-50.

Friend, hope for the Guest while you are alive.

 If you don't break your ropes while you're alive,
 do you think
 ghosts will do it after?¹³

The best-known Indian woman poet, Mira Bai (a fifteenth-century Hindu), like Dickinson, uses metaphors of marriage to one absent to describe a love paradoxically both personal and abstract. "People say Mira has gone mad," for she wanders the countryside singing of her lovesickness, which manifests itself in some ways similar to Dickinson's, despite obvious cultural differences:

Friend, how can I meet my lord?
 My love came
 and vanished from my courtyard
 while I was sleeping.
 I will tear my sari,
 wear faded red robes
 and live as an ascetic.

 This separation is torture
 day and night.
 Peace never comes.
 Mira says: Lord Hari, god of permanence,
 when we come together,
 let us never again be torn apart.
 (Barnstone 72-3)

Thus I will consider Dickinson's male muse not biographically—as evidence of heterosexuality, homosexuality, or psychosis—but poetically, as a trace of her vision or inspiration, that mystery through which poetry is generated. I consider the poem as a mystical object, and the muse as the Other that engenders its creation. Like Gelpi, I consider the male figure in the work as something like her animus; he need not be a lover, though this metaphor predominates in poetry as in religious mysticism. Dickinson's specifically poetic or "Beatrician" vision is one of transfiguration of the sensual world through love of an Other who becomes her godbearing image. This direct mystical

¹³ *The Kabir Book: Forty-Four of the Ecstatic Poems of Kabir, Versions by Robert Bly* (Boston: Beacon P, 1977) 24.

experience of Being is the reason she lives “unspeakably *alone*”—as many Eastern poets have chosen to live.

THE MASTER LETTERS

“No mistress but the Muse” is easily understood: “mistress” here means “lover.” “No master but the Muse” would give a different sense: the idea of domination is much stronger in the masculine form . . . but there are many dimensions: for example, a junior artist addresses a senior as “*maître*”; in the New Testament and Pilgrim’s Progress “master” means Christ: “follow the Master.” In Freemasonry it applies to the hierophant of a lodge. Love itself is a kind of guru or teacher, one who leads the way from earth to heaven; and “master” as “lover” is to the female artist the equivalent of that mistress who is also muse to the male poet. (Imlay 161)

Elizabeth Imlay’s discussion of “Charlotte [Brontë]’s predilection for the word ‘Master’” and “the fond phrase ‘*mon maître*’” offers a series of positive readings for the term, which helps counter dismissive readings of the male muse as inherently destructive because masculine. Imlay further recognizes that the master as muse may represent not only a lover, precursors, or Christ, but Love itself as a daemon who mediates the human and divine. The contemporary Italian writer Natalia Ginzburg offers yet another possibility; Ginzburg personifies writing in her essay, “My Vocation,” in terms strikingly similar to Dickinson’s:

This vocation is a master who is able to beat us till the blood flows, a master who reviles and condemns us. We must swallow our saliva and our tears and grit our teeth and dry the blood from our wounds and serve him. Serve him when he asks. Then he will help us up on to our feet, fix our feet firmly on the ground; he will help us overcome madness and delirium, fever and despair. But he has to be the one who gives the orders and he always refuses to pay attention to us when we need him.¹⁴

Who or what is Dickinson’s Master? Attempting to answer this vexing question, I shall first briefly examine the so-called “Master letters” [L 187, 233, 448], though they

¹⁴ Natalia Ginzburg, “My Vocation,” *The Little Virtues* (New York: Seaver Books, 1986) 66.

have already been done to death. (I would fain ignore them, but for non-Dickinson scholars, I must introduce them here, as they are crucial to my argument.) These three undated drafts, fair copies of which may or may not have been sent, were found posthumously among Dickinson's papers, and have been a focus of Dickinson criticism for years. "These three letters," Franklin begins the introduction to his loving edition of their facsimiles, "which Emily Dickinson drafted to a man she called 'Master,' stand near the heart of her mystery" (5). Sewall considers them "the seedbed, the matrix, of dozens of her poems—'final drafts,' as it were, of thoughts and themes appearing here, but further pondered over, developed, made into poetic wholes"; he notes that Ruth Miller "finds in the Master letters her whole poetic process in little, a revelation of 'the operation of Emily Dickinson's poetic imagination,' her attempt 'to explain herself and her poetry'" (520).

Franklin dates the Master letters spring 1858 to summer 1861, Johnson 1858-1862; no one knows their recipient (if there were one), or whether they were ever intended to be mailed, and even their order of composition is doubtful. The first letter, all agree, is the shortest and least impassioned, a loving get-well letter, which seems to imply an ongoing correspondence:

Dear Master

I am ill, but grieving more that you are ill, I make my stronger hand work long eno' to tell you. I thought perhaps you were in Heaven, and when you spoke again, it seemed quite sweet, and wonderful, and surprised me so—I wish that you were well.

I would that all I love, should be weak no more. The Violets are by my side, the Robin very near, and "Spring"—they say, Who is she—going by the door—

Indeed it is God's house—and these are the gates of Heaven, and to and fro, the angels go, with their sweet postillions—I wish that I were great, like Mr. Michael Angelo, and could paint for you. You ask me what my flowers said—then they were disobedient—I gave them messages. They said what the lips in the West, say, when the sun goes down, and so says the Dawn.

[L 187]

Already the effects of her love for the Master are to imbue the world with grace and to make her long for artistic greatness. We may recognize here the symptoms of what Sayers calls the "Beatrician vision":

Meekness within, and an overflowing of charity to those without are thus the signs of this gracious state; and where they are present there is the assurance that the vision is a true one, and that we have not to do merely with aesthetic pleasure or with the lust of possession. The soul adores and loves. It prostrates itself before a fellow-creature whose bodily presence is somehow felt to be a vehicle of grace, and the image of a greater Reality that informs and indwells it and is the eternal truth of its being. (50)

The meekness and self-prostration increase in the more fervent later letters to a painful, even grotesque degree. While the "flowers" in the first letter presumably refer to poems (which the Master seems to have had difficulty understanding), Dickinson calls herself "Daisy" in the later two letters, diminishing herself before an idealized, elevated Master:

Oh, did I offend it—[Didn't it want me to tell it the truth] Daisy—
Daisy—offend it—who bends her smaller life to his (it's) meeker (lower)
every day—who only asks—a task—[who] something to do for love of it—
some little way she cannot guess to make that master glad—

A love so big it scares her, rushing among her small heart—pushing aside
the blood and leaving her faint (all) and white in the gust's arm—

Daisy—who never flinched thro' that awful parting, but held her life so
tight he should not see the wound—who would have sheltered him in her
childish bosom (Heart)—only it was'nt big eno' for a Guest so large—*this*
Daisy—grieve her Lord—and yet it (she) often blundered— . . . Daisy
[fea] knows all that—but must she go unpardoned—teach her, preceptor
grace—teach her majesty—Slow (Dull) at patrician things—Even the wren
upon her nest learns (knows) more than Daisy Dares—

[L 248; words cancelled in her draft are enclosed in brackets, alternative readings in parentheses]

The narrative generally constructed around these letters is that Dickinson was rejected when she finally confessed her love for an unattainable, probably older, married man. They have been considered the key to the secret of Emily Dickinson, and the search for their biographical addressee has been relentless.

Sewall, Ruth Miller and others believe the Master to be Samuel Bowles, dashing editor of the *Springfield Republican*, and a very handsome married man; Johnson, Robert Sherwood and others suggest the Reverend Charles Wadsworth, also married;¹⁵ other

candidates are Judge Otis P. Lord, to whom Dickinson much later wrote and mailed extant love letters; and Colonel Thomas Wentworth Higginson, also married, whom she later occasionally addressed (within an obviously non-romantic literary correspondence) as “Master.” Martha Nell Smith argues creatively in *Rowing in Eden* for the possibility that the drafts are “cross-dressed” letters to Susan Gilbert.

Susan Howe makes a plausible case in *My Emily Dickinson* that they “were probably self-conscious exercises in prose by one writer playing with, listening to, and learning from others” (27), namely Barrett Browning and Dickens, two of Dickinson’s favorite writers. Howe conjectures that Dickinson is mimicking Marian Earle in *Aurora Leigh*, and the “three disjointed, pleading letters” Little Em’ly writes after eloping with Steerforth in *David Copperfield*; Master Davy’s nickname is also “Daisy.” While tempting, Howe’s account does not explain the dozens, if not hundreds, of searing lyrics, which spring from similar emotions and sometimes employ similar rhetoric and imagery. It is possible that the love affair is completely “supposed,” but seems more likely that she used unrequited love to generate the poetry. (If I had to vote for only one candidate, I’d choose Bowles; he’s handsomest.) A composite or series is also likely.

For example, the great twentieth-century Russian poet, Marina Tsvetaeva, while married, “was turning out impassioned poetic tributes to various men on so frequent a basis that a single poem might have to bear up under several sequential dedications,” as Claudia Roth Pierpont observes (94).¹⁶ Anne Sexton, too, while married, sent same love poem to more than one man, according to biographer Diane Wood Middlebrook. Dickinson is known to have changed the pronouns of at least one poem to suit the gender of its recipient: “Going to Him! Happy letter!” becomes “Going—to—Her!” [494].

¹⁵Both Johnson and Sherwood call Wadsworth her “muse”: see Robert Sherwood, *Circumference and Circumstance*, and T. H. Johnson, *Emily Dickinson: An Interpretive Biography*, ch. 4, “The Poet and the Muse,” (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1955) 69-102, *passim*, especially 73, 84, and 96.

¹⁶“The Rage of Aphrodite,” *The New Yorker* 7 February 1994: 90-98.

The object of a love poem is a target, and if the aim is true, the poem can orbit the earth for thousands of years to pierce a reader's heart, like a Sapphic fragment:

You may forget but
let me tell you this
someone in some future time
will think of us

Each reader is not only "someone in some future time" but the speaker and the beloved "you." We don't need to know the original's name, or whether the beloved was male or female.

Smith complains in *Rowing in Eden* that

the supposed but never substantiated relationship with "Master" is so privileged in Dickinson study that the three mysterious missives are reproduced separately in facsimile, in a book all their own, while the three hundred or so poems and one hundred and fifty or more letters to Sue lie dispersed throughout six volumes of poems and letters. (3)

Smith's *With The Exception of Shakespeare: Emily Dickinson's Letters to Susan Huntington Gilbert Dickinson*, edited with Ellen Louise Hart, begins to rectify this imbalance, and will certainly change the way we read Dickinson. Smith argues compellingly that by ignoring Dickinson's love for women, critics have misread and distorted her work, which is undoubtedly true. Yet, when she quotes Franklin disapprovingly, "Some even maintain that of the more than one thousand letters still extant, [these] 'three letters . . . stand near the heart of her mystery'," she ignores the very fascination of mystery itself. We know who Susan is—Dickinson's early romantic friend who became her sister-in-law—and, despite all the potential fascination of incestuous and lesbian possibilities there, we *don't* know who Master is. Scholars abhor a vacuum, and rush to fill it up with books. Alas, Dickinson mocks us in poem 546:

To fill a Gap
Insert the Thing that caused it—
Block it up
With Other—and 'twill yawn the more—
You cannot solder an Abyss
With Air.

My argument is, simply put, that no one person will be found to fill the Gap, because “the Thing that caused it” is the muse. No strictly biographical account will “block it up”; “’twill yawn the more.” The muse does indeed stand near the heart of her mystery, which is the dedication of her life to poetry. (She writes not only “My Business is Circumference,” but “*My business is to love. . . . My business is to sing*” [L 269].) If we grasp this, the nature of the mystery becomes clear—though the writing of poetry itself, like the muse, remains mysterious. As Howe claims,

In some sense the subject of any poem is the author’s state of mind at the time it was written, but facts of an artist’s life will never explain that particular artist’s truth. Poems and poets of the first rank remain mysterious. Emily Dickinson’s life was language and a lexicon her landscape. The vital distinction between concealment and revelation is the essence of her work. (27)

In *The Tenth Muse* Albert Gelpi comes closest to my own sense of the Master’s identity, concluding that the

very diversity of interpretations and the intriguing but inconclusive evidence advanced in the cause of each confirm the fact that the “other” in Dickinson’s love poems is finally none of the candidates, is finally “no one” at all. The poems describe a subjective drama, and both figures in the drama are first and last psychological factors.

Though Homans thanks Gelpi for thus laying the quest for the Master’s identity to rest, and one would hope he had, the new focus on Dickinson’s sexuality has reopened the search. Gelpi, however, has already considered the possibility that if the Master has a biographical model, that person may be female; nevertheless, the figure in the poems is male.

This is not to say that the drama is totally self-induced with no catalytic agent in Dickinson’s biographical experience; but it is to conclude that even if there was an external agent and even if he (or she) served as a catalyst to arouse the poet’s craving for erotic and spiritual satisfaction, the experience as played out in the poems is imaginary as well as vividly imagined; the “other” is a projected personification of the poet’s emotional and religious needs much more than any person she has known and loved. “He” is real but not actual, and his reality is self-referential. “He” is a protagonist/antagonist in the drama of identity. (247-48)

Both Rich and Diehl speculate that Dickinson may have used "Master" to refer to "her active, creative self—her own inner agency, which she feared would desert or destroy her," much as Mary Ann Evans and the Brontës adopted male pseudonyms for their writing selves, as Wendy Martin observes. Martin concludes that "[w]hether 'Master' refers to a man, to a series of men, or to her imagination, the important point is that during this period of her life, Emily Dickinson was undergoing an acute conflict between her active and passive and creative and conventional selves. Even more important, she emerged from the struggle in command of her energy and fully committed to writing" (Martin 103).

Further testimony against any specific biographical identity for the Master comes from Lavinia Dickinson, who attempted to lay the myth to rest by writing to the *Boston Transcript*, Dec. 22, 1894, in response to an account of her sister's life:

. . . Emily never had any love disaster;
 . . . Emily's so called "withdrawal from general society," for which she never cared, was only a happen. . . .
 . . . Emily had a joyous nature, yet full of pathos, and her power of language was unlike any one who ever lived. She fascinated every one she saw. Her intense verses were not more personal experiences than Shakespeare's tragedies, or Mrs. Browning's minor-key pictures. There has been an endeavor to invent and enforce a reason for Emily's peculiar and wonderful genius. . . . (Sewall 1: 153)

Rather than inventing "a reason for Emily's peculiar and wonderful genius," I hope that this exploration of the muse will clarify Dickinson's own account of the way her genius manifested itself. Eschewing the biographical hunt, I consider the Master as a composite catalyst whose biographical identity is not important but whose function in her work is central. I hope to clarify the way this psychic element—the Other represented as male—becomes the focus of the drama enacted in her poetry. Dickinson's transference relationship with this figure, expressed in a marriage fantasy, entails idealization of the Master as deity, and a concomitant abasement of the poet as humble suitor or slave, as in Ginzburg's account of her vocation of writing quoted above. Dickinson's Master as daemon ultimately leads the poet to consciousness of the Guest within that gives her a sense of grace or election.

Again, comparison to Dante and Shakespeare is helpful: "Dante's love for Beatrice was the emotional focus of his life, but at no point was it a sexual love or connected with marriage," Frye writes, claiming a similar role for the youth in Shakespeare's sonnets;¹⁷ the same may be said of Dickinson's love for her Master. Frye acknowledges that the Master serves a function similar to that of the courtly poet's mistress, though he stops short of recognizing the Master as muse:

A poet of Shakespeare's day could hardly set up in business without a "mistress" to whom he vowed eternal devotion, though this mistress might have little if any part to play in his actual life, and very seldom had anything to do with his marriage. Emily Dickinson seemed to need in her life an older man to act as her "preceptor" or "master," to use her own terms, who could keep her in touch with qualities she did not profess to have.¹⁸

This certainly describes the second letter quoted above when she implores her Master to "teach her, preceptor grace—teach her majesty—". Frye's description of the Renaissance lyric poet's training seems precisely Dickinson's instinctive choice:

Love was for the Renaissance poet a kind of creative yoga, an imaginative discipline in which he watched the strongest possible feelings swirling around sexual excitement, jealousy, obsession, melancholy . . . He was expected to turn his mind into an emotional laboratory and gain his experience there under high pressure and close observation. (91)

The Master provides the catalyst for Dickinson's experiments in extreme states of emotional intensity within the laboratory of her solitary room and soul. As Rich observes, "Dickinson is *the* American poet whose work consisted in exploring states of psychic extremity."¹⁹ Let us turn, then, to some results of these experiments.

¹⁷Northrop Frye, "How True a Twain," *Fables of Identity* 93.

¹⁸Northrop Frye, "Emily Dickinson," *Fables of Identity* 194.

¹⁹"Vesuvius at Home: The Power of Emily Dickinson," *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence* (New York: Norton, 1979) 176.

THE MASTER POEMS

I have categorized hundreds of Dickinson's poems according to my perception of the evolution of the muse and her relationship to the muse (sometimes, not always, called "Master") throughout her work. (See Appendix B: Dickinson's Master-Muse Poems.) The earliest Master poem, "Sexton! My Master's sleeping here" [96], dated by Johnson 1859, appears in fascicle 3.²⁰ Whether this poem expresses mourning for a dead lover or teacher (perhaps her early "tutor" and "preceptor," Benjamin Newton), or a fantasy about a beloved's death, or a reference to dead precursors, it is the first to pair the term "Master" with both "Daisies" and "Bird," another figure used for the poet in the third Master letter. It is also a very early association of love with both death and poetry:

Sexton! My Master's sleeping here.
Pray lead me to his bed!
I came to build the Bird's nest,
And sow the Early seed—

That when the snow creeps slowly
From off his chamber door—
Daisies point the way there—
And the Troubadour.

The graveyard fantasy of the second line is reminiscent of Poe and of Emily Brontë's poems of dungeons, snow, and love-in-death. The "I" of the poem personifies spring, ushering in both "Daisies" (poems) and the "Troubadour" (poet). This seems to be an early proclamation of her ambition: to bring poetic rebirth literally upon the grave of her Master.

²⁰I consider Dickinson's sewing the majority of her poems into the little volumes, packets, or fascicles Vinnie found after the poet's death as the author's intentional ordering. Hence, although poems are cited by Johnson's chronological numbers enclosed in brackets, if followed by F and number, this indicates the fascicle number, as in Franklin's edition of *The Manuscript Books*; if followed by J and year, this indicates Johnson's estimated date of composition. For example, "Sexton! My Master's sleeping here" would be notated [96; F3; J1859].

Even earlier poems, 28 and 32 from the first fascicle, which Johnson dates 1858, show Dickinson wrestling with her “flood subject,” death and immortality, already imagined in terms of the relationship between flower and God, or “Sir.” Poem 28, “So has a Daisy vanished,” ends, “Are ye then with God?” a very simple statement of the theme she tries over and over again, to imagine death and the otherworld. In a slightly later poem, “Good night, because we must” [114; F5; J 1859] the speaker declares, “I would go, to know!”—along with Orpheus, Persephone, Odysseus, Aeneas, and Dante. Playing the little girl, she complains of the “Saucy Seraph” that eludes her, ending, “Father! they wont tell me / Wont you tell them to?” In poem 32, “When Roses cease to bloom, Sir,” the speaker imagines after her own death, when “The hand that paused to gather . . . Will idle lie—” “Then take my flowers—pray!” If she cannot be sure of immortality in Heaven, she seems confident of immortality on earth.

In such early poems Dickinson can be seen evolving her idiolect, playing scales in rehearsal for greater work. Poems throughout the third fascicle concern flowers, particularly daisies [90, 91, 93, 94, 95, 97, 903, 12, 50, 51, 54], birds [89, 92, 97, 99, 51, 54], and death [88, 98, 99, 50, 51, 53, 54]. The flowers and birds both represent and provide a counterpoint to death, as in “If I should die” [54]. Here the speaker, again imagining her own death (an exercise later perfected in “I heard a fly buzz”), wonders “If Birds should build as early / . . . / When we with Daisies lie—”. Another poem, “One dignity delays for all” [98], imagines death as coronation, replete with “Coach” in which “we ride grand along” through the village in “pomp surpassing ermine.” This poem rehearses “Because I could not stop for death,” as does another poem in this group, “I often passed the village” [51]. Again the journey with cemetery (here “the village”) as final destination is imagined, with death as the ultimate lover, exhorting, “Trust the loving promise / Underneath the mould, / . . . / And I will enfold!”

Continuing the poet's identification with flowers, another poem in fascicle 3 [903] exists in several versions, which were probably sent along with flowers, as was the poet's custom:

I hide myself within my flower,
That fading from your Vase,
You, unsuspecting, feel for me—
Almost a loneliness.

Yet another flower poem in this gathering, "So bashful when I spied her!" [91], describes the picking of a wildflower, "So pretty—so ashamed!", in terms akin to rape: "So helpless when I turned / And bore her struggling, blushing" away. As in the "man of noon" letter, sexual fear is symbolized by violence against a flower—though in this case, the speaker is the perpetrator.

In a later poem, the poet is again represented by a flower, though here the twin-threat of sex and death has been triumphantly surpassed:

Through the Dark Sod—as Education—
The Lily passes sure—
Feels her white foot—no trepidation—
Her faith—no fear—

Afterward—in the Meadow—
Swinging her Beryl Bell—
The Mold-life—all forgotten—now—
In Ecstasy—and Dell—

[392]

The imagery is strikingly similar to that of "As kingfishers catch fire" by G. M. Hopkins, her near-contemporary and fellow in posthumous publication:

. . . each hung bell's
Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;
Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
Selves — goes itself; *myself* it speaks and spells,
Crying *Whát I dó is me: for that I came.*

Hopkins continues, "I say móre," proclaiming, "Christ plays in ten thousand places" (51).

In another early Master poem, Dickinson compares her "Broken hearted" self to Christ :

“They have not chosen me,” he said,
 “But I have chosen them!”
 Brave—Broken hearted statement—
 Uttered in Bethlehem!

I could not have told it,
 But since *Jesus dared* —
 Sovereign! Know a Daisy
 Thy dishonor shared!

[85]

Here Daisy identifies with Christ in his suffering, though “Sovereign” could refer to either Christ or the heartbreaking Master. The conflation of the three (Daisy, Christ, and Master, also called Sovereign, Sir, Lord, King, and so on) recurs in various configurations.

The first poem [58] in fascicle 3 involves a death fantasy complementary to that of “Sexton! My Master’s sleeping here,” in which the images of Master/king and Daisy/woman merge. In the first stanza of poem 58, a woman dies too soon:

Delayed till she had ceased to know—
 Delayed till in its vest of snow
 Her loving bosom lay—

The woman has died just before “joy” or “Victory” arrived; perhaps the poem is an instance of Dickinson’s encouraging herself to persevere unknown. The last stanza offers this homily:

Oh if there may departing be
 Any forgot by Victory
 In her imperial round—
 Show them this meek appareled thing
 That could not stop to be a king—
 Doubtful if it be crowned!

Dickinson is herself a “meek appareled thing,” still “Doubtful if it be crowned”; she will soon use the same image to proclaim her own coronation. Though in the later poems the “king” is often split off and projected onto another (male, master, muse, sun) figure, this early poem indicates that the two are aspects of the same being.

That “to be a king” is associated with death is also made clear in another death-fantasy poem in this gathering, “Taken from men — this morning —” [53], which describes “One little maid” who is “Carried by men today” away:

Far—as the East from Even—
Dim— as the border star—
Courtiers quaint, in Kingdoms
Our departed are.

The quaint courtiers in death’s kingdom also bring to mind another Master poem not sewn into any fascicle [151]:

Mute thy Coronation—
Meek my Vive le roi,
Fold a tiny courtier
In thine Ermine, Sir,
There to rest revering
Till the pageant by,
I can murmur broken,
Master, It was I—

The “tiny courtier” enfolded in “Ermine” recalls Elizabeth Bishop’s “First Death in Nova Scotia,” as well as the “tiny” “Chivalries” in the last poem in this gathering [55]:

By Chivalries as tiny,
A Blossom, or a Book,
The seeds of smiles are planted—
Which blossom in the dark.

This tiny poem affirms that Dickinson saw her work of writing poems (and perhaps also her hobby of cultivating flowers in her greenhouse) as planting the seeds of others’ pleasure, though they may “blossom in the dark”; that is, the gardener may not be aware, or alive. As in the “Sexton” poem discussed above, this quatrain equates blossom and book, poems and perennials. While the earlier poem looks backwards to the dead (perhaps precursors), the later looks ahead to posterity. Her association of “kingship” or “coronation” with death may well be a prophetic (and perhaps compensatory) declaration of faith in her own posthumous fame.

The finest poem in this gathering [49] also concerns burial, yet without sentimentality and with the control, ironic ambivalence, and elusiveness that characterizes her later work:

I never lost as much but twice,
And that was in the sod.
Twice have I stood a beggar
Before the door of God!

Angels—twice descending
Reimbursed my store—
Burglar! Banker—Father!
I am poor once more!

The earlier two losses may have been deaths of loved ones, or love losses; “the sod” again represents an earlier stage of growth, as in “Through the Dark Sod—as Education—”. The relative positions of speaker and God in this poem resemble those of Daisy and Master: one begs low at the door of the all-powerful and withholding other. The poem depicts God as burglar (thief of love and life), banker (perhaps storing them up in some unseen vault) and a most ambivalent father figure. (In “What Inn is this” [115; F5; J 1859] the “Peculiar Traveller” addresses him similarly as “Necromancer! Landlord!”)

Gilbert and Gubar note that this “archetypal patriarch . . . sounds very like that sinister divinity Blake described as Nobodaddy, the tyrannical God who created ‘the old Anything’” (594). Gilbert and Gubar cite the oft-quoted “man of noon” letter as evidence of the poet’s “keen consciousness of her own warring feelings about that solar Nobodaddy who was both censorious ‘Burglar! Banker—Father,’ and idealized Master/Lover”:

How dull our lives must seem to the bride and the plighted maiden, whose days are fed with gold . . . but to the *wife*, Susie . . . our lives perhaps seem dearer than all others in the world; you have seen flowers at morning, satisfied with the dew, and these same sweet flowers at noon with their heads bowed in anguish before the mighty sun; think you these thirsty blossoms will *now* need nought but—*dew*? No, they will cry for sunlight, and pine for the burning noon, though it scorches them, scathes them; they have got through with peace—they know that the man of noon is *mightier* than the morning and their life is henceforth to him. Oh, Susie, it is dangerous . . . and the spirits mightier, which we cannot resist! It does so rend me, Susie, the thought of it when it comes, that I tremble lest at sometime I, too, am yielded up. [L 93]

Few critics miss the opportunity to point out the terror of heterosexuality manifest in this letter. Gilbert and Gubar observe that already, at twenty-two, Dickinson “had begun apprehensively to define herself as an ambivalently light-loving/sun-fearing flower” (596). Separating “the tyrannical husband/father” from “her beloved Master/Father as a glowing Apollo,” they conclude that “even leaving aside biographical questions—her ambivalence toward the male Other leads to one of the central paradoxes of her art” (595). They do not, however, draw the connection between the paradoxical nature of the Other and his identity as the muse, who is both courted and feared.

“All my life I have been in love with the sun,” Anne Sexton similarly though more brazenly compares the sun to a lover/God. “I looked at it as the great lover, the great seizure. Somehow, letting the sun wash over you, letting its heat adore you, was like having intercourse with God.” On Thorazine, Sexton could no longer tolerate exposure to the sun without suffering adverse side effects, which “felt like daily evidence that the drug was blocking her inspiration” (Middlebrook 232). Similarly associating her Master/Teacher figure with both inspiration and light, in poem 1556, Dickinson bids “Adieu” to a personified “Image of Light,” whom she calls “Preceptor of the whole—”

Three slightly later poems [102, 103, 106], dated by Johnson from 1859 and gathered in fascicle 7, also employ images and attitudes similar to those of the Master letters. In poem 102, for example, she addresses an idealized male, “Great Caesar! Condescend / The Daisy, to receive.” Poem 103, “I have a King, who does not speak —”, recalls “Mute thy Coronation” [151], discussed above. Again, the speaker diminishes herself before his royal presence: when she receives a visit from him in dreams, “shouts fill all my Childish sky,” but “if I don’t — the little Bird / Within the Orchard, is not heard.” The speaker strikes a childish pose (“little Bird,” like the diminutive Daisy) before an elevated male, similar to the relationship in the Master letters; in the poem, the “King who does not speak” yet whose nocturnal visits cause drumrolls, shouts, and Bells around and in the speaker, enabling “the little Bird” to sing, is already a muse, less a real man than an

inspiring dream-figure who brings poetry in his wake. Her blasphemous preference for the muse over God is stated clearly in the poem's last stanza, which describes a morning after no nocturnal visit:

And if I don't—the little Bird
 Within the Orchard, is not heard,
 And I omit to pray
 "Father, thy will be done" today
 For my will goes the other way,
 And it were perjury!

Her stubborn and heretical belief in her own numinous dreams over and above dogma is further emphasized by the last lines of stanza two, which describes the aftermath of his dream visits: "Bells keep saying 'Victory' / From steeples in my soul!" As Dickinson writes to her Norcross cousins, "Let Emily sing for you, since she cannot pray" [L 278]. In the earlier poem 58, the woman who "could not stop to be a king" dies "forgot by Victory"; here, "king" and "Victory" are ecstatically claimed as the speaker's own.

Gilbert and Gubar recognize "I have a King, who does not speak" as a muse poem, citing it as one example of Dickinson's celebrating "the poetic inspiration her distant stately lover provides" for, although in the Master letters as in some poems, she "might sometimes abase herself to her distant Master in a fever of despair . . . she could also transform him into a powerful muse who served *her* purposes" (607).

In poem 106, "The Daisy follows soft the Sun," the male figure is elevated above King and Caesar to an Apollo image, which Gilbert and Gubar consider "the patriarchal sun as Father/Master/Lover" (600). In this poem, Daisy "Sits shyly at his feet," much as "Daisy" abases herself in the most cringing Master letter (which Franklin dates second, based on handwriting, though most critics, like Johnson, consider it third):

Low at the knee that bore her once unto [royal] wordless rest [now] Daisy
 [stoops a] kneels a culprit—tell her her [offence] fault—Master—if it is
 [not so] small eno' to cancel with her life, [Daisy] she is satisfied—but
 punish [do not] dont banish her—shut her in prison, Sir—only pledge that
 you will forgive—sometime—before the grave, and Daisy will not mind—
 She will awake in [his] your likeness. [L 248]

Her awakening “in his likeness” likens him to God. In the poem, the waking sun demands of the flower, “Wherefore—Marauder—art thou here?” as if the flower were stalking him, rather than following nature’s law. “Because, Sir, love is sweet!” the flower meekly defends itself. The poem ends with a plea for sympathy far more elegant and controlled than the letter’s raw outpouring:

We are the Flower—Thou the Sun!
 Forgive us, if as days decline—
 We nearer steal to Thee!
 Enamoured of the parting West—
 The peace—the flight—the Amethyst—
 Night’s possibility!

Even in this early poem, it is clear that what Dickinson seeks is not attainment of the beloved, but the “flight” and “possibility” of her imagination inspired by his removal. Again, this describes a poet-muse relationship rather than that of actual lovers.

Thus, in Dickinson’s idiolect, one set of terms is: {Master, Teacher, Preceptor, Sun, God, Burglar, Banker, Father, Death}, associated with the muse; a complementary set is: {Daisy, flower, bird, scholar, nobody, wife, queen, bride, woman}, or poet. Note that in the “man of noon” letter, the lot of the unmarried woman is considered as vastly superior to that of “the *wife*,” but inferior to that of “the bride and the plighted maiden.” By plighting her troth to the muse, Dickinson creates her ideal identity—perpetual bride, “whose days are fed with gold”—thus avoiding both a “dull” spinster’s life and the “bowed . . . anguish” of wifehood.

MARRIAGE

That's what they call a metaphor in our country. Don't be afraid
of it, sir, it won't bite.

—Dickinson²¹

The dialogue of Soul and God expressed as the love of bride and bridegroom is an ancient one in many religious traditions, and particularly popular among the Puritans, as derived from the *Song of Songs*. Dickinson adapts this marriage metaphor to her own unique ends. Sewall quotes as a key source *Of the Imitation of Christ*:

O thou most beloved spouse of my soul, Jesu Christ, thou most pure Lover,
thou Lord of all creation; O that I had the wings of true liberty, that I
might flee away and rest in thee! (2: 693)

Beginning with this received metaphor of Bride of Christ, Dickinson twists, distorts, amplifies, ironizes, and renews it. As Sewall further remarks,

the Puritan drama of the soul had its dialogue, where in diaries or, as in Anne Bradstreet's and Edward Taylor's formal verse or prose, the Soul addressed its God, or the Soul addressed the Self, or the Flesh addressed the Spirit. The Puritans talked a great deal to themselves—a way of thinking, of attacking one's inner problems, that Emily Dickinson was born to. If her communication with her God or her Soul is a good deal more informal, even chatty, than a true Puritan would have thought seemly, she never permanently lost hold of these spiritual realities, whatever the vicissitudes of her faith. (1: 23)

In *My Life a Loaded Gun* (following Vivian Pollack's *Dickinson: The Anxiety of Gender*) Paula Bennett compares Dickinson's relationship with the Master to transference: "real love, love with the possibility of mature mutual reciprocation, was not the desired goal. . . . It was a fantasy relationship that she carried out . . . in the safety of knowing it could never be fulfilled" (68-69). After the Master (presumably) rejected Dickinson in 1861, she "turned not to the Master . . . but to a fantasy marriage that she performed in her art . . . she found in her poetry and in her role as poet the fulfillment and selfhood—as

²¹From an early valentine, Sewall 1: 4.

queen, bride, wife, woman, empress—that she could not find in life” (73). But to a poet, poetry *is* life, not an alternative to it. Thus Rich argues that Dickinson’s life-choices were “practical,” and not a renunciation of life. Though I agree that, if there were a biographical model for the Master, her relationship with him was one akin to transference, I do not read her marriage as a “fantasy” substitute for real life.

Bennett contends that “by redefining herself as bride-wife-queen of Calvary, within the context of a fantasy marriage, the poet was able to integrate her feelings,” so that the Master’s significance for Dickinson is that “in rejecting her love, he provided the context within which the feelings of rage and loss . . . could be consciously released” (83). Once Dickinson has “exploded” in her *annus mirabilis*, the Master has fulfilled his function, according to Bennett, and is forgotten; I believe he has a much more important ongoing role. The muse is not a consolation prize for a woman poet disappointed in love—but her true and abiding love, who may take many forms. As Graves (gender-translated) holds:

No Muse-poet grows conscious of the Muse except by experience of a man in whom the God is to some degree resident . . . her true love is for her the embodiment of the Muse . . . the real, perpetually obsessed Muse-poet distinguishes between the God . . . and the individual man whom the God may make his instrument for a month, a year, seven years, or even more . . . (cf. *White Goddess* 490)

Dickinson’s love for her Master teaches her what the lyric poet needs to learn through painful apprenticeship: “that the reality of his love is the love itself rather than anything he receives from the beloved,” as Frye reads Shakespeare’s sonnets (*Fables* 93).

Bennett continues:

Like a nun married to Christ and perpetually his bride, “Bride,” not wife, was Dickinson’s true identity. . . . As the betrothed of one to whom she was and was not married, the poet could prolong indefinitely her bridal moment with all its intensity and rapture—intensity and rapture which she had always considered necessary to the practice of her craft. (80)

Again, this is the traditional function of the unattainable mistress in the courtly tradition.

Dickinson *is* like a nun, but married to the muse, not Christ (to whom she often makes a point of preferring him).

Bennett draws a line between Dickinson's pre- and post-1862 (the *annus mirabilis*) marriage poems, pointing out the ambivalence of the earlier poems, such as poem 199, which begins

I'm "wife"—I've finished that—
That other state—
I'm Czar—I'm "Woman" now—

The fact that "wife" and "Woman" are enclosed in quotation marks emphasizes their metaphorical nature, but "Czar" is not so enclosed. In earlier poems, the woman dies before being crowned king [58] or declares, "I have a king" [103]; here, the poet claims her own throne: "I'm Czar." The second stanza continues,

How odd the Girl's life looks
Behind this soft Eclipse—
I think that Earth feels so
To folks in Heaven—now—

Bennett states the "obvious implication . . . that marriage equals death" (75). Dickinson's equation of love, marriage, and sex with death is very old, although she puts her own idiosyncratic spin on it. As Howe glosses it,

In the nineteenth century, sensuality too often ushered in tragedy for the female sex. Women from all classes and countries risked dying in childbirth or from infection afterwards. If the mother survived, frequently her baby did not. Between 1861 and 1870 only one British infant in eight survived its first year of life, and as many again died between the ages of one and five. In America the appalling statistics were similar. . . . Uncertain relation of opposition—Love and Death; for men the fusion was metaphysical and metaphorical. Centuries of tropes and clever punning in Western literary tradition have married and mated their meanings. (15)

"A Wife—at Daybreak I shall be—" [461] even more clearly equates marriage with death, as many have noted. The first stanza appears to describe a bride preparing for her wedding, but the second stanza reveals the bridegroom as death, or God:

Midnight—Good Night! I hear them call,
 The Angels bustle in the Hall—
 Softly my Future climbs the Stair,
 I fumble at my Childhood's prayer
 So soon to be a Child no more—
 Eternity, I'm coming—Sir,
 Savior—I've seen the face—before!

Bennett criticizes three Master poems [232, 233, and 236], all written before 1862 and gathered in fascicle 10, as expressive of a passive woman filled with a man's power who believes that "without him she is nothing," as in the "truly awful" "If *He Dissolve*—then—there is *nothing—more*—" [236], with its bathetic final quatrain:

Say—that a *little life*—for his—
 Is *leaking—red*—
 His *little Spaniel*—tell Him!
 Will He heed?

This recalls the opening of the second Master letter, with its small wounded animal, stage blood, and childish question:

Master.
 If you saw a bullet hit a Bird—and he told you
 he was'nt shot—you might weep at his courtesy, but you would
 certainly doubt his word.
 One drop more from the gash that stains your Daisy's
 bosom—then would you *believe?* [L 233]

Bennett concludes that in this poem "Dickinson writes from the position of a woman whose womanhood and womanly power can only be confirmed through the presence and love of a man" (77). Dickinson's self-abasement is indeed disturbing to all who read these letters and such melodramatic poems. Another, much later poem [1059] seems aware of its maudlin quality:

Sang from the Heart, Sire,
 Dipped my Beak in it,
 If the Tune drip too much
 Have a tint too Red
 Pardon the Cochineal—
 Suffer the Vermilion—
 Death is the Wealth
 Of the Poorest Bird

This Master letter, "If you saw a bullet hit a Bird," generally presumed to be the second (though Franklin dates it third, from the summer of 1861) is the longest; several paragraphs later, she continues to write of her grievous wound,

I dont know what you can do for it—thank you—Master—but if I had the
Beard on my cheek—[like you]—and you—had Daisy's petals—and you
cared so for me—what would become of you? [L 233]

But is Dickinson truly abasing herself before a man here? Martha Nell Smith discovered that the words bracketed above, "like you," are pencilled in, though the holograph is written in pen, upon which Smith builds her case for the Master as a woman. She conjectures that someone else (most likely Austin) may have pencilled in "like you" to conceal Dickinson's gender play in writing to a woman (most likely Austin's wife, Susan): "If I had a beard," means, if I were a man, and "you had Daisy's petals," means, "if you were a woman"; in other words, if ours were a heterosexual love, then would you accept me? However, according to Faderman's critique,

that reading is more than a little strained, since if the recipient were in fact female, the subjunctive form of Dickinson's phrase—"if you [were a woman]" is inexplicable. Alternately, Smith postulates that Dickinson may have been disguising the homosexual nature of their love by dressing a woman up in masculine pronouns and names. If that is the case, how does one explain the many extant love letters not only to Sue but also to Emily Ford and Kate Anthon in which she feels no need for such disguise? (*The Emily Dickinson Journal* 3.1: 106)

Cody uses the same argument to discount Rebecca Patterson's early contention that all the love poems were written to Kate Scott Anthon, with the pronouns changed.

Yet Dickinson may not be as passively dependent upon a male lover as Bennett assumes, not because the Master was a woman, but something other. Poets male and female have attested for millennia to their passivity when filled with the divine afflatus. Again, if one examines the entire fascicle [F3] in which these three poems Bennett cites are gathered, the ordering suggests the subject is primarily poetry, or the state from which poetry arises, and not a simple unrequited love affair.

The first poem of the group, “We—Bee and I—live by the quaffing—” [230], whimsically sets the theme. Dickinson’s association of poetry with nectar and liquor, as in the better known “I taste a liquor never brewed” [214], is repeated here at the close of the first stanza:

But it’s many a lay of the Dim Burgundy—
We chant—for cheer—when the Wines—fail—

Do we “get drunk”?
Ask the jolly Clovers!
Do we “beat” our “Wife”?
I—never wed—

In the second stanza Dickinson identifies with the male bee as far as getting drunk (inspired), but stops short of getting married, with its attendant sexual brutality. That even metaphoric marriage equals death, however, is born out in the last stanza, in which

He and I—revel—
First—at the vat—and latest at the Vine—
Noon—our last Cup—
“Found dead”—“of Nectar”—

These simultaneous deaths of “Bee and I” recall “We don’t cry—Tim and I,” which ends “Take us simultaneous—Lord— / I—” “Tim”—and—Me!” [196]. Martin cites this poem as an example of Dickinson’s androgyny, with “Tim” representing her “alter ego” or “imaginative faculty” (103).

This rather Keatsian ending might be called “death by too much plenitude,” in Bray’s terms: “The name for direct experience of Being in its benign aspect is plenitude; in its malign or fearsome aspect it might be called too much plenitude. Dickinson’s name for it is Awe” (123). As Dickinson describes her own defensive strategy in a late letter, “I work to drive the Awe away, yet Awe impels the work.” The danger of being overwhelmed by Awe should not be underestimated; as Bray writes, “The conflict in her work between the poet and the direct experience of Being is rather to be conceived in terms of a battle of Olympian proportions; a weaker poet would have been crushed utterly” (119), which she imagines playfully here as death by “Nectar.”

A later poem [676; J1863] again identifies the poet with Bee, and Bee-ing with plenitude, though the maker here is feminine (and active, in contrast to the Nectar-drowned Bee above):

Least Bee that brew—
 A Honey's Weight
 The Summer multiply—
 Content Her smallest fraction help
 The Amber Quantity—

Dickinson again takes a diminutive pose here, "Least Bee," but now confidently in order to claim her place in the poetic tradition, "The Amber Quantity." Her association of "Poets" with "The Summer" she will "multiply" is made explicit in poem 569, which begins:

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

Negative Capability manifests itself in her unconcern over choosing a clearly masculine or feminine role, bee or flower, again recalling Keats, in his letter to Reynolds:

it seems to me that we should rather be the flower than the Bee—for it is a false notion that more is gained by receiving than giving—no the receiver and the giver are equal in their benefits—The f[l]ower I doubt not receives a fair guerdon from the Bee—its leaves blush deeper in the next spring—and who shall say between Man and Woman which is the most delighted . . . let us open our leaves like a flower and be passive and receptive—budding patiently under the eye of Apollo and taking hints from every noble insect that favors us with a visit . . . (*Selected Poems and Letters* 266)

Similarly, an early poem [124; F5] confounds "you" and "I," "Alps" and "Daisy," male and female, elevated and "meek," "everlasting" and ephemeral:

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

 Meek at whose everlasting feet
 A myriad Daisy play—
 Which, Sir, are you and which am I
 Upon an August day?

Like Keats, she plays with metaphors such as bee and flower to indicate the poet's identification with both.

Returning to fascicle 10, the poem following "We—Bee and I—live by the quaffing—" [231] uses a different metaphor to describe poetic inspiration:

God permits industrious Angels—
 Afternoons—to play—
 I met one—forgot my Schoolmates—
 All—for Him—straightway—

God calls home—the Angels—promptly—
 At the Setting Sun—
 I missed mine—how dreary—*Marbles*—
 After playing *Crown!*

This idea echoes in a slightly later poem, "It was given to me by the Gods—" [454; F21; J1862] in its assertion of Dickinson's very early awareness of her gift:

It was given to me by the Gods
 When I was a little Girl—
 They give us Presents most—you know—
 When we are new— and small.

Bray speculates that "from early childhood Dickinson waged a rather desperate struggle to maintain psychic integrity against a spiritualized natural world that encroached upon her, spoke to her, and, in a sense, threatened to engulf her" (119). Though she fought not to be overwhelmed by it, the vision's waning is cause for mourning, too: "how dreary—*Marbles*— / After playing *Crown!*"

Several other poems help elucidate Dickinson's early sense of election. For example, various attempts have been made to gloss the "The Missing All" of poem 985:

The Missing All—prevented Me
 From missing minor Things.
 If nothing larger than a World's
 Departure from a Hinge—
 Or Sun's extinction, be observed—
 'Twas not so large that I
 Could lift my Forehead from my work
 For Curiosity.

The most popular psychoanalytic reading (upon which Cody and Wolff concur) is that Dickinson's mother was not "good enough," leaving her starved for primary affection all her life. They cite her famous statements to Higginson, "I never had a mother. I suppose a mother is one to whom you hurry when you are troubled" [L 342b], and "I always ran Home to Awe when a child, if anything befell me. He was an awful Mother, but I liked him better than none" [L 405]. The psychoanalytic reading may very well be true; as the poet William Matthews quips, "It's never not Mom." But it is too narrow an application of Winnicott, who, like Wordsworth, sees the infant's primary connection to the mother as the gateway, as it were, to a connection with the All. The poet herself tells us in poem 231 that when first visited by an "industrious Angel" she forgot her child's play: "All—for Him—straightway—". The "All" here refers to a youthful call, an early "Intimation of Immortality," which vanishes in the course of poem, leaving her bereft. The "Angel" is a muse, a transitional agent connecting her to the All. And, in a similar poem, "A loss of something ever felt I—" [959], the poet describes herself, again, in terms of masculine royalty:

A mourner walked among the children
I notwithstanding went about
As one bemoaning a Dominion
Itself the only Prince cast out—

"Elder, Today," the poem continues, "I find myself still softly searching / For my Delinquent Palaces—" identified in the last line as "the site of the Kingdom of Heaven—". "The Missing All" to which she dedicated her life, and for which she abjured other love, is exactly what she says: All. The Heaven of poets.

In several earlier poems the speakers gamble their souls for "all," as in "Soul, Wilt thou toss again?" [139]. The "hazard" is one in which "Hundreds have lost indeed— / But tens have won an all—". And "'Tis so much joy!" [172] makes the wager clearer; the "poor" speaker has "ventured all upon a throw!" The second stanza reveals an existential (if somewhat antic) awareness of the dilemma.

Life is but Life! And Death, but Death!
 Bliss is but Bliss, and Breath but Breath!
 And if indeed I fail,
 At least, to know the worst, is sweet!
 Defeat means nothing *but* Defeat,
 No drearier, can befall!

Dickinson's gamble is dedicating her life to poetry, to those "beautiful tempters" (the muses) rather than Christ, and the third stanza anticipates success:

And if I gain! Oh Gun at Sea!
 Oh Bells, that in the Steeples be!
 At first, repeat it slow!
 For Heaven is a different thing,
 Conjectured, and waked sudden in—
 And might extinguish me!

As in "I reckon—when I count at all", to be a poet is equated with Heaven; Dickinson's "industrious Angel," her messenger from that heaven, disappears as inexplicably as he comes in poem 231. In the next poem in fascicle 10, inspiration comes and goes, though a different set of metaphors is employed.

"The *Sun—just touched* the Morning—" [232] is usually read as a love poem, and is one of the poems Bennett cites as an early and less than successful marriage poem. "Her wheeling King" who she "Supposed . . . had come to *dwell—*" instead, sets:

The Morning—*fluttered—staggered—*
*Felt feebly—*for her *Crown—*
 Her *unanointed forehead—*
*Henceforth—*Her *only One!*

As in "God permits industrious Angels" [231], the setting sun symbolizes the natural and timely, even inevitable, loss of the vision. The missing "*Crown*" is one and the same in both poems (and underlined in both). This is not a poem about a fickle lover, but about the vagaries of inspiration.

The following poem in fascicle 10, "The Lamp burns sure—within—" [233] uses traditional symbols of the loving soul awaiting its bridegroom, as in Matthew 25, The Parable of the Ten Virgins, or as in Kabir: "A lamp burns and has neither wick nor oil" (27).

The Lamp burns sure—within—
 Tho' 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.

This may be read as a poem about poetic immortality: the lamp continues to burn long after she, the Slave, is gone and “her phosphoric toil” is over. Poem 883, “The Poets light but Lamps— / Themselves—go out—” uses the same image more explicitly. Similarly, in “Dare you see a Soul *at the White Heat?*” [365], poetry burns itself free of its origins:

Red—is the Fire's common tint—
 But when the vivid Ore
 Has vanquished Flame's conditions,
 It quivers from the Forge
 Without a color, but the light
 Of unanointed Blaze.

.....
 Until the Designated Light
 Repudiate the Forge—

Mystical poems of many traditions use the metaphors of slave and master, lover and bridegroom, to refer to the soul and god. Yet Bennett reads “The Lamp burns sure—within—” as a love poem in which “the lover himself proves inadequate, a ‘Slave’ who does not appreciate the sturdy light that he has ignited in the loving but abandoned lamp” (76). There is evidence for reading the Lamp as feminine in “the busy Wick / At her phosphoric toil,” clearly a metaphor for Dickinson’s writing, but even if we read the Slave as masculine lover, the poem still would be about the transcendence of her need for him. The lamp burns miraculously, no longer needing the fuel the lover once provided. As she wrote Judge Lord late (c. 1883; he died the next year), “The withdrawal of the Fuel of Rapture does not withdraw the Rapture itself” [L 842]. If Dickinson is indeed playing with the parable from Matthew, then the first stanza would seem to concern the wise virgins whom the bridegroom invites “within” to the wedding feast. The second stanza might depict the

transformation of the wise virgins: once welcomed into the wedding feast, lost in glory, they forget both earthly bodies (the Slave) and perhaps earthly love (the oil once needed to light the lamp of love, but not to keep it burning in the bridegroom's presence).

Dickinson sees clearly the lover's supernal aspect, to which Bennett, for one, remains blind. The Master is but one name for "Sun," or "Angel," or "Nectar," to list a few of the images used in this fascicle. Like Plato, Dickinson deploys interchangeable metaphors to refer to things of the spirit, "Hallowed things," so that we do not mistake any one metaphor for the "truth."²² Such things are not to be spoken of directly, she implies when she writes Higginson, "Of 'shunning Men and Women'—they talk of Hallowed things, aloud—and embarrass my Dog—" [L 271].

Dickinson sometimes glorifies her beloved beyond God, much as she accuses herself in an early letter of "idolatry" of those she loves, and reasons that they are taken from her as punishment²³ (by that old "Burglar! Banker—Father!"). Sometimes she compares him (favorably) to Christ, sometimes she boasts that she loves him more than Christ, but ultimately she realizes:

You constituted Time—
I deemed Eternity
A Revelation of Yourself—
'Twas therefore Deity

²²As Pieper explains, "We are not able to speak of matters such as soul, spirit, deity, with any claim to direct description. This is Plato's excuse for attempting to explain the same thing by *several* analogies, as he is wont to do. The implication is that a matter is difficult or impossible to grasp by direct, non-metaphorical statement, and that no single metaphor is in itself completely adequate, none fully accurate." *Love and Inspiration* 77.

²³Dickinson writes Sue upon her engagement to Austin (c. 1854), in the oft-quoted "Sue—you can go or stay—" letter, "Few have been given me, and if I love them so, that for *idolatry*, they are removed from me—I simply murmur *gone*, and the billow dies away into the boundless blue, and no one knows but me, that one went down today." [L 173]

The Absolute—removed+
 The Relative away—
 That I unto Himself adjust
 My slow idolatry—

+withdrew—

[765]

That is, the speaker realizes her mistake in confusing the godbearing image with God. In “My Reward for Being, was This” [343], the beloved is preferred to “An Admiralty,” “A Sceptre,” “Realms,” and “Thrones.” Instead, the speaker claims,

I’ll unroll Thee—
 Dominions dowerless—beside this Grace—
 Election—Vote—
 The Ballots of Eternity, will show just that.

The ending indicates that this is no merely human lover, but a “Grace” or “Election” to be ratified by “The Ballots of Eternity”—or poetic immortality.

In poem 603, “He found my Being—set it up—” the absent lover is equated with death and/or God, who “would come again / With Equipage of Amber— / That time— to take it Home—”. The most explicit statement of the marriage theme as that of the soul to God is poem 817 (c. 1864); a fair copy of the first stanza was sent to the devout Sue:

Given in Marriage unto Thee
 Oh thou Celestial Host—
 Bride of the Father and the Son
 Bride of the Holy Ghost.

Other Betrothal shall dissolve—
 Wedlock of Will, decay—
 Only the Keeper of this Ring
 Conquer Mortality—

Dickinson’s self-abasement before the Master becomes easier to bear if he is considered not as a mere man, but as a godbearing image, or divine aspect of the self. In later poems, Dickinson internalizes this aspect, taking on his grandeur. For example, poem 1072 is Dickinson’s most ecstatic announcement of her new-found powers and state:

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

Again, she is “Wife” and “Woman,” but rather than “Czar,” her “Title divine” is now “Empress of Calvary,” feminine royalty and human deity. She is still missing the “Crown,” the outer sign (fame?), but proclaims her own coronation by sending this poem to Samuel Bowles in late 1861 or early 1862, and another version to Sue in 1866. Again she equates marriage and death: “Born—Bridalled—Shrouded— / In a Day—”. Who is her “Husband”? “The Melody” she strokes. This poem is a passionate declaration of her identity as a woman artist, married to the muse. It announces the *coniunctio*, or sacred marriage, which Jung uses to symbolize the wholeness of a psyche that has wed its masculine and feminine aspects. Jung quotes an “apocryphal saying of Jesus from the beginning of the second century” as a paradigm for “the mystery of the coniunctio, in which extreme opposites unite, night is wedded with day, and ‘the two shall be as one, and the outside as the inside, and the male with the female neither male nor female’” (*Mysterium Coniunctionis* 166).

LOADED GUN

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

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

And do I smile, such cordial light
 Upon the Valley glow—
 It is as a Vesuvian face
 Had let its pleasure through—

And when at Night—Our good Day done—
 I guard My Master's Head—
 'Tis better than the Eider-Duck's
 Deep Pillow—to have shared—

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

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

The ultimate Master poem, “My life had stood—a Loaded Gun—” is so enigmatic that Susan Howe has devoted much of *My Emily Dickinson* to explicating without exhausting its meanings: “Like all poems on the trace of the holy, this one remains outside the protection of specific solution” (35). And Rich calls this poem “the real ‘onlie begetter’” of her thoughts about Dickinson in “Vesuvius at Home” (*On Lies* 172).

Anderson reads it as a ballad of the “Owner” as “pioneer husband” and the “Gun” as “frontier wife”; Johnson reads them as “creative spirit or inspiration” and “physical entity,” respectively; yet neither interpretation manages to explain the final paradoxical quatrain (Cody 401). Cody finds “the Owner” “an unfamiliar aspect” of the poet’s

divided self “employed in the poet’s creative periods,” which had lain dormant; released during her presumed psychotic episode, these “‘new’ sectors of the personality were activated by the poet’s acceptance of her masculine identifications,” the “Gun” serving as phallic symbol, with attendant envy of father and brother, fear of castration, and so on (414).

Louise Bogan wisely writes that the poem “defies analysis” and asks, “Is this an allegory, and if so of what? Is it a cry from some psychic deep where good and evil are not to be separated?”²⁴ Yes. This “psychic deep” is the substratum of the muse as Trickster, that “spirit of disorder, the enemy of boundaries” and representative of the “archaic and primordial past, where there as yet existed no clear-cut differentiation between the divine and the non-divine.” The poem erases boundaries between feminine and masculine, creator and destroyer, human being and object, mortal and immortal. The poem provides an account, as Jung describes the Trickster myths, of “the gradual civilizing, i.e. assimilation, of a primitive daemonic figure who was originally autonomous and even capable of causing possession,” who is split off from “consciousness and consequently behaves like an autonomous personality,”²⁵ who, though violent and destructive, is nevertheless a culture-hero, bringer of blessings.

There is perhaps no more uncanny account of possession than this poem. “My Life had stood—a Loaded Gun— / In Corners,” that is, unused, unable to realize its proper function, “till a Day” the split-off “Owner passed—identified / And carried me away—”

²⁴In “A Mystical Poet,” Louise Bogan compares Dickinson to the English Romantics, particularly the Blake who declares, “The world of Imagination is the world of Eternity . . . The world of Imagination is Infinite and Eternal, whereas the world of generation is Finite and Temporal . . .” and finds “that the progress of the mystic toward illumination, and of the poet toward the full depth and richness of his insight—are much alike.” *Emily Dickinson: Three Views* (Amherst: Amherst College P, 1960) by Louise Bogan, Archibald MacLeish, and Richard Wilbur; rpt. in *Emily Dickinson: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Richard B. Sewall (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963) 138.

²⁵ See Chapter One for a fuller discussion of Trickster, and Radin 185, 122, 205.

literally, possessed me, shot through me. The astonishing violence of this figure is reminiscent of the Trickster myths. The civilization or assimilation of this split-off archaic being is represented first by roaming and hunting, then smiling (like Vesuvius, again identified with an archaic stratum of earth, its molten magma), to guarding “My Master’s Head” at night, like a good watch-dog/gun. Indeed, Dickinson’s life was severely restricted (rendered almost “inhuman”) in order to fiercely protect her “Master’s Head,” that seat of vision; her life was devoted to “killing off” everything that threatened her inspiration: “To foe of His—I’m deadly foe—”. And she preferred this hypervigilance to an easy, soft life of regular human companionship: “’Tis better than the Eider-Duck’s / Deep Pillow—to have shared—”.

Poem 1334 glosses this difficult line; six months after her father, Edward Dickinson, had died, she wrote Mrs. Holland (in late Jan., 1875):

Mother is asleep in the Library—Vinnie—in the Dining Room—Father—
in the Masked Bed—in the Marl House.
How soft his Prison is—
How sweet those sullen Bars—
No Despot—but the King of Down
Invented that Repose!

The Despot King of Down is another name for that old Burglar/Banker or Necromancer/Landlord, the Lord that Taketh Away. Along these lines, her preference for guarding her master’s head over sleeping may be interpreted as her choice of poetic immortality over death.

The poem ends with a conundrum about the relative times of death of the speaker and a male aspect, “The Owner” or “Master”:

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

Howe reads the last mysterious stanza as follows, tying together many of the themes of this chapter:

Inward and outward turning, the four lines of the sixth and last stanza of the poem are a mirror-maze in the process of Metamorphosis. Inside the mirror—the second two lines—the poem makes its transumptive turn. Master-Owner is gone—mere Gun. In the third stanza, Gun took God's place as guard. "Which, Sir, are you and which am I / Upon an August day?" [124] Now Dickinson assumes in art her own power. The soul is a bride. Joined together, she and her precursor-lover are mighty as the greatest mystery which is Death." (130)

This final riddle recalls the endings of "We—Bee and I—live by the quaffing," and "We don't cry—Tim and I," although those poems end with both speaker and male aspect dying "simultaneous—". What has "the power to kill / Without—the power to die—"? The immortal or the inanimate: God or Gun. "An earnest letter is or should be a life-warrant or death-warrant, for what is each instant but a gun, harmless because 'unloaded,' but that touched 'goes off?'" Dickinson writes.²⁶ Since the riddle concerns length of life, only the immortal fits its conditions. What is the "I"'s immortality? Either poetry, or the "immortal soul." The second stanza of "A word made flesh is seldom / And tremblingly partook" [1651] provides one answer:

A Word that breathes distinctly
Has not the power to die
Cohesive as the Spirit
It may expire if He—
"Made Flesh and dwelt among us
Could condescension be
Like this consent of Language
This loved Philology

Moreover, as Rich observes, the power to kill is equated throughout with the power to write, so the "I" that cannot die is the Emily Dickinson alive in the poetry, her Word made flesh.

In that case, "Though I than He—may longer live" would mean that poetry may outlive its inspiration, as expressed also in "The Poets light but Lamps— / Themselves—go out—". Why, then, the next line? According to Rich, because the prospect of life without possession by the beloved daemon is "unthinkable: 'he longer *must* than I.'" Yet

²⁶David J. M. Higgins, "Emily Dickinson's Prose," *Emily Dickinson: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Richard B. Sewall (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963) 162.

the strangeness of the last two lines remains logically insoluble, linked as they are to the first two by the conjunction “For”: how can he outlive that which cannot die?

One possible solution to the riddle is that it concerns two aspects of the same double-being, like “Tim and I” or “Bee and I,” or Heathcliff and Catherine. As Howe writes,

The subject and conflict of *Wuthering Heights* and “My Life had stood—a Loaded Gun—” is complete union with another soul and absolute separation. Catherine and Heathcliff are each other’s central source. They contain, define, and defy one another, and everyone else around them. In Dickinson’s poem, this same unity is at the core of identity—Gun and hunter, My Life and Master . . . (136)

Similarly, Poe’s story “William Wilson” ends when Wilson kills his double, and himself dies, hearing the double speak, though “I could have fancied that I myself was speaking while he said:”

You have conquered, and I yield. Yet, henceforward art thou also dead—dead to the World, to Heaven, and to hope! In me didst thou exist—and, in my death, see by this image, which is thine own, how utterly thou hast murdered thyself. (215)

Yet in the poem, rather than murdering itself, the killer “I” cannot die, so “He” who must live longer than an immortal “I” must be immortal, too. Thus the end implies that the two aspects are one, in immortality as in death—and that death and immortality are also one. Boundaries obliterated.

I do not presume to have solved the riddle. The poem’s uncanny power springs from its resistance to logical explanation, which casts the reader into that realm of experience beyond all limits, “Awe.”

Johnson writes of the following poem [809], which also deals with a mirroring pair of immortalities, “Her muse has led her to the discovery of secret springs”:

Unable are the Loved to die
For Love is Immortality,
Nay, it is Deity—

Unable they that love—to die
 For Love reforms Vitality
 Into Divinity

The discovery her muse imparts is, like Shakespeare's in the sonnets, nothing less than "the identity of love, immortality, and the poet's genius or essential self" (Frye, *Fables* 103).

Again in poem 679, (quoted at the top of this chapter, and here from the slightly different version sent to Sue), Dickinson names her "shapeless friend," who goes by so many names, among them "Owner" and "Master":

Neither if He visit other—
 Do He dwell or Nay
 Know I—just instinct esteem Him
 Immortality—

Thus, as we have seen so far, the male figure in Dickinson's poems and letters has been variously interpreted as a human lover, as a composite lover/father/precursor muse, as her animus or masculine aspect, and as Christ, God or Logos. This male muse is the Other that engenders the creation of the poem. The muse need not be a lover, though the metaphor of love predominates in poetry as in religious mysticism. Dickinson receives but reworks the traditional metaphor of the soul as Bride of Christ to express her own relationship to deity, experienced directly through poetry and through visitations described in various ways. Her visitant, guest, or "shapeless friend" I take to be the muse as shape-shifter, for he appears in many forms—such as Master, Preceptor, Sun, King, God, Burglar, Banker, Father, Death, Owner—while the poet takes complementary forms—Daisy, flower, bird, scholar, nobody, wife, queen, bride, woman, loaded gun. The wedding of these two sets of terms, enacted in the marriage poems as in "My life had stood—a Loaded Gun—", should be understood metaphorically as a mystical marriage within the soul—the *coniunctio oppositorum*— that confers the blessing of Immortality.

CHAPTER IV: THE SOUL THAT HATH A GUEST

I asked if she never felt want of employment, never going off the place & never seeing any visitor "I never thought of conceiving that I could ever have the slightest approach to such a want in all future time" (& added) "I feel that I have not expressed myself strongly enough."

—Thomas Wentworth Higginson¹

The Soul that hath a Guest
Doth seldom go abroad—
Diviner Crowd at Home—
Obliterate the need—

And Courtesy forbid
A Host's departure when
Upon Himself be visiting
The Emperor of Men—

[674]

Occupation: "At Home" Austin Dickinson wrote on her death certificate

Dickinson's election of solitude can best be explained by the dedication of her life to the Word, not by love or madness, though it may be connected to, and at times resembles, these other forms of mania. For Dickinson, as for Plato, according to Pieper,

love reaches its apogee and attains its own potentialities only by awakening recollection, or rather, when it itself is recollection of something that exceeds any possibility of gratification in the finite realm. (81)

As Dickinson writes in a letter, "Our unfinished interview like the Cloth of Dreams, cheapens other fabrics. That Possession fairest lies that is least possest" [L 359]. Over and over, in poems and letters, Dickinson expresses her preference for "the Cloth of Dreams"

¹Describing his first meeting Dickinson, after eight years of corresponding.

to any other, cheaper fabrics. For example, Dickinson writes her friend Mrs. Holland, “When you had gone the love came. I supposed it would. The supper of the heart is when the guest has gone” [L 318].

“My favorite kind of relationship is otherworldly: to see someone in a dream. And the second is correspondence,” Tsvetaeva wrote Pasternak, her muse of the moment. Though they carried on a passionate epistolary relationship, Tsvetaeva refused to meet him—not only to preserve their families (both poets were married with children) but, as Pierpont observes, “more than that, her poems to him—and his greatest value to her *was* in her poems to him—depended on longing, and therefore on absence. The poet already had what she wanted, and mere happiness would have made a poor exchange” (95). After Pasternak introduced Tsvetaeva (via correspondence) to Rilke, whom both “worshipped . . . as the Orpheus of the age,” Tsvetaeva’s letters to Pasternak turned cold as she began to pursue Rilke, “confounding angel and man” (Pierpont 95). She proposed coming to him; Rilke avoided her, exactly as she had Pasternak. She reassured Rilke (in writing, of course), “The word, which for me already is the thing, is all I want.”

Dickinson, like Tsvetaeva, conducted many passionate epistolary relationships, and both poets tended to frighten off those they loved by the intensity of their passion, which verged on idolatry.² And both used their lives primarily to write, Dickinson producing close to two thousand, Tsvetaeva more than two thousand poems (most of which have, so far, defied translation into English; one wonders how Dickinson fares in Russian). Tsvetaeva’s poetry, again, much like Dickinson’s,

²See Dickinson’s letter to Sue upon the latter’s engagement to Austin [L 173]. Or, a quarter-century later, Dickinson writes Judge Lord, “Oh, my too beloved, save me from the idolatry which would crush us both—” [L 560].

even when mythically allusive, both uses and rebels against feminine *realia*. Tsvetaeva . . . begins not with conjunction with a male, but with aloneness—aloneness after intense union, during inadequate union, or prior to union that will never occur. The poet finds this singularity both humanly intolerable and poetically indispensable; the poems integrate these conflicting findings.³

Dickinson could be included in Pierpont's description of Tsvetaeva and Pasternak: they "were consumed with the other-worldly aspect of the poet's calling, and found reality a near-impossible premise for living" (95).

Dickinson herself might well have written, "The word, which for me already is the thing, is all I want." She did write to an early friend, Joseph Lyman,

We used to think, Joseph, when I was an unsifted girl and you so scholarly that words were cheap & weak. Now I dont know of anything so mighty. There are [those] to which I lift my hat when I see them sitting princelike among their peers on the page. Sometimes I write one, and look at his outlines till he glows as no sapphire. (Sewall 2: 675)

Words are not only reified but personified as "mighty," "princelike," male. Sewall adds that "Some such enthusiasm was surely the meaning behind her remark that for several years in the late 1850s her 'Lexicon' was her only companion," and tells us that "[s]he once begged off seeing a caller because, she said, 'My own Words so chill and burn me'" (2: 675-76). Like Ginzburg's master, her vocation of writing, Dickinson's Master may be understood as the Word, as Logos.

A Word made Flesh is seldom
And tremblingly partook
Nor then perhaps reported
But have I not mistook
Each one of us has tasted
With ecstasies of stealth
The very food debated
To our specific strength—

³Barbara Heldt, *Terrible Perfection* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1987) 130-31.

A Word that breathes distinctly
 Has not the power to die
 Cohesive as the Spirit
 It may expire if He—
 “Made Flesh and dwelt among us
 Could condescension be
 Like this consent of Language
 This loved Philology
 [1651]

Dickinson transfers the idea of the Incarnation from theology to poetry, with the full force of the Gospel according to St. John behind it, and “describes the experience of partaking the Word as a kind of communion,” as Sewall notes. “This is why, in her first letter to Higginson, she was eager to know if her verse was ‘alive,’ whether it ‘breathed’—that is, whether she had achieved the miracle of Incarnation” (2: 677). An undated prose fragment (presumably transcribed by Sue from a note Dickinson sent her) hints at the same idea:

The import of that Paragraph “The Word made Flesh”
 Had he the faintest intimation Who broached it Yesterday!
 “Made Flesh and dwelt among us.” [PF 4]

The necessary condition for partaking of this sacrament was solitude.

THE PASSION

In the *Symposium*, Diotima instructs Socrates about Eros:

“He is a great spirit [*daimon*], and like all spirits he is intermediate between the divine and the mortal.” “And what,” I said, “is his power?” “He interprets,” she replied, “between gods and men, conveying and taking across to the gods the prayers and sacrifices of men, and to men the commands and replies of the gods; he is the mediator who spans the chasm which divides them, and therefore in him all is bound together, and through him the arts of the prophet and the priest, their sacrifices and charms, and all prophecy and incantation, find their way . . . Now these spirits or intermediate powers are many and diverse, and one of them is Love. (81)

This great spirit, often conflated with Christ as Love incarnate, remains the mediator or muse for many poets, from Dante to Dickinson and Tsvetaeva, and beyond. "It may surprise you I speak of God—I know him but a little, but Cupid taught Jehovah to many an untutored Mind—Witchcraft is wiser than we—" Dickinson writes Lord, and "You showed me the word." The letter begins, "Dont you know you are happiest while I withhold and not confer—dont you know that "No" is the wildest word we consign to Language?" and later advises, "Ask your throbbing Scripture." Her reason for refusing him: "you ask the divine Crust and that would doom the Bread."⁴

"Emily Dickinson's religion was Poetry," Howe states. "As she went on through veils of connection to the secret alchemy of Deity, she was less and less interested in temporal blessing" (48-49). Dickinson's poem "Love—thou art high—" [453] ends

Love—thou art Vailed
 A few—behold thee—
 Smile—and alter—and prattle—and die—
 Bliss—were an Oddity—without thee—
 Nicknamed by God—
 Eternity—

"Eternity" is God's nickname for Love, which is equated with Dickinson's "shapeless friend," "Immortality"; once again we are led to "the identity of love, immortality, and the poet's genius or essential self" (Frye, *Fables* 103). One veil Dickinson moves through in her poetry is the mystery of Christ's Passion. Her Christ-like muse is at first a seemingly flesh and blood man, divine yet subject to death; through "marriage," she identifies with and incorporates him, to imaginatively suffer, die, and rise herself, immortal—through love, and through the Word. As Howe observes of Emilie Dickinson and Brontë, "In the separate souls of these two women, once again the inhuman legalism of Calvin warred with

⁴Letter 562, c. 1878; Dickinson would have been in her late forties; he, his late sixties. The letters were heavily censored (with scissors), presumably by Austin or Vinnie. Lord was a Salem judge and friend of the poet's father, who had died in 1874; Lord's wife had died in 1877. Marriage is toyed with in the letters, but never considered seriously by Dickinson. It would appear that she sought a replacement for her father, he, for his wife.

the intellectual beauty of Neoplatonism" (61). The Calvinist strand has been well-traced by many critics, such as William Sherwood in *Circumference and Circumstance*, so I emphasize the Neoplatonic here.

Sherwood, who believes one man was Dickinson's Master, paraphrases Voltaire, "if life had not presented a Reverend Charles Wadsworth Emily Dickinson would have had to invent him," and then adds "that to a great extent she did," forging an idol out of intractable materials.⁵ He argues that Dickinson constructed "a drama of passion" out of their (conjectured, mainly epistolary) relationship, "assimilating, as Hawthorne may have taught her to do, the conventions of medieval romance within a Calvinist framework" (82). Without the benefit of Franklin's facsimile edition, Sherwood divides her work into four clear-cut periods: 1) questioning, 2) heresy: creation of her own god, Wadsworth, 3) despair: having lost, not only him, but salvation, and 4) conversion: an orthodox Puritan visitation by the grace of God.

To some extent my difference with Sherwood is a semantic one; as Perry Miller describes grace in *The New England Mind*,

⁵Emphasizing the difference between Dickinson's "idol" and what he considers its "real" model, Sherwood quotes amusingly from a sermon of Wadsworth's: "Certainly the man who in 1852, when the twenty-two year old Emily Dickinson was beginning to experiment in poetry, was capable of saying that 'the steam engine is a mightier epic than the *Paradise Lost*. The magnetic telegraph is a lovelier and loftier creation of true poetry than Spenser's *Fairy Queen* or Shakespeare's *Tempest*' could not have been the creation who inspired Emily Dickinson to write some of her finest poems" (81-82). Indeed. Yet Sherwood does not allow his own evidence to persuade him.

Perhaps because of those innate assumptions that allow him to write in his conclusion that "after all, the most important generalization to be made about Emily Dickinson is the one on which all her commentators agree— . . . that she was a lady." He praises her "feminine" "artifice and calculation," her "housewife's skill," her "neatness, taste, and order," her "fastidiousness" and tidiness (232-33). Elsewhere he praises her as a "careful shopper" (122), with the "thrift, resourcefulness, and economy of one well trained in the domestic virtues" (114). This, too, is amusing at a distance of over twenty-five years, but if one imagines back one hundred and twenty-five years, it gives pause, and justification almost sufficient in itself for Dickinson's decision not to publish. William R. Sherwood, *Circumference and Circumstance* (New York and London: Columbia UP, 1968).

Other people have found other names for the experience: to lovers it is love, to mystics it is ecstasy, to poets inspiration. . . . To the Puritans there was of course only one interpretation. It was the act of communion in which the infinite impinged upon the finite, when the misery of the fragmentary was replaced by the delight of wholeness. (Miller 25-26; qtd. in Sherwood 138-39.)

My sense of Dickinson is that she was poet first, mystic second, lover third, and Puritan fourth, by birth, but heterodox to the end. Thus, the "He" Sherwood interprets in post-1862 poems as the Calvinist God, I read as muse; the poems he interprets as describing an orthodox "divine grace," I read as describing poetic inspiration. Rather than clear stages organized around one individual, I infer a gradual climb, as Diotima describes, from the love of individual(s) through beauty to God and immortality.

It is not clear whether Dickinson was rejected by, or renounced any, human Master; recent feminist criticism emphasizes Dickinson's role-playing and virtuoso use of dramatic voices. She may not be recounting personal experience but adapting poetic conventions of romantic love and Calvinist conventions of religious grace to suit her own needs. The essential is that "He" be both idealized and unattainable, for absence and longing inspire.

Absence disembodies—so does Death
Hiding individuals from the Earth
Superstition helps, as well as love—
Tenderness decreases as we prove—

[860]

Or, as she writes in poem 838, like Marvell's "The Definition of Love":

Impossibility, like Wine
Exhilarates the Man
Who tastes it; Possibility
Is flavorless—Combine

A Chance's faintest Tincture
And in the former Dram
Enchantment make ingredient
As certainly as Doom—

Dickinson's Master as Logos may also be conflated with Christ as Love. Her religion was poetry: she not only performed her own sacramental rites and miracles of

incarnation, but enacted an imitation of Christ's passion in her work. Whether or not there were any individuals through whom she experienced the muse, her devotion to the Word is unquestionable.

A PIERCING VIRTUE

Renunciation—is a piercing
 Virtue—
 The letting go
 A presence—for an Expectation—
 Not now—
 The putting out of Eyes—
 Just Sunrise—
 Lest Day—
 Day's Great Progenitor—
 Outvie +Outshow +Outglow
 Renunciation—is the Choosing
 Against itself—
 Itself to justify
 Unto itself—
 When larger function—
 Make that appear—
 Smaller—that +Covered Vision—Here—
 +flooded— sated—

[745; F 37]

Many feminist critics, following Rich, attempt to down-play the renunciation entailed by Dickinson's reclusive, visionary life. Rich argues that "her nonmarrying was neither a pathological retreat . . . nor probably even a conscious decision; it was a fact in her life as in Christina Rossetti's; both women had more primary needs" (*On Lies* 171). Or, as Vinnie claimed, it "was only a happen." Sewall reports that once "in later years when Vinnie was asked if she could not get Emily to go out sometimes, she replied: 'But why should I? She is quite happy and contented as she is. I would only disturb her'" (1: 155). Sewall also quotes a marvelous letter on the subject to Higginson from Samuel G. Ward, a Transcendentalist and near-contemporary of Dickinson's:

She is the quintessence of that element we all have who are of the Puritan descent *pur sang*. We came to this country to think our own thoughts with nobody to hinder. Ascetics of course, & this our Thebaid. We conversed with our own souls till we lost the art of communicating with other people. The typical family grew up strangers to each other, as in this case. It was *awfully* high, but awfully lonesome. Such prodigies of shyness do not exist elsewhere. We get it from the English, but the English were not alone in a corner of the world for a hundred & fifty years with no outside interest.
(1: 26)

Nevertheless, such a great number of Dickinson's poems concern renunciation and its attendant pain that I cannot help but read it as a crucial "happen." As Sewall notes, merely reading a list of some first lines indicates the importance of the theme:

293 "I got so I could take his name"
 349 "I had the Glory—that will do"
 366 "Although I put away his life"
 398 "I had not minded—Walls"
 419 "We grow accustomed to the Dark"
 456 "So well that I can live without"
 482 "We Cover Thee—Sweet Face"
 498 "I envy Seas, whereon He rides"
 611 "I see thee better—in the Dark"
 616 "I rose—because He sank"
 640 "I cannot live with You"
 643 "I could suffice for Him, I knew"
 644 "You left me—Sire—two Legacies"
 646 "I think to Live—may be a Bliss"
 745 "Renunciation—is a piercing Virtue"
 853 "When One has given up One's life"
 858 "This Chasm, Sweet, upon my life"
 863 "That Distance was between Us"
 998 "Best Things dwell out of Sight"
 1013 "Too scanty 'twas to die for you"
 1141 "The Face we choose to miss"
 1754 "To lose thee—sweeter than to gain"

The following relatively late poem exists only in a pencilled "very unfinished worksheet draft," according to Johnson, yet seems even (more) so to sum up an aesthetic:

I'd rather recollect a setting
 Than own a rising sun
 Though one is beautiful forgetting—
 And true the other one.

Because in going is a Drama
 Staying cannot confer
 To die divinely once a Twilight—
 Than wane is easier—

3. forgetting] secession	6. cannot] could not
4] And best the [new]est one	7. a Twilight] an evening
real newer	Limit
bland	8. wane] live
fine	
fair	

To recollect is better than to own, for owning entails losing, whereas in recollection the poet can recreate “Exterior—to Time.” “The supper of the heart is when the guest has gone.” Or again, as Pieper writes of the *Phaedrus*,

The erotic emotion experienced in the encounter with beauty is a form of *theia mania*, of divine madness, to the extent that what really takes place in it is not “gratification,” not becoming at home in the here and now, but rather opening the inner spaces of life to an infinite assuagement which cannot be had “here”—save in the form of yearning and recollection. (86)

Dickinson knows she cannot possess the sun, but via the sun’s “beautiful secession” or divine death, through yearning and recollection, she is inspired to poetry. For perhaps similar reasons, the tenth-century Japanese Sei Shonagon, in her celebrated poetic diary, chooses autumn over spring, preferring the beauty of sadness and loss. For, as Dickinson writes,

Perception of an object costs
 Precise the Object’s loss—
 Perception in itself a Gain
 Replying to it’s Price—
 The Object Absolute—is nought—
 Perception sets it fair
 And then upbraids a Perfectness
 That situates so far—

And, to a poet, perception is the paramount “possession,” the “reducelless Mine.” As Middlebrook writes of another woman poet, “Loss was Sexton’s most reliable muse” (150) and “the threat of separation would always be the ally of her deepest work” (89).

Dickinson writes, more impishly, “You remember my ideal cat has always a huge rat in its

mouth, just going out of sight—though going out of sight in itself has a peculiar charm” [L 471].

I will examine in some detail fascicle 21 (c. 1862), which centers on loss and its rewards, intercutting poems of renunciation with others proclaiming poetic gifts as more than ample compensation. The group begins:

I Years had been from Home
And now before the Door
I dared not enter, lest a Face
I never saw before

Stare stolid into mine
And ask my Business there—
“My Business but a Life I left
Was such remaining there?”

I leaned upon the Awe—
I lingered with Before—
The Second like an Ocean rolled
And broke against my ear—

I laughed a crumbling Laugh
That I could fear a Door
Who Consternation compassed
And never winced before.

I fitted to the Latch
My Hand, with trembling care
Lest back the awful Door should spring
And leave me in the Floor—

Then moved my Fingers off
As cautiously as Glass
And held my ears, and like a Thief
Fled gasping from the House—

[609]

Alternative wordings include “I dared not enter [open]” “the Door,” and in the end, “like a Thief / Fled [Stole—] gasping from the House—”. The terror of finding a stranger within, “a face / I never saw before,” alternately described as “stolid,” “horrid,” “vacant,” drives the speaker away, keeping the “I” from inquiring after “a Life I left” there.

This poem can be read as a forerunner of “My Life had stood—a Loaded Gun—”. In both poems, the “I” and its “Life” are oddly split; here, the “Life” has been left behind at home while “I” was away, much as “My Life” the “Loaded Gun” had been left leaning “In Corners” until possessed by “The Owner.” In this poem, the “Life” has not been “identified” yet, and “I” fears the new inhabitant of “the House” that was once “Home.” As so often in Dickinson poems, the self, like Nature, “is a Haunted House.”⁶ The stolid/horrid/vacant new inhabitant, like a ghost or haunt, may be read as a negative animus or muse—the unknown other that inhabits the poet’s old house and keeps her from claiming her old life as her own. As Bray notes, in her poetry “the haunted and the holy are often the same,” and the mind is often represented with architectural metaphors, with especial attention to doors and floors (121), as in this poem. Bray continues, “language itself is that which houses” and

One of the feared consequences of trying to domesticate the natural world, to invite it, as it were, into the house of language, is the jealousy and resentment the newcomer may arouse in the ghosts who already reside there. . . . So . . . the poet may . . . release the language-ghosts into the infinite as-yet-unhaunted expanse of the silent world. (122-23)

“I Years had been from Home” can be read as an account of the ghost’s repelling of the newcomer, and “My Life had stood—a Loaded Gun—” as an account of the terrific release of the “language-ghosts” to “roam in Sovereign Woods—”.

Much as the speaker in “I Years had been from Home” renounces a long-awaited pleasure, the third poem in this fascicle [F21], “I see thee better—in the Dark—” [611], declares the speaker’s love so powerful that it obviates the presence of the beloved. “The word, which is for me already the thing, is all I want.” This seemingly reflexive shunning of fulfillment, which Dickinson expresses much later, “The Banquet of Abstemiousness / Defaces+ that of Wine—” [1430], appears linked to two subsequent poems in this

⁶Dickinson sent the famous dictum to Higginson: “Nature is a Haunted House—but Art—a House that tries to be haunted” [L 459A].

+Debases, surpasses

gathering. The child in "It would have starved a Gnat—" [612] and "They shut me up in Prose—" [613] is in each case so starved and stifled that she learns to do without, and to escape within. Poem 612 begins

It would have starved a Gnat—
To live so small as I—
And yet I was a living Child—
With Food's necessity
Upon me—like a Claw—

Even the gnat is "mightier" than she, for He has "the privilege to fly / And seek a Dinner"; she also lacks his "Art," the poem ends,

Upon the Window Pane
To gad my little Being out
And not begin—again—

Like the speaker of "My life had stood—a Loaded Gun," this living child is "Without—the power to die—". But by the next poem [613], the speaker has learned to "fly":

They shut me up in Prose—
As when a little Girl
They put me in the Closet
Because they liked me "still"—

Still! Could themself have peeped—
And seen my Brain—go round—
They might as wise have lodged a Bird
For Treason—in the Pound—

Himself has but to will
And easy as a Star
Look down upon Captivity—
And laugh—No more have I—

Thus the poet can claim in a slightly later poem [657], "I dwell in Possibility— / A fairer House than Prose—". Possibility represents the spirit, imagination, poetry, and Prose the prisonhouse of the body, or necessity. Renunciation—the suffering of the flesh—leads to the triumph of the spirit. Her solution recalls Thoreau's in "Civil Disobedience," and Emily Brontë's in "To Imagination":

So hopeless is the world without,
 The world within I doubly prize;
 Thy world where guile and hate and doubt
 And cold suspicion never rise;
 Where thou and I and Liberty
 Have undisputed sovereignty.

(*The Complete Poems of Emily Jane Brontë* 205)

Another well-known Dickinson poem, borrowing images from the martyrs, the
 Inquisition, perhaps even the Salem witch trials, proclaims

No Rack can torture me—
 My Soul—at Liberty—
 Behind this mortal Bone
 There knits a bolder One—

You Cannot prick with saw—
 Nor pierce with Cimitar—
 Two Bodies—therefore be—
 Bind One—the Other Fly—

and ends with the couplet,

Captivity is Consciousness—
 So's Liberty.

[384]

The “Two Bodies” here shed light upon her many double poems, such as “Me from Myself—to banish—” [642], “I tried to think a lonelier Thing” [532], and “Of Consciousness, her awful Mate” [894]. (“We—Bee and I,” “We dont cry—Tim and I,” and “My Life had stood—a Loaded Gun—” are discussed above.) Otto Rank claims in *Der Doppeltgänger* that “the significance of the double as an embodiment of the soul—a notion represented in primitive belief and living on in our superstition—” (81) is a denial of death by duplication of the self. It is related to the ancient notion of the “eidolon and second self, duplicating the visible self, [which] has originally the same meaning as the *genius* of the Romans, the *fravaulti* of the Persians, and the *Ka* of the Egyptians.”⁷ Thus the muse appears as a double, or an “other” self, conferring immortality on the poet.

⁷“According to the Homeric conception, man has a twofold existence: in his perceptible presence, and in his invisible image which only death sets free. This, and nothing else, is his psyche. In the living human being, completely filled with his soul, there

The famous "This was a Poet—" [448], the next poem in fascicle 21, describes the poet's Fortune as amazing perception, the ability to see and reveal the "Supernatural" within (the humblest instances of) the "Natural"; as Dickinson writes to Higginson, "I was thinking, today—as I noticed, that the 'Supernatural,' was only the Natural, disclosed—" [L 280]:

This was a Poet—It is That
 Distills amazing sense
 From ordinary Meanings—
 And Attar so immense

From the familiar species
 That perished by the Door—
 We wonder it was not Ourselves
 Arrested it—before—

Of Pictures, the Discloser—
 The Poet—it is He—
 Entitles Us—by Contrast—
 To ceaseless Poverty—

Of Portion—so unconscious—
 The Robbing—Could not harm—
 Himself—to Him—a Fortune—
 Exterior—to Time—

dwells, like an alien guest, a *weaker double*, his self other than his psyche . . . whose realm is the world of dreams. When the other self is asleep, unconscious of itself, the double is awake and active." [Cf. the Homeric concept of the soul as the shadow (eidolon) of the once living person (*Iliad* xxiii. 104; *Od.* x. 495; and xi, 207).]

Perhaps the muse is something like this "*weaker double*," which is stronger in poets and artists who frequent its realm—the world of dreams—strong enough to be perceptible as a double or an other self.

"The primitive belief in soul is originally nothing else than a kind of belief in immortality which energetically denies the power of death," Rank concludes, noting that "Characteristic of this naive view is the remark of the anthropologist K. von den Steinen, who gave a Bakairi-Indian the sentence, 'All men must die,' to translate into the latter's language. To his great amazement, it turned out that the man was unable to grasp the meaning of this sentence, since he had no idea of the necessity of death. (Frazer, 'The Belief in Immortality,' p. 35)."

Otto Rank, *The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study* (U of N Carolina P, 1971. Rpt. New York: New American Library, 1979) 60, 84.

See also Freud's essay, "The Uncanny" ("*Das Unheimlich*").

Although written in tribute to Elizabeth Barrett Browning, the poem calls the poet “He,” as if perhaps Dickinson shares Aphra Behn’s notion of “my masculine part, the poet in me” (Gilbert and Gubar 66). The last two lines split or double the poet, “Himself” and “Him”; indeed, this is Dickinson’s strategy for attaining immortality. Similarly, in “I died for Beauty—” [449], a tribute to Keats following close upon this tribute to Browning, the two poets are imagined as twins in the tomb, “Brethren” or “Kinsmen” in adjoining rooms, talking away into eternity.

Dickinson marked the following passage in her family’s edition of Shakespeare, according to Jay Leyda:

He that is robb’d, not wanting what is stolen,
Let him not know’t, and he’s not robb’d at all.

(Othello, III.iii)

Dickinson claims similarly, “Reverse cannot befall / That fine Prosperity / Whose Sources are interior—” [395]. By practicing overcoming desire for what she does not or cannot have, by valuing the internal over the external, she achieves freedom within constraint. A bit further in fascicle 21, she declares “The Outer—from the Inner / Derives it’s Magnitude—” [451].

A few poems later in this fascicle appears “The Malay—took the Pearl” [452], which Smith interprets as concerning Austin’s theft of Sue, followed by “Love—thou art high” [453], which continues, “I cannot climb thee— / But, were it Two— / Who knows.” And yet, offered the chance to climb with a companion, in the penultimate poem of the group, “I rose—because He sank—” [616], the speaker apparently resists consummating a relationship, and convinces the lover of the same (much as Dickinson restrains Lord in the letter quoted above). Having thus dealt with the impossibility of love, the fascicle closes with another portrayal of early childhood, but in a very different light:

It was given to me by the Gods—
 When I was a little Girl—
 They give us Presents most—you know—
 When we are new—and small.
 I kept it in my Hand—
 I never put it down—
 I did not dare to eat—or sleep—
 For fear it would be gone—
 I heard such words as “Rich”—
 When hurrying to school—
 From lips at Corners of the Streets—
 And wrestled with a smile.
 Rich! ’Twas Myself—was rich—
 To take the name of Gold—
 And Gold to own—in solid Bars—
 The difference—made me bold—

The fascicle ends, then, on a note of triumph; whatever the poet has lost or renounced, it cannot compare to her own gift from the Gods. These plural Gods are pagan, not Christian, perhaps the same ones who “once taught beautiful singing to Hesiod,” which is, as he declares in the *Theogony*, “the gift of the Muses and of the archer-god Apollo” (53-55). Fascicle 21 considers various forms of renunciation—of home, food, freedom, and love—but repeatedly claims poetic gifts as superior riches.

Dickinson understands the secret of renunciation, again according to Pieper:

in erotic emotion purely received and maintained, and perhaps in no other way, man can catch a glimpse of that promise which aims at a satiation affording deeper happiness than any gratification of the senses. (87)

Many other poems of renunciation emphasize this point. For example, in poem 405, “It might be lonelier / Without the Loneliness—” the speaker clearly states her preference for solitary yearning, “I’m so accustomed to my Fate— / Perhaps the Other—Peace—” would “crowd the little Room— / Too scant—by Cubits—to contain / The Sacrament— of Him—” and ends,

It might be easier
 To fail—with Land in Sight—
 Than gain—My Blue Peninsula—
 To perish—of Delight—

As in “We—Bee and I” who are “‘found dead’— ‘of Nectar’—” [230], or “Come slowly—Eden!” in which the “fainting Bee” “Enters—and is lost in Balms” [211], consummation = death, in Dickinson’s algebra. Or poem 439,

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

which ends, “It was the Distance— / Was Savory—”. There are far too many poems on this theme to discuss: for example, fascicle 33, which also treats of renunciation throughout, in poems such as “I cannot live with You” [640], “Except the Heaven had come so near—” [472], “They put Us far apart—” [464], “I could suffice for Him, I knew—” [643], and “You left me—Sire—two Legacies—” [644].

Dickinson sometimes overtly compares her love as demonstrated by renunciation to that of Christ, as in poem 456:

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—

Again, in “Too scanty ’twas to die for you,” she claims “The living, Sweet, is costlier—” for “this include / The dying multifold—without / The Respite to be dead” [1013]. By dying perpetually she suffers more than Christ, and thus proves her love even greater. Though the comparison be blasphemous, through her renunciation of living with a human beloved, she discovers the divinity, love, living within.

To lose thee—sweeter than to gain
All other hearts I knew.
'Tis true the drought is destitute,
But then, I had the dew!

The Caspian has its realms of sand,
Its other realm of sea.
Without the sterile perquisite,
No Caspian could be.

Her poetry is the product of loss, as ecstasy is bought with tears. Sterile perquisite and Caspian, “Abandonment and power are both regarded by Tsvetaeva as necessary givens, prerequisites to creativity,” Heldt claims. Quoting “Power is only pain— / Stranded, thro’ Discipline” [252], she compares “the mature Tsvetaeva” to Dickinson.

Forgoing irony, she exhorts or declares opposites to be one, absence to be presence, flesh to be spirit. She hits an emotion directly, locating its center within the self. The female self in her poetry is no longer a mirrored self, a split self, or a double self; it is a whole self, one intact, with its own pain and its own ability to recreate it: the “formal feeling” that Emily Dickinson describes as coming “after great pain” . . . (130-31)

Although Dickinson explores the pain of renunciation in many poems, she gladly embraces and dramatizes it for the sake of poetry. Her poetics of loss dictates the sacrifice of sensual gratification in exchange for imaginative freedom and the company of the immortal poets. Though she complains and, at times, even boasts of her suffering, she willingly undergoes it as a necessary part of her passion.

ANATOMY OF PAIN

“It is a commonplace now in Dickinson criticism . . . that this poet writes frequently of pain, death, loss, and suffering,” as Cristanne Miller notes,⁸ and as any reader can readily perceive. Like the courtly love poets, Dickinson explores the extremity of her own agony as proof of love; it is the steep price she pays for her gift, and in itself, one of the great themes of her poetry. Dickinson is a connoisseur of pain, expert at not only describing anguish but even winning ecstasy from it, as in poem 125:

For each extatic instant
We must an anguish pay
In keen and quivering ratio
To the extasy.

⁸ Suzanne Juhasz, Cristanne Miller, and Martha Nell Smith, *Comic Power in Emily Dickinson* (Austin: U of Texas P, 1993) 108.

For each beloved hour
 Sharp pittance of years—
 Bitter contested farthings—
 And Coffers heaped with Tears!

She writes often of the twinship of pain and pleasure, their inverse ratio, as in “Success is counted sweetest / By those who ne’er succeed” [67; F 5] (one of the few poems published in her lifetime), “Water, is taught by thirst” [135; F 4], “To learn the Transport by the Pain—” [167], or “Delight is as the flight— / Or in the Ratio of it” [257].

Her attitude is stoic, heroic: “If your Nerve, deny you— / Go above your Nerve” [292]. She writes of pain the way New Englanders speak of winter—with survivors’ pride in the strength and knowledge born of endurance.

There is a pain—so utter—
 It swallows substance+ up—
 Then covers the Abyss with Trance—
 So Memory can step
 Around—across—upon it—
 As one within a Swoon—
 Goes safely+—where an open eye—
 Would drop+ Him—Bone by Bone.

+Being
 +steady
 +spill Him

[599]

Dickinson remains exquisitely conscious to the uttermost reaches of pain, like some mountaineer of consciousness, and takes pride in her ability not only to endure but to recollect and express the worst:⁹

⁹Cf. Akhmatova’s “Instead of a Preface” to her great “Requiem”:

“In the awful years of Yezhovian horror, I spent seventeen months standing in line in front of various prisons in Leningrad. One day someone ‘recognized’ me. Then a woman with blue lips, who was standing behind me, and who, of course, had never heard my name, came out of the stupor which typified all of us, and whispered into my ear (everyone there spoke only in whispers):

—Can you describe this?
 And I said:
 —I can.

A Doubt if it be Us
Assists the staggering Mind
In an extremer Anguish
Until it footing find.

An Unreality is lent,
A merciful Mirage
That makes the living possible
While it suspends the lives.

[859]

Or again, recalling earlier poems in which she gambles “all,” or gambles her soul for “all”:

The hallowing of Pain
Like hallowing of Heaven,
Obtains at corporeal cost—
The summit is not given

To Him who strives severe
At middle of the Hill—
But He who has achieved the Top—
All—is the price of All—

[772]

This is Dickinson’s version of “whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it” (Mat. 16:25).

Such extremity (and her ability to sing it) enables identification with martyrs:

“Unto like Story—Trouble has enticed me— / How . . . Brothers and Sisters . . . Bent to the Scaffold, or in Dungeons—chanted—” [295]. Even more explicitly, she names her “Brothers and Sisters”:

The Martyr Poets—did not tell—
But wrought their Pang in syllable—
That when their mortal name be numb—
Their mortal fate—encourage Some—

[544]

Then something like a fleeting smile passed over what once had been her face.
April 1, 1957
Leningrad”

Poems, trans. Lyn Coffin (New York and London: Norton, 1983) 82.

“There came a Day at Summer’s full” [322] describes that poetic martyrdom: the separated lovers “Each bound the Other’s Crucifix—” to rise “To that new Marriage, / Justified—through Calvaries of Love—”. As Sherwood writes,

she chooses to serve the religion of love and raises secular love to a holy state through investing it with religious imagery. . . . The convention of the suffering and faithful courtly lover is assimilated to the martyrology, and equated with the prototype of passionate action and suffering, Christ’s passion at Calvary. In this respect she is more of a medieval poet than a metaphysical one . . . (90)

“The invocation of Christ as the Word” is another and related convention she shares with the medieval poets.

Rather than Bride of Christ, Dickinson casts herself as the Empress of Calvary, as in “Title divine—is mine!” In “I dreaded that first Robin, so,” she becomes “The Queen of Calvary,” and fears “the Daffodils . . . Would pierce me” [348]. Images of piercing, sometimes quite horrific, recur: “Renunciation—is a piercing virtue”; “You Cannot prick with saw— / Nor pierce with Cimitar—”; “that forcing, in my breath— / As Staples— driven through—” [292]; “We stood upon our stapled feet”; “With shackles [irons] on the plumed feet, / And staples, [rivets]—in the Song” [512]. Or

A weight with Needles on the pounds—
To push, and pierce, besides—
That if the Flesh resist the Heft—
The puncture—cooly tries—

That not a pore be overlooked
Of all this Compound Frame—
As manifold for Anguish—
As Species—be—for name—

[264]

The French renaissance sonneteer Louise Labé similarly complains (or boasts) that there is not a single spot left on her body for Love’s arrows to pierce.¹⁰ And, finally, the gallows humor in the punning oxymoron at the end of “I measure every Grief I meet”:

¹⁰Cf. Sonnet 3, especially the sestet:

Let love take aim at me again,

A piercing Comfort it affords
In passing Calvary—

To note the fashions—of the Cross—
And how they're mostly worn—
Still fascinated to presume
That Some—are like My Own—

“One Crucifixion is recorded—only—” [553] concludes, “And yet— / There’s newer—
nearer Crucifixion / Than That—”. Like Hopkins’s declaration, “Christ plays in ten
thousand places,” she declares “Gethsemane— // Is but a Province—in the Being’s
Centre—.”

Sherwood comments on her use of such religious symbols:

If the poles of her “metaphysical” imagery—the human and the divine—
are as separate as those of Herbert and Donne, and the force, the spark,
that leaps the barrier between them is as electric and as illuminating, yet the
direction of the current, to carry out the metaphor, is the reverse of that of
the earlier metaphysicals: God is not humanized; He does not through the
power of poetry walk the earth once again in the shape of natural man; it is
the poet who walks proudly through heaven, or condescends to purchase at
His drygoods store, or leaves Him to cool His heels on her doorstep. (10)

As a heterodox woman poet, Dickinson reads Christian mythology with a difference: God
is not like herself because He is male in all His aspects; denied likeness to deity, she
ridicules this limited image of God—Burglar, Banker, Landlord, drygoods store clerk—
and discovers instead immediate experience of divinity within her, through her own
powers of creation. Again, Bray’s notion of poetry as “an embryonic religion, one that has
not yet been reified,” is helpful here (122). “Myself was formed—a Carpenter” [488]

Fling new fires and new darts at me;
Let him be vexed and do his worst:

For I am so torn in every part
That he can no longer find a place
To make me worse by wounding me once more.

Jeanne Prine, “Poet of Lyon: Louise Labé,” *Women Writers of the Renaissance and
Reformation*, ed. Katharina M. Wilson (Athens, GA: U of Georgia P, 1987) 151.

compares her “Art of Boards” to that of Christ: “We—Temples build—I said—”. The art of poetry is thus parallel to God’s act of creation, breathing the same divine spirit into the word.

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

That I shall love alway—
I argue thee
That love is life—
And life hath Immortality—

This—dost thou doubt—Sweet—
Then have I
Nothing to show
But Calvary—

[549]

Love gives her immortality; without it, she has nothing but suffering. And yet, even pure suffering has its benefits, too; she details the uses of affliction, as does Simone Weil.

A nearness to Tremendousness—
An Agony procures—
Affliction ranges Boundlessness—
Vicinity to Laws

Contentment’s quiet Suburb—
Affliction cannot stay
In Acres—It’s Location+
Is Illocality—

+In Acre—Or Location—
It rents Immensity—

[963]

This is why the poet claims, “I like a look of agony / Because I know it’s true,” not because she is “Amherst’s Madame de Sade,” as Camille Paglia dubs her.¹¹ Dickinson remarked to Joseph Lyman, “So I conclude that space & time are things of the body. . . .

¹¹The title of Paglia’s last chapter in *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* is “Amherst’s Madame de Sade: Emily Dickinson” (New York: Random House, 1991) 623-73.

My Country is Truth” (Sewall 224). Agony and extremity, like Death, can inspire because they burst bounds, approach tremendousness. In “I tried to think a lonelier Thing / Than any I had seen,” she arrives at the astonishing, “An Omen in the Bone / Of Death’s tremendous nearness—”, and then a strange fantasy of her “Duplicate”:

I plucked at our Partition
As one should pry the Walls—
Between Himself—and Horror’s Twin—
Within Opposing Cells—

[532]

This Horror Twin, like the horrid stranger in “I Years had been from Home,” forms an uncanny negative image of the weaker double, not the soul, but an other within, or the muse. Again, as Bray notes, in her poetry “the haunted and the holy are often the same” (121): this is the haunted version of “I died for Beauty,” which finds a positive animus figure in the dead but immortal Keats.

This fascination with pain, as with death, is neither sado-masochistic nor morbid; it is the question of Job, the mystery of Christ. She is a metaphysician at work. An explorer of consciousness to its very limits, she writes, “Soto! Explore thyself! . . . The ‘Undiscovered Continent’—” [832], and “To shut our eyes is Travel” [L 354], journeying toward the horizon where great wit and madness meet:

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 it’s 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?

[410; F15]

Extremity inspires her: “grateful” to have “endured— / I told my Soul to Sing.” Ironically, the poem describes “a thing / so terrible” that it has destroyed her ability to write. As soon as she has recovered, mending “Her Bow—to Atoms blown—” with cartoon-like speed, the terrible thing returns, “a Day as huge / As Yesterdays in pairs,” many times bigger than before, like the Blob. Her response to this outlandish horror is laughter: “My brain keeps giggling—still.” As Juhasz, Smith, and Miller assert in their recent *Comic Power in Emily Dickinson*, it is important to counteract the tragic myth of Dickinson by emphasizing her wit and playfulness, even in extremity—or especially then, according to Miller, who finds humor in Dickinson’s most “over the top” descriptions (often of pain), which Miller terms “humor of excess” and associates with the grotesque and carnival. The power of carnival is, of course, that of Trickster and Fool, those eternal breakers of boundaries.

All Dickinson’s journeys are rehearsals for breaking the last boundary, “the most profound experiment” and “Adventure most unto itself”:

This Consciousness that is aware
 Of Neighbors and the Sun
 Will be the one aware of Death
 And that itself alone

Is traversing the interval
 Experience between
 And most profound experiment
 Appointed unto Men—

How adequate unto itself
 It's properties shall be
 Itself unto itself and none
 Shall make discovery.

Adventure most unto itself
 The Soul condemned to be—
 Attended by a single Hound
 It's own identity.

[822]

“The soul must go by Death alone, so, it must by life, if it is a soul,” Dickinson writes Dr. Holland, as if commenting on this poem, and then adds, for the academics among us, “If a committee—no matter” [L 321].

Dickinson's explorations of pain, like her meditations on death, are related to the muse in that they, too, shatter boundaries and release the poet from necessity, the body's frailties and mortality, into the transcendent realm of poetry.

MASTER DEATH

Depend upon it, Sir, when a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully.

—Dr. Johnson

Dame Edith Sitwell used to lie in an open coffin for a while before she began her day's writing.

—Ackerman (293)

“Lavinia said of Emily that ‘she had to think—she was the only one of us who had that to do’” (Sewall 128). The prospect of death concentrates Emily Dickinson's mind wonderfully, and if we often find her lying in her open coffin (sometimes giggling), imagining herself as dead, it inspires some of her most famous poems, such as “Because I could not stop for Death,” “I heard a Fly buzz—when I died,” or “I felt a Funeral, in my Brain.” Or, this less-anthologized poem [858]:

This Chasm, Sweet, upon my life
 I mention it to you,
 When Sunrise through a fissure drop
 The Day must follow too.

If we demur, it's gaping sides
 Disclose as 'twere a Tomb
 Ourselves am lying straight wherein
 The Favorite of Doom.

When it has just contained a Life
 Then, Darling, it will close
 And yet so bolder every Day
 So turbulent it grows

I'm tempted half to stitch it up
 With a remaining Breath
 I should not miss in yielding, though
 To Him, it would be Death—

And so I bear it big about
 My Burial—before
 A Life quite ready to depart
 Can harass me no more—

Who is "Him," the pronoun that appears only in the fourth stanza? Not the "I," and not the "you" addressed as "Sweet," "Darling." He must be the other part of "Ourselves," the odd plural-singular in line 7, the male aspect, double, or muse. The uncanniness of "Ourselves" joined with the singular verb "am" is strange and jarring as the image of the plural self ("we") lying in "as 'twere a Tomb," speaking to the beloved "you," "Sweet," "Darling." The grave is doubled by the womb: it just contains "a Life", and "grows" "bolder" and more "turbulent" "every Day"—the way Plath's deadly "Tulips" "breathe / Lightly, through their white swaddlings, like an awful baby."¹² The contemplation of suicide by "stitching it up" has horrific echoes of infibulation or the stitching up of an episiotomy. But, the speaker considers, if "I" were to yield to such

¹²Cf. also "Death & Co." which concerns a double figure for death, and begins, "Two, of course there are two. / It seems perfectly natural now—" *Ariel* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966) 11, 28.

temptation, "To Him, it would be Death"—much as William Wilson dies by killing his double.

As in "My Life had stood—a Loaded Gun" and "I years had been from Home," "a Life" is treated as oddly separate from the "I," and a third (male) character intervenes. Also as in "My Life had stood—a Loaded Gun" and several other male-double poems, discussed above, this poem ends with a riddling consideration of the possibilities of this singular-plural being's death. Here, the result is a strange reversal; the speaker contained within "as 'twere a Tomb" becomes the container: "I bear it big about," as if gravid with a grave, "A Life" that is already a corpse. The poet bears her own burial about instead of an infant; thus impregnated by Death she brings forth poems. In "The Death Baby," Sexton imagines an "ice-baby," "my stone child," and claims "There is a death baby / for each of us." (In *Malte Laurids Brigge* Rilke expresses a similar notion that each of us bears our own death inside like a seed.)

"Because I could not stop for Death," like "I heard a Fly buzz—when I died," does not so much imagine death as it evokes approaching the liminal moment, coming as close as consciousness can. The dimming of the senses in "I heard a Fly buzz—when I died" pushes at the threshold by focusing on one minute sensory experience, trying to pierce the veil—in a parallel manner to the slowing of time jolting to a halt here.

Because I could not stop for Death—
He kindly stopped for me—
The Carriage held but just Ourselves—
And Immortality.

We slowly drove—He knew no haste
And I had put away
My labor and my leisure too,
For His Civility—

We passed the School, where Children strove
At Recess—In the Ring—
We passed the Fields of Gazing Grain—
We passed the Setting Sun—

Or rather—He passed Us—
 The Dews drew quivering and chill—
 For only Gossamer, my Gown—
 My Tippet—only Tulle—

We paused before a House that seemed
 A Swelling of the Ground—
 The Roof was scarcely visible—
 The Cornice—in the Ground—

Since then—'tis Centuries—and yet
 Feels shorter than the Day
 I first surmised the Horses Heads
 Were toward Eternity—

[712]

In the first stanza, “I could not stop,” so He does. They “slowly drove,” and “knew no haste” past quick scenes of life. The turn at the beginning of the fourth stanza, “Or rather—He passed Us—”, brings the poem to a second halt, reversing the relative motions of “Us” and “Sun,” dizzyingly. Stanza five begins with yet another drawing up, “We paused”; motion and time are gone by stanza six, in which “Centuries” pass more quickly than “the Day / I first surmised the Horses Heads / Were toward Eternity—” where we are now. The long day is not death itself, which is beyond time, but the living consciousness of its approach—that is the agony; death itself is nothing.

Howe notes the debt of this famous poem to Browning’s “The Last Ride Together”: “With a few images from *Aurora Leigh*, and her own wit and terse urgency, Dickinson re-wrote his poem. Changing Browning’s “Mistress” to her “Master,” Death, she wrote an American woman’s version” (70). And again equating Death with Master, Howe suggests, that to “subjugate her master, Death, by means of Art” is one solution to Dickinson’s dilemma as a “woman who is no longer youthful but who remains a virile poet hemmed in by centuries, as Stevens rightly said, that have a way of being male” (137). Dickinson’s Death has a way of being male, too.

“Death is the supple suitor / That wins at last—” Dickinson declares in a later poem [1445]; indeed, Death as suitor, lover, and psychopomp is one of her most powerful

muses, leading directly as he does to that “most profound experiment” and “Adventure most unto itself.” Johnson devotes a full chapter of his *Emily Dickinson: An Interpretive Biography* to “Death,” personified, whom he calls “one of the most extraordinary characters in American literature”:

a protean figure, part element of nature, part erlking, part Grendel, but mostly country squire: a suave, elusive; persuasive, insinuating character, but always a very genteel and attentive Amherst friend and suitor. (218-19)

This suitor may bring about reunion with the beloved, immortality, and/or God, as in “It’s Coming—the postponeless Creature—” who “gains the Door,” “Enters . . . And Carries one—out of it—to God—” [390]. Or not. She sometimes depicts Death as an eagerly-awaited lover; sometimes she loves this earthly life so intensely that death seems a great injustice. She expresses both longing for and dread of him—much as she does toward sex. She loves to write to Death, as to Judge Lord, but appears in no hurry to marry him—or anyone.

Come slowly—Eden!
Lips unused to Thee—
Bashful—sip thy Jessamines—
As the fainting Bee—

Reaching late his flower,
Round her chamber hums—
Counts his nectars—enters—
And is lost in Balms.

[211]

Death is a muse for Plath too, throughout *Ariel*, especially, and for Sexton, particularly in *The Death Notebooks*. In “For Mr. Death Who Stands With His Door Open,” she addresses him: “you actor, you have many masks . . . a kind of Valentino,” the ultimate lover, with “your blackguard charm” (74). In “Sylvia’s Death,” the two women poets speak of death as “that ride home / with *our* boy” (recalling “Because I could not stop for death”), and Sexton describes her desire: “I know at the news of your death, / a terrible taste for it, like salt.” In “Wanting to Die” she remarks,

But suicides have a special language.
 Like carpenters they want to know *which tools*.
 They never ask *why build*. (67)

Though Dickinson considers suicide, as in "This Chasm, Sweet," she resists, for "To Him, it would be Death—"; she cannot kill her alto ego, double, or muse. In poem 612, she both envies and despises suicide as a gnat's way out. In "The Heart asks Pleasure—first" it is "the Privilege—to die—" the Heart asks of its "Inquisitor" last. Perhaps religious scruples, Puritan pride, belief in immortality hold her back—or perhaps it is all along an imaginative exploit.

A significant group of poems anticipate reunion with the beloved in or after death. Ellen Louise Hart believes that Dickinson hoped to be united with Sue in the "Costumeless Consciousness" [1454] of immortality;¹³ this may well be, but one is left again with the pronoun problem to explain away in many poems, such as "Not in this World to see his face—" [418], or "The face I carry with me—last / When I go out of Time—". In the latter poem the speaker fantasizes, "I'll hand it to the Angel," who will be so duly impressed that he will return with a special crown:

And then—he'll turn me round and round—
 To an admiring sky—
 As one that bore her Master's name—
 Sufficient Royalty!

[336]

Or again, in poem 1001, here quoted in its entirety:

The Stimulus, beyond the Grave
 His Countenance to see
 Supports me like imperial Drams
 Afforded Day by Day.

Like Dante clinging to his ideal of Beatrice in Heaven, Dickinson, bearing her Master's name, attains a state of grace (often figured as election or coronation), as in "The

¹³Ellen Louise Hart "The Encoding of Homoerotic Desire: Emily Dickinson's Letters and Poems to Susan Dickinson, 1850-1886," in *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 9 (Fall 1990), 264; qtd. by Smith in *Comic Power in Emily Dickinson* 150, n. 36.

Day that I was Crowned" [356]. In Calvinist theology, Howe observes, "Grace often visited the elect, with visionary intensity born in ecstasy and trance" (47), and

The decision not to publish her poems in her lifetime, to close up an extraordinary amount of work, is astonishing. Far from being the misguided modesty of an oppressed female ego, it is a consummate Calvinist gesture of self-assertion by a poet with faith to fling election loose across the incandescent shadows of futurity. (48-49)

Yet Dickinson differentiates her election from the orthodox kind, as in "I'm ceded—I've stopped being Theirs—" [508], in which she contrasts being "Baptized, before, without the choice, / But this time, consciously, of Grace—". The final stanza announces,

My second Rank—too small the first—
Crowned—Crowing—on my Father's breast—
A half unconscious Queen—
But this time—Adequate—Erect,
With Will to choose, or to reject,
And I choose, just a Crown—

Dickinson's play here resembles the way "customary male-female relationships are reversed in Tsvetaeva," according to Heldt. "The 'female' position is advanced against a male order that defines her from the cradle, and against the ultimate male—God—who is spoken back to in his own imperative tones" (*Terrible Perfection* 131). Dickinson rejects the coronation offered by the Fathers of the Church as "too small," but declares her Queenship on her own terms.

"I gained it so—/ by Climbing slow—" [359] is another fairly early poem about "Grace," won here with painful slow toil, only to disappear in an instant. In many of the earlier poems, inspiration comes and goes suddenly, inexplicably; by the final, most ecstatic, poems of possession by the muse, this grace becomes her state of being.

Thus Dickinson's extensive meditations on death serve many purposes, not the least of which is to concentrate her mind wonderfully. Quite simply, death inspires her, as it has countless poets. Death as the limen between this life and the unknown, which she calls "the largest need of the intellect," endlessly fascinates. Personifying Death, she creates "one of the great characters of literature" (Johnson, *An Interpretive Biography* 222). This

Master Death as psychopomp leads her to Immortality, including reunion with the beloved and God; much like Dante's Beatrice, his image leads the poet upward in her slow climb, and confers grace.

TRANSLATION

translate

1. To bear or change from one place, condition, etc., to another.
 2. Specif.: a. To remove to heaven;—originally implying without death.
 3. To turn into one's own or another language; broadly, to carry over from one medium or sphere (into another).
 4. To transport or ravish; enrapture.
 6. *Teleg.* To repeat or forward (a message) by translation.
- (*Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, Fifth Edition)

Dickinson gradually and increasingly realizes the necessary uses of the imaginative dramas of marriage and crucifixion for her rebirth into a greater life. Or, she "translates" these received dramas into her own terms. What is the meaning of marriage, or of Christ's passion, to a single woman poet? "First I find myself a Slave, next I understand my slavery, finally I re-discover myself at liberty inside the confines of known necessity" (Howe 117). Around 1864, when Dickinson had already bound over 800 poems into the 40 fascicles Vinnie found in a drawer,¹⁴ she wrote:

¹⁴"When she stopped binding fascicle sheets about 1864, it was a conscious change," Franklin writes in his introduction to *The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson*. He speculates that "Dickinson may have stopped binding because, once she had survived the crisis and drive of 1861-1863, her need for self-publication declined, and with it the desire to leave an organized legacy for the world. That she continued to copy fascicle sheets without binding them suggests that she found the bound books difficult to use. . . . unbound sheets may have been easier . . . —connected perhaps to the eye trouble of 1864 and 1865 . . . In the later 1860's . . . Dickinson stopped copying fascicle sheets. The poems of 1867-1870 are few and are unorganized. For a time in the 1870's she revived such copying (Sets 8-15) but finally gave herself up to the proliferation of shapes and sizes of her worksheets and miscellaneous manuscripts" (xii-xiii). The poem above is from Set 6, copied in ink on stationery, unbound.

I tell thee while I waited—
 The mystery of Food
 Increased till I abjured it
 Subsisting now like God—

3. a] the
 4. did'st] *could'st*

5. waited] famished
 8. now] since

rough draft II

Dickinson knows that “the love which renounces enjoyment” is, yet again
 according to Pieper on the *Phaedrus*,

the most blissful form of love, the heroic achievement of love. He who loves
 in this manner leaves this earthly life “with burden shed and wings
 recovered” when he dies; he can forthwith ascend into the divine sphere and
 once more take part in the heavenly procession and in the Great Banquet of
 the gods. (87)

In the poem above, she seats herself at God’s table. Something like the earlier poems of
 renunciation, these poems of transformation describe her deepening awareness of her
 choice of solitude and poetry, and her triumph: here suffering is translated to ecstasy. No
 longer idealizing the beloved as godlike, she has herself become godlike by incorporating
 him. As she outgrows (personal) love and its crucifixion, once so needful to her and/or her
 poetry, she casts them aside, as described in poem 1142:

The Props assist the House
 Until the House is built
 And then the Props withdraw
 And adequate, erect,
 The House support itself
 And cease to recollect
 The Augur and the Carpenter—
 Just such a retrospect
 Hath the perfected Life—
 A past of Plank and Nail
 And slowness—then the Scaffolds drop
 Affirming it a soul.

The “past of Plank and Nail” recalls the “Calvary” poems, with their imagery of piercing
 and nailing, and of herself as Carpenter. That she is, indeed, a soul, many late poems
 attest, such as poem 1354 (c. 1876):

The Heart is the Capital of the Mind—
 The Mind is a single State—
 The Heart and the Mind together make
 A single Continent—

One—is the Population—
 Numerous enough—
 This ecstatic Nation
 Seek—it is Yourself.

(Though I am not imposing chronological order, the poems as I have grouped them according to my perception of the evolution of the muse tend to move generally from early to late.)

The last, most mystical and elusive poems express a state of visionary transport, which she attempts to wrestle into language. Like Melville, she uses Jacob wrestling the angel as a metaphor for art, as early as poem 59, in which “the bewildered Gymnast / Found he had worsted God!”, and as late as the spring of 1886 when she was dying, in two letters. The first of these letters closes, “Says the blissful voice, not yet a voice, but a vision, ‘I will not let thee go, except I bless thee,’” as if the angel spoke Jacob’s line, with pronouns reversed [L 1035]; in the second, to Higginson:

Audacity of Bliss, said Jacob to the Angel “I will not let thee go
 except I bless thee”—Pugilist and Poet, Jacob was correct—
 Your Scholar—

[L 1045]

Here, Jacob speaks, but reversing the roles of the receiver and giver of blessing. She casts Higginson (whom she sometimes addresses as Master in letters) as the angel, though it is she who confers the blessing on him. As Frye claims, “she fought her angel until she had forced out of him the crippling blessing of genius” (*Fables* 217).

Ultimately, when the muse is completely interiorized, he never leaves, and is indistinguishable from the poet; divinity is perceived as ubiquitous, as in the famous poem 827, the first poem in the last fascicle Dickinson bound:

The Only News I know
Is Bulletins all Day
From Immortality.

The Only Shows I see—
Tomorrow and Today—
Perchance Eternity—

The Only One I meet
Is God—The Only Street—
Existence—This traversed

If Other News there be—
Or Admirabler Show—
I'll tell it You—

As if, having attained this vision, she saw no need to concern herself further with posterity or posthumous fame. Why bind?

In poem 1309, the muse, nicknamed by God "Eternity," and called by herself "Immortality," is renamed yet again:

The Infinite a sudden Guest
Has been assumed to be—
But how can that stupendous come
Which never went away?

What once seemed "a sudden Guest" who came and went, assumed to be separate from the poet and daily life, is now perceived as always there; it is that "Which never went away." This is the vision of "furnished" or enlightened eyes:

I was thinking, today—as I noticed, that the "Supernatural," was only the
Natural, disclosed—
Not "Revelation"—'tis—that waits,
But our unfurnished eyes—

[L 280]

Or cleansed eyes, in Blake's words: "If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite."

Summing up her drowned-in-balms theme, this Natural/Supernatural note accompanied a dead bee [L 712; c. 1881]:

For Gilbert to carry to his Teacher—

The Bumble Bee's Religion—

His little Hearse like Figure
 Unto itself a Dirge
 To a delusive Lilac
 The vanity divulge
 Of Industry and Morals
 And every righteous thing
 For the divine Perdition
 Of Idleness and Spring—

“All Liars shall have their part”—
 Jonathan Edwards—
 “And let him that is athirst come”—
 Jesus—

This bee has been translated—in every sense of the word. Aunt Emily must have seemed to Gilbert like the wonderful Aunt Ophelia of the Adams family, in her white dress, sending the child off to school with a dead bee instead of an apple for teacher. (Perhaps something of the original Ophelia underlies her persona as the Myth of Amherst: a riddling, love-crazed, death-driven, flower-strewing virgin in outlandish dress.)

Like the late Yeats of “The Circus Animals’ Desertion,” the late Dickinson casts aside the earlier props of her verse, outgrowing “Themes of the embittered heart,” until she can subsist without, like God. Having internalized the muse, who was a split-off divine male aspect, she can take either Jacob or the angel’s place, conferring blessings. “For every thing that lives is Holy,” she knows, with Blake, and so becomes that poet who distills “Attar so immense / From the familiar species / That perished by the Door—”

POSSESSION

Look not to legislatures and churches for your guidance, nor to any soulless *incorporated* bodies, but to *inspirited* or inspired ones.

—Thoreau, "The Last Days of John Brown"

Dickinson lived as Thoreau advised, looking not to legislatures (of which her father was a member) or churches (she alone of all her family, including Sue, was not "saved") but to her own inspirited, inspired body. She stayed home from church (and, eventually, from everywhere else as well) to partake of the divine in her own way, as declared in the early poem, "Some keep the Sabbath going to Church— / I keep it, staying at Home—" [324; J1860], which ends

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

She writes many poems describing her experience of solitary communion, which both Johnson and Rich recognize as possession by the daemon of poetry. Besides "My Life had stood—a Loaded Gun," Rich rightly describes "He put the Belt around my life" and "He fumbles at your Soul" as poems about possession, "a poet's poems":

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

When winds take Forests in their Paws—
The Universe—is still—

[315]

This poem is often described as a rape poem; like Apollo, “He” assaults with music; perhaps Dickinson imagines herself as Daphne. The thunderbolts also equate him with Zeus, notoriously fond of mortal women. The winds at the end are divine breath, like the voice that speaks to Job out of the Whirlwind, or the end of Rilke’s third sonnet to Orpheus,

True singing is a different breath, about
nothing. A gust inside the god. A wind.

“In a patriarchal culture, specifically the Judeo-Christian, quasi-Puritan culture of 19th-century New England in which Dickinson grew up,” Rich remarks, “the equation of divinity with maleness was so fundamental that it is hardly surprising to find Dickinson, like many an early mystic, blurring erotic with religious experience and imagery. The poem I just read has intimations both of seduction and rape merged with the intense force of a religious experience” (*On Lies* 165). The Hades myth provides a useful archetype: the Other, disowned, appears most threatening and will often be experienced as a hostile intruder; when further integrated, he may be recognized as divinity, bestowing power and the blessing of more life. “But are these metaphors for each other,” (rape and religious experience) Rich continues, “or for something more intrinsic to Dickinson? Here is another:”

He put the Belt around my life—
I heard the buckle snap—
And turned away, imperial,
My Lifetime folding up—
Deliberate, as a Duke would do
A Kingdom’s Title Deed
Henceforth, a Dedicated sort—
Member of the Cloud.

Yet not too far to come at call—
And do the little Toils
That make the Circuit of the Rest—
And deal occasional smiles
To lives that stoop to notice mine—
And kindly ask it in—
Whose invitation, know you not
For Whom I must decline?

This poem describes her sense of election; she has signed away her lifetime to the Duke of poetry as if to the devil. In an early letter to Sue she writes, "There is a darker spirit will not disown it's child" [L 173, c. 1854]; to a devout Christian such as Sue, belief in any spirit but Christ would have been tantamount to consorting with the devil. Yet Dickinson remains "dedicated" to her faith in her own experience, and becomes henceforth a "Member of the Cloud," the heavenly order of poets. Stanza two describes her politely distracted outer life in the familial home: "Whose invitation, know you not," she riddles, "For Whom I must decline?"

Rich answers perfectly, "What, in fact, *did* she allow to 'put the Belt around her Life'—what *did* wholly occupy her mature years and possess her? For 'Whom' did she decline the invitations of other lives? The writing of Poetry. Nearly two thousand poems. Three hundred and sixty-six poems in the year of her fullest power" (*On Lies* 171)—surely an overwhelming and at times terrifying experience.

In another poem of possession she boasts of toiling in the forge like Haephestus, preparing her "Bolts of Melody":

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

Hopkins's "No worst, there is none" similarly uses the image of the forge: "My cries heave, herds-long, huddle in a main, a chief / Woe, world sorrow, on an age-old anvil, wince and sing, / Then lull, then leave off . . ." The sestet of this "terrible sonnet" begins,

Oh, the mind, mind has mountains, cliffs of fall
 Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed; hold them cheap
 May who ne'er hung there. Nor does long our small
 Durance deal with that steep or deep . . .

Dickinson describes hanging from those mind-mountains as perhaps no one else, and she can do the drop, too, as in the final stanza of "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain" [280].

Dickinson's "crisis" is generally assumed to be caused by unrequited (or forbidden lesbian) love, yet, as Louise Bogan observes, and as Hopkins's life illustrates,

Poets down the centuries, visited by that power which the ancients call *the Muse*, have described their experience in much the same way as the mystic describes his ecstatic union with Divine Truth. This experience has been rendered at length, and dramatically, by Dante, as well as by St. John of the Cross; and certain poems in the literature of every language attest to moments when, for the poet, "the deep and primal life which he shares with all creation has been roused from its sleep." And both poets and mystics have described with great poignance that sense of deprivation and that shutting away from grace which follows the loss of the vision (or of the inspiring breath), which is called, in the language of mysticism, "the dark night of the soul." (*Emily Dickinson: Three Views* 142)

The explosive violence of these poems, "Dare you see a soul at the White Heat" and "He fumbles at your Soul," like "My life a Loaded Gun," renders one face of the muse. Again, one is reminded of the outrageous violence of the Trickster myths. Another, gentler, face of the shape-shifter is recognized by Johnson, who quotes two poems as particularly describing Dickinson's possession by the daemon: "Conscious am I in my Chamber / Of a shapeless friend—" [679] (quoted in full at the top of Part II) and "Alone, I cannot be—" [298].

In "Conscious am I in my Chamber," the "shapeless friend" does not "Confirm—by word—", much like the muse-figure in the early "I have a King—who does not speak." In the second stanza, he asks nothing but that she intuit his presence hospitably; the poet's discipline is to wait, open and ready to receive inspiration. The third stanza would seem to answer those who read "He fumbles at your soul" as a rape poem; "Presence—is His furthest license," and neither "He" nor the speaker "Forfeit Probity." In stanza four, the

speaker asserts his infinite fascination; in the last, she professes ignorance. Does he visit her alone? Does he “dwell” with her, or elsewhere? He remains unknowable, but instinct names him “Immortality,” elsewhere equated with Love, Deity, and Divinity.

Like the classical muses, Dickinson’s daemon is sometimes singular, “a Shapeless friend” or a Guest, as in “The Soul that hath a Guest” [674] (quoted at the top of this chapter), and sometimes plural, as in the other poem Johnson cites:

Alone, I cannot be—
The Hosts—do visit me—
Recordless Company—
Who Baffle Key—

They have no Robes, nor Names—
No Almanacs—nor Climes—
But general Homes
Like Gnomes—

Their Coming, may be known
By Couriers within—
Their going—is not—
For they’re never gone—

The Hosts are indescribable—“Recordless Company”—unnameable, and homeless.

(Unlike Swedenborg, she claims they “have no Robes.”) Inner signs, “Couriers,” give notice of their coming—and yet, paradoxically, they’re never gone. Transitional beings, at once part of the poet and separate, they arise, call attention to themselves, and subside, though they do not disappear. They belong to that transitional realm where subjective and objective dissolve.

In the well-known “I Dwell in Possibility,” the muses are again many, here named “Visitors”:

I dwell in Possibility—
A fairer House than Prose—
More numerous of Windows—
Superior—for Doors—

Of Chambers as the Cedars—
 Impregnable of Eye—
 And for the Everlasting Roof
 the Gambrels+ of the Sky—

Of Visitors—the fairest—
 For Occupation—This—
 The spreading wide my narrow Hands
 To gather Paradise—

+Gables

[657]

These fairest of Visitors at first appear and disappear inexplicably, leaving her bereft. This is a universal experience, as Mark Van Doren claims, discussing Wordsworth's inspired state: "like all mystics he could be puzzled by the fact that the experience not only came but went. He was in and out of ecstasy," leaving his most famous records in the *Intimations Ode* and "Tintern Abbey" (xviii).

Dickinson leaves many records of the muse's capricious visits and disappearances, such as "Did Our Best Moments last—" [393], which ends by claiming "These Heavenly Moments are—"

A Grant of the Divine—
 That Certain as it Comes
 Withdraws—and leaves the dazzled Soul
 In her unfurnished Rooms—

This disembodied presence may be compared to "The Wind—tapped like a tired Man—" [436]. The speaker of this poem "like a Host" invites in "A Rapid—footless Guest—". The poem could be read merely as a whimsical description of wind, but the word "Guest" relates him to that Guest of the Soul who remains equally invisible and indescribable, the wind as *hagion pneuma*, which Taylor identifies as Emily Brontë's poetic muse. In poem 297, Dickinson offers a series of her favorite similes for the indescribable, so we know it cannot be simply Light, or Bee, or Woods, or Breeze, or Morning, though somewhat like them all:

It's like the Light—
 A fashionless Delight—
 It's like the Bee—
 A dateless—Melody—

It's like the Woods—
 Private—Like the Breeze—
 Phraseless—yet it stirs
 The proudest Trees—

It's like the Morning—
 Best—when it's done—
 And the Everlasting Clocks—
 Chime—Noon!

[297]

She uses the image of perpetual Noon to indicate the full illumination of her vision, as in the following poem, in which the “Grace” seems to have moved in permanently:

Always Mine!
 No more Vacation!
 Term of Light this Day begun!
 Failless as the fair rotation
 Of the Seasons and the Sun.

[839]

And yet, in the next poem, it has again slipped away:

I cannot buy it—'tis not sold—
 There is no other in the World—
 Mine was the only one

I was so happy I forgot
 To shut the Door And it went out
 And I am all alone—

[840]

Her muse comes in and out the Door; Plato uses the same common metaphor to describe the comings and goings of inspiration in the *Phaedrus*:

He who, having no touch of the Muses' madness in his soul, comes to the doors of poetry, trusting to enter in, and who thinks forsooth that art is enough to make him a poet, remains outside, a bungler: sound reason fades into nothingness before the poetry of madmen. (245)¹⁵

¹⁵ Trans. and qtd. Maritain, *Creative Intuition* 102. Maritain later quotes Lu Chui, giving further evidence of the universality of the metaphor of the door (or limen) to express the uncontrollable metamorphosis of inspiration:

In another group of poems, the muse seems to inhabit (or cohabit) her.

For example, poem 834 describes the muse's visitation as a customary, familiar, and beloved occurrence, though He still comes and goes:

Before He comes we weigh the Time!
'Tis Heavy and 'tis Light.
When He depart, an Emptiness
Is the prevailing Freight.

Heavy with expectation and dread, light with anticipation and exhilaration, she awaits the most disembodied of lovers, and afterwards is empty, spent.

In some poems, she seems to possess her daemon, rather than his possessing her. "Possession leads to total identification," as Angus Fletcher has observed (Bloom, *Anxiety* 100).

To own the Art within the Soul
The Soul to entertain
With Silence as a Company
And Festival maintain

Is an unfurnished Circumstance
Possession is to One
As an Estate perpetual
Or a reduceless Mine.

[855]

As in "I cannot dance upon my toes," her inner wealth is an Art: "It's Full as Opera—".

Dickinson plays with the idea of possessing endless wealth in many poems, such as "It was given to me by the gods" and "This was a poet"; another well-known example is:

Some—work for Immortality—
The Chiefer part, for Time—
He—Compensates—immediately—
The former—Checks—on Fame—

"This thing which is in me *but* which no efforts of mine can slay!
"Wherefore time and time again I stroke my empty bosom in pity for myself:
so ignorant am I of what causes the opening and the barring of the door."
Lu Chi, Wen Fu, II, (o), 6-7, in *The Art of Letters: Lu Chi's "Wen Fu,"* A. D. 302, trans. and ed. E. R. Hughes (Bollingen Series XXIX; NY: Pantheon Books, 1951), p. 108, qtd. Maritain 115 n.8.

Slow Gold—but Everlasting—
 The Bullion of Today—
 Contrasted with the Currency
 Of Immortality—

A Beggar—Here and There—
 Is gifted to discern
 Beyond the Broker's insight—
 One's—Money—One's—the Mine—

[406]

Further examples are “Without this—there is nought—” [655]; “I made slow riches,” [843] which obviously equates wealth with poetry; similarly, “Because 'twas Riches I could own, / Myself had earned it—Me,” [1093]; and “A Mine there is no Man would own / But must it be conferred” [1117].

Yet the muse remains mysterious and capricious, always capable of vanishing, as she has learned from experience by 1878, when she writes

Your thoughts don't have words every day
 They come a single time
 Like signal esoteric sips
 Of the communion Wine
 Which while you taste so native seems
 So easy so to be
 You cannot comprehend its price
 Nor its infrequency

[1452]

Thus her “Occupation,” as Austin noted on her death certificate, is “At Home,” waiting in readiness for the Guest:

The Soul should always stand ajar
 That if the Heaven inquire
 He will not be obliged to wait
 Or shy of troubling Her

Depart, before the Host have slid
 The Bolt unto the Door—
 To search for the accomplished Guest,
 Her Visitor, no more—

[1055]

Here the feminine Soul plays Host to “the accomplished Guest,” a male “Visitor.” Her business is to be ready, the Door or soul ajar. Similarly, in poem 1262:

I cannot see my soul but know 'tis there
 Nor ever saw his house nor furniture,
 Who has invited me with him to dwell;
 But a confiding guest consult as well,
 What raiment honor him the most,
 That I be adequately dressed,
 For he insures to none
 Lest men specifical adorn
 Procuring him perpetual drest
 By dating it a sudden feast.

In this poem, he plays host, she the “confiding guest.” Again, he is homeless (though she dwells with him), invisible like the soul, yet not the soul. Perhaps this poem explains her choice of white dress as “What raiment honor him the most,” just as the poem above explains her vocation, “at home,” in readiness.

An undated poem expresses the utterly mystical nature of this muse who remains indefinable, though he has quite taken over her life:

He was my host—he was my guest,
 I never to this day
 If I invited him could tell,
 Or he invited me.

So infinite our intercourse
 So intimate, indeed,
 Analysis as capsule seemed
 To keeper of the seed.

[1721]

The poet does not analyze, which would enclose (or encapsulate) the seed—“murder to dissect,” in Wordsworth’s famous phrase— but rather plants and tends the seed that it may grow.

So we see that Dickinson trusts her own experience of inspiration above any received idea, and casts that experience in terms of relationship to an Other, generally figured as male. A shape-shifter or “shapeless friend,” he ranges from the violently daemonic to the holy, from singular to plural. She deploys many metaphors to describe his protean nature: during her most possessed years, he takes most violent shapes, such as a Thunderbolt-wielder (Zeus) or Death (Hades); as the poet increasingly integrates this

Other, he appears in gentler forms, such as Light (Apollo), Wind (*Hagion Pneuma*), Melody (Genius of Poetry), Hosts (angels), Visitors, Guest, or simply He. When completely internalized, it is “a reduceless Mine.” Finally, as in a long-married couple, she can scarcely tell herself from him: Host/Guest, Jacob/angel— “Which, Sir, are you and which am I / Upon an August day?” [124] She dedicates her life to this mystical relationship, her business to sing, her Occupation “At Home” to record each call.

CONCLUSION

The final chapter on Emily Dickinson having concluded on the note of the mysticism of her invocation of the male muse raises the question of gender in a new and quite non-thematic fashion. Gender here is dematerialized and belongs to the making of the poem as a mystical object. To speak of the imagination here is to speak of the power of shape-shifting; this in turn suggests that the “genital” should be understood in the sense of “genesis,” the procreative power itself, of giving form and shape. The muse is thus related to the erotics of the imagination. My contribution to gender studies is to provide a specific focus by which to examine gender: in the inspiration and writing of poetry.

I hope to have demonstrated not only the existence of the male muse, but his centrality in the work of Emily Dickinson, in particular, and in that of many other writers, both male and female. I intend, by reading from the perspective of the male muse, to have constellated ideas in new ways, and to have provided a means by which Dickinson’s work, in particular, may be interpreted poetically, instead of biographically. My goal is, through this shift in perspective onto, and into, the poetry itself, not only to elucidate her work, which remains elusive, but also to contribute to a broader goal of interpreting women’s, and men’s, writing impartially, by deepening understanding of the erotics of imagination. Ultimately, I hope this opens up new possibilities for women’s and men’s creativity, by providing a new model for inspiration.

Nevertheless, there can be no final proof of these matters. To an open mind the evidence accrues and accrues: when I first mentioned the idea of the male muse, thinking of women poets, I was surprised by the ever-burgeoning list of *male* poets with male muses others suggested. (See Appendix A for some examples.) I clearly read traces of a male muse in Dickinson’s work, while others read nothing but women therein. So be it. This is not a scientific experiment, but an attempt to describe the ineffable. Perhaps there will always be a lack of evidence regarding the muse, because the poet does not go on and on

repeating the muse's name; just a few very important moments tell the whole story. Homer mentions the muse only twice, Milton three times; it is a matter of method, of fundamental insight, not of repeated allusions. We deal with hints or clues—and like a good murderer, the muse leaves only a few from which we must reconstruct the case. Thus I am above all opening out this question of the muse, and demonstrating that there is indeed a necessary place for the male muse.

Something numinous in Dickinson connects radically to the courtly love tradition. Pieper's work is helpful because he is in touch with the language of inspiration, as is the tradition, and as Dickinson is—which has to do with not sexuality per se but our way of figuring sexuality. For example, when we consider actual heterosexual intercourse, we may say that the woman takes the "masculine" role, though she remains a woman; we begin to lose all determinacy. Who is more male, Antony or Cleopatra? is the sort of question that arises here. In homosexual couples, we speak of "butch" and "fem," "top" and "bottom"; issues of dominance and mastery remain, whether figured as masculine/feminine or not.

This whole sex/gender question remains up in the air as regards the poet. Just as no one would claim any male artist worth his salt lacks a "feminine" side, it seems to me that female artists also contain and express the "masculine" (whatever that might be). These terms are not really adequate to talk about art, and yet we use them for lack of any better. I am not attempting to measure what quantity of male and female adheres in each poet but rather recognizing a general situation of being mixed or hybrid; sexuality must be redefined within this conundrum. Being called forth by the muse is for Dickinson a maleness, though one that shifts; thus she may very well at times be inspired by an actual woman, and yet describe it in male terms. This is all most tricky, which returns us to the realm of Trickster, or the liminal.

Dickinson indeed follows the courtly love tradition in that she receives inspiration from her Master as the equivalent of *la dompna* (the lady or mistress, from the same root

as *dominus*, lord or master, and dominate, dominion, dominance). For a man in that tradition, the mistress was his master, literally. As Meg Bogin explains the other favored term of address, *midons*, for the poet's always-married and superior lady:

Linguistically, *midons* is a curious, almost hermaphroditic word: *mi* is probably a shortened form of the feminine possessive *mia* . . . while *dons* is clearly masculine, deriving from the Latin *dominus*. This startling usage deserves more than the puzzled treatment it has usually received. What did this form of address imply? And to whom were the poets really talking? First and foremost, *midons*, while not a proper name, served as a *senhal*, a code name which let everyone fill in his or her own details.¹

Bogin speculates that perhaps, "as the sexual ambiguity of *midons* suggests, and despite the seeming adoration of the lady, the troubadours were really 'courting' women to reach their men," the poets' lordly patrons, in order to curry favor, rather than expressing platonic love or religious allegory, or attempting to cover up adultery, as critics more generally assume.

Considered poetically, however, this hermaphroditic word, *midons*, startlingly similar to Shakespeare's Master-Mistress, seems much richer than Bogin's historical account considers. Once the religious vision of Eros becomes the poet's need to be favored or mastered by the spirit of poetry, it no longer matters what "sex" the muse has—there is only a dominant muse. Though in the West, that dominance is erroneously called "male," it should rather be called "mastering," "masterful," or "empowering."

¹Bogin corroborates "the so-called Arab theory," which sees the courtly lyric of Provence as substantially derived from the Arabic tradition of love poetry (43), for the "image of the lady in the courtly lyric was at once more sensual and more spiritual than anything that could have come directly from indigenous European sources" (47). She notes that the "Arab poets had used a similar form of address, variously given as *sidi* or *sayidd*—'my lord'—in their love poems to women" (50). "However, research needs to be done on why Arab poets idealized the lady." *The Women Troubadours* (New York: Norton, 1980) 183, n. 9.

Bogin does not consider that in the Arabic tradition, since the ninth century, the Beloved, whether male or female, represents God. Jonathan Star, Introduction, *A Garden Beyond Paradise: The Mystical Poetry of Rumi*, trans. Jonathan Star (New York: Bantam, 1992) xix.

In his introduction to the *Vita Nuova*, William Anderson asserts that Dante borrows directly from the Sufi tradition of divine love poems: "There is no other known source in European literature for this revolutionizing idea of sexual love sublimated into the means of salvation itself, and when we know Ibn Arabi asserted that it is God who appears to every lover in the image of his beloved, we may be nearer to understanding how Dante was able to stress the Christ-like nature of Beatrice" (26). Is not the Christ in Herbert's or Donne's poems a Master-Mistress, in the deepest sense, and is this not the case in all religious poetry? Within the Christian tradition, Christ remains the supreme example; for Christian poets, Christ *is* the muse.

If we consider the Sufi poets, in whose work the Greek, Hebrew, Christian, Islamic, and Hindu traditions meld, the question opens out even further toward the fullest sense of the poet seeking inspiration. Rumi, "the greatest mystical poet of any age," invokes his Master, Shams, as a symbol for the formless Beloved throughout his voluminous masterpiece, the *Divan-e Shams-e Tabrizi*, which charts "the whole range of experience and emotion that a seeker might encounter on his journey to the Beloved" (Rumi xxiii).

You are my Sultan, you are my Lord;

 My mouth may open, words may come out,
 But you are every sweet song of mine. (Rumi 143)

This is the tradition in which Dickinson belongs, for as R. A. Nicholson writes: "All manifestations of the mystical spirit are fundamentally the same, and we shall not be astonished to encounter in remote lands and different ages of the world 'one set of principles variously combined'" (Rumi xviii). Thus some standard Sufi symbols Dickinson shares are the soul depicted as a woman pining for her Beloved, as a bird, a flower, or a pawn with its heart set on becoming a king (Rumi xx), and further:

Beloved: God.
 Breeze: The life-giving breath of the Beloved.
 Drunkenness: Divine intoxication; a soul enraptured with the love of God.
 Face: God's true form, one not covered by the veils of the world.
 Garden: Paradise; a symbol for God's creative power.

Killing: The destruction of one's ego and its limited sense of identity.
 King: God; an epithet for the Beloved.
 Ocean: God. The universe.
 Wedding night: The night the soul (lover) joins in union with God (the Beloved).
 Wine: Nectar; the intoxicating love of God. (Rumi 155-56).

Dickinson's transport is ecstatic, in Emerson's sense—she is enthused—and it is as if there were only one sex when it comes to such transport. However, and finally, these ideas can only be intimations. This is all quite difficult to describe; I have thoroughly demonstrated if nothing else at least the subtlety of these questions. Poetry only happens when there is access to the divine. We can explain this psychoanalytically up to the point where life and death meet, which is after all where Dickinson dwells—but there we can explain no more. It remains mysterious. What could femaleness and maleness be at this level?

Which, Sir, are you and which am I
 Upon an August day?

The muse is part of the poet's religion, or part of the poet's numinous ritual life. What is the nature of this ritual? Give me the power to create, the poet begs of the master/mistress, *dompna/dominus*. The idea of the Master is thus one of mastery, an issue which seems endlessly complicated for the woman poet. Yet, in establishing a tradition of women's poetry, we need not look exclusively to the feminine. Masculine and feminine are, after all, culturally constructed, and we are all formed by participation in that culture. For women artists to eschew the masculine is to cut off a great part of experience (so to speak) and a vital source of inspiration.

Feminism's heroic struggle to valorize female experience need not avoid the aspects of that experience necessarily informed by the male, or formed in contact with the Other. To do so would deny too much of our inherited tradition. Rather we should seek our own ground on which to stand proudly within that tradition, free to absorb and be inspired by men as well as women, past and present. A woman poet is both poet and woman. As woman she will seek out great foremothers; as poet, she will seek out great poets, regardless of gender, and translate into her own terms.

Finally, at the mystic threshold between life and death—where something comes out of nothing, where poetry is born—such categories as male and female evaporate, as the greatest artists, Dickinson no less than Shakespeare, tell us. The muse is at once a figure for that transcendence of gender, that destruction of all boundaries, and a means of reaching it. An image of the divine as experienced in the enthusiasm of the poet, the muse takes infinite shapes in our human attempts to express it in poetry.

APPENDIX A: A LOOSE WORKING TAXONOMY OF THE MUSE

The following outline merely indicates the general lines of inquiry and some of the authors to be examined if one wishes to begin even the initial exploration of the muse as shape-shifter. My purpose here is to give a sense of the broad range of questions raised by the very idea of the male muse.

I. Prehistory (Conjectural)

A. My Theory

1. Muse as projected aspects of the "feminine"
 - a. Creativity: Childbirth as model
 - b. Receptivity to the Divine: Impregnation and Oracles as model
2. Psychological paradigms
 - a. Winnicott
 1. Muse as Transitional Agent; the Paradox
 2. Playing and making art; trust
 - b. Jung
 1. *anima, animus, mysterium coniunctionis*
 2. *Symposium*: Aristophanes' three original wholes

B. Graves's *White Goddess*

1. Muse as The Great Triple-Goddess
 - a. The Single Poetic Theme: life, death & resurrection of poet as Goddess's son/lover
2. Patriarchy
 - a. Subordination to Zeus, Apollo
 - b. Triad to ennead: departmentalized, weakened

II. Classical Muse

A. Epic Muse: poets as interpreters invoke possessed muse (Dodds);

Homer, Hesiod, Virgil, Horace

B. Possessed Poet: Democritus, Plato, especially *Phaedrus*; Longinus *On the*

Sublime

III. Hellenistic Muse

A. Parodies: invocations of friends, lovers

B. Pythagorean celestial spirits

IV. Christian Muse

A. Biblical inspiration

1. Genesis: "Let there be light," creation of Adam, naming, Moses

2. John: "In the Beginning was the Word," Revelations

3. Holy Ghost: Annunciation, Pentecost

4. Christ: Incarnation, Logos, Love

B. Male Pagan Muses (Apollo, Eros, Dionysus, Orpheus, Narcissus) replace the

Sisters: Caldéron, Sor Juana de la Cruz, Dante, Wroth, Rilke

C. The Trinity replaces the Sisters: Caedmon, Smart, Rossetti, Hopkins, Clifton

D. Muses Hebraized: Milton, Blake

E. Muses Demonized: *Dr. Faustus*, Rossetti's "Goblin Market," Heathcliff, Sexton,

Plath

V. Archaic Muse

A. Conventional invocations, often in conjunction with other muses: Dante,

Shakespeare, Milton, Spenser, Romantics

B. Parody: Byron's "Hail Muse, etc."; O'Hara's "The Muse Considered as a

Demon Lover," "A True Account of Talking to the Sun at Fire Island"

C. Figure of Speech: Bradstreet, Sor Juana, Dickinson as "Tenth Muse"

VI. Modern Muse

A. Emulative Muse (Longinus on Indirect Inspiration)

1. Precursor Muse: Dante's Virgil, Romantics' Milton, Keat's Shakespeare and Chapman's Homer, Ginsberg's Blake
2. Elegiac Tradition: (Orpheus & Adonis) Bion, Moschus, Jonson's Ode on Cary & Morison, "Lycidas," Gray's Elegy, "Adonais," "The Waste Land," Berryman on Delmore Schwartz

B. Personal (or Erotic) Muse

1. Courtly Love: Shelley's "Defence of Poetry"
 - a. Troubadours, Petrarch, Dante
 - b. Women sonneteers: Labé, Stampa, Wroth
2. Modern Love Poetry
 - a. Men with female muses: Romantics, Yeats, Pound, Eliot
 - b. Women with male muses: Bradstreet, Brontës, Dickinson, Loy, H.D., Tsvetaeva, Bogan, Plath, Sexton
 - c. Men with male muses: Shakespeare, Marlowe, Tennyson, Whitman, Wilde, Ginsberg, O'Hara
 - d. Women with female muses: Rich, Hacker, Barnes, Stein
3. Collaborative Muse
 - a. Fellow poets: Wordsworths & Coleridge; Eliot, Pound & H.D.
 - b. Psychoanalyst as Muse: Freud & H.D., Dr. Martin Orne & Sexton

C. *Genius Loci*

1. Nature
 - a. Romantics
 - b. Moderns: Williams, Frost, Moore, Bishop
 - c. Specific place or feature: O'Hara's New York City or the Sun

2. Indwelling spirit of form

a. Fletcher's "The Language-Game of Prophecy in Renaissance

Poetics": making inspires; Moderns

b. Paz: God replaced by Language; back to The Word

D. No Muse

1. Idiosyncratic Ritual: Ackerman's "Courting the Muse"

APPENDIX B: DICKINSON'S MASTER-MUSE POEMS

CHAPTER III: MASTER AS MUSE

A. Master poems

- 96 "Sexton! My Master's sleeping here"
- 102 "Great Caesar! Condescend"
- 103 "I have a King, who does not speak"
- 106 "The Daisy follows soft the Sun"
- 151 "Mute thy Coronation"
- 232 "The *Sun*—*just touched* the Morning"
- 236 "If *He dissolve*—then—there is *nothing—more—*"
- 267 "Did we disobey Him?"
- 268 "Me, change!"
- 275 "Doubt Me! My Dim Companion!"
- 296 "One Year ago—jots what?"
- 336 "The face I carry with me—last"
- 338 "I know that He exists."
- 339 "I tend my flowers for thee"
- 415 "Sunset at Night—is natural"
- 429 "The Moon is distant from the Sea"
- 438 "Forget! The lady with the Amulet"
- 462 "Why make it doubt"
- 480 "'Why do I love' You, Sir?"
- 481 "The Himmaleh was known to stoop"
- 659 "That first Day, when you praised Me, Sweet"
- 663 "Again—his voice is at the door"
- 729 "Alter! When the Hills do"

- 734 "If He were living—dare I ask"
 1059 "Sang from the Heart, Sire"
B. Marriage
 199 "I'm 'wife'—I've finished that—"
 205 "I should not dare to leave my friend"
 246 "Forever at His side to walk—"
 461 "A Wife—at Daybreak I shall be"
 473 "I am ashamed—I hide"
 961 "Wert Thou but ill"
 1072 "Title divine—is mine!"
 1737 "Rearrange a "Wife's" affection"
 1743 "The grave my little cottage is"
 463 "I live with Him—I see His face"
 568 "We learned the Whole of Love"
 580 "I gave myself to Him"
 631 "Ourselves were wed one summer—dear"
 664 "Of all the Souls that stand create"
 732 "She rose to His Requirement—dropt"
 961 "Wert Thou but ill"
C. Idealization
 247 "What would I give to see his face?"
 256 "If I'm lost—now"
 270 "*One Life* of so much Consequence!"
 343 "My Reward for Being, was This"
 394 "'Twas Love—not me"
 464 "The power to be true to You"
 603 "He found my Being—set it up"

- 751 "My Worthiness is all my Doubt"
 914 "I cannot be ashamed"
 968 "Fitter to see Him"
 1007 "Falsehood of Thee could I suppose"
 1011 "She rose as high as His Occasion"
 1053 "It was a quiet way"
 1297 "Go slow, my soul, to feed theyself"
 1398 "I have no Life but this—"
 1446 "His Mind like Fabrics of the East"
 1555 "I groped for him before I knew"

CHAPTER IV: THE SOUL THAT HATH A GUEST

A. The Passion

- 348 "I dreaded that first Robin, so"
 364 "The Morning after Woe"
 544 "The Martyr Poets—did not tell"
 549 "That I did always love"
 553 "One Crucifixion is recorded—only"
 554 "The Black Berry—wears a Thorn in his side"
 561 "I measure every Grief I meet"
 1072 "Title divine—is mine!"

B. A Piercing Virtue (Renunciation)

- 190 "He was weak"
 217 "Savior! I've no one else to tell"
 293 "I got so I could take his name"
 349 "I had the Glory"
 355 "'Tis Opposites—entice"

- 366 "Although I put away his life"
398 "I had not minded—Walls"
419 "We grow accustomed to the Dark"
456 "So well that I can live without"
482 "We Cover Thee—Sweet Face"
498 "I envy Seas, whereon He rides"
522 "Had I presumed to hope"
611 "I see thee better—in the Dark"
616 "I rose—because He sank"
640 "I cannot live with You"
643 "I could suffice for Him, I knew"
644 "You left me—Sire—two Legacies"
646 "I think to Live—may be a Bliss"
745 "Renunciation—is a piercing Virtue"
853 "When One has given up One's life"
858 "This Chasm, Sweet, upon my life"
863 "That Distance was between Us"
877 "Each Scar I'll keep for Him"
958 "We met as Sparks"
1010 "Up Life's Hill with my little Bundle"
1013 "Too scanty 'twas to die for you"
1017 "To die—without the Dying"
1071 "Perception of an object costs"
1123 "A great Hope fell"
1141 "The Face we choose to miss"
1160 "He is alive"
1290 "The most pathetic thing I do"

- 1349 "I'd rather recollect a setting"
 1410 "I shall not murmur if at last"
 1754 "To lose thee—sweeter than to gain"
 1071 "Perception of an object costs"

C. Anatomy of Pain

- 244 "It is easy to work when the soul is at play"
 252 "I can wade Grief"
 264 "A Weight with Needles on the pounds"
 269 "Bound—a trouble"
 341 "After great pain"
 362 "It struck me—every Day"
 376 "Of Course—I prayed"
 490 "To One denied to drink"
 497 "He strained my faith"
 536 "The Heart asks Pleasure—first"
 599 "There is a pain—so utter"
 618 "At leisure is the Soul"
 650 "Pain—has an Element of Blank"
 768 "When I hoped, I recollect"
 770 "I lived on Dread"
 772 "The hallowing of Pain"
 859 "A doubt if it be Us"
 967 "Pain—expands the Time"
 1049 "Pain has but one Acquaintance"

D. Master Death

- 279 "Tie the Strings to my Life, My Lord"
 280 "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain"

- 281 "Tis so appalling—it exhilarates"
 336 "The face I carry with me—last—"
 344 "'Twas the old—road—through pain"
 358 "If any sink"
 379 "Rehearsal to Ourselves"
 418 "Not in this World to see his face"
 449 "I died for Beauty"
 465 "I heard a Fly buzz—when I died"
 474 "They put Us far apart"
 475 "Doom is the House without the Door"
 537 "Me prove it now"
 550 "I cross till I am weary"
 598 "Three times—we parted—Breath—and I"
 611 "I see thee better—in the Dark"
 788 "Joy to have merited the Pain"
 850 "I sing to use the Waiting"
 902 "The first Day that I was a Life"
 925 "Struck, was I, not yet by Lightning"
 1001 "The Stimulus, beyond the Grave"
 1005 "Bind me—I still can sing"
 1046 "I've dropped my Brain"
 1260 "Because that you are going"
 1365 "Take all away"
 1559 "Tried always and Condemned by thee"
 1737 "Rearrange a "Wife's" affection!"

E. Translation

- 167 "To learn the Transport by the Pain—"

- 172 "Tis so much joy!"
- 231 "God permits industrious Angels"
- 271 "A solemn thing—it was—I said"
- 356 "The Day that I was Crowned"
- 359 "I gained it so"
- 365 "Dare you see a Soul *at the White Heat?*"
- 373 "I'm saying every day"
- 392 "Through the Dark Sod"
- 405 "It might be lonelier"
- 410 "The first Day's Night had come"
- 419 "We grow accustomed to the Dark"
- 439 "Undue Significance a starving man attaches"
- 442 "God made a little Gentian"
- 487 "You love the Lord—you cannot see"
- 506 "He touched me, so I live to know"
- 508 "I'm ceded—I've stopped being Theirs"
- 512 "The Soul has Bandaged moments"
- 534 "We see—Comparatively"
- 535 "She's happy, with a new Content"
- 560 "It knew no lapse, nor Diminution"
- 579 "I had been hungry, all the Years"
- 584 "It ceased to hurt me, though so slow"
- 652 "A Prison gets to be a friend"
- 661 "Could I but ride indefinite"
- 675 "Essential Oils—are wrung"
- 747 "It dropped so low—in my Regard"
- 765 "You constituted Time"

- 773 "Deprived of other Banquet"
 838 "Impossibility, like Wine"
 839 "Always Mine!"
 887 "We outgrow love, like other things"
 1036 "Satisfaction—is the Agent"
 1072 "Title divine—is mine!"
 1121 "Time does go on"
 1142 "The Props assist the House"
 1194 "Somehow myself survived the Night"
 1197 "I should not dare to be so sad"
 1282 "Art thou the thing I wanted?"
 1283 "Could Hope inspect her Basis"
 1286 "I thought that nature was enough"
 1430 "Who never wanted—maddest Joy"
 1706 "When we have ceased to care"

F. Possession

- 231 "God permits industrious Angels"
 273 "He put the Belt around my life"
 274 "The only Ghost I ever saw"
 298 "Alone, I cannot be—"
 315 "He fumbles at your Soul"
 436 "The Wind—tapped like a tired Man"
 520 "I started Early—took my Dog"
 638 "To my small Hearth His fire came"
 657 "I dwell in Possibility"
 670 "One need not be a Chamber—to be Haunted"
 674 "The Soul that hath a Guest"

- 679 "Conscious am I in my Chamber"
 754 "My Life had stood—a Loaded Gun"
 778 "This that would greet—an hour ago"
 834 "Before He comes we weigh the Time"
 840 "I cannot buy it"
 1055 "The Soul should always stand ajar"
 1260 "I Dwell in Possibility"
 1335 "Let me not mar that perfect Dream"
 1339 "A Bee his burnished Carriage"
 1452 "Your thoughts don't have words every day"
 1517 "How much of Source escapes with thee"
 1555 "I groped for him before I knew"
 1584 "Expanse cannot be lost"
 1614 "Parting with Thee reluctantly"
 1651 "A Word made Flesh"
 1670 "In Winter in my Room"
 1721 "He was my host—he was my guest"

G. Intimations

- 155 "The Murmur of a Bee"
 184 "A transport one cannot contain"
 245 "I held a Jewel in my fingers"
 352 "Perhaps I asked too large"
 378 "I saw no Way—The Heavens were stitched"
 393 "Did Our Best Moment last"
 406 "Some—Work for Immortality"
 454 "It was given to me by the Gods"
 501 "This World is not Conclusion"

- 695 "As if the Sea should part"
774 "It is a lonesome Glee"
827 "The Only News I know"
842 "Good to hide, and hear 'em hunt!"
888 "When I have seen the Sun emerge"
1000 "The Fingers of the Light"
1129 "Tell all the Truth"
1309 "The Infinite a sudden Guest"
1382 "In many and reportless places"
1400 "What mystery pervades a well"
1421 "Such are the inlets of the mind"
1544 "Who has not found the Heaven"
1583 "Witchcraft was hung, in History"
1585 "The Bird her punctual music brings"
1695 "There is a solitude of space"
1705 "Volcanoes be in Sicily"
1730 "Lethe" in my flower"
1733 "No man saw awe"
1746 "The most important population"
1765 "That Love is all there is"
1775 "The earth has many keys"

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abrams, M. H. *The Mirror and the Lamp*. New York: Oxford UP, 1953.
- , gen. ed. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, fifth ed. 2 vols. New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1986.
- Ackerman, Diane. *A Natural History of the Senses*. New York: Vintage, 1991.
- Akhmatova, Anna. *Poems*. Trans. Lyn Coffin. New York: Norton, 1983.
- Anderson, William, trans. Introduction. *Vita Nuova*. By Dante Alighieri. Baltimore: Penguin, 1964.
- Barnstone, Alike and Willis. *A Book of Women Poets: From Antiquity to Now*. New York: Schocken Books, 1992.
- Barthes, Roland. *Roland Barthes*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977.
- Baudelaire, Charles. *Paris Spleen 1869*. Trans. Louise Varèse. New York: New Directions, 1970.
- Bennett, Paula. *My Life A Loaded Gun: Female Creativity and Feminist Poetics*. Boston: Beacon, 1986.
- . *Emily Dickinson: Woman Poet*. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 1990.
- Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. London: BBC, 1972. New York, Penguin, 1977.
- Blake, William. *The Complete Poetry & Prose of William Blake*. New York: Doubleday, 1988.
- Blanchot, Maurice. *The Gaze of Orpheus and other literary essays*. Trans. Lydia Davis. Station Hill, NY: Station Hill Press, 1981.
- Bloom, Harold. *The Anxiety of Influence*. New York: Oxford UP, 1975.
- , ed. *Emily Dickinson: Modern Critical Views*. New York: Chelsea House, 1985.
- . *Figures of Capable Imagination*. New York: Seabury P, 1976.
- Boer, Charles, trans. *The Homeric Hymns*. 2nd ed. Dallas: Spring Publications, 1970.
- Bogan, Louise. "A Mystical Poet." *Emily Dickinson: Three Views*. Amherst: Amherst College P, 1960; rpt. in *Emily Dickinson: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Richard B. Sewall. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963.
- Bogin, Meg. *The Women Troubadours*. New York: Norton, 1980.

- Bollas, Christopher. *The Shadow of the Object: Psychoanalysis of the Unthought Known*. New York: Columbia UP, 1987.
- Boswell, James. *Life of Johnson*. London: Oxford UP, 1904.
- Bray, Paul. "Emily Dickinson as Visionary." *Raritan* 12.1 (Summer 1992): 113-137.
- Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. New York: Random House, 1950.
- . *Villette*. New York: Penguin, 1979.
- Brontë, Emily. *The Complete Poems of Emily Jane Brontë*. New York: Columbia UP, 1941.
- . *Wuthering Heights*. New York: Penguin, 1965.
- Brown, Norman O., trans. *Theogony*. By Hesiod. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1953.
- Cameron, Sharon. *Lyric Time*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1979.
- Charlton, James and Lisbeth Mark. *The Writer's Home Companion*. New York: Penguin, 1989.
- Chodorow, Nancy. *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1989.
- Clifton, Lucille. *good woman: poems and a memoir, 1969-1980*. Brockport, New York: BOA Editions, 1987.
- . "An Interview with Lucille Clifton." By Grace Cavalieri. *Poets and Writers Magazine* 22.2 (1994): 55-61
- Cody, John. *After Great Pain: The Inner Life of Emily Dickinson*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1971.
- Coleridge, S. T. *Coleridge: Poetry and Prose*. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1960.
- Curtius, Ernst Robert. *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*. New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1953.
- Dante Alighieri. *The Divine Comedy*. Trans. Allen Mandelbaum. New York: Bantam, 1982.
- . *The Divine Comedy*. Trans. John Ciardi. New York: New American Library, 1970.
- De la Cruz, Sor Juana. *A Sor Juana Anthology*. Trans. Alan Trueblood. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1988.

- DeShazer, Mary K. *Inspiring Women: Reimagining the Muse*. New York: Pergamon Press, 1986.
- Dickinson, Emily. *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*. Ed. Thomas H. Johnson. Boston: Little, Brown, 1960.
- . *Emily Dickinson: Selected Letters*. Ed. T. H. Johnson. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1971.
- . *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*. Ed. T. H. Johnson and Theodora Ward. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1958.
- . *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Including Variant Readings Critically Compared with All Known Manuscripts*. Ed. Thomas H. Johnson. 3 vols. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1955.
- . *The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson*. Ed. R. W. Franklin. Amherst: Amherst College P, 1986.
- . *The Master Letters of Emily Dickinson*. Ed. R. W. Franklin. 2 vols. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1981.
- Diehl, Joanne Feit. "Come Slowly Eden: An Exploration of Women Poets and Their Muse," *Signs* 3.3 (1978): 572-87.
- . *Dickinson and the Romantic Imagination*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980.
- Dodds, E. R., ed. *Euripides Bacchae*, second ed. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1960.
- . *The Greeks and the Irrational*. Berkeley: U California P, 1973.
- DuPlessis, Rachel Blau. *The Pink Guitar*. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Eliot, T. S. *The Complete Poems and Plays*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1952.
- Fausto-Sterling, Anne. "The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female Are Not Enough." *The Sciences* March/April 1993: 20-24.
- Feder, Lillian. *Crowell's Handbook of Classical Literature*. New York: Lippincott & Crowell, 1964.
- Fletcher, Angus. *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1970.
- . *Colors of the Mind: Conjectures on Thinking in Literature*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1991.
- Franklin, R. W. *The Editing of Emily Dickinson: A Reconsideration*. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1967.

- Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957.
- . *Fables of Identity*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963.
- Gee, Karen Richardson. "My George Eliot' and My Emily Dickinson." *The Emily Dickinson Journal* 3.1 (1994): 24-40.
- Gelpi, Albert. *Emily Dickinson: The Mind of the Poet*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1966.
- . *The Tenth Muse: The Psyche of the Poet*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1975.
- Gilbert, Sandra and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1979.
- Ginsberg, Allen. *Howl and Other Poems*. San Francisco: City Lights, 1956.
- Ginzburg, Natalia. *The Little Virtues*. New York: Seaver Books, 1986.
- Goldberg, Natalie. *Wild Mind*. New York: Bantam, 1990.
- Graham, Susette Ryan. "Dickinson: Poetic Power and the Masculine," *dai* 48 (1987): 1454A-1455A.
- Graves, Robert. *The White Goddess*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1966.
- . *The Greek Myths*. 2 vols. Baltimore: Penguin, 1955.
- Grimm, Jacob and William. *The Grimms' Fairy Tales*. New York: Grosset & Dunlap, n.d.
- Harding, Rosamond. *Anatomy of Inspiration*. 2nd ed. 1942. New York: Barnes & Noble, 1967.
- H.D. *Collected Poems*. New York: New Directions, 1986.
- Heilbrun, Carolyn. *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny*. New York: Norton, 1982.
- . *Reinventing Womanhood*. New York: Norton, 1979.
- Heldt, Barbara. *Terrible Perfection*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1987.
- Hesiod. *Theogony, & Works and Days*. Trans. M. L. West. New York: Oxford UP, 1988.
- Hirschhorn, Norbert. "A Bandaged Secret: Emily Dickinson and Incest." *The Journal of Psychohistory*, 18.3 (Winter 1991): 251-81.
- Homans, Margaret. *Women Writers and Poetic Identity: Dorothy Wordsworth, Emily Brontë, and Emily Dickinson*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980.

- . *Bearing the Word: Language and Female Experience in Nineteenth Century Women's Writing*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1986.
- Homer, *The Odyssey of Homer*. Trans. Richard Lattimore. New York: Harper & Row, 1975.
- . *The Iliad of Homer*. Trans. Richard Lattimore. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1951.
- Hopkins, Gerard Manley. *Poems and Prose*. New York: Penguin, 1985.
- Hopper, Stanley R. and David L. Miller, ed. *Interpretation: The Poetry of Meaning*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966.
- Howe, Susan. *My Emily Dickinson*. Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1985.
- Imlay, Elizabeth. *Charlotte Brontë and the Mysteries of Love: Myth and Allegory in Jane Eyre*. New York: St. Martin's P, 1989.
- James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. New York: Collier, 1961.
- Johnson, Thomas H. "Emily Dickinson: Creating the Poems." *Harvard Library Bulletin* 7 (1953): 257-270.
- . *Emily Dickinson: An Interpretive Biography*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1955.
- Jong, Erica. *Fruits and Vegetables*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968.
- Juhasz, Suzanne, ed. *Feminist Critics Read Emily Dickinson*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1983.
- . *Naked and Fiery Forms: Modern American Poetry by Women, A New Tradition*. New York: Harper & Row, 1976.
- , Cristanne Miller, and Martha Nell Smith. *Comic Power in Emily Dickinson*. Austin: U of Texas P, 1993.
- Jung, Carl. *Aion*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1978.
- . *Aspects of the Masculine*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1989.
- . *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. New York: Vintage, 1989.
- . *Mysterium Coniunctionis*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1970.
- . *The Spirit in Man, Art and Literature*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1971.

- Kabir. *The Kabir Book: Forty-Four of the Ecstatic Poems of Kabir, Versions by Robert Bly*. Boston: Beacon P, 1977.
- Kazin, Alfred. *An American Procession*. New York: Knopf, 1984.
- Keats, John. *Selected Poems and Letters*. Ed. Douglas Bush. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1959.
- Koestenbaum, Wayne. *Double Talk: The Erotics of Male Literary Collaboration*. New York: Routledge, 1989.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Desire in Language*. Trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia UP, 1980.
- Lesser, Wendy. *His Other Half: Men Looking at Women through Art*. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard UP, 1991.
- Lewis, C. S. *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1966.
- . *Screwtape Letters*. London, 1942; New York, 1943.
- Lewis, Wyndham. *The Demon of Progress in the Arts*. London: Methuen, 1954.
- Leyda, Jay. *The Years and Hours of Emily Dickinson*. 2 vols. New Haven: Yale UP, 1960.
- Longinus. *On the Sublime*. Trans. A. O. Prickard. London: Oxford UP, 1961.
- Lucan. *The Civil War*. Trans. J. D. Duff. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1969.
- Maritain, Jacques. *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1952.
- Martin, Wendy. *An American Triptych: Ann Bradstreet, Emily Dickinson, Adrienne Rich*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1984.
- Marlowe, Christopher. *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*. New York: New American Library, 1969.
- McNeil, Helen. *Emily Dickinson*. New York: Pantheon, 1986.
- Mead, Margaret. "Sex and Achievement." *Male and Female*. 1949. Rpt. in *The Dolphin Reader*. 2nd ed. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1985.
- Merrill, James. *The Changing Light at Sandover*. New York: Knopf, 1993.
- Middlebrook, Diane Wood. *Anne Sexton: A Biography*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1991.
- Miller, Christanne. *Emily Dickinson: A Poet's Grammar*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1987.

- Miller, Ruth. *The Poetry of Emily Dickinson*. Middletown: Wesleyan UP, 1968.
- Milton, John. *Paradise Lost and Other Poems*. New York: New American Library, 1981.
- Monick, Eugene. *Phallos: Sacred Image of the Masculine*. Toronto: Inner City Books, 1987.
- Monk, Samuel H. *The Sublime*. New York: Modern Language Association, 1935.
- Montague, John, ed. *The Book of Irish Verse*. New York: Macmillan, 1974.
- Murray, Penelope, ed. *Genius: The History of an Idea*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989.
- Neumann, Eric. *Amor & Psyche, The Psychic Development of the Feminine*. Princeton UP, 1956.
- Nietzsche, Friederich. *The Birth of Tragedy and the Genealogy of Morals*. New York: Doubleday, 1956.
- O'Hara, Frank. *The Selected Poems of Frank O'Hara*. New York: Vintage, 1974.
- Olson, Charles. *Call Me Ishmael*. San Francisco: City Lights, 1947.
- Ono no Komachi and Izumi Shikibu. *The Ink Dark Moon: Love Poems by Ono no Komachi & Izumi Shikibu, Women of the Ancient Court of Japan*. Trans. Jane Hirschfield. New York: Macmillan, 1988.
- Paglia, Camille. *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson*. New York: Vintage, 1991.
- Patterson, Rebecca. *The Riddle of Emily Dickinson*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1951. Rpt. New York: Cooper Square, 1973.
- Paz, Octavio. *The Other Voice: Essays on Modern Poetry*. Trans. Helen Lane. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990.
- . *Sor Juana, or, The Traps of Faith*. Trans. Margaret Sayers Peden. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1988.
- Pieper, Josef. *Love and Inspiration: A Study of Plato's Phaedrus*. Trans. Richard and Clara Winston. London: Faber and Faber, 1965.
- . *Leisure, The Basis of Culture*. Trans. Alexander Dru. London: Faber and Faber, 1952.
- Plath, Sylvia. *Ariel*. New York: Harper & Row, 1966.
- . *The Collected Poems*. New York: Harper & Row, 1981.
- . *The Journals of Sylvia Plath*. New York: Ballantine, 1982.

- Plato. *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1963.
- . *Symposium*. Trans. Walter Hamilton. New York: Penguin, 1951.
- Pollak, Vivian. *Dickinson: The Anxiety of Gender*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1984.
- Pound, Ezra. *Selected Poems*. New York: New Directions, 1957.
- Preminger, Alex, ed. *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*. Rev. ed. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1974.
- Prine, Jeanne "Louise Labé: Poet of Lyon." *Women Writers of the Renaissance and Reformation*. Ed. Katharina M. Wilson. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1987.
- Radin, Paul. *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology*. New York: Greenwood P, 1969.
- Rank, Otto. *Art and Artist: Creative Urge and Personality Development*. Trans. Charles Francis Atkinson. New York: Norton, 1989.
- . *The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study*. Trans. Harry Tucker Jr. Chapel Hill: U North Carolina P, 1971.
- Rich, Adrienne. "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." *Blood, Bread and Poetry: Selected Prose, 1979-1985*. New York: Norton, 1985.
- . *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose, 1966-1978*. New York: Norton, 1979.
- Rilke, Rainer Maria. *The Sonnets to Orpheus*. Trans. Stephen Mitchell. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985.
- . *The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke*. Ed. and trans. Stephen Mitchell. New York: Vintage, 1984.
- Rumi, Jalaluddin. *A Garden Beyond Paradise: The Mystical Poetry of Rumi*. Trans. Jonathan Star. New York: Bantam, 1992.
- Ruthven, K. K. *Feminist Literary Studies: An Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984.
- Sayers, Dorothy. *The Poetry of Search and the Poetry of Statement*. London: Victor Gollancz, 1963.
- Sewall, Richard B. *The Life of Emily Dickinson*. 2 vols. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1974.

- , ed. *Emily Dickinson: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963.
- Sexton, Anne. *Selected Poems*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1988.
- Shakespeare, William. *Shakespeare's Sonnets*. Ed. Stephen Booth. New Haven: Yale UP, 1977.
- Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*. New York: Penguin, 1985.
- . *The Last Man*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1965.
- Shelley, Percy Bysshe. *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*. New York: Norton, 1977.
- Sherwood, Robert. *Circumference and Circumstance*. New York and London: Columbia UP, 1968.
- Smith, Martha Nell. *Rowing in Eden: Rereading Emily Dickinson*. Austin: U of Texas P, 1992.
- Spenser, Edmund. *The Faerie Queene*. New York: Penguin, 1978.
- Stevenson, Anne. *Bitter Fame: A Life of Sylvia Plath*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989.
- St. Armand, Barton Levi. *Emily Dickinson and Her Culture: The Soul's Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984.
- Taylor, Irene. *Holy Ghosts: The Male Muses of Emily and Charlotte Brontë*. New York: Columbia UP, 1990.
- Van Gennep, Arnold. *The Rites of Passage*. Trans. M.B. Vizedom and G. L. Chaffee. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1960.
- Virgil. *The Aeneid of Virgil*. Trans. John Dryden. Franklin Center, PA: The Franklin Library, 1982.
- . *The Aeneid of Virgil*. Trans. Allen Mandelbaum. New York: Bantam, 1961.
- Warner, Marina. *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form*. New York: Atheneum, 1985.
- Warnke, Frank. *Three Women Poets, Renaissance and Baroque: Louise Labé, Gaspara Stampa, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz*. Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1986.
- White, Anna McBride and A. Norman Jeffares, ed. *The Gonne-Yeats Letters 1893-1938*. New York: Norton, 1993.
- Whitman, Walt. *Leaves of Grass*. New York: Norton, 1973.

- . *Leaves of Grass: Reproduced from the First Edition (1855)*. New York: Columbia UP, 1939.
- . *Leaves of Grass: The First (1855) Edition*. Ed. Malcolm Cowley. New York: Penguin, 1976.
- Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, U. von. *History of Classical Scholarship*. Trans. Alan Harris. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1982.
- Winnicott, D.W. *Playing and Reality*. London: Tavistock, 1971.
- . *The Maturation Processes*. New York: International Universities P, 1985.
- Wittreich, Joseph. *The Romantics on Milton*. Cleveland: P of Case Western Reserve U, 1970.
- Wolff, Cynthia Griffin. *Emily Dickinson*. New York: Knopf, 1986.
- Wordsworth, Dorothy. *The Grasmere Journals*. New York: Oxford UP, 1991.
- Wordsworth, William. *Selected Poetry*. Ed. Mark Van Doren. New York: Modern Library, 1950.
- Wroth, Lady Mary. *The Poems of Lady Mary Wroth*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1983.
- Yohannan, John D., ed. *A Treasury of Asian Literature*. 1956. New York: Harper & Row, 1984.